

Podcast 491: The Value of IEW Training with Sydney Hoff

Episode Transcript

Sydney Hoff: I'm happy I found this so early in my career, but one of the things that has really stood out to me is the number of teachers I've been fortunate to introduce this to, who learn about it, and the look on their faces. After a year of studying IEW and getting familiar with the method, just it really motivates me.

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 hear from lots of families, lots of teachers who have started this IEW journey and were impressed and surprised at how well it worked because it's such a different, unique way to teach writing. And I thought it would be fun for our listeners today to have a conversation with someone who has some pretty interesting stories about how she discovered IEW.

Andrew Pudewa: And now she's teaching it.

Julie Walker: Now she's teaching it. Right?

Andrew Pudewa: We love to hear people are out on the front lines.

Julie Walker: Right, exactly. In fact, one of the things that we're gonna talk about today as a part of this conversation is IEW's accreditation program and how we want to help teachers. Know that they can be confident that they know what they're doing and we have said they know what they're doing. So we have such a teacher here today, and her name is Sydney Hoff.

Welcome to our podcast, Sydney.

Sydney Hoff: Hello. Thank you so much. I'm glad to be here.

Julie Walker: So Sydney owns a company called Rose Writing Center, and the little bit of conversation we had at the beginning was why Rose Writing Center? So Sydney, do you want to tell your story?

Sydney Hoff: Yes, of course. Well, everyone in my family kept encouraging me to name my first business after myself, and I was a little bit too shy to go with that. So I settled on using my middle name, Rose, and that's the connection.

Julie Walker: There you go. So how and when did you learn about IEW?

Sydney Hoff: Sure. So I actually had been tutoring and supporting students with their coursework for several years after I graduated from college, and then when the pandemic began in 2020, I found there were many more demands for tutoring and academic support, but it was totally different. Instead of parents wanting help with the existing coursework and assignments, they gave me the opportunity to just teach what I thought their children should be learning.

And I was so excited because I had never found the assignments they were completing particularly effective. And then I found myself trying to design a curriculum while teaching with more students than ever before. And I felt a bit lost, and I reached out to a professional connection, somebody that I had met at a conference several years in the past who owns a private school in Southern California that is renowned for producing gifted writers.

And I reached out hoping she would remember me and be kind enough to give me a few minutes of her time. And she was, and when I mentioned the struggle I was having, she very politely interrupted me midway and she said, I completely understand what you're facing. It's a real problem, but someone already solved it.

Go to IEW.com.

Andrew Pudewa: It had to have been Lisa Van Dam

Julie Walker: That's what I was thinking.

Sydney Hoff: Yes, exactly.

Julie Walker: And so you of course homeschooled your own children for decades and decades and you're just now a homeschool mom emeritus or something like that, right? Sydnee.

Sydney Hoff: Oh no, I never, I don't have children yet.

Julie Walker: There you go. And so I just think that's a unique story. Andrew and I knew that Sydnee of course, but I just think that in itself is a unique story—someone who didn't find us through the homeschool world, but talked to a teacher in a private school in Southern California and who started a business based on teaching, writing, using IEW. So I love that.

Sydney Hoff: It was just wonderful when, when Lisa told me to go to IEW.com, I remember she said, you might not know exactly what to do. Do when you start reading of this method, but don't give up. When you reach the first sign of confusion. Push past it, dig deep, figure it out. It will be completely worth it. And I remember going to the website and starting to read about the curriculum and the *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style* program and thinking, I don't really know how to evaluate this or how to start, and then I heard her voice, and I don't know how many hours I spent watching every YouTube video and listening to every podcast and starting to understand what it was that IEW was offering, but it was entirely worth it, as she said.

Julie Walker: So Sydney, explain to our listeners what is this thing that we do here, just in your own

Sydney Hoff: Oh sure. It's magic. No, it's magic that can be explained actually. What I appreciate so much about IEW is that it's designed a comprehensive program and approach for teaching writing. So the standards are very, very objective. Writing is broken down into different units that cover different areas of fiction and nonfiction writing. And throughout each of those units, students learn specific stylistic techniques and they learn them in a particular order. And there are really clear standards for proficiency and mastery of these techniques. And IEW does not tell you how to bring your personality into the classroom or how to customize certain assignments for your students. But it tells you what to teach, how to teach it, and in what order to teach it, and that unlocks the problem, at least for me and every teacher I've ever met in how to begin teaching what is perceived as such a murky subject.

Andrew Pudewa: Do you need another part-time job? I mean, we, we could probably put you to work explaining what we do,

Julie Walker: I think she's got a few life events that are happening.

Andrew Pudewa: right?

Sydney Hoff: Anything I can do to help more people, especially parents, learn about IEW truly is a pleasure. As you can see, I don't say no to putting more things on my plate that are interesting to me. And I'm happy I found this so early in my career, but one of the things that has really stood out to me is the number of teachers I've been fortunate to introduce this to, who learn about it midway or, or toward the end of their careers and the look on their faces after a year of studying IEW and getting familiar with the method and then realizing how helpful it would have been all those years ago, it just, it really motivates me. So.

Julie Walker: I have to mention Andrew because I know that this will just bring joy and delight to your soul. But one of her teachers is Kathleen Van Avery.

Andrew Pudewa: Oh, really?

Julie Walker: Yeah.

Andrew Pudewa: Kathleen works for you?

Sydney Hoff: She has her own practice that is quite full, but she has been so kind to offer to help us as a substitute teacher whenever we need. And she has joined some of our team meetings and gotten to know others on the team. So I don't have the pleasure of employing her fully at this point, but she has just been such a wonderful resource to us and has been so generous with extending support whenever she can.

Andrew Pudewa: It is a small world in many ways, especially with like-minded people and you find someone who knows someone and then they know each other. And then pretty soon

you have this little network of people who are all excited and that one kind of central truth idea brought you all together. And that's always a great joy in the big, big world.

Julie Walker: She's truly a lifelong learner.

Andrew Pudewa: So I'm still not quite sure—you were tutoring some kids and then the COVID cycle happened, and so you perceived, oh, I can expand this tutoring, and now you have teachers who work for you. About how many students do you have in your school?

Sydney Hoff: We reached 90 at some point during this school year. It may have dropped a little bit as students take off for the summer, but I think we're hovering at the mid eighties now.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, that can keep you busy, especially because writing is one of those more time consuming types of jobs where you can talk to kids and answer their questions, and then they send you papers and then you have to mess with the papers. I always thought it would be the perfect job if you just didn't have to read any of the papers.

Julie Walker: Andrew. Which of course he, with the *Structure and Style for Students* videos that we did, he definitely read every single one of those papers and gave feedback, which is appropriate. A teacher needs to do that. Andrew, what you may not know about Sydney is she was actually instrumental in helping one of our developers with IEW..

Andrew Pudewa: Well that would be the Joseph connection because he got into the whole world of education and literature and English because of Lisa Van Dam. So, and he did some setting up of a literature app, Read with Me, I think something like that.

Julie Walker: We had Lisa on our podcast. We'll put a link in the show notes to that podcast and just the work that they did to help people get more easily immersed, saturated with good literature, which I love that. We love that. So Sydney and all of our listeners, you know that we at IEW offer IEW Online classes using the *Structure and Style for Students* video courses along with *Fix It! Grammar*.

But those classes fill up, and we're just so grateful to be able to say to our families when they can't get into our classes, well, here is a trusted resource that you can go to and Rose Writing Center is one of them. So I love that we're able to send business your way. So how does your program work?

Sydney Hoff: Thank you. We, we love to support. Also, we offer private classes and small group classes for students, and so all of our groups meet once per week with an instructor for 60 minutes, and that's where we deliver the content of the week. So the students will learn about the new structural model, any new stylistic techniques, they read through the source text, they create their key word outline, they brainstorm style and vocabulary, and then throughout the week they complete their homework assignments and submit those digitally to us.

And our instructors serve as the children's editors. So we mark up their rough draft with feedback, ideas, encouragement. And then they refer to that to produce their final draft, which is due before the next week's class, so that they arrive ready to begin the next lesson.

Andrew Pudewa: Pretty standard. Do you have students in other countries?

Sydney Hoff: We have had a handful of homeschooling families who travel abroad, and they will take classes with us each week from wherever they are in the world. And then we've also had a couple of families who are generally based in the US but have been relocated for work, usually to different parts of Asia, but also we had a family in South America. And they have continued their classes. And I think that it's been really nice for those families to have such a different routine of life and a whole new environment but still the exact same learning experience for their children.

Andrew Pudewa: Which age group do you most enjoy teaching yourself?

Sydney Hoff: Oh, I love that question. It's hard to answer. I have really, really enjoyed elementary aged students when they're in third, fourth grade and they're just starting to learn how systematic and intentional writing can be, and they have all of these beautiful questions that come from such a fresh and blank point of view. I really appreciate that age group. I also find that they are much easier to motivate than the teenagers.

Andrew Pudewa: There is something delightful about learning to do something in the right way or the best way you can at an early age because then you don't have to undo it. A lot of conversations I had with teachers are, "Well, I've got some kids who are doing great, but now I have these new kids and they came from wherever they came from and it's just harder to get them to attend to all the details." Do you find that true as well?

Sydney Hoff: Completely. I so appreciate when students begin an IEW education earlier in their academic careers because they just learn things in such a systematic and clear way, and they develop such wonderful habits that later it is so easy for them to progress to higher level essays or more difficult forms of writing.

And I've had some students who began as early as third grade with me during the pandemic actually, and a few years later, they were still continuing. Now they were closer to fifth or sixth grade, and they would sign on to class and tell me that they had a really bad day at school. I would say, I'm sorry to hear what happened, and they said, well, we're writing an essay. And my teacher said, I can't make an outline. I have to just start writing.

Julie Walker: Oh no.

Sydney Hoff: And I said, well, what did you do? And he said, I made the outline in my head, and I jotted it down in the corner of the page. And then I crossed it out after because how can anyone start to write without an outline? That's their plan. And I thought, I'm so proud. This was exactly the takeaway that I would want for a child to have. Not that that's the schooling

experience I would design for them, but for them to feel so genuinely committed to the process because it sincerely helps them is precisely the goal.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, that is delightful. I was doing work for a school district, and the elementary went up through sixth grade, and then they'd go off to seventh, eighth for a middle school, and they would always come back and tell their fifth and sixth grade teachers, "Our teachers in middle school don't know anything about writing." Because you, you do, you get that system that works. You know how to plan, think ahead, collect up, organize. You've got a better vocabulary. I think vocabulary is one of the most delightful things that I see—children are so happy to learn new words, especially in that younger age. They're almost like new toys. Like, gimme some new Lego pieces, and I'll show you what I can do with it. Give me some new vocabulary and, and they use it awkwardly, of course, but that's par for the course. Do you have some other particular student stories that stand out for you?

Sydney Hoff: Oh, sure. I can tell you one, not as related to writing, but related to poetry and the *Linguistic Development through Poetry Memorization* program, which I found such a gift to incorporate into my teaching practice. One of the first students I ever taught was a young boy in second grade wrapping up his second grade. And I taught him in a group class, not an IEW class, but for another center I had been connected with at that time. And this young boy would never raise his hand in class. And if I called on him, he was very, very uncomfortable. But when my class ended, his parents reached out to see if I could offer private instruction, and I was happy to meet with him. And we went through the poetry memorization program. We ended up going all the way through the third level. I don't know if we finished the third level, but close.

Andrew Pudewa: Wow.

Sydney Hoff: This young man had such a knack for memorizing poetry. You could give him the most complicated winding sentence with words that nobody his age could remember how to pronounce, let alone form the word so eloquently. And he just completely soared with it. And I saw that young man's personality change, not truly overnight, but in such a way that it felt it at the time. And by the end of a year of tutoring, he was standing up and reciting long form poetry to all of his family and friends. He created some videos that are actually on Rose Writing Center's YouTube channel, where you can see him sharing some of the long poems in the book with such pride. And it was just so nice to feel like this young man had a voice that he could carry with him through the rest of his life.

Julie Walker: We will have to link to some of those poems in the show notes, if that's okay with you, Sydney.

Andrew Pudewa: That would be great. It is amazing what a certain level of mastery will do in terms of confidence and then what confidence will do for motivation. And all too long I think so many people look at motivation as the problem. Like how do we make this kid work harder, pay more attention, attend to detail, do better, when what we really should be doing is

backing up and think: how do we build the confidence? Because the motivation stems from that. And your story with the poetry, memorization and, and also the kids who know they need an outline and write it in their head and then secretly scratch it down and erase it out—like that is confidence.

Sydney Hoff: Yep. I love that too. And I find a lot of students would say in the third and fourth grade years, when they would reach a longer poem in the program. They would say, well, Sydney, I can't memorize such a long poem. I can't memorize four stanzas. And I would say, okay, how many can you memorize? And they'd say, well, I can just do two lines.

So I said, okay, this week let's do two lines. Come back next week, share them with me and we'll see. And of course, they would come back, two lines were perfectly memorized, and I would say, can you do two more? And a few months later, the whole poem would be memorized that way.

And I thought it was just, it's so understandable why they feel overwhelmed when they see a long poem or a long five paragraph essay, and they've never tackled it before.

It's a very natural reaction to think, this is more than I've ever done in the past, so I can't do it today in the present. It's the role of a teacher to help break that down so a child can realize that a long poem is the same as a short one. There's just a little bit more to it and a long essay is the same as a short essay. There's just, again, more to it, but they're not different in substance in a way that makes them inaccessible.

Julie Walker: I love that. I love that. So I have two more questions for you. One has to do with IEW's accreditation program, and I would just like for you to share your personal experience with that and why you think that would be important for teachers to pursue that if they're teaching with IEW.

Sydney Hoff: It is the single handed most important thing for a teacher to pursue if they are looking to provide a sincere, high quality IEW education to a child that is studying with them. And I will just say that for me as a teacher, the training has given me such confidence to know that I've produced the same assignments as the students, that I've grappled with the same techniques, and that I've gotten my gold star from IEW to know that I'm doing everything correctly.

And I must admit, there were some things I did not do correctly that I sincerely didn't know, and I learned through the process. I have so much more confidence. I feel so much more comfortable relating to my students. I've even pulled up my practicum assignments in a class to say, "Hey, I wrote this too. I remember what it was like. Here's how I did this technique, or Here's how I approached the most significant for my conclusion. Let's jump back to yours and talk about what your ideas are." Just to show them that I'm not assigning something I haven't sincerely wrestled with myself, that I haven't truly found value in myself offers a lot of just, just value on purpose to the program.

And then from the perspective of hiring, now that I have the joy of bringing other teachers onto the Rose Writing Center team. It's very, very hard to evaluate a person's technical expertise and understanding of the program because there are just so many layers to it that you can't really exhaust every last detail in an interviewing process and seeing that someone has successfully completed the accreditation and knowing where they're at, what level they're accredited with IEW allows me to focus my interviewing process so much more on personality, teaching style, demeanor, and other areas rather than being as overly concerned about their technical knowledge, like I had been at one point.

Andrew Pudewa: You have a beautiful voice.

Sydney Hoff: Oh, thank you. Thank you.

Andrew Pudewa: I think your voice is a combination of a smile, a deep caring, a high attentiveness to how the things you're saying would be received. I can see why you are such a great teacher.

Julie Walker: I love it.

Sydney Hoff: Thank you. What, what greater compliment could there be?

Julie Walker: So my last question, and we're going to have to wrap up with this. Perhaps there is a parent who wants to enroll their students in their classes, or perhaps there is an IEW accredited instructor who's looking for work and maybe they would like to connect with you. What can we share with our listeners on how to find you?

Sydney Hoff: Oh, sure. Well, the most formal channels, of course, would be through our website and through my email, which we can probably provide. And then what I would say also is I love to meet people in this community, so please feel free, truly at any time to just reach out to me directly and, and have a conversation, whether it's because we might be able to support your child in learning or because you are a teacher looking for additional work to do. Or even if you'd just like to say hi, because something that we're doing at Rose Writing Center interests you or resonates with you. I really have enjoyed getting to know all sorts of people in this community, and I'm happy to continue to do that.

Julie Walker: Great. So that's rosewritingcenter.com, all one word, and your email address is

Sydney Hoff: It's sydney@rosewritingcenter.com.

Julie Walker: Pretty easy.

Andrew Pudewa: Do you know about our *Magnum Opus Magazine*?

Sydney Hoff: Yes. Several of our students have been thrilled to be published in it, although this year, I think we submitted less than in the past. The children love to see their work there and the parents are just over the moon when it happens.

Andrew Pudewa: Good.

Julie Walker: Well, we wish you well, Sydney. Super excited for you. I know that you shared before we got on the podcast that you are engaged to be married, and you are continuing to pursue higher education, so we wish you well on that and we wish you continued success with Rose Writing Center. We really appreciate this partnership that we can have with you and your teachers and just hope for continued success for that and your students as well.

Sydney Hoff: Thank you so much, Julie and truly a big, warm and heartfelt thank you to all of you at IEW because you've made my dream job possible, so truly, 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.