

Podcast 526: Navigating the Four Deadly Errors in the Classroom, Part 1

Episode Transcript

Andrew Pudewa: We don't value imitation as much as we should. This imitation, that's cheap learning. But anything that any of us have ever learned, it started with imitation. And it continues to this day.

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: Well, we are here. We're back. We are here with our panel, and we've got Jessica, who taught—Jessica, why don't you just introduce yourself briefly.

Jessica Tinney: I'm Jessica Tinney from Owosso, Oklahoma. My range is a little bit varied. I taught at a private Christian school before and I've taught in a public school before, so

Julie Walker: What grades did you teach?

Jessica Tinney: everything, so

Julie Walker: in the public school? What grade did you teach?

Jessica Tinney: That was kindergarten. Okay. Yeah. And then in private school it was actually a Spanish teacher for K4 through fifth.

Julie Walker: Great. Okay. And Jeff

Jeff Nease: Oh, well, I'm Jeff Nease. I am IEW's Implementation Coach. I'm one of the Schools Department managers, and then I'm also an Educational Consultant. I taught high school social studies for almost 10 years, primarily all to freshmen, and that is my background, and that was in public school setting.

Julie Walker: That was in Broken Arrow.

Jeff Nease: In Broken Arrow.

Julie Walker: Which is in the Tulsa area. So Jennifer.

Jennifer Mauser: Hi, Jennifer Mauser. I am here from St. Augustine, Florida, and I have taught in classrooms. I've taught in a tutor relationship because I have a private practice

where I work with students impacted by learning differences, and my background is actually in home education.

Julie Walker: So that's our panel today and we are going to unpack a little bit more of the Four Deadly Errors, but I also have some questions for any of the panelists that want to be brave enough to take them. So how do you want to do this, Jeff?

Jeff Nease: Hey, you ask away and we'll answer.

Julie Walker: Okay. Okay. So have any of you experienced and have personally are guilty of committing any of the four deadly errors?

Jeff Nease: All four of them.

Jennifer Mauser: Multiple times.

Julie Walker: I'm sorry. Does anybody want to speak to any of those that you committed and how this has impacted you?

Jennifer Mauser: Well, I can talk about my experience with my students in one of my classes. What Andrew said in the talk that you gave just the previous session was on how you got your lesson plans, right? From your student errors that you would find and you'd change a few sentences. And I had a particularly challenging class one year. We were doing *Medieval History-Based Writing Lessons*. It was a high school class, so I was using the advanced editions and, and, I had students that were really struggling with causal structure. And so I remember feeling stymied by that because I was trying to use the lesson itself to help teach that.

And so what I finally did is I gathered up examples, and then I used what I knew of the students. And by making it more engaging because I was involving the students and their activities and the things that they enjoyed, I got a lot more engagement and that really helped handle that challenge of not just how do I not overcorrect, but how do I move them along in their learning?

Julie Walker: Good. That was the overcorrecting error. Other errors you want to point out? Jeff, what about you?

Jeff Nease: Well, guilty of all four and probably all seven. I would say that just comes to mind withholding help. Teaching high school freshmen, they're kind of, they are very awkward. And so they're kind of, we used to call them just big eighth graders. Yeah. And until really second semester, until they are okay. Now you understand kind of how high school works.

But withholding help, because I didn't want to help too much and I didn't want to give them an answer or a model to go off of. And I got much better at this as I went on. But early on, if I give them a model, if I show them exactly what it should look like, they're just going to copy

that. But now, going through IEW's approach, Andrew's talks and articles of really just—we need good modeling and we need students to have a clear idea of what is expected of them. When I was in the classroom, I didn't want to play the aha-gotcha game. And I think a lot of students are kind of what you talked about. They're trying to be a mind reader, whereas just tell me what you want me to do and I'll do it. But it's also the, “well for you, you have to kind of guess what I'm expecting and I hope you get it right and if you don't...Aha, gotcha.” So as I went on each year and each year, providing more modeling and more help was, I mean, a game changer for sure. And so, it's. Teaching at a ninth grade level—those students are...What is expected of a ninth grader to be the best they can be? But we are on this very age segregated, grade segregated conveyor belt type of mentality of if you know it, well, if you don't it, that's okay. You're probably not studying hard enough. It's on you.

We're just going to pass you along to the next. So there's really no progression of skills. It's just we have to keep passing them along. And so too, it's discouraging because we even have some school districts that their motto is 100% graduation. So when you have that, it's very much, well, now we have to live up to that. So if we say our goal is 100% graduation, we've seen it firsthand. This kid is not doing so well, but we're just going to keep passing him along to kind of meet our motto.

Andrew Pudewa: I'd like to comment on something you mentioned, which was, if I show that to them, they'll just copy it.

And that does sound bad. But if we back up just a little bit, we don't value imitation as much as we should. Everyone's, yeah. Okay. That's kindergarten, first grade. Yeah. They monkey see, monkey do. But by the time they're nine, we have to get them thinking independently. We've have to build critical thinking, this imitation, that's cheap learning. But. that any of us have ever learned. Yeah. It started with imitation, right? . And it continues to this day. even old people, if, if you're thinking, how do I get better at something? watch people who are better and you try to do stuff that they do that's normal. So I would love to see a re-norming imitation as a fundamental part of and classroom practice at all grade levels.

I come from a music background. And it's all imitation. It is, everything you teach in music teaching kids how to play the violin, you're saying do it this way. And then after years, Okay, now try that on your own. But you just don't go here, pick up a violin and fool around with it.

You get zero. So I think that, my thought is yeah, show it to them and if the best they can do is just copy it, that's learning. And if, if they could do it without copying it, they would. And actually, it's always somewhere in between. We're always copying something, whether we like it or not, whether it was provided for us or not.

And we're always on the edge of experimenting. If we think of that as kind of an okay place to hang out even with ninth graders. The other thing that came to my mind was so many schools do have this kind of segregated approach—for ninth grade, this is the curriculum. For

10th grade, this is the curriculum. There's not necessarily a lot of overlap, a way that provides them with a review. This is one of the super powerful things. If you can get structure and style going three or four or five years. Then they will leave that experience having a good, solid foundation, knowing what models and structures are, knowing what style is, having some techniques under their belt. They're not going to follow the checklist forever, but we don't want them to. We want them to gain the skills, and so building that consistency in grade after grade, after grade, and then that solves the problem of kids forgetting everything over the summer. I've taught kids, well, when we were making the videos here, I taught the kids and then we came back after twenty weeks or something because we had a pretty long break. And I was astounded at the things they did not remember. We did this, you all did this, we all knew this. You were there. How is it you do not know this?

So I have learned over time to not be astounded and to understand that part of a good curriculum is going to be embedded—and I wouldn't even use the term review because that has a slightly negative connotation. It's just embedded repetition, modeling, practice, all the things that work, and doing it kind of in the same way with different stories and articles and all that, but doing that for years, that is a huge gift.

Jeff Nease: Well, and to piggyback off of one thing that you said about imitation. Think about the benefit of invitation and exposure for students to be able to see so many different styles. And I mean, you can't blame a student for what they don't know. And if you say, look, this is an example, this is an example. You can do it this way. And even if it's great literature, if it's a history composition, whatever the case may be. For them to be able to see that. It gives them so many ideas. And I love that what you talk about is what we do with IEW is we kind of think of their brain as a toolbox or an inventory, and we're just pouring these tools in year after year, week after week, where they can pull these out and use them. And so giving them all these different opportunities for imitation and seeing what that looks like and just exposure is, I mean, it's a beautiful thing. And for a teacher to withhold that and to say, well now you have to kind of read my mind. And good luck, especially if they get a pretty, well for one, no rubric or a very vague rubric, they don't know what to do or how to do it. So I love the, just the whole thing of imitation is such a beautiful thing.

Julie Walker: One of our questions that one of our attendees submitted was this question of plagiarism. So let me read the question and I'll let any of you answer this. "How do you help students avoid accidental plagiarism (which I love that it, it wasn't intentional. They're not trying to be devious) when they first learned to write rough drafts, or maybe after they've learned to write rough drafts many times?" Avoiding plagiarism. Anyone want to take that one on?

Andrew Pudewa: I think the question comes up usually at the beginning when we're in Unit 2, and it's just sentence by sentence and you're moving key words, you can't really not sound like what you came from. And this is not a goal, this is not a finished product. Right. This is not an end, this is a step in a process, but a lot of times people have that feeling that, oh, all

these kids, it's just so similar. Some of these sentences are exactly the same as what we started with. Don't worry, just throw it all away. You're not keeping it anyway. Unit 3 you start to get a little more variety because you're not looking in every sentence for key words. You put the story in your mind, you pull it out into an outline and you get more variety.

In Unit 4 if you do it right, you're going to have kids choosing different facts. But by then you've also started to introduce a number of style techniques. And I had a conversation with Dr. Webster about plagiarism and he said, well, my system is the solution to that. Because even if you tried to copy from the encyclopedia, you'd still have to put in all the dress up and openers and decorations and triples, you wouldn't be able to come up with the same thing. So in a way, the style checklist is a protection against accidental plagiarism. Yep. That's good. Yep. The other thing I would point out is that. If you do have kids, who are they? They have, they're blessed with a good memory, that's a blessing.

Every kid who has a good memory is thankful for it, but sometimes it comes out like, yeah, those three words, they came from the sentence. I remember it exactly. I wrote it down exactly. And that's an indicator that they could probably use a slightly more advanced source text, right? Something a little more challenging to read, slightly longer sentences, vocabulary, but if you're working with a group, you can't necessarily customize source text as easily as you can customize the checklist, but you can kinda have a couple source texts on the side that you might take to that student. Because the one who's likely to do that is also likely to finish before everybody else. So Webster's idea was while you're writing, everybody's writing. And if you finished what you're writing, here's another one. Or go to the file and pick a source text you want and do this with that.

So he always encouraged teachers to have a kind of a backup file of source texts to keep the, what he called the birdies, right—the ones who take off—to give them another option. And this idea that that's not fair. I have to write more than someone else. I don't think that there's any role anywhere that says everyone has to do the exact same number of paragraphs or exact same number of assignments, or even use the exact same checklist. And so thinking more flexibly. The kids have been brainwashed into an egalitarian mindset. And the thing they're most likely to say, well that's not fair. Mark, it's not fair, but it's just.

Jeff Nease: That speaks to modeling too. Well, it's not fair that I have to go through something four times. And Jimmy over here only had to do it two times. We're all in different areas of learning and growth, and we process differently. Julie and I talked about this yesterday. One of my biggest pieces of advice when I go out and I'm training teachers in our methodology is trust the system. Because we will have, there's this almost unlearning that needs to happen. Yep. Absolutely. Because they have this word in their head, well, it should look like this. We should, students should be able to do five paragraph essays by, say we start in September, it's November. There we are. Well, they're moving too fast. And so I actually went out to a school, one time, and I mean, they were hammering me. I was like, one. Maybe Andrew should have been here. But why do you, why do you all wait till unit seven to do five

paragraphs? That's usually around February, March-ish. You know that the school year is almost done. They need to go all the way back here because, and so they just kept going on and on. Why do you wait so long? So in their mind, it kind of is what you talked about earlier. Good writing is a five paragraph essay with very clear, X, Y, and Z fill in the blank. And so I finally just asked them. I said, okay. I kind of played dumb. Is there like a state standard that you all are trying to meet? Why is there such a heavy emphasis on doing a five-paragraph essay in say, October or November? Well, that's what we've always done. We've always done that. We always had this one really awesome Thanksgiving project that we do. Okay. Then we started walking, kind of walking back the skills of each one of those units. And really the reason I'm here is because you are seeing a deficiency in your students' writing. So when we talk about, if we're giving them multiple opportunities for single-paragraph or even three paragraphs, we're getting them really good at that. Instead of introducing more. So there's really just this unlearning that needs to happen. And but we say trust the process. And usually they have to get through the whole, the whole nine use before they go, oh, I get it. I get it. Okay, now I see what we're doing.

Andrew Pudewa: One teacher said to me, you don't do any real writing until March. And I thought, It's all real writing. The other thing I like to mention is that I think for everyone involved, more frequent, shorter assignments is more effective because, well, number one, what do kids like the most about schoolwork?

Jeff Nease: Getting it done.

Andrew Pudewa: The other end, you have more frequent, shorter things that get to be finished more often. So it's a dopamine thing. The second thing is. If you give a group of kids, okay, here's the five-paragraph plan and this is how we do it, and it, and it takes time. It takes a lot of time, especially to do it well, then you give them feedback. And then you try another one and that takes a couple weeks. Your feedback loop is big. Whereas if it's a paragraph feedback loop, next paragraph, two paragraphs, feedback loop, three paragraphs. Okay. Your feedback loop is tighter. And so you can address the things that need to be addressed more frequently and more efficiently. And so that's why I would encourage, and I'm not opposed to big assignments. I think super essays are great.. But even if you're teaching 10th grade. Don't jump there with the assumption that everybody should already know everything they need to know to do this. Let's start and build it up. I've always wanted to go into a hypothetical teaching competition. Two cloned groups of kids. They're exactly the same in every way, and you start throwing prompts at them in September. And let me start with Unit 1, 2, 3, 4, and work up to Unit 7, and then we give them some objective standardized tasks. I will win. I know it's not possible, but, hypothetically, it's interesting to think about.

Julie Walker: And I just want to mention a couple resources, Andrew, as you were sharing, and Jeff, this process, Andrew has written an article called "Process versus Product." And there's also another article, "The Four Deadly Errors" we've already talked about, but also "However Imperfectly." Well, Andrew wrote a book called *However Imperfectly: Lessons*

Learned from 30 Years of Teaching and Other Articles. If you are a Premium member, you have a coupon to get a free copy of this book, and if you're really nice and ask sweetly, Andrew will even autograph it for you. But those things, we also have those articles available on our web site. So Mark, if you could please post those two in particular.

Andrew Pudewa: And there's an article on imitation. That would be applicable.

Julie Walker: Okay. There you go. Three articles to post, Mark. Ready, set, go see if you can, what you can do about posting.

Jeff Nease: That “Process versus Product” is one of my favorites. Any time when I start getting a little bit of pushback. We've always...read this.

Julie Walker: Well, and I love your question, Jeff, because it's so true. Why are you being asked to come in and teach a different way of teaching writing? Because what they were using before wasn't working. So why, you said it yesterday, why continue to cut the ends of the roast off? To fit in a pan when you don't have the same size pans?

Andrew Pudewa: On that same tangent, then you can go on, but I wanted to sometimes. Teachers get pushback from parents who never experienced anything like this. So they're looking at it as a completely foreign idea, they don't necessarily understand all of the thought that you as a teacher learning our system have gone through. So I always encourage teachers or administrators. Get the article on the website . And give a copy, send it to all the parents in the school. They may or may not read it, but the ones that do, it'll give them a little bit better insight and understanding into why we do what we do.

Jeff Nease: Well, I, I want to just, I know you have another question, but

Julie Walker: Of course I do.

Jeff Nease: When I was in the classroom, probably my last year before I came here, I implemented a mastery-based approach to teaching social studies, which was really hard because I had to kind of remove myself from the sage on the stage where, and I put it more on them to say, you know what? We're having unit one. You got three weeks, here's your start, here's your finish. I'm going to come around kind of coaching and leading some discussions and so on, and the students pushed back initially, but I got more pushback from the parents and other teachers because now these students were being held to a standard they really haven't been held to. So they would fail an assignment and expect just to move on. And so I would get phone calls from coaches and saying, they need to play in the basketball game this weekend. And I had one who said, can you just pass him? And so, but that kind of goes back to what Andrew was saying earlier of this kind of conveyor belt. It doesn't really matter what you get, it's did you do the assignment, you got your grade, we're just going to move you, we're going to keep moving until the end of the year. But now being a part of IEW and just seeing the beauty of slowing it down and really catering, I don't want to say catering, but really just meeting students where they're at. I mean, it's been a total game changer.

Jessica Tinney: I'll say that's one thing about the homeschool hybrid school that I worked at in California, it was great because we almost, it wasn't like a one room schoolhouse, but we did have fifth and sixth were together, seventh and eighth, were together. And I even taught in a math class where we had freshmen through seniors together. That was a little bit wild because I mean, you had every age, every spectrum. You might have had one child that was a little bit more remedial, one that was, had a different path that they were going on and, but it was nice because they were able to be with their peers, but learning at their own, at their own pace. And that's kind of what I love about this, is like you don't have to run right out the gate, right? You can learn.

Julie Walker: Limp along. Yep. If you need

Jeff Nease: It's not that expectation either, right? You need to be here by May or June.

Jessica Tinney: Exactly. So when we homeschooled our kids, we still did the standardized testing because I wanted to check that box and I'm legit, I promise, but don't arrest me. But I would tell my kids— I feel like standardized tests for us were like judging a fish on its ability to climb a tree. Not every 8-year-old is going to know the same thing. And that doesn't mean that they're failing. They're at a different stage. And so thankfully they did well on all of our standardized tests and I didn't get arrested for not teaching my children. But I've just always thought that to try to compare everybody just because they're the same age.

Julie Walker: a question actually, I think, Jennifer, this one's for you and I love how it's introduced. If it's not too off topic, you never know off topic.

Andrew Pudewa: Now we're curious.

Julie Walker: Yes. What are some modifications that still help students learn the concepts for students who are dyslexic or have other learning differences that impacts writing? When you've got, learning differences mainstreamed into a classroom, and you're teaching, do you have your learning different students do Unit 1 while everybody else is doing unit three? What kind of modifications can you make?

Jennifer Mauser: Well, first off, I'll say in any respective classroom across the United States, you're going to have a student with a learning difference. The most common learning differences are, that are diagnosed or would be dyslexia and ADHD, and depending upon who you speak to or check it ranges anywhere from 10 to 20%. So think about that for a minute. 10 to 20%. Of course, it occurs on a continuum. Some are much more stealthy in presentation than others. But one of the things that I did is anytime I go into a classroom, I assume I'm going to have those students. So the things that I would do and that I would encourage others to do as they're able is to take time, especially comprehension is hard. Vocabulary is hard because these students are not able to read at the same level as their peers. So when you're going through a source text together, it benefits all students to take time to break down that source text. Don't just assume that they know the vocabulary. Really take time to talk about those elements, speak to them using Socratic dialogue, questioning, what do you think this

means? What could this impact have? And then when you are working on the board. And I would say take a class key word outline. There is nothing wrong with doing that. I have found it beneficial for my students that I know are diagnosed with it to not require that they write that key word outline during class. I would take it and then I would capture it as a PDF. I would send it to them and then they would copy it at home. Because then they're not under the pressure of, do I try and get the artwork right, of writing the letters, because really that's kind of what it is. Sometimes it's its artwork. Or do I take my brain, which I only have so much available to use, and use that for really understanding and engaging with the content. So you've got to figure out what you're trying to focus on. But there is definite value in having them copy that when they get home. Because they're, they're associating the letters with the words and the sounds, and it also helps build that and strengthen that comprehension. So do that.

Also consider editing your checklist. That Premium membership is wonderful for that, so I highly recommend that Premium membership because you can alter the checklist to meet the students where their needs are. We have certain materials that are available. For example, some of our Writing Across the Curriculum materials will have some simplified source text.

That can be utilized if needed. We also have them read the source text aloud, like I said, but also allow for scribing, voice dictation, having parents be allowed to scribe for their students as homework is really also beneficial, so.

Julie Walker: Anybody want to comment further on that or shall we go on to the next question?

Jeff Nease: One thing that you said about copying, I know that I've worked with educators—kind of going back to imitation, right? “Well, if you're copying something that's not a good thing. You're wasting your time.” You have a whole article and talk about the benefits of copy work. And even with my ninth graders, I would encourage, I couldn't mandate it, but because we would have writers that, or students that would write incredibly slow. And teachers or students or parents would ask me, is there anything I can do? And really just the benefit of copy work is tremendous.

Andrew Pudewa: And kind of just being there. So if they don't know how to spell a word, you can write it for them or put it on a whiteboard if you have one at home, or tell them how to spell it. And then that gives them confidence. Whereas they may be afraid to write a word they don't know how to spell, and then they just dumb down their vocabulary to the shortest, simplest words.

Yep. One more thing on this subject of copying. I just came across this very recently. Perhaps some of you know the author Hunter Thompson, his stuff, little edgy Fear of Loathing in Las Vegas. Okay. Drug adventures, all that. So I'm not recommending his books, but I think it's very interesting. He was a successful writer, and he decided that he was going to type the book *A Farewell to Arms* by Hemingway.

He's just going to type it. And one of his friends said, why did you do that? He goes. I just want to know what it feels like to write this well. Isn't that interesting? yeah. I just want to know what it feels like to have that level of artistic use of words flowing through my brain. And so even at a high level, you can learn a lot from copywork.

Julie Walker: Well, and I think, Frederick Douglas of course.

Andrew Pudewa: Memorizing all those speeches

Julie Walker: Yeah, exactly.

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.