

Homeschool 101 - You CAN Homeschool

Transcript of Podcast Episode 365

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.

Do you remember the year 2020, Andrew?

Andrew Pudewa: I remember it better than most years of my life actually, yes.

Julie Walker: A lot happened that year to us as a company, to us personally, to many students who were no longer in a classroom because they had to go home and quarantine. And an amazing thing happened during 2020. And that is a lot of people decided, hey, this homeschooling thing – maybe it’s not as hard as I thought it would be. And it was actually at that time, Andrew, that you said, hey, let’s do some Homeschool 101 podcast episodes. I mean, we definitely have a contingency of homeschoolers who use our materials.

Andrew Pudewa: You mean that was my idea?

Julie Walker: It was your idea, yes.

Andrew Pudewa: Wow, I should be, like, a marketing director or something. Well, we certainly saw a lot of people who were just confused about what to do. Their kids weren’t going to school. They didn’t know, what am I supposed to do? The remote learning thing was just ineffective at best, especially the younger the children were. And the plight of a nine-year-old trying to sit in front of a screen for six hours a day, asking permission from a remote teacher to go use the restroom ... I mean, it became, you know, from unpleasant to absurd for so many.

Julie Walker: There was a little YouTube thing that was out there. And we’ll see if we can find it and put a link in the show notes. Or maybe listeners, you’ve already seen this: where the kids are on a Zoom call, and they’re talking to each other. The teacher’s not there yet, and they’re just talking to each other. And one of the students says, oh, she’s toast or something like that. Like the teacher’s late. And so she’s going to be in trouble. And the conversation degrades to now they want to go out and make themselves some toast. So it’s pretty cute.

Andrew Pudewa: Oh, I didn’t see that, but I did see the one where a boy had a BB gun on his wall in his own room – a teenager. And he was reported to the school for violating their zero tolerance weapons policy.

Julie Walker: Oh, yeah.

Andrew Pudewa: It was just what more could tip the scale towards “let’s just change”? And part of that, of course, was what we thought would be kind of a temporary explosion of homeschooling. And I don’t know the numbers, but I think we were up thirty some percent in one year, which is huge. I personally thought things would go back, like, when the schools opened again and Covid was over.

But no, it appears that a lot of people have continued to look at alternative education options. And I just heard ... I wanted to read the article, but it was behind a paywall for *The Wall Street Journal*. And I was so stingy; I wouldn’t pay. But over one million students have left public schools, and districts all over the country are closing schools for lack of students. But at the same time, what do we see opening up? Hybrid schools, charter schools, co-op school programs, online schools. There’s so many. You hear about a new one every day. So it’s just a complete shift of the balance, I guess, is happening.

Julie Walker: Right. We did a webinar, you and I together in November, when there were some more restrictions going to be placed on parents of students or students, really, as they were considering, you know, continuing on in school. And we thought, you know what? This might be a good time to talk about how to homeschool in case you’re considering this in light of some of these headlines that we were seeing.

Andrew Pudewa: So various reasons. But you know, I think the nicest thing is when you hear the story of, well, you know, we were kind of forced into keeping our kids home and trying to teach them at home and help them. And after a year it was great.

Julie Walker: We kind of like each other.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, we kind of like each other. And you know, a lot of parents also shifted from having to leave and go to an office or a workplace every day, to adjusting that to be able to work at home or work part-time at home or, you know, flex their schedule. So I think there ... You know, that side has been a very good shift too. So I assume today we’re going to talk about how you can continue to homeschool even if the world isn’t forcing you to do it anymore.

Julie Walker: Right, exactly. So this is a podcast that you might want to share with your friend if you are homeschooling yourself, and want to perhaps let your friend know that it is possible, and that what you’re doing with your own children perhaps isn’t crazy, though we can’t vouch for that, you know.

Andrew Pudewa: Hey, you know, the longer I live, the more I think sanity is just relative.

Julie Walker: It’s true. It’s true.

Andrew Pudewa: We do insane things, and then they turn out to be great. Sometimes we try to be as logical-minded as possible, and it doesn’t work as well. But certainly there’s a huge shift. You know, once it was kind of like homeschooling, wow! Now it’s like everybody knows somebody who’s homeschooling. You can’t talk to any random person and say the word

homeschool and go, oh yeah, my friend, my sister-in-law, so-and-so ... So you know, that's a big shift.

Julie Walker: Yes, and I would just speak to those listeners or friends of listeners who ... Perhaps it's a baby step, and you've already taken that step, which is you're going to assume more responsibility for your children's education. You're actually going to find out what's going on in their classroom and be more involved so that you can help out because ultimately what we believe here at IEW is that your children to you – they're a gift to you. And it is your responsibility to steward them as best you can.

Andrew Pudewa: As one of our mutual friends once said, and we were trying to actually build kind of like a public awareness campaign around this idea: Every parent homeschools. Just some do it full-time.

Julie Walker: Exactly. Exactly right. And I would add to that, and Andrew, you would agree with me: every grandparent homeschools.

Andrew Pudewa: Oh, man, am I in the thick of it. Yes. But well, let's get into it. What's on your agenda for this podcast?

Julie Walker: So this whole idea of, are schools promoting values that are contrary to your belief – I would say that that's probably one of the reasons why parents choose to homeschool or certainly get more involved in their children's education. And so then we talked about—And actually it really wasn't so much we as it was you—talked about the three Cs of culture, curriculum, and care. What does it mean to be homeschooling?

Andrew Pudewa: I love those words because they have so many implications. And wherever you are, there's going to be a culture because the school will create its culture. Your home has a culture. You have little if no, more likely, no control over the culture of a school or a classroom where you send a child to. So you want to try and shop or choose very carefully.

You have a huge amount of control over the culture in your home. Right? What's on the walls? What's on the bookshelves? What comes through the speakers? What comes through the screens? What's the schedule and use of time? Is it stress promoting? Is it relaxing and edifying and nurturing to the spirits of all the people in the environment?

Curriculum, right? I mean, everybody has a curriculum. I mean, doing nothing would be a curriculum, right? Reading and talking about great books as opposed to textbooks: that's a curricular idea. *Curriculum* basically means *racetrack* from the Latin. And you can have a racetrack that kind of goes around and around and around and around. And you do that for a decade, and you feel like, yeah, I've been here before; I've done that. What am I doing? Why am I doing it?

Julie Walker: I feel like I'm in a rut.

Andrew Pudewa: You know, or you can have a racetrack that goes from one place to another, that has a goal, that has an end, that has ... and maybe stops along the way to take in the beautiful scenery. And care. I kind of don't like this whole idea of, like, *self-care*, because I think it so easily moves into kind of a myopic version of, you know, what's best for me is the most important thing.

But when you look at it on a broader scale, what's best for us? What's best for our souls, our minds, our physical bodies? And I don't think schools are particularly attentive to the humanity, and I would even go so far as to say the souls of the people in them because they very often are a system that is very heavy in one area, such as here's the standards. Here's the state. Here's the district. Here's the curriculum. Here's the stuff we must do.

And then you shuffle in some stuff to make that look like, yes, we're caring for the emotional well-being of students. But the environment itself, the culture itself is probably falling short of that. There are exceptions. We've both been in classrooms with amazing teachers. I've been in amazing schools. But unfortunately, those seem to be the exception, not the norm. And so you know, parents have that challenge: Can I find a school that the culture, the curriculum, and cares about us as a family? And if you can't find it, you kind of have to go make it. You have to create it.

Julie Walker: I think one thing when you think about homeschooling ... And you know, I'm speaking as a homeschool mom emeritus, you know, because of course, my boys are all grown up now. But one of the things that I had to fight because I was also a classroom teacher, was the difference between school at home versus homeschooling. And I think that is a huge cultural shift, where you don't have to have little desks in your room with little, you know, flags to alert the teacher that you need help, but that it is a different environment.

Andrew Pudewa: Right. And you know, that even goes to, I have to supervise and boss my kids around for at least six hours a day, or I'm not doing ... One of the things that homeschoolers discover after a year or two or ten is that children love to work independently. They thrive on a level of freedom that is just not possible in an institution.

And so that shift, really. And I have some friends who do not like the word *homeschooling* because it can easily mean school at home. They would prefer the term *home education* or *home learning*. So you know, we rephrase or reposition although ironically the word *school* comes from the Greek *schola*, which means leisure.

Julie Walker: Yes.

Andrew Pudewa: Right? Because if you have time to go study, that means you're not working in the field, eeking out a living by hoeing radishes or whatever.

Julie Walker: Yes, exactly.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah.

Julie Walker: So you know, I mentioned my boys and homeschool mom emeritus. I actually did a talk at a convention last year, and one of the points that came out of the talk, not necessarily by me, but those guests that I interviewed, which were my sons—I put them on videotape, and I interviewed them—is they said over and over again how they learned to think.

And I think that idea of school at home is just basically bringing home the textbooks and the schedules and everything. And that may be a good starting place. Truth be told, because I was a schoolteacher, that is how I started. And I realized, wow, you can't really pour that much into one child in that type of environment. It's more of a ... I once was told that homeschooling is like the education of kings because it's more of a tutoring, more one-on-one, but even ...

Andrew Pudewa: But not in an elitist way.

Julie Walker: No, right.

Andrew Pudewa: You don't have to have a governess and a whole lot of money to homeschool. I mean, I know single parents who work and find time to teach their kids at home. So it's really accessible to everyone, especially with some of the very innovative and excellent programs and materials and courses and online resources that are now available, which did not exist when you and I were in our youth, homeschooling little kids.

Julie Walker: Little kids, yeah. And you know, this idea of ... Well, I don't know where this falls under – culture, curriculum, or care. But there's so many resources, some of which you mentioned, where there's so much help now available in homeschooling. And so, you know, yes, my boys and I would try and start every morning at the dining room table having conversations. And I think that's where a lot of their thinking came in. But then, you know, after we got going and did our white tornado ... You know what a white tornado is?

Andrew Pudewa: Clean the house.

Julie Walker: Yes, you got fifteen minutes and clean the house, you know, in fifteen minutes. So that way when we would go out and do things as homeschoolers, which oftentimes we were car schoolers or park schoolers or go play with other families schoolers, we would come home to a clean house. And wasn't that nice?

It's especially nice if I got home after my husband got home, and the house wasn't too chaotic. But like I said, this ... I don't know where this fits in. I don't know if it's curriculum or not, but there's so much now where homeschooling is a part of a community.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, and you know, well, there's many, many Facebook pages, websites. We have one: Homeschool Helps. But I really enjoy if I have time, and I happen to see, okay, someone asked a question. And you know, it's a question that would be kind of typical of a first-year homeschool family. And then you see a dozen people giving really good answers.

You're just thinking, well, that kind of, you know, networking opportunity – that's such a huge blessing. And it really didn't exist way back when. It's easy to get distracted and sucked into,

you know, online rabbit trails and tunnels. But the fact that community helps people who now have to navigate the problems of curriculum and all that ... So there's just so ... It's so rich; there's so much available.

Julie Walker: Right. Okay, so let's talk about curriculum. That's one of our Cs. Specifically what are the most important subjects to cover? How do we cover all the bases, Andrew Pudewa?

Andrew Pudewa: Well, you know, that that could differ according to different families may have a different priority. You know, I have my opinions about priorities in homeschooling, but I wouldn't want to suggest or imply that this is the one right set of priorities. I tend to hang out with people who tend to share priorities with me, but you know, I think a lot of them are just common sense.

Julie Walker: Yep.

Andrew Pudewa: So teach your kids to make their bed, cook their own food, clean up after themselves, take care of each other. And I'll just ... this was so delightful. So I had three granddaughters at my house last night and this morning. And because my wife and my daughter who were also there ... I wouldn't call them lazy, but I was the first one who got up.

And I came out, and there's the three energetic little granddaughters: seven, four, and almost two. And they had completely been taking care of themselves for well over an hour because I think they wake up at six. And I didn't show up till about seven. And you know, the four-year-old says, "Grandpa, I made my bed so nice."

Julie Walker: Aw.

Andrew Pudewa: And then the older one was reading a book to the baby, and they had told me that they did their morning prayers together. And wow, you know, the whole attitude of independence. And so in a way, you know, I think their mother – she just hangs out in bed a little bit longer just to get them in that zone of having the responsibility of caring for themselves.

And then, you know, it was cold this morning, but they have the habit of always going outside. So as soon as I showed up, they wanted to take me outside and show me, you know, stuff in the garden and make me get cold because they're used to that time outside. Why? Because their mother kicks them outside every morning, regardless of whether it's cold or hot or nice or raining.

So there's that. Then, you know, there's reading, right? Reading is just the core of an education because when you think about it, that's where you acquire the richness and depth of vocabulary and idiom and illusion and metaphor and, you know, all these things that enrich our intellect. We get them primarily through language, and primarily the language comes through books.

Yeah, we talk to each other, and we watch movies now and then. But it's the books that raise the quality of the language environment, therefore, the intellectual environment, therefore the nurturing of the young intellect. And I've always been fascinated how a child – you can read

them a book. And they'll just say, read it again. Like right now, read this book that you just finished. Read it again right now. Now that doesn't happen forever. And they hit a point where, okay, I read that; I want something new. But because they have different needs at different times, and you're there, you can meet those intellectual developmental needs in the most appropriate way.

A school can never do that. And when you're, you know, hurry up, get ready, get dressed, we've got to get to school on time – it is a completely different universe for everybody. So you know, I would put that. And you just basically go back to the “three Rs,” right: reading, writing, and arithmetic. You know, mental calculation, thinking mathematically. You know, this whole idea of teaching children how to think: everybody wants this. But not everybody sees what things promote it and what things impede it.

Julie Walker: Yes, yes. You know, I told you that was the answer that often came out independently. My boys were not talking to each other. I did these all. And I thought, what did I actually do to help them think? And a lot of it was just what you've already suggested. You know: conversations, reading a book, and then having conversations about that book. Mental math, that was a big thing.

Andrew Pudewa: You know, I look at maybe you, my wife, my children, other young moms now. The ones who I think have the most feeling that they're succeeding in this area – they've learned to ask good questions.

Julie Walker: Yes. Yep.

Andrew Pudewa: And schools just are not equipped to easily ask good questions because it's time consuming; it's messy; it's very hard to assess. And then the modeling that happens ... If a child grows up in an environment with adults who are able to ask good questions that really do force them to figure out stuff, they're also learning by imitation how to ask good questions.

Julie Walker: Yes. That's good.

Andrew Pudewa: And we've talked about, in the teaching of writing, any number of times – that's the trick. If you don't know what to write, well, the problem is you need to ask better questions.

Julie Walker: Yep, exactly. So here's a parent, and they're listening to this conversation right now. And it's March, and they're thinking, you know what? Come August, September, I think I'm just going to try this. You know? And I just think that Listener, you have permission just to try this. There are options to just try it and see if you like it. What recommendations do you have for that: a family who's saying, yep, I'm going to give this a try.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, one thing I would consider. It's a little bit counter to what most people's default is. But that is, start a little bit of homeschooling. Start a little bit of what you think you might be able to do ... just a little bit in the summer. All right. So school's out in May, whatever. Take a few weeks. Just relax; spend time outside. It's beautiful.

But you know, come mid-June or whatever, try to say, okay, we're going to take an hour every morning and read to the family. We're going to do some, depending on the age of the children, some things like some copy work, some mental math. Why don't you learn something that isn't often taught in a school, such as maybe geography or something that you are personally interested in?

And just see if you can spend an hour or two and low stress. And kind of try out the idea of actively teaching your kids at home over the summer. And I'm sure we could make some recommendations for people who might want to do some language development stuff during that time. And you know, that may be a little different. Like, kids might rebel: Like, wait a minute. It's vacation. We're not supposed to have to do school. Well, we're not doing school; we're just learning together, right?

And this can be super low stress. And then, you know, you get to August, and toss up the idea. Say, what do you think, kids? How about if we don't go back to school this year? And we stay home and keep learning together at home? That's one thing, I think. You can kind of ease into it. Another thing is one of the biggest adjustments for many kids—not all, but many—is it's a radical change of social experience.

And I would say a good number of kids who want to go to school don't want to go because of what they're learning or the inconvenience. They want to be with friends. So take some time, and try to cultivate some friendships with homeschoolers, and find a group. And maybe they're not meeting over the summer; that's possible. But you can kind of get on the edge of a different circle of families. And if the kids feel like they can have friends, they'll be able to make the shift, whereas if all of a sudden, you know, it's August; you're not going back to school. But what about my best friend?

So that creating opportunity for social, I don't know, replacement, if you will, or nurturing. And you know, kids are pretty flexible in this way, but you don't want to neglect that; otherwise you can get rebellion. It's like, no, I want to go see my friends. Oh, I got new friends. Okay, so that's no longer an issue. So cultivating summer friendships, I think, is really key. And you know, obviously spending time outside is so critical. And that's perhaps one of the things that schools are really just not good at.

Yeah, there's recess. Yeah, there's lunch. But then if it's too hot, too cold, raining, half the time, oh, we're in the multipurpose room. We're not even outside. And so if you can kind of consciously create a daily time of being outside and being relatively free ... And you know, even if that's just your own backyard if you have it or, you know, the park down the street if you don't have it, or you take a half-day trip to somewhere ... Children respond so well to being outside.

It balances them. It balances their mind and heart. And we know that it's good for, you know, light coming into their mind and their circadian rhythms. And I think that all too often, kids who spend a lot of time indoors during the school year are just not used to that. So what do they want to do? They want to stay indoors and look at screens or be amused or occupy themselves. And it's just so easy for a parent to, you know, give the kid a technology that becomes a babysitter. And you lose out the great benefits of that. So I would kind of look at those three things as

maybe the best to think about right now if it's spring, and you're not sure what you're going to do after the school year.

Julie Walker: Right. So I'm going to bring up two questions that are often asked when people are, you know, seriously considering homeschooling. The first one is, is it legal?

Andrew Pudewa: Yes. That's really all you need. Well, you know, we often refer people to Homeschool Legal Defense Association. Almost every state has a state homeschool organization, which has the primary role of providing information about how to legally homeschool in your state. Some states like Oklahoma, super easy; California, relatively easy.

Other states – you do; you have to jump through some hoops and file some papers. But you know, it's interesting. If you look at it statistically, there's actually a higher percentage of people homeschooling in states where there's a little more paperwork.

Julie Walker: Interesting.

Andrew Pudewa: So it shows that, you know, the state rules or district rules or whatever exists isn't so burdensome that it makes it too difficult or impossible. So it's legal in every one of the fifty states. It's legal in many, many countries. And you just find out what you have to do, and do it. You know, it's probably less burdensome than buying a car, which – you have to jump through a whole lot of hoops and go to the DMV. And that's all just a headache and a half. So and generally you only have to do it once or maybe do one more thing once a year. So anyone can homeschool.

Julie Walker: Yep. So the second question that we often hear when people are considering homeschooling is what about socialization?

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, well, that's also a closed question. Anyone who's spent any amount of time ever in the company of homeschoolers will notice right away: homeschooled kids spend more time with a greater diversity of people: adults, kids older than they are, kids younger than they are, other people's parents. And they generally are much more flexible. In fact, one interesting thing ... So I have one daughter in Michigan, and her oldest is seven. And so they've been kind of officially homeschooling for a year, year and a half. I don't know when you say you have to officially do it.

And they went to some event. And her husband, my son-in-law, said to her after this event, he said, well, I have realized this is the number one reason why we should keep homeschooling: All these kids are just so comfortable talking to anyone, whereas when you go out into an environment where kids are so used to being age segregated, controlled by certain adults, and separated from everybody else, it's very unnatural.

And they get into certain habits where, you know, they don't want to interact. And they don't look adults in the eye. And they don't have the vocabulary to communicate above and below their social level, so to speak. So I mean, I think anybody who does this for any length of time

will say, wow, if you really want well-socialized children, you would intentionally homeschool because the opportunities are so much better.

Julie Walker: Yep. I would heartily agree with that. I love interacting with kids that have been homeschooled. They look me in the eye, and they have a conversation with me, and they're not embarrassed to talk to me. That's not to say that there are not some awkward kids out there that are homeschooled, but that's because there's awkward kids everywhere.

Julie Walker: Exactly.

Andrew Pudewa: It's funny. You know, some of the time ... I was in a Chipotle maybe a year ago, and I was just kind of observing this family. And they were eating, and I was just eating. And I thought, man, those kids really look like they're homeschooled. And as I was getting up to leave, the mom came over and said, would you just come and talk to us for a minute? My kids would really like to meet you. They saw you on the video, and you're just like one of their favorite teachers. You know, so it wasn't ... You know, it was kind of a random happening. But it's funny how my observation of them turned out to correlate with the reality of their situation.

Julie Walker: I don't know that very many people, Andrew, would have that exact experience, though, would they? They wouldn't be able to identify because they're some type of homeschool celebrity.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, you know, people say, are you famous? In very, very small circles ... But we're trying to grow those circles.

Julie Walker: This is true.

Andrew Pudewa: But it is that case where there's just something about those kids.

Julie Walker: Yeah. So socialization. Check.

Andrew Pudewa: Not a problem.

Julie Walker: Legality. Check.

Andrew Pudewa: Not a problem. Curriculum – we're right up next to you there, and there are a lot of good companies. You know, we do language stuff. We know friends who do math stuff. We know wonderful people who do art and science and music. And there's just so many really dedicated, intelligent, competent people who've created, you know, everything from books to videos to online courses. So everything you need is there.

Julie Walker: And we are here to help. We have many people on our customer service team who have homeschooled many years. They themselves are done homeschooling. And so, you know, just ask for a homeschool expert. And they can give you some recommendations on these various curricular options, various communities ... certainly direct you to the state org in your

particular area. And so we just want to say homeschooling is an option. You can do this if this is where you are feeling led to do it.

Andrew Pudewa: And I would just tag on a slight addendum there. I would say not a hundred percent, but a very high percentage of people who start homeschooling with a little bit of trepidation, fear, uncertainty ... Or they go in and say, I'll try it for one year. But I'm not committing my life to this. It's too dangerous.

Julie Walker: And maybe it's only one child.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, and four or five years down the line, they look back and say, I would never go back. I don't regret this. This has been the best decision we've made for the family.

Julie Walker: Yep. Well, let us know how we can help you. Thank you, Andrew.

Andrew Pudewa: Thank you, 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.