Podcast 487: Helping Students Avoid Plagiarism, Part 1

Episode Transcript

Andrew Pudewa: I think it requires a little more detective work today to not accidentally use someone else's words or ideas. It's really hard, I think, to have integrity in searching out the original source of that idea.

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, we are here today in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Andrew Pudewa: This is very different. We have, I don't think we've ever done an on-location live with an audience podcast recording, have we?

Julie Walker: No, we have not. This is a first, and I think it's fitting that we are doing this first ever way of doing a podcast here with this group at NCFCA.

Andrew Pudewa: Yes.

Julie Walker: This is an amazing group of students and a just as amazing group of parents who are here because I just figure if the students who have been able to accomplish what they've been able to accomplish to be here at the National Christian Forensic and Communication Association National Event. It's Speech and Debate. And so yesterday I was in as a judge for some of these students, eight students, doing informative speeches. And as you know, because I've shared some of the content with you already–very informative and really remarkable. So parents, you've done an incredible job of training your students to become confident–I'm getting teary eyed because I'm just so impressed with these kids–confident and competent communicators and thinkers. And that's really what we are about at IEW, which is why we love NCFCA so much because you too are about nurturing confident and competent communicators and thinkers.

Andrew Pudewa: I always tell people if you're feeling a little short on hope for the future of the world, which happens to me pretty much every day, just get yourself to a speech and debate tournament and it will change your emotional position because these kids are truly, truly remarkable. What I don't understand is why there isn't an education correspondent from every major news organization here because this is probably the most interesting thing happening in the entire United States right now.

They just don't know it.

Julie Walker: They don't know it. And I heard today that there are over 450 students who have qualified for nationals that are here today out of the over 1,500 families who are a part of NCFCA. So this is like, as you say, the cream of the crop right here. So, And we have actually done several podcast episodes with various people who are a part of NCFCA, most recent being with Kristi Shipe in January of this year, episode 459, we talked about the value of having your students become a part of NCFCA or any other type of speech and debate program, and you talk about this a little bit in your talk *Hacking High School*.

Andrew Pudewa: In fact, I met someone yesterday who said that their family is here right now because of hearing that talk three years ago.

Julie Walker: Wow.

Andrew Pudewa: It inspired them to find a debate club, and boom, it worked for them. They're here now, so it makes me happy when I hear things like that.

Julie Walker: So this talk *Hacking High School*, those of you that are listening to our podcast will have a link in the show notes for those of you that are here in the audience. If you go to, and I just learned this, Andrew, yesterday at one of your talks, if you go to AndrewPudewa.com, you just have to know how to spell Pudewa..

Andrew Pudewa: P-U-D-E-W-A.

Julie Walker: There you go, Andrew.

Andrew Pudewa: one word. Andrewpudewa.com.

Julie Walker: that links to his page on our website. And if you scroll all the way down to the bottom, you can see all the talks that we've recorded. You can click on the link, and I'm pretty sure *Hacking High School* is one of them.

Andrew Pudewa: It is.

Julie Walker: There you go. So we can listen to that talk and be inspired to join the NCFCA.

Oh wait, you're already here. Okay. Good job everyone.

So this talk that we are giving today, that we're presenting as part of the education track for NCFCA is about preparing students for university writing and specifically speaking to plagiarism. And so I thought it would be good just to start off with the definition of plagiarism. What do you think?

Andrew Pudewa: Do you have a good definition?

Julie Walker: I actually do.

Andrew Pudewa: I thought you would. She's always very prepared for these podcasts. I usually walk into her office 10 minutes before we start recording and say, "So what are we talking about today?" So thank heaven she is prepared. Were you a Girl Scout?

Julie Walker: I was a Girl Scout. Yes. I can even still say, "On my honor. I will try…" the Girl Scout pledge.

So I'm going to read a little paragraph from our product *University-Ready Writing*. This is preparing communicators for collegiate success.

Andrew Pudewa: Okay.

Julie Walker: The very first assignment in this course–and this is a 12-week course designed for high school students who are college bound–and the very first assignment that they write about is–shocking– plagiarism.

Andrew Pudewa: You mean we used a source text on plagiarism as the first source text in a course about how to not do that.

Julie Walker: Exactly right.

Andrew Pudewa: Okay. Well, I'm a big fan of irony wherever you can find it.

Julie Walker: exactly

Andrew Pudewa: Alright. Shoot.

Julie Walker: You know what? I'm going to read this. But then I realized I have the funny man with the wonderful words sitting right next to me. I'm going to have you read this.

Andrew Pudewa: That's tedious because that tiny little print means I'm going to have to pull out glasses, just makes me look older.

"The first century Roman poet, Martial [or Mar-ti-al, depends how you pronounce your Latin words] Martial used the Latin word *plagiarius*, literally *kidnapper* to describe another poet who he claimed had kidnapped some of his verses. In 1620, the term *plagiarism* entered the English language and is today defined as "presenting work or ideas from another source as your own, with or without consent of the original author by incorporating it into your work without full acknowledgement." Usually this is done for personal, social, political, or financial gain.

"Plagiarism can be divided into three categories: literal, academic, and commercial. Literal plagiarism occurs when a writer copies the exact wording of someone else's prose and does not give credit to the source. Most common among high school and college students, this can undermine one's reputation among faculty and peers and even result in a poor or failing grade.

Academic plagiarism occurs when another's original research and or ideas are represented as one's own. This has more serious consequences and may even result in expulsion or professional censure. Commercial plagiarism, which may occur in journalism, politics, or business can result in disgrace, termination, or even lawsuits."

Julie Walker: So that's kind of our working definition of plagiarism. I think it's pretty accurate. And specifically what we've been invited to talk about is this idea of the academic problem. And of course now, and we were talking about this a couple years ago, but now more than ever, AI can become a part of that conversation. And how do we help students avoid this?

Andrew Pudewa: And that's a continuously changing landscape of AI, and I'm sure we'll get into it. It used to be that you would copy something, change a few words, and then not give any kind of citation or source. Then that was questionable. But then how do you know if something is general knowledge or specific to one researcher or writer?

Julie Walker: How do you know?

Andrew Pudewa: Well, you don't, so you play it safe, and you just cite everything ad nauseum. That's what most people are doing now, and you've read these papers and there's so many citations. Really? Do you have to clutter this thing up with all that? But they're hedging their bets.

The one thing I had heard is, if there's something that is published or stated in two or three or more reliable sources, that would be considered general knowledge. So you can't really academic plagiarize from the *World Book Encyclopedia* because everything in the *World Book Encyclopedia* probably came from somewhere else. And so you're pretty safe on that account.

Whereas, if you're reading an editorial or a Substack post or something that a specific person wrote and they make a statement or a claim and you can't find where that came from, then you would say, "oh, that was that person's original idea." Probably not, but at least you think it might be. Then you're safer to cite the thing.

Julie Walker: I am thinking about just the little bit of talk that you gave yesterday morning when you were talking about Ecclesiastes. There's nothing new under the sun is a recurring theme in Ecclesiastes. Doesn't that actually mean that there's no such thing as plagiarism? Because everything is plagiarism because there's nothing new under the sun.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, that's also an irony and a gray area. I think the idea is when you're doing research, you're collecting up a bunch of information, you're adding some of your own information to it, and then you're publishing that. So then the question is, the stuff you collected up, well that wasn't really yours, so you've got to give credit. Then the person who's getting it from you would have to go back to your source. You might have to go back to the previous source. Or if you just get any one of those sources, you've protected yourself. But

then we also have kind of the widespread problem of people just making up citations. And AI actually chatGPT has been known to just make up citations, totally fictional, which then people are using in their papers, and then that turns out not to exist. And so it's a big, big mess right now.

Julie Walker: So, so rather than going down quite yet how to avoid plagiarism or how to detect plagiarism, which maybe we'll get to. Can we talk about the problems with plagiarism and why? Why is this such a bad idea to kidnap other person's ideas?

Andrew Pudewa: It's a spectrum. On one end is there's no new ideas. Nobody's ever had a new idea. Everybody, every idea anybody ever had came from somewhere, and you've just changed it a little bit or added to it, combination, permutation. And on the other end, you think you have a really great idea. So you copyright it, you patent it, you want to control it, you want to economically benefit from it, and this whole academic thing is somewhere in between those two extremes.

Julie Walker: So why avoid it?

Andrew Pudewa: Well, because you might get in trouble.

Julie Walker: Is that why?

Andrew Pudewa: That's most people's reason why.

Julie Walker: Right, right. I just, I'm wanting to, and some of you know that I passed this out yesterday at some of the workshops.

Andrew Pudewa: Note in the show notes.

Julie Walker: Yes. Link in the show notes, this article that you wrote, “Writing Maketh an Exact Man,” and you talk specifically about AI, but the idea of if you use AI in your writing, then you start to believe that what you wrote is your own idea. So can you speak to that a little bit?

Andrew Pudewa: I think that's very typical for us as humans. We hear an idea, we take it in, and so now it's in our mind. And then we think about it, and then we communicate that idea. And it's very easy to kind of think that that was our idea. And in a way, it was. If you buy or acquire something, now it's yours. So you tend to fall into that. Well, this was my idea, but I acknowledge it came from somewhere. Then there's that process of saying, do I even remember where I got this idea from? And if so, I could give credit to that. And if not, then you can always qualify it by saying, “A very smart person once said…”

Julie Walker: I don't know that that would be an acceptable citation in the NCFCA.

Andrew Pudewa: No, I don't think so. But it might make you feel better.

Julie Walker: So would you say that plagiarism is more common today than it was say 10, 15 years ago?

Andrew Pudewa: I don't know if it's more common, but it's certainly easier, right? If you go way back before there was the internet, then you had to intentionally find the source, the book, the article and copy from that, either verbatim or copy a sentence, change a few words, copy a sentence, change a few words, and do it that way.

And, and you would know that you had done that. Now, if all your information is online from somewhere, you don't necessarily even know where the ideas originated, and someone else is using them from somewhere. I think it's, it requires a little more detective work today to not accidentally use someone else's words or ideas.

And so many people are just putting stuff out in their blogs and Substack and web articles and it's really hard, I think, to have integrity in searching out the original source of that idea. But you can do that and you can say, well, I got it from this place. If that guy got it from somewhere else, well, that's not necessarily your responsibility. And so sometimes you'll see kind of that string of citations of something. So I think there's a level of due diligence that is common sense, a level of integrity that we would hope most students have. But it is very tempting to not do that extra legwork. And so I think the temptation and the ease of the copy, paste, copy, paste–it's so much easier than it was when you had to read a book and type it into a typewriter or something.

Julie Walker: Right, so. It's easier to accidentally plagiarize. It takes more work to have integrity and to be intentional about not plagiarizing.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, I think so. And then, what's the difference between factual information that really doesn't belong to anybody and then an opinion or a comment or an analysis of that factual information that someone did put their name on? And that's a fuzzy line, especially for young people. It's hard for them necessarily to tell the difference between statements that are factual and statements that are opinion, and that's why it's a very good thing to be practicing competitive speech and debate because it's going to hone and refine that discernment that is not something you just grow up and get. It has to be refined and trained.

Julie Walker: Well, and I know there's a, and you're going to forgive me for not knowing There's a committee that's dedicated to making sure the students do give their speeches and their positions with integrity. What? What's the name of that? Compliance? Is that what it's called? Compliance. And so these kids that, I mean, I felt pretty confident yesterday when I was hearing these eight incredible speeches that somehow I'm supposed to rank? Are you kidding me? To be at nationals and to be a judge,

Andrew Pudewa: I told you what to do.

Julie Walker: close my eyes.

Andrew Pudewa: Rank the one you liked, just go with your gut.

Julie Walker: The one that was the funniest and told the best stories. That's what I went with. Now, I'm not, this is not true. But I felt pretty confident that the students, they were presenting the information. I didn't have to go fact check because of this compliance group that's here. But I just wonder, what are college professors, we're talking about specifically being prepared for university writing and speaking to this problem with plagiarism. How are professors…?

Andrew Pudewa: well, there's tools, so as technology has made it maybe easier and more tempting for students to just lift stuff and use it, now the professors have tools like plagiarism checkers, and so they will run the papers, which are all electronically submitted, through a massive database of other papers. If there's a certain percentage of word repeat, then it flags it as possible or probable plagiarism, and then they can look into it personally. Because how else would you do that?

And you're a professor, you're teaching a section with a hundred kids, you're getting a hundred papers. Nobody's gonna read all those things. You kidding me? In fact, I have talked to university professors who have admitted that they don't read all of the papers from all of the students. They will read the beginning, they will read the end. They will read a few random things in the middle. They will run it through the device that checks it out, and then they will grade it based on that.

And I heard a funny story of a kid who once wrote a master's thesis or some super long, high level thing, and he put a comment to his professor in the middle of the paper just to see if the professor would have read that and respond to it saying, yes. I read your little comment to me in the middle of your paper. And he was very gratified because the professor did actually read it.

But I thought that was kind of clever.

Julie Walker: Well especially with a master's thesis, I would think that they would expect that.

Julie Walker: Yeah. Yeah. So I'm reminded of a podcast guest we had, and I can't remember his name, nor his moniker, but it's Hilarious...

Andrew Pudewa: Hilarius Bookbinder. Hales, Professor Hales. Yes. That was a fascinating podcast, and it was provoked by me reading an article he wrote mostly about the type of students he's teaching and his analysis of their behaviors, their habits, their level of competency, and their willingness to actually engage in hard, rigorous work. And he is a professor of philosophy, so he's not teaching bonehead English or something. He's teaching kids who signed up to read harder stuff.

Julie Walker: Really smart kids. Yep.

Andrew Pudewa: And what he found is that they really can't read hard stuff, and they don't really want to put out a lot of effort or energy. And it was a good podcast, so people should definitely listen to that and his substack is very interesting, Hilarius. Like the medieval spelling of that name. Not funny, but it's an old name. I like to have a grandchild named Hilarius. I think that'd be very cool.

Julie Walker: I don't think it's going to happen, Boss.

Andrew Pudewa: I like unusual names. You know that.

Julie Walker: I do.

Andrew Pudewa: Hilarius Bookbinder. So, yeah, I think, part of what he was saying is it's really hard for everybody. The kids don't want to work hard. Mm-hmm. And he works really hard in trying to engage them. They just don't have the raw material for him to work with. And if you can't do it, but you're in a class and you need to pass the class because you've paid for it and you gotta get a grade on the transcript so you can graduate, a lot of kids will do whatever they have to do to try and delude the professor into thinking that they are doing the work and engaging and mentally wrestling with the ideas.

Julie Walker: And our time for this episode just expired.

Andrew Pudewa: It's a good thing that we are planning a double episode then it's true because we have hardly scratched the surface.

Julie Walker: It's true. But I do want to let our listeners know that in our next episode next week, you're going to have to wait to the solution that the Hilarius Bookbinder came up with to solve the plagiarism problem,

Andrew Pudewa: I hope you remember that.

Julie Walker: I do. Okay. Until next week.

Andrew Pudewa: But, but we'll talk about, we'll talk a little bit more about how what we do helps kids not do that. And then the problems of AI.

Julie Walker: Right, 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, 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.