

Why IEW Works for Students with Learning Differences

Transcript of Podcast Episode 356

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, with apologies to our listener this podcast might be just a twenty-minute infomercial.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, coming from you, that’s not surprising, given your job. But you know, you put the info into the infomercial.

Julie Walker: That’s true.

Andrew Pudewa: And then it has value.

Julie Walker: It’s true.

Andrew Pudewa: I mean, I listen to infomercial-type podcasts because I want to learn more about the thing that I might want to do.

Julie Walker: Right, right. Well, and specifically we’re talking about special needs students and how they can learn to write and thrive using our Structure and Style approach to teaching writing, which is really unique.

Andrew Pudewa: We have so many stories. So many stories. In fact, this morning I was doing an online event, and there was ... It was a Zoom thing. And there was a chat. And in the chat, you know, someone wanted to share that, you know, we used IEW with my autistic son. And it was so amazingly different than anything else we ever tried. He wrote, you know, a paragraph for the first time. I was in tears. So, yeah, I see that; that comes across my screen on a fairly regular basis.

Julie Walker: Yes. Well, here’s a few. Some of these were culled from Facebook groups or just testimonies. People just had to share their joy, which, you know, they say that for every one person that shares something positive about your company, there might be, you know, ten to fifty more out there. So we’ll just exponentially inflate these numbers. Or not.

So I’ll just share a few of these. Janelle says that she was using IEW or is using IEW with her special needs daughter. “And it’s been a huge win for us.” For both mom and daughter, right? I love that. “She has gone from a frustrated and struggling learner to a more confident and seemingly in control of her own destiny student.”

Ooh, I know. I like that. That's like that confidence, right? "She still gets a little frustrated, but that's part of the growth process. Mr. Pudewa's calm yet engaging presence ..." Oh, I like that. "... calm, yet engaging presence throughout the course is the key for my daughter. Excellent program. I'm glad I found it."

Andrew Pudewa: Oh, and what we don't know, of course is how old is this student. And what kind of issues does she have? But it's nice because it's very general.

Julie Walker: Right. Right. And this is a course ... If she's watching *Structure and Style for Students*, this is a course that was not specifically made for special ed kids, SPED kids. But really the methodology is still solid for any student.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah. Absolutely.

Julie Walker: So another one. Laura, not our own Laura House that works for us, but another Laura. I suppose there's many Laura's in this world, right? To my point –

I am using *Structure and Style for Students* Year One, Level A (which is actually really ideal for special ed kids) ... with my daughter who has severe combined type ADHD and moderate to severe dyslexia. I believe IEW has been successful because it breaks down writing into smaller bite-size pieces. And for now, my daughter isn't needing to focus on content and how to write – just the writing process itself. Self-created content will come later.

And yes, we'll get that in Unit 7 for later. "I love that videos engage her in ways I can't. And she can pause the video until she's done with her writing and doesn't feel rushed the way she would in a classroom."

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, there are some real advantages to the video in that you do control the pacing a lot. On the flip side, I've heard people say, you know, they wanted to skip sections because it was boring. But you know, I think there's something about giving students that ability to regulate the environment themselves. I was listening to a book recently on ... It's called *Happy Mind, Happy Life*.

Julie Walker: Oh, okay.

Andrew Pudewa: I don't normally listen to self-help kinds of books like this. But he was talking about the three-legged stool of happiness. And you have to have all these three things in place to be happy, and one of them is control, right. And you can exercise control over your environment even when it seems like you have none.

He talked about, you know, prisoners in a prison camp during war. And they would have little things that they could control that would bring them a level of peace, whereas almost everything – they couldn't control. And you think about a child with various special needs; it seems like everything is beyond their control.

And so when we can break this down into the very small parts, pause the video, give as much help as is needed, gradually establish that feeling of, yes, I know what I'm doing, and I can do it, that is contributing to the actual happiness of the human being as opposed to the overwhelmed, frustrated, I can't, hopeless feeling that can so easily happen.

Julie Walker: Yep. That's good. Okay. Heather writes, and she's basically talking about our approach to teaching writing: "The systematic, you-can't-help-too-much modeling is in line with Orton-Gillingham methodology. This is the only system of writing that clearly defines the process and removes barriers. Plus, Mr. Pudewa is a great storyteller. That helps."

Andrew Pudewa: That's sweet. Well, yeah, the Orton-Gillingham, for people who may or may not know, is kind of the foundational approach to teaching English phonics. And what we have is these cycles of education where they would teach phonics. And then they would throw it out. And then they would get bad results for a couple decades. And then they would put it back in under a different name. And then they would throw it out and put it back.

And interviewed several dyslexia experts – Susan Barton, the Eides, who are all in that world of how do you teach reading to someone who is so easily overwhelmed? The visual complexity that their condition amplifies or exacerbates. And so that's why I think, you know, we have such a good alliance with people that are either in the Orton-Gillingham world or the Barton world or, you know, even another of these very similar phonics-based, systematic, step-by-step approaches.

Julie Walker: Yep. So I have another testimonial from Ruby. But before I get into this, I want to just ask you after I read this, to comment also for the classroom teacher who might have some special needs kids mainstreamed into his or her classroom, right?

So Ruby says: "My ten-year-old child has Asperger's and a diagnosed writing ability." And so she's using IEW. And she says, "My son is thriving with the program. He likes the step-by-step instruction and the guided method. He thrives with learning a concept and giving clear and detailed instructions on how to implement them. We are moving along at his pace, and I've seen remarkable improvements since we started the program."

Andrew Pudewa: Right. I think the key there is *his pace*. And we see so many things that either are in schools or sometimes even in alternative situations, hybrid, homeschooling – that are trying to do the same thing, which is to get everybody to do the same activity in the same way according to the same schedule to get the same result. And you know, if human beings were pieces of a machine, maybe that would work. But we're not; we're so very different.

And so one of the things we see is that when you can adjust the pacing, you can get a tremendously better result. And that's easiest obviously in a one-on-one type of setting. But you know, we've talked a lot about how you can kind of filter students and say, okay, here. This is how we're going to do it. Now, try. And then run around and help everyone, and then do it again. And have more people try on their own. And help the people who still need help. And do it again. And maybe more people become independent, but you're still helping the people who need help.

You're not prematurely forcing the independence. And then along with that, you know, we've set it up to make it very easy for people to control variables. What are the variables? Number one would be the reading level of the source text. So we have alternate source texts for many of the theme-based books. We generally have all the source texts at or usually below the target age or grade or reading level of the students. And then the complexity of the Style checklist can be adjusted so that, yeah, you could teach ten students, and they could—theoretically probably wouldn't have to do ten—but theoretically you could have ten different levels of independence and levels of complexity going on.

But you know, for most classroom teachers or group settings, you generally will have kind of the slower, the medium, and the faster. And that's what's great. You can keep everyone challenged appropriately. And so the faster students aren't getting bored. You can throw an extra thing at them on the side. But more importantly, the students who do have those neurological impediments – you can take things out and keep it as simple as possible until there's a level of mastery. Then add in the next complexity. And move on from there.

Julie Walker: Right. So we have checklists that go with every writing assignment once the stylistic techniques are introduced. And there's two ways to modify the checklist: Literally write on top of that checklist, and cross things out or add things. Or our Checklist Generator – That's apart and only can be had through our Premium Membership. We've actually had people saying, oh, can't I just ... ? And we will say ...

Andrew Pudewa: Infomercial! Infomercial!

Julie Walker: But I love our Checklist Generator.

Andrew Pudewa: I do too. And I use it. I use it myself.

Julie Walker: Okay. Here's a few that are specifically related to dyslexia. Okay. So Julie, a different Julie – she must be brilliant.

My daughters both began IEW in elementary school and continued through middle school. They both entered a classical education high school program that had a strong writing component, which utilized and built upon all their years in IEW. They are both in college and are strong writers who need the editors because of their dyslexia, which is an accommodation. They're both honor students. IEW is the best, and the more the better.

Andrew Pudewa: That's great. How much did we pay her to say that?

Julie Walker: I think we didn't pay her much at all.

Andrew Pudewa: No, but that's very typical of stories we hear. And you know, one of the things, too, is people can be very anxious about children who aren't reading and writing easily at, say, eight, nine, ten, eleven, even twelve years old if they compare those children to other children of the same age. And then they kind of can get into a fear or a panic, like: They're never going to catch up.

And one of the things that I've noticed is that, you know, you teach a process. And they may or may not be able to implement that process with the level of mastery or independence that you wish. But that process is what's forming their methodology. It's forming the way they think about how to write.

And then when they grow up a little bit and become, you know, teenagers, generally the dyslexic problems fade a bit because they can exercise their willpower over their brain and make it do things they couldn't previously do so easily. And yet that process is ready to go. It's intact. It's been taught and practiced and modeled. And now that everything's easier, yes, they shine.

And yeah, they need a proofreading. I mean, English spelling is a bear for most people, let alone you know, people who grew up seeing letters moving around on the page a bit. But that, you know, spelling is not at the core of what we do. We teach how to collect up, organize, and present with a variety of tools and techniques, ideas. And that's what writing is. And if you can spell well or not, you know, that's on top or on the side of that, although you as the chief marketing officer should mention that we have a spelling program that works pretty well for the dyslexics as well.

Julie Walker: And now I don't need to. Yes, because it is an auditory program. And dyslexics, of course, that's a visual challenge. And so if you can learn to spell using an auditory approach, that could be really helpful.

Andrew Pudewa: It would make a big difference, yeah.

Julie Walker: Yep. Okay. So Kate also has a severely dyslexic fourth grader, and she's participating in the Barton program and is on level 7. I'm not exactly sure what that means, but the Barton people do. "We have tried writing with a couple different options in the past, and it all ended with frustration." And then, so her daughter was so excited after her first paragraph with IEW. "She couldn't believe that she was able to do it and was so proud to read it and show it to everyone. She said that she couldn't believe she could write so well, even with dyslexia." I love that. That's that confidence again.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah. That just speaks for itself.

Julie Walker: Yeah.

Andrew Pudewa: And you know, we've seen that again and again, the sense of accomplishment when you put the pieces together. That's what we're particularly good at is making the pieces available in a way that the students can put them together easily. One metaphor someone used once, and we've used it. But the first time a mom said to me, it's like the Legos of language, and my son understands that.

Julie Walker: Yes, yes. Legos is easier to make really cool things easier than, say, modeling clay, yeah, because you don't have to necessarily come up with it on your own. But this also reminds me of your motivation talk and how children like to do ...

Andrew Pudewa: ... what they can do. Children want to do what they think they can do. So you start with helping them be successful, no matter how much help that takes. Then they will want to stretch a little bit and try something they haven't tried yet.

Julie Walker: Yep. Sounds good. Okay, so this last one is from Tricia. She says IEW was "wonderful for her students. It is systematic and methodical like the dyslexic students need. Some of my kids became brilliant, confident, capable writers." I think this is a teacher. "IEW empowered them to be successful. I highly recommend it. We also use *Fix It! Grammar*, and I've become a strong believer in that as well."

Andrew Pudewa: And she used a nice triple adjective there.

Julie Walker: Great. Yes, so thank you, Tricia. Thank you, Kate, Julie, all of others who have contributed to this podcast.

Andrew Pudewa: And just that they took the time to share that with us. And like you said, there are probably hundreds, thousands, countless more who have had similar experiences to a greater or lesser extent. Yeah.

Julie Walker: Well, we do have a website for families or teachers that have special needs students. That's IEW.com/sped. S-P-E-D, special ed. But we also have many who are trained in this world of special ed in our customer service team. And one in particular is a master Barton tutor and got certified at that level.

So she knows a thing or two and has written many blog posts about dyslexia. So we have lots of resources we can point our families to. I think the biggest thing to say is, you know, kind of like what you say in one of the little promo videos we did: The hardest thing is just to open it up and start doing. It's not that hard. Just open it up. And just do it. Thank you, Andrew.

Andrew Pudewa: It's always a pleasure hearing stories like this, Julie.

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. 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.