

Podcast 485: Homeschool 101: Tips for New Homeschoolers

Episode Transcript

Andrew Pudewa: The ideal situation for what the buzzwords college and career readiness is really that character training that is most easily accomplished with longer periods of time at home, and the games and activities that go along with that.

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: Happy July, Andrew Pudewa.

Andrew Pudewa: It's hot. I like it though. I used to hate the summer because I was just so hot all the time. But now that, well, I have less body fat, I'm not quite so over-insulated. I really like the summer. I love the morning sunshine. That is the best thing— getting up. And you wake up, the sun's up, sit outside, get that vitamin D production going. Yeah, I am a big fan of July

Julie Walker: Yeah, well, that's great. I think getting up early before it gets too hot and getting outside and just getting some exercise is always my goal. Not always possible, but setting goals. So today is an episode that we devote to those new to homeschooling. So this is our Homeschool 101 podcast, and I thought it would be of interest to our listeners whether they are considering homeschooling or they've made the decision and now they're maybe having cold feet. “Oh my goodness. It's July and school starts in a month.”

Andrew Pudewa: Well, the good news is you can't really have too cold of feet in July, but we, well, unless you're in the Southern hemisphere, but we will bring sunshine to their idea of homeschooling.

Julie Walker: So both you and I homeschooled for several years. My story is I did teach in school for several years before I had children, and once I had children and was homeschooling them, I did the school at home thing. All those things that I was doing with my first and second graders in the classroom, I just brought home to my kids.

Andrew Pudewa: Yep. My wife too. She has her degree in elementary ed and had to set it up with little desks and a flag in the corner and the, I guess it was a whiteboard. Dunno if the first one was a blackboard or not. Yep. We had to do school at home until we figured out that's not necessarily what you have to do.

Julie Walker: So mistake that both of our families made was thinking that homeschooling is school at home, and it's not. There's a lot more flexibility.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, and I have this talk—*However Imperfectly: Lessons Learned from 30 Years of Teaching*—and the very first thing is it's hard not to do to your children what was done to you. The number one influence on you as a teacher is your experience of having been taught, and we like to step back and say, well, was all that which was done to me necessarily a good thing? And if not, then what can we do differently? So a lot of people get into it and at a certain point start thinking, do I really have to do that in that way or is there a better way?

Julie Walker: I think one of the advantages of homeschooling today that wasn't as prevalent 30 years ago when I was kind of in the throes of all of this is the co-op classes or the two day a week program, but you still have that time where it's just you and your kids at the dining room table and the idea of what, what's the best use of your time? How can you make the most of this? I think it would just be kind of good for you and I just to kind of go back and forth and you share a tip and I share a tip and we'll just see how this plays out. So, you first.

Andrew Pudewa: I think one of the first things that people realize, especially if they have several or many children, is this idea of every kid being in a different grade and having a different book for each subject in each grade. It becomes very untenable, and you become more of a curriculum administrator than learning and teaching and loving doing it with your kids.

So the first thing I always try to help people understand is. There are some things that are kind of cumulative skills based. Math is the perfect example where everyone really does need to be kind of working at their own pace. But then there are other things that you can easily do in groups and you can chunk them, and those would be content areas such as.

History, probably some science literature, things that you can take your top two or three kids, maybe there's five years difference between them or more, but you can really read and talk about that stuff together with all of them. So that idea of chunking kids and saying, I'm going to teach this with two or three, or who knows, maybe even four, depending how close they are together and not worry about everybody doing their own history for a specific grade during a specific time period.

One of my friends, Martin, likes to say, history is not chronological, which it attracts your, your humor button because you would say there's nothing more chronological than history. But what he's, what we're saying is you don't have to study it in the same order. You can study a little bit of this time period and a little bit of that place in the world, and then if you have a nice big timeline...

Julie Walker: I was just thinking that, Andrew...

Andrew Pudewa: ...spread down the hall of the house. It all comes together in the kids' minds eventually. So that'd be my first thought is ditch the pile of grade level everything for

everybody and chunk kids when they can. And then help them with the very specific skills-based stuff like math and spelling on an individual basis.

Julie Walker: Now my tip, just kind of springboarding off of that, might cause some people to think that I am anti-unschooling, and for the most part I am.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, you'd have to define unschooling, and I've heard a couple different definitions.

Julie Walker: yeah. So in my world, unschooling is very little structure, student-directed education throughout the day and. I am not a fan of that. I think kids need more structure, but at the same time, I believe that kids have certain bents and talents that you can, as you're homeschooling, spend more time developing them. I always mention in this context, my son, who was a musician, and he as in high school, for one of his one-semester credits, composed all of his own original music and recorded an album.

Andrew Pudewa: And having the free, having the time to do that. Some listeners may not know that the word *school* comes from the Greek *schola*, which actually in its literal meaning is leisure compared to the hard work of eeking out a living from the ground or something. it was, it was the people who had the leisure to study.

The word *studio* is also *study* comes from the Latin meaning *zeal*. So if you were to combine those two, like school and zeal what you would have as the origin would be, or school and study would be a zeal for using leisure well.

Julie Walker: I love that. Yeah,

Andrew Pudewa: That's, I think when you see a high school student that says, I've got this thing I want to do. Well, if you're going to school, and you're in classrooms being shuffled around and giving mechanical assignments of homework and spending a lot of time with peers, you're not going to have the time to engage in a big project like write an album or write a novel. I know lots of kids who wrote a novel in their teens, and a couple of them even got publishers to publish it for them. Or become really good at something like art or robotics.

So I think we want to incorporate that idea that by choosing to homeschool, you're gaining time. And then the question is, how can that time best benefit the child and their mind and heart and their future?

Julie Walker: I'm going to count that as your tip.

Andrew Pudewa: Okay, that's fine.

Julie Walker: Good. And I'm going to mention that you have a talk *Hacking High School*. I think that, and we'll put a link in the show notes for that as well as some other things that we're mentioning here, but kind of going back to my idea of it's good for students to have a schedule regardless of what their ages are.

High school students need a schedule; they need a framework so that they know what the expectations are and when you work in this time schedule, then that's kind of the real world, Andrew. We get up, we've got to go to work, we've got things to do, we've got meetings to have, and that's just real life. And if we are always so loosey goosey and not, I guess that's what I'm saying is don't be afraid to put your kids on a schedule.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, Oliver DeMille had his talk, *The Seven Keys of Great Teaching*, which I've listened to dozens, oh any number of times, and one of those is structure time. Not content. And I didn't get that for a long time, but one day I was driving late at night and thinking about this, listening to it, and I thought that's kind of the mistake I think that we've been making with one of my kids in particular was—here's your checklist. Here's all the things you have to do today. Well, the problem, especially with a 12-year-old, is they may go through the motions of doing all those things as quickly as possible, but they're not gaining the full benefit, engaging with it. With DeMille's idea, don't worry so much about how many pages or chapters or lessons or, or that. Just dedicate the time.

That way a child knows, well, I'm going to be doing math for half an hour from 10:30 to 11, or, age appropriate, whatever.

Julie Walker: If they're seven, it's a half an hour. No more

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, max at 7

Julie Walker: max. Yeah.

Andrew Pudewa: but I'm going to be doing math. How much math I do may vary right from day to day or kid to kid, or year to year, how many problems you accomplish.

But that really had a very transformative effect on one of my children, particularly in fact, since you like to put link to the show notes, we have a couple podcast episodes on, um, the three best things I did. Three, maybe four best things I did as a dad. And I tell this story of Julia and that shift of structuring time, not content, because we don't want people who will come in and do everything on a checklist with as little effort as possible and say, "yeah, I'm done. Goodbye." People who know how to use time well. And that's probably the greatest lesson I think that homeschooling affords.

Julie Walker: Yes, yes. A typical schedule for us on the days that we didn't have classes, co-op classes or other activities was kids are up and at the dining room table by eight o'clock.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, but you made them clean up before that, right? Because didn't you have your little morning cleaning ritual?

Julie Walker: Well, that would be after the eight o'clock. So breakfast and dressed at the table, eight o'clock. And then at eight o'clock we did family devotions, memory work. Just for about an hour, just had conversations. It was pretty relaxed. And then from 9:00 to 9:15, this is what you're talking about. I did a white tornado

Andrew Pudewa: White tornado.

Julie Walker: And the kids had 15 minutes. We set the timer and they all had their area to clean up and they, it really helped to get those breakfast dishes done if they hadn't done them already, get their beds made if they hadn't done that already. And then the next time was math. And then we focused on math. And kind of that same idea, Andrew, where we spent, depending on their ages, a certain amount of time on math, but they had their assignment, they had to get done within that time. And if they didn't get their assignment done within that time, then they do it in the afternoon or in the evening with dad or something like that. So there was an expectations because... Are you familiar with Parkinson's law?

Andrew Pudewa: Not fluently.

Julie Walker: Work expands to meet the time allotted for it. It's why projects take longer because they have a longer timeline.

If you shrink the timeline, and I think telling this, my kids, you've got 45 minutes to finish your math, and then you need to move on to the next subject, then they knew, oh my goodness, I gotta get this done, otherwise I'm going to get stuck doing this in the evening with dad.

Andrew Pudewa: It forces the focus.

Julie Walker: Right. Exactly.

Andrew Pudewa: Alright, what's your next tip?

Julie Walker: Well, my next tip is really taking advantage of the opportunity. We talked a little bit about math and some curriculum things, but really taking advantage of the opportunity of developing character. And some of this happens, like this whole idea of leadership and good character and showing up on time and being proactive. I had all boys and one of the things that I taught my boys was be attentive to things like opening doors for ladies or helping carry in the groceries and being that number one worker. These are not things that there's necessarily a textbook for, but it's just naturally modeling, reminding, talking, walking them through things. A lot of just character building activities. There is something called the Etiquette Factory. Are you familiar with that?

Andrew Pudewa: Oh yes, I know her. I see her at conventions very often.

Julie Walker: That is something that I did not use because I didn't know about it, and I don't think it came out until I was pretty much done. But the Etiquette Factory would be a perfect example of what I'm talking about. Teach your kids something that they probably wouldn't get in schools. When I was teaching Sunday school there were boys and girls, and the girls came in late and so there wasn't a chair for them to sit on. The boys knew that they needed to get up and give the girls those chairs. And Andrew, this is important—to all the girls out there and the girls needed to say thank you and take that chair because the boy got up and, and how

embarrassing of say no, I don't want to take your chair. No. Let them be the gentleman that they are, and I think it's one of the reasons why they got such wonderful wives today.

Andrew Pudewa: I would not doubt that at all. And it is something that you can be proactive and having a curriculum like that, we should get her as a guest sometime. She would be good. Because you tend to be very reactionary and then say, you should have done better. You should have done that differently rather than when this situation occurs, here's how you would best handle it. Here's how you would best behave.

Julie Walker: Another thing that we taught our boys was first-time obedience, and this is a character thing. Oftentimes you'll hear parents doing the counting “one, two, and...” then they're really getting grumpy “three.” And we actually, just like what you're saying. We made it a game initially. Like, I'm going to call your name, you're going to say, yes mom, and you're going to come immediately. And I stood them in the backyard way across over there, and I would say. Daniel, can you come here please? And he would yell the top of his lungs. Yes, mom. And they, it was a game. And here's the funny thing is after we were done playing the game for quite a while, I went back in the house and we did our thing.

And I called Daniel and he said, “yes, mom.” And he came. And Andrew, I had forgotten that we had done that thing, but he learned it. He had practiced it in a fun and engaging way. And so it became natural to them.

Andrew Pudewa: We had a similar “Yes, mom, I'd be happy to” points. So every time you would say that you'd get some points. And then you'd have enough points to cash it in for, for something. So yeah, I think you hit on what I would view as the number one most valuable thing or important reason to choose homeschooling. Because when you have these larger periods of time with kids, if they go to school, they're gone six hours plus a couple more in transportation, plus another one or two in extracurricular, and you lose the time where you really have the opportunity to work on those character issues.

And one of the things that I do in the talk, I say to people, pretend that you are a person who has to teach high school graduates, or a person who has to hire and supervise high school graduates. What do you want these people to come to you with? And 90% or more of what everybody says are not anything to do with academics, but all having to do with work ethic, gratitude, teachability, showing up on time.

Julie Walker: Yes. Imagine that.

Andrew Pudewa: They're all character issues. So really when you look at the ideal situation for what the buzzwords “college and career readiness” is really that character training that is most easily accomplished with longer periods of time at home, and the games and activities and stories and literature and challenges and tantrums that go along with that.

Julie Walker: Exactly Mom too, having those tantrums and that. I didn't do it perfectly. I think of your talk again, *However Imperfectly*. Yeah, I didn't do this perfectly for sure. I want to just kind of run through the list and promote a couple things.

It's July, and so a lot of the homeschool conventions are gone. And so if you were considering homeschooling and you miss the homeschool convention, I want to let you know of an opportunity, our Annual Educators' Conference that this year is happening on July 26.

Andrew is doing four talks; I want to mention what they are. *He's doing Reading Strategies for the Struggling or Non-Reader*. He is doing *Cultivating Attentiveness and Contemplation*.

I hear this is a great talk. This is a new one

Andrew Pudewa: It is new this year. I've done it a few times and I think it's ready.

Julie Walker: He's going to be giving another talk called *Power Tips for Improving Teaching and Learning*, and I wanted to kind of highlight this one because it's not, this is more kind of in the realm of what you can do, what you can focus on when you're homeschooling that's not curricular, but it's basically healthy living because what an opportunity we have to teach our children what healthy living is. And that means getting out and exercising.

And my oldest son is a PE teacher now at a small Christian school, and I'm just so proud of him for doing that, and I just feel like, I don't know that he learned all that from me. And of course you're also doing *The Full, Ready, Exact Man*. This is the idea of the language arts.

And so here's a list of all the curriculum and things that you will want to accomplish as a homeschooling mom, you want to do math, you want to do reading, you want to do writing? Wait, that sounds like reading, writing, arithmetic, right? Getting to the basics. Probably include some typing. Teach them music, get outdoors and do some PE and healthy living type exercises. Don't be afraid of creating a schedule that's reasonable, that's relaxed. You're not going to spend six hours a day, especially when they're young. It might be an hour and a half a day. Focus on character.

Andrew Pudewa: Major in the majors.

Julie Walker: Exactly. 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, 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.