

## Episode 409: The Mentoring Model Transcript

**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.

**Julie Walker:** So Andrew, yesterday when we were preparing to record this podcast, I mentioned that January is National Mentoring Month. And I appreciate your feedback, which is there's a national month for a hundred different things for the month of January, and that's probably true.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Probably true.

**Julie Walker:** Yeah. But I liked this particular theme for the month of January because that's kind of what we're about here at IEW, modeling and mentoring. We want to help people be successful, and so we have tools and a technique to be able to help their students learn to write.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Okay!

**Julie Walker:** But this goes back even deeper, and I was thinking about your story and how you came to be the founder and director of the Institute for Excellence in Writing, and a lot of that story has to do with mentors. So tell us about some of the mentors that you had growing up.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, growing up, I don't know that I would think back that far.

**Julie Walker:** Sure. Did you have teachers out in school that, any memorable teachers?

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yes, I have one memorable teacher. Mr. Grantham was the middle school orchestra teacher. He also taught band, but nobody cares about band because they don't have string instruments. So,

**Julie Walker:** Right. You were a violin player.

**Andrew Pudewa:** yeah. But the thing I remember, mostly, is that he had an endless supply of pencils. And if you were not looking at him when he looked at you, he would throw a pencil at you.

**Julie Walker:** Okay.

**Andrew Pudewa:** I, I don't think this would do well in today's educational environment. But it was interesting because all it took was a couple pencil throws at the beginning of the year, and he had pretty much everyone just locked in, attentive to him every class, every rehearsal, every performance. So, he had some kind of knack there. He was also humorous, and I have

always appreciated humor in teaching. And definitely he was the most significant teacher of the very few that I even remember from school.

But you know, I think mentors for me, that's more of an adult thing. That's when you're trying to figure out what to do with your life. And you're all grown up, and it's voluntary relationship, right? You go to school, you get who you get, you don't really have much choice about teachers, and you know that it's a very temporary relationship because when the semester, the year is over, you know, you don't, you probably won't see... although Mr. Grantham, 3 years, 6th, 7th, and 8th grade, probably, probably more than any other teacher. Maybe that's why I remember him.

**Julie Walker:** I have a special teacher that I had in high school, Mrs. Mark. And you know Mrs. Mark because a lot of her sayings creep into my vocabulary even today.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Hard work is immensely satisfying?

**Julie Walker:** That is one of them. And another one is, good enough isn't, yep, that was Mrs. Mark. And yes, I did choose to have her as a teacher. You know, at first you're kind of stuck with who you get, but then I went back and took a creative writing class from her, and so she was an English teacher. And so, in some ways, I would consider her one of my mentors, even though I wasn't an adult. I was certainly practicing to be an adult in high school.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, I would, you know, think of great people that I have had a chance to have a relationship with. The first would be Dr. Shinichi Suzuki of Suzuki Method. And when I went over to go to school there in Japan, I didn't really know what to expect. But it was very interesting how he had all of these teacher trainees. And, I mean, we're all, I don't know, the youngest were 18, 19. I was 21 when I got there, I think. There are older people, 30, some 40 maybe. But he managed to have this incredible ability to connect with each person in exactly the way they needed to be connected with. He would say something to you, and you would know that he said that very specifically for you at that moment, almost a spiritual kind of thing, like he had some kind of supernatural insight into what you were going through or your personality. And so I think of a mentor as someone you'd work more closely with kind of side by side, but to that degree, you know, the very valuable but small amounts of time that I had with him were quite noteworthy. And again, he loved to laugh and he loved to play with children. And he would, you know, he is 83 years old when I got there and he would get on the stage and do all these antics dancing and sitting down on the floor and teasing children and making them all smile and somehow then just getting the best out of them. I loved watching him interact with children and I think to a very high degree that influenced my style of interacting with children, probably more than anything else.

I left Japan. I went to Philadelphia and worked for the Institutes for the Achievement of Human Potential. And there I had several people that were very formative in my understanding of humans and brains and children and people and teaching and learning and doing. First would be the founder of the Institutes, Glenn Doman. He was still working all the time. He was at every single staff meeting. He was in the clinic. He was a truly great, great man who inspired just countless people. And again, he was very jovial, you know, he was kind of toward the end of his active working life when I was there, and his daughter, Janet, was the director of the institute, but he was still the chairman of the board. And he always had a cheerful word and a positive thing to say, and boy did he understand the brain in children, and I think he would have been fascinated to have access to all the research that has just come out in the last decade because you know we thought we knew a lot back in the 80s or 90s, but huge, huge breakthroughs in understanding neurological function, neuroplasticity.

A lot of the things that he knew and claimed and taught were supported by what you might call really good logic, based on the science at the time. And now we know from much harder science, much clearer data, that those things were very true. So it was kind of also being, like, in the presence of someone who knew things. It was a rough row for him because the kind of medical establishment of the day did not look at fixing brain injury kids. They looked at accommodations and treating. And he was saying, no, we can actually change the brain. And so he was scoffed at by many in the medical profession. He also brought his experience in the military. Yeah, he was, I don't remember his rank pretty high, lieutenant colonel, colonel, maybe, but he had this organizational and motivational aptitude from being a leader in the army and that came through in the whole structure of the organization. And there were many other people.

Then of course, I left Philadelphia, went to Montana and that's where I met the Canadian woman who said, Let's all go and take this course called the Blended Sound-Sight Program of Learning in Northern Alberta this summer. And so all the teachers at the school I was working with went up and that's when I met Dr. Webster for the first time. His humor was much more, what would you call it, wry and dry and, but, but behind his stern visage, he always did have this kind of playing with you way of interacting. And of course I spent probably more time with him than anyone and was profoundly grateful when he kind of took me close and said, okay, here's how you really do this stuff. If you're going to go teach it to people, you better really know what you're doing. So those are the three most important people in my adult life.

**Julie Walker:** And with Dr. Webster, of course, you still correspond with him. You still visit him. In fact, you brought some student papers from the Structure and Style for Students classes and asked Dr. Webster to look at them. And it was kind of a delight to—of course, we don't show this in the video—but when you pass the papers back to the students, you said, Dr. Webster, marked these up. They were a little intimidated by that, but I think overall he is pleased with you, Andrew, and all that we've done.

**Andrew Pudewa:** I think so. You know, I certainly have done a few things that were either irritating or enigmatic to him. But it is interesting because just being a teacher is a little bit different than having a business. And for a long time I kind of just wanted to just be a teacher. But then it got bigger and bigger, and so then you kind of have to bring in someone like Julie Walker who knows how to do business stuff.

**Julie Walker:** Well, I could name all of my mentors, but probably, I think, I think the thing that you have also talked about before in terms of a mentor, or at least in influence, is the books we read. So can you speak to that for a little bit about the books we read and how that can help shape who we are?

**Andrew Pudewa:** I have done from time to time a commencement address for homeschoolers various times. And one of the things I like to point out is that the thing that will have the greatest impact on you in terms of who you become and what you can accomplish and what you choose to do in life will be the people. And there's two types of people, living and dead. And so the living people you choose to spend time with are the ones that are going to nourish your soul and challenge you and bring ideas up. And relationships are messy, but that's hugely important. The other kind of people are the dead ones. Well, how do you have a relationship with a dead person? Well, you read their books. And we know because books have been around for such a long time and read by so many, you know, millions, billions of people that there really are some books that are clearly just great. There's

no other word. And when you read a book, a great book that was created by a great person, it gets you in direct contact with that person's great mind.

I am currently rereading *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy. The first time I read it, I had no life experience, I thought it was boring, and it was a hard to read Russian novel, and I forgot about it. Then the second time I read it, which was probably seven years ago, I thought, this is the best novel that has ever been written, because I had more life experience. And now I'm listening to it again, and I'm realizing, it's not at all about the plot. The power of Tolstoy is in the moments of truth that surface in the dialogue and the interaction between the characters. The plot is just the means to deliver the power of the truth that's embedded in the book. And so I hear it more and more carefully. It's funny, I had this girl, she wrote me a teasingly nasty letter about me on the video, giving away the end of books.

**Julie Walker:** Oh, it's true, Andrew. That is hard.

**Andrew Pudewa:** You know, that somehow I'm a spoiler and oh, she raked me. She's probably, I don't know, 14, 15, and she used every little bit of elocutive power she had to criticize, condemn, and make me feel horribly guilty. And of course I wrote back unapologetically. But it's interesting because when you know the end of the book, then you can read the book at a different level. The first time, you're trying to get to the end, find out what happens. Once you already know that, then it's almost like you can pay attention better. I would liken it to taking a trip. If you don't know where you're going. You're always looking, okay, can't miss the roads, got to track of where I am, and what's the time, and how come. But when you know where you're going, well you don't have to worry about that stuff, and you can look at the beautiful scenery along the way. That's a little off track of mentoring, but I do think we, we can learn a tremendous amount from both the people we meet and the books that we read. By the way, do you know where the word mentor comes from?

**Julie Walker:** No. Do tell.

**Andrew Pudewa:** So mentor is the name of one of the characters in the Odyssey.

**Julie Walker:** Yes. And actually, as you're saying that, Andrew, I absolutely know exactly where it came from.

**Andrew Pudewa:** So, Odysseus, he went off to fight the Trojan War and he was gone for a long, long time. And then the war was over and he was going to head back to Ithaca, where his virtuous and faithful wife, Penelope, was waiting for him. But he got distracted and waylaid by many sorts of, weird creatures and temptations and disasters along the way, so it took him even longer to get back. But meanwhile, back at the ranch, his little son was born, Telemachus, or Telemachus, however you want to say it. And Penelope is believing Odysseus is still alive and will come home. But there's all these kind of suitors who say, "No, he's been gone so long. He's dead. You have to marry one of us. So you got to choose one of us." So they just hang out at her house, eating her stuff, and taking advantage of their situation. She's trying to say, No, I'm waiting. I'm waiting. She pulls some pretty clever tricks. Plans like she's going to...

**Julie Walker:** Knit the burial

**Andrew Pudewa:** knit the burial cloth or weave it and so she weaves or knits during the day And then she undoes it at night so that it's going even slower. But Mentor is the character who was Telemachus's tutor. He was kind of in charge of helping Telemachus grow up and know how to speak and what to do. And that's interesting, because when you think of how to speak, that translates as how to think. What to do would be standards of behavior, decorum, propriety. He's preparing a future prince or king of Ithaca, and so that job is a pretty serious one. And then, of course, Odysseus does come back, meets Mentor in disguise, they go over and it's a bloodbath at the end, which, you know, all the boys really like.

**Julie Walker:** Well, yes. One of my favorite scenes, though, from the movie. Wait, I don't know if it's in any movie, but it's in my mind.

**Andrew Pudewa:** The movie in your mind of the book that you read. Yes.

**Julie Walker:** Is when he shoots an arrow through, is it 12 axes?

**Andrew Pudewa:** Axe heads. Yeah.

**Julie Walker:** that's how they know it's actually

**Andrew Pudewa:** Odysseus.

**Julie Walker:** Yeah, I love that.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And then he proceeds to shoot arrows through all of those suitors.

**Julie Walker:** Right. So I do, I do want you to speak on a, perhaps you're not thinking of this young man as a mentor, but I know, especially recently, he has influenced your life profoundly. And that would be? Your son.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Oh

**Julie Walker:** So talk about Chris and that journey that he has brought you on because I think in that way, maybe he's not older and wiser in all things in life, but he certainly has taken you on a journey that has changed your life.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah. I think it does show that whatever age you are, you do have something to offer. And sometimes that can be very significant. Yeah. So, well, through various steps, which I will not elaborate on, I tricked myself into agreeing to go to the gym and let him be my personal trainer, mostly to kind of motivate him.

**Julie Walker:** But it helps that he's your son. So you love him and have a relationship with him.

**Andrew Pudewa:** uh, oh man, did I hate that so bad. Those first months at the gym were just, I dreaded it, absolutely dreaded it. He's really a very good teacher. And he's very patient, he explains things well, he sets an appropriate level of challenge. And, you know, it was very encouraging. In fact, I really enjoyed being at the gym and watching him train someone because then I could see all of those powerfully positive traits that he brought to the work that he was doing.

So, yeah, it got me going on a path of wanting to learn a whole lot more about, you know, longevity, muscle physiology, the whole art, if you will, the sport, I wouldn't really call it a sport myself, but the practice of improving your body through diet and exercise and proper care. So I am profoundly grateful for him and I've told him that many times because I would like to live long enough to be able to swim, play chess and wrestle with great-grandchildren, but you know, I'm going to have to stick around for a while to be able to do that.

**Julie Walker:** Right. Another thing that we were talking about before we turned on the mics is that this 2024 is leap year, which means we all have an extra day to do something.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, I think most people are going to spend their extra day whining about the outcome of the election. That's why you get the election year and the leap year at the same.

**Julie Walker:** Oh, interesting. I would challenge that, Andrew Pudewa, but you know, that's our relationship, right?

**Andrew Pudewa:** Okay, only half the people are going to whine about the election. The other half may be, you know, less unhappy.

**Julie Walker:** That could be true, but I like this idea of a three-pronged approach. So here's the challenge, listeners, for you with that extra day that you have this year, and that is find a mentor. Someone maybe older than you or wiser than you in a certain area that can help you accomplish something. Find a mentor. The second thing would be to become a mentor. To find someone that you can mentor, and help them grow in a certain area that may be your expertise. And then the third area would be find a peer that can support you right where you are. So higher, lower, and same level. And that's three different relationships, and I think in all three of those, you can find support and accountability in a way that you wouldn't necessarily be able to do if you were just only doing one of them. But I do know, and Andrew, you talk about this in, there's an article you wrote about the value of mixed-age classrooms and how there's and I think that kind of brings that in a practical way, but as an adult. So can you just spend a couple minutes talking about the benefits of a mixed age classroom?

**Andrew Pudewa:** I don't speak from a huge amount of personal experience. The first teaching job I had was a grade 7-8 combination classroom, but that's because the school was very small. What I do have is a lot of stories of Webster teaching in a one-room schoolhouse and doing some reading about the history of education and how one-room schoolhouses were kind of a community of learners that was designed for everyone to be helping each other. So, Webster explained that his first teaching job, he wasn't even 18 years old. He was 17. It was the end of World War II. There was a shortage of teachers and men in particular. And so they ran him through a six-week summer teacher training course, sent him out to a small town in Saskatchewan and said, you're the teacher of the school, THE school, the ONE school.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And he, you know, I don't know how much of this is precise from his memory or even from my memory. But as I remember him telling me, he had forty-six students in a one-room schoolhouse. No electricity. The youngest was six, the oldest was sixteen. Several of the young children were European refugees and didn't speak English very much. He had to rotate living with families in this village, so he didn't really even have his

own permanent room in a house or, or a house. And when it was dark, which was a lot of the school year in Saskatchewan, you know, he'd come in, the kids would make the fire, and he would stand by the window and just read to them by moonlight until it was light enough. for them to start doing their own work. And they would cook their own lunch. Usually, one family would bring lunch each day, so it would rotate around, and they would cook it up and serve it to everybody. And he said, you know, in retrospect, it was one of the easiest teaching jobs he's ever had because if someone had a problem, they wouldn't pester him.

It was part of the culture. So if a grade 5 student had a problem, didn't know how to do something or not sure, it would go straight over to a grade 7 or 8 student and ask that student. And then that student would be explaining the math or helping understand the concept or whatever they were doing, figure out. And then if a grade 8 student had a problem, they go to the older students, of which there were only a few. And that sixteen year old girl was kind of like his assistant in this classroom because they weren't even two years apart. And he said it was pretty easy because you would just administer the curriculum and everybody would be working independently and knowing what to do. And if they had any problems, then they would help each other. He did that for two years.

The war ended and then they said, well, you actually aren't qualified to be a teacher. You need to go get a credential. So he went to a two-year university program and then he taught fifth grade in Vancouver City. He said this is the worst teaching job he ever had because all the kids are the same age, and if one of them didn't understand something, they pretty much, lots of them, didn't understand, and they're all pestering him all the time, and they couldn't help each other. And so what he did was, the first thing he did was he set up a system, particularly for the writing stuff, and said, You know, if you have a question, you go to this person. If that person can't help you, you go to the next person. If that person can't help you, you go to this. And if she can't help you, then and only then, come to me. So he set up kind of an artificial system based on, you know, probably natural aptitude and a little bit of, you know, academic rigor discipline that they had. But he always said it was much easier to do that when you had a widely mixed range of ages in the classroom.

And I've talked to other teachers who've taught in one room schools. I've talked to people running cottage schools that'll usually do three or maybe four grade levels in one group. And, you know, I think part of that isn't to make the teacher's life easier, but to give leadership opportunities to the older students who are now responsible for helping and coaching and being kind to younger students. So I often say I don't know that we can fix educational institutional problems very well when we insist on segregating children by age. Because it's an unnatural condition and it really kind of prevents that mentor mentee relationship from, from coming into existence.

**Julie Walker:** I love that way that Dr. Webster did to work around that. And I know that happened in that Mrs. Mark's English class. You know, there were people that were assigned different levels of responsibility, and I think that's super helpful. It does make me think about being a mentor and the responsibility that you have that in and of itself is accountability. Because now you've got someone coming to you and saying, I need help with this, and yet you don't want to be a hypocrite. You want to be able to help them honestly, and so I think all of those things

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, and it forces you to give up things like selfishness and, you know, having a pity party or wanting to do your own thing. No, there's people who need you. And I think most people who live long enough realize this is the way society is structured. That we

need each other and that is a good thing. And when we experience that at a younger age, either a bigger family or, you know, a school type situation where you have responsibility and you have older people that you can learn from, it sets you up, I think, better for success in life.

**Julie Walker:** Yep. Well, thank you, Andrew.

**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.