

Podcast 532:Peeking behind the Curtain with Denise Kelley (Laying the Foundation)

Episode Transcript

Denise Kelley: I just love the fact that there's, you know, so much experience all packed together and that is what I see the *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style*, third edition, is years and years and years of experience.

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: Our theme for the year is Laying The Foundation, and what we try to do with this podcast is the first Wednesday of every month we introduce a new topic on the theme of Laying the Foundation. So today we are going to talk about our third edition of *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style*, and I was thinking, wow, we actually should have done this in January because this is such an important product. It is the foundation for everything we do here at IEW? So that's what we're going to be talking about today, but this is also one of those awkward episodes where Andrew isn't here. He's actually speaking at a conference right now. So I decided that who better to invite as a guest on this podcast than the person who oversaw the production of this brand new edition, this new product? My dear friend, Denise Kelley. Denise, welcome to our podcast.

Denise Kelley: I'm so happy to be here.

Julie Walker: So Denise, you are the director of product development, but you've been working with IEW, and even before you started working for us, you were a huge fan of what we do here at IEW. So tell us a little bit about your story of how you came to be in the role that you're in right now.

Denise Kelley: Well, I am a huge fan, and so the very beginning it was just as a homeschool mom using the curriculum with my boys and many things led to me working as a volunteer in a booth at conventions. And then from there I was actually hired to be exhibitor coordinator. And so this August I will have been with the company for seventeen years. So that's pretty exciting, I think. But many years before that, also using the product.

Julie Walker: Yeah, so I know that you and I first started working together when you came on as exhibitor coordinator, and there was a time, in fact, it was at the *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style*, second edition recording, you were there most of the time, but you weren't there all the time because you were busy getting food for the crew. You were the event

coordinator for that event, and yet here you are now eleven years later, not just overseeing this project, but so many other projects that you have overseen over the last, well, how many years have you actually been in this role of overseeing product development?

Denise Kelley: I believe it's been eleven years. That was just me coming in by myself as product development manager, and then pretty quickly, like within a couple of years, it was obvious that we needed a team. And so that's where we started to build that team for product development. And then I became the director of product development. And I have a fantastic team, and it's very much everything that you see. What you'll see with the new *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style*, third edition, and the other things that we put out for IEW is because we have an amazing team.

Julie Walker: Yes, so I want to mention just a couple of the projects that Denise has overseen. *Structure and Style for Students*, of course, *Fix It! Grammar* that, Denise, was a real labor of love and of course, we are so excited of our partnership that we have with Hillsdale College and Denise, you were able to churn out six books in what, three, four years? That is really remarkable, super exciting.

But of course we are here to talk about the *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style* third edition. The way I see it, there's two major parts to this project and I don't know that everybody understands that there is the *Seminar Workbook* and there's also the video. So if you don't mind, if we can just break down the *Seminar Workbook* because that guides the content for the video, and so it has to be right. Talk about how you were able to get what we needed for this new updated *Seminar Workbook*.

Denise Kelley: So it's even that is really interesting when I look back and see how everything fell into place, because the team that I'm talking about, they've all used IEW curriculum for decades. And so there is a sense in which, because we were using *Seminar Workbook* from way back when Andrew was probably correlating them on his kitchen table. We know what has worked and what not so much, and so I feel like this third edition really is a culmination of years of using the *Seminar Workbook* and, and some of what we've done is we have gone back to the basics and simplified some things, but also recognized that the workbook needed to be a resource as well as something that you used while you were watching the video. So, I feel like for myself, the second edition, I really needed the videos to use the workbook. And what we were really striving for, and I believe we accomplished quite well with the third edition, is yes, you do use it while you're doing the video, and you do use it if you're going to become accredited to do the practicums. But you also have it as a resource. And so if you're getting ready to teach Unit 8, you can go to your *Seminar Workbook* and you can go through Unit 8 again, just reading in the workbook. And it is a resource that is a standalone once you've familiarized yourself by watching the videos, probably more than one time, but it also can be used as a standalone resource when you're teaching.

Julie Walker: I also loved Denise. That you and your team were able to intentionally use color to bring across these points that you're talking about. You can refer to it again and

again. It's super helpful, and color not only makes it pop and makes it really attractive, it's used intentionally for instructional purposes.

Denise Kelley: Yes, absolutely. One of the things that we did with the sample in the lesson exemplar was to set up the structure model on the left hand side, but then the color takes you directly across the page. So it's a beautiful two page spread where you have an exemplar on the right hand side and you can see, okay, this is the structure of what goes in that particular paragraph. And it's beautiful. The color just, it makes the posters pop. It makes things easier to read. So that's one of my favorite things with the new one is the color.

Julie Walker: Right. And I also know that, you know, and we'll get to accreditation because that's actually the secret third part of this project is the accreditation, but I do know that one of the things that you did to really help the accreditation team is to put exemplars in the *Seminar Workbook* rather than student samples. Can you speak to that?

Denise Kelley: Yes. So the student samples certainly have a place because they'll encourage the teacher. This is the type of work that you might expect from a student this age, but what was happening with student samples when they were, and that's what was used in the *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style* second edition. They often confused someone that was looking at them for a model because they hadn't been edited, so if the student didn't quite understand how to do a number four opener and it was wrong, if somebody's looking at that to try to figure out how to do it on a number four opener correctly, it was confusing and that causes frustration and that's the last thing that we want.

So what we have developed over a number of years are exemplars. And it is again, the team actually writing from the assignment and writing at the level that a student would write for whatever particular assignment we're working on, but making sure that everything is exactly what it should be for the dress up sentence openers for grammar. So I feel like that's huge, that the teachers really, really have loved what they have found in using the exemplars.

Julie Walker: Yeah. And we've now been selling this for about six months, and we are starting to get that feedback. In fact, one of the points of feedback that I saw, Andrew and I did a webinar together in March. We'll put a link in the show notes to that. It was sometimes pretty silly, but basically explaining the differences between the old and the new and why it's so much, so much better.

But there was a concern, a complaint, I'm going to say, call it what? It was a complaint from one of the accredited instructors that her friend had to use the new edition, and why should she have to use the new edition? But then she started singing a different tune when her friend said it's so much better that she wishes now that she was able to be accredited using the third edition. Of course, there's no problem—anybody can get re-accredited using the third edition. Right, Denise?

Denise Kelley: Exactly. And it's, it is funny because now that we've been using it for a while now with accreditation, and we're seeing a change in comments that are being made on social

media. And I understand that, change is hard and so there was a lot of question of why would we have to do it or, but it's really gone in the other direction now we're, there's a lot of positive feedback on using the third edition compared to the second.

Julie Walker: I want to ask this question because I think it's really important for our listeners to hear this. I know how much work you and your team put into this, but this was not apart from Andrew's input. Talk about the meetings that you had with Andrew as you were developing this resource.

Denise Kelley: Okay. And that is an important part of this. The whole team is from different areas of the country and we, the main team, Heidi Thomas and Sabrina Cardinale and myself, we came to Oklahoma to the IEW office to sit down with Andrew at the big conference table and you were there too, Julie, and we all had notebooks, and we literally went through like almost page by page with him, second edition so that he could give us his feedback on what he wanted to make sure that we kept. Or what he felt like we could drop and just his vision for what he would like the new one to look like. And that was so helpful. Like we had pages of notes. And then even though we are remote from each other, because of the way we work, it seems like we're all in little cubicles in the same room. And so when we were comparing our notes as we started actually working on the file that then would become what we have with the workbook, it was interesting how most of the time we had the same thing, but sometimes one person might have something that the other two missed or you know, that type of thing. So it was, I just feel like it could not have been better for having all of those people sitting at that table, talking to him. And one of the things that was kind of funny, because all three of us have been around from the very beginning with Andrew as far as using the program itself. And one of the things that was interesting was we had certain things that we really wanted to make sure that we put in this edition. I had stars in my notebook next to those particular things. And there were a couple of times where he would then share with us what he wanted and we were just looking at each other like, wow, we didn't even have to hard sell that. He actually gave us what we wanted sometimes before we even asked for it.

So that was really fun because it just showed that we have, we do have those years behind us and understanding sometimes how he even thinks. And that was very helpful.

Julie Walker: I think it's really important to note, and this is going to segue pretty quickly now into the video and what all that meant, but because you and your team. I'm going to put myself on your team, Denise, because I was a part of this too. The *Structure and Style for Students* video courses, there were a lot of things that we learned as we were watching him teach 168 lessons to children over multiple years at various levels. We learned a lot. But you know what? It's interesting. He said this at the webinar that I was referring to earlier. He learned a lot as well. And so taking all of that knowledge and trying to funnel it all together and put it in the video. And have it accompanied by this beautiful *Seminar Workbook*. This was truly a labor of love and a consolidation of so much great wisdom over the years.

Denise Kelley: Yeah, and, and again, I just love the fact that. The product development team is the one that worked on the SSS product, and we watched those videos that he made over and over and over while we were building the curriculum. And so it's just full circle, like one thing leads into another, which leads into another. And I just love the fact that there's so much experience. All packed together, and that is what I see the *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style*, third edition, is years and years and years of experience.

Julie Walker: One of the things that could happen, and this happened in the second edition, is information bloat. Too much information. It was too long. So to have all these years and years of experience, there was wisdom in knowing what to cut out.

Denise Kelley: And again, I think that's because we were actually using the second edition, just like we had used the earlier editions. We were using Second Edition ourselves when we were doing our own classes or. And so there is a sense in which I was a little bit afraid of what our customers might think to take something that was 19 plus hours and bring it down to 11 hours for the video part. And then the *Seminar Workbook* went from 234 pages to 188 pages, but more is sometimes just more, not necessarily good. and

I definitely feel that what we took out isn't missing. It is things that you can find in other places, but too much clutter in the *Seminar Workbook*, I felt like it was watering down what you could learn when you were watching the videos and using your workbook, and it kept you from being able to use that workbook as a resource later on because there was so much information, you know, even in like margins and things like that.

Julie Walker: So we introduced Jeff, and he does the Unit 9 and the Writing about Literature units. Talk about working with Jeff and getting him ready for his big debut. Now, Jeff has been working with us for several years and is a former school teacher who decided to join us in our work at IEW. So it's not that he has a lack of teaching experience. Just to be able to now be a part of this foundational product is a little bit overwhelming and intimidating for anyone. And tell me about, because you actually coached Jeff in being able to contribute so well to this project.

Denise Kelley: Yes, and it's just beautiful how it all works together because really my, the first thing that I worked on with Jeff was when he came into the company, and he was in the Schools Department, and so I was his coach that first year that he worked for IEW and he also, I'm the director for online classes. He also taught under me in Level B, which is a wonderful way to learn the curriculum if from the deep end—teach it. And so that background that we had working together really is what made it possible for him to then be able to be up to speed for doing something like taking on Unit 9 and the literature, Writing about Literature part of this course. And again, he hasn't been with the company as long as I have, but he has been a quick study with understanding the system, and he 100% believes in the system, which is wonderful because a lot of us are veterans and have used it for years and years, but he really did right off the bat, see the beauty in the program and got excited about it, much the same way that Andrew did when he was first introduced to it with under Dr. Webster. And so

he has a real passion for the program because he believes that it is the best thing that you could use to teach students how to write. He was a delight to work with.

Julie Walker: So you mentioned a couple things that you know, just in wrapping up, I just want to be sure we touch on, we talked a little bit about accreditation. And one of the things that I love that we are now doing with our accreditation program is teachers who are completing the practicum assignments submit their accreditation in a very different way than they used to. They're actually using IEW Gradebook as a way to evaluate whether or not they actually know what they're doing before it gets submitted to us. So just spend 30 seconds. Denise, talking about Gradebook, IEW Gradebook and why that's so valuable to teachers in particular.

Denise Kelley: IEW Gradebook is used in the accreditation program. It isn't nearly as complicated as it might sound if I gave you a big description of it. But really what you're doing because we have clearly marked the practicum assignments in the *Seminar Workbook* that you have to turn in. And so what you're really doing is uploading your assignments into IEW Gradebook, and it forces you to go through the checklist for each practicum and really scrutinize what you have inserted. So it's like an editor, but it doesn't change your answers. It doesn't, it doesn't give you answers, but it does make you slow down and really scrutinize, do I have this? And if you believe that you do, you can keep moving. You don't, you know, you can still go ahead and click, click, click, click and turn it in. And some people do that, and then they have to do the assignment again. So it's important to really understand that Gradebook really does help, if you will use it to help you to review your assignments that you're turning in for accreditation.

Julie Walker: Yes. I love that we have harnessed a little bit of technology to both help teachers as they're evaluating themselves. Also in turn to evaluate their own students and just make their jobs a whole lot easier using IEW Gradebook. And then the other thing you mentioned almost in passing that I don't want to overlook, and Denise, Andrew said something that I've not told you yet, so I'm, you're going to hear it for the first time.

And that is about our online classes. And we were talking about our online classes earlier this week, and he said, "What I love about our online classes is that it's like our lab." We can test things like IEW Gradebook and other tools that we've got coming out in the online program. And so he loves that idea of now using our online classes as our lab. Isn't that great?

Denise Kelley: Yeah. And it is so true. We have, again, full circle product development. It has been the ones that develop the assignments and PowerPoints that we use for online classes, and it's a great place to just keep learning. I feel like we learn every single day that we teach students and we have a wonderful department of instructors, handpicked

Julie Walker: Handpicked.

Denise Kelley: instructors that are the best of the best as far as I've learned.

Julie Walker: And we have students near and far taking our online classes.

Denise Kelley: Yeah, that's so true.

Julie Walker: And we, and 'm going to say one last thing and then we do for sure need to wrap this up because this is already gone way too long, so sorry. But our online classes there are intentionally small in terms of we don't have hundreds and hundreds of, well, we do have hundreds and hun we don't have thousands and thousands of spots. It's just keep it small, keep it good. And April 1st, which is long past now, is when we take registration for the next year. And oftentimes we've got classes already full by the end of the day on April 1st.

So, well, Denise, it's been a delight to have you not only as one of my dear, dear friends, but also the work that you do at IEW has just been so important and made so many teachers and teaching parents made their lives so much easier because these resources are so much easier to use than when you and I were first trying to use them all those years ago when we were teaching our own kids.

Denise Kelley: Well, thank you for having me. I enjoyed it.

Julie Walker: We'll just keep doing this together, Denise. Right? We've got a few more years that we've got some more products on the horizon that we're looking to develop, and we'll just have you back on when we're ready to announce the new one. Sound good?

Denise Kelley: Thank you. I enjoyed it. Thank you.

Julie Walker: Thank you.