

Podcast 551: Enhance Vocabulary with IEW Writing Toolbox

Episode Transcript

Andrew Pudewa: Part of what we're really trying to do is help children grow into adults who have the habit of kind of always asking, "Is this the best word?" as they're writing things.

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.

So Andrew, this is Thank you for doing this for me. This is part one of a four-part series on the various writing tools that we have available to our families, and I love that just even that we're doing this podcast, that we do webinars. The way we teach writing is different, and you you've said that before. You said the way we teach spelling is a little different. The way we teach A lot of what we do is different, and it's not that we just tell teachers and parents, "Here's the different thing. Now have fun with it," and then we leave them. We've got constant ways to support them, and so I think this is an example of that. So a four-part series on the various writing tools that we have. Many of them are based, well, all of them are based on an analog presentation.

Andrew Pudewa: Right, and, and I think it's important to point out that different does not always mean better. That's kind of the fallacy that we've seen with progressive kind of modern education is, well, let's do something different and it should be better. . And then if it isn't, well, then we have to do something else different and something else different. And really what we're doing is different only in a modern sense because it can be traced back to things that were kind of standard and established in the Well, you can go even back to the ancient classical Renaissance, the Neoclassical period. I think that Webster had this, he inherited a tradition that he didn't really even understand. But he reacted against this modernism. And it was funny because he and I would disagree on almost everything politically. But when it came to education we really did see things very similarly. He was very conservative in that way.

Julie Walker: Well, I'm gonna kind of introduce these analog tools that we have, I think in the order that they were created.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, can I give you just a tiny bit of background? Because I think it's important for people to understand that when I met Dr. Webster and Mrs. Ingham, things like this didn't exist. But what did exist was this idea that blended sight and sound: if you're going to tell people, show them as well. If you're going to show them, explain it, and if you can get a kinesthetic element in there even better. They understood multi-sensory input methods before anybody started talking about it in the more modern sense. And so one of the, the kind of really interesting things about the Giruard experience: We went up there. . It was a 10-day period of time. Sunday was off. And there was usually about three or four hours of lectures

each day. And then there was a lot of time, and so all the teachers would come from all over wherever, bringing carloads full of, you know, big poster board and construction paper and boxes of felt markers and yardsticks and all, all sorts of stuff to make things for their classroom. And a big part of the writing program stuff were the posters for the wall. And this idea that if you are going to teach kids to put an -ly adverb in every paragraph, you want them to have easy access to a long list of -ly adverbs that could work in their paragraphs. . And so, we would go year after year after year, and, and all the hallways and all the classrooms, all the common space was just plastered with handmade stuff that people had made and brought back to put on the wall and show the new wave of teachers, “Here's what you make for your classroom.” And that was, you know, that was kind of the end of the old school when, when teachers would make the posters they wanted, the reminder signs, the quotations, the word lists, the diagrams the charts, whatever they wanted. Most of that had to be made. And, and then, you know, toward the, you know, as we moved into the 21st century, , this didn't appeal to teachers. They wanted to be able to buy everything rather than hand-make it.

Julie Walker: Well, and I have a little story about that. When I first started working for you Well, I need to go back to when I was a teacher in the classroom. I was in that era where we made our own posters and we made our own bulletin boards, and I actually had a teacher's aide, and that was her job was to decorate my classroom and put up the visuals that I wanted to have there, the motivation charts, the things that I wanted the kids to memorize, the copy work that we were doing. I taught first and second grade. And it was just, Mrs. Staman was just a wonderful grandmother type, and she was there to help me.

But when I first started working for you and we were now, as you say, kind of at the end of that era, teachers wanted to buy posters, we made posters. We hired a graphic designer and got them printed, and we made them exactly the wrong size. They were too big to be used at home and too small to be used in a classroom. So those didn't last very long. But now we, of course, have two sizes of posters, small for the homeschooling parent and big for the classroom teachers.

Andrew Pudewa: And then because I see you're holding some of our portable walls products, it's worth just quickly telling the story of how this came to be for those who don't know. So I was— it was early days, early 00's, and I was working with the school district in, , Rocklin, California. And I was explaining to the teachers, “You wanna make these word lists. Make these reminder signs, make these posters so that when you teach this thing, you can put it on the wall and gradually build up the wall as a resource for the children in the classroom.” And then I was informed that the fire marshal of Sacramento County had established some kind of rule that you couldn't cover more than 20% of your walls with paper. And I was incensed. I was angered. I thought, This guy should be sentenced to teach fourth grade with a whole room full of caffeinated nine-year-olds. And he's got no idea what he's doing with this. And it's stupid, like paper on the wall is gonna burn down the building? I was just I anyway, so I went back to the hotel that night, and I'm just stewing in anger.

And I thought, “Okay, if the children cannot go to the walls, the walls must come to the children.” So I went out to the store. And this is the night in between my day one and day two

in-service. I went to the store and bought file folders. And I got tape, and I got colored felt markers, and I put two file folders together, and then I handwrote all of the things that you would want to have on the walls in the classroom, and I brought it in, and I showed it to the teachers. And I said, "Make these things." Or "Have the kids make these things." But you, you gotta have things available. And I set it so that they would stand up on the desk, like be little mini walls. And I don't know how long it was after that that we came up with the Portable Walls product. We've of course been through a few different refinements of this thing, but I've never met a kid who had one of these and didn't love it.

Julie Walker: It's a very cool tool. Well, and I just this is a Portable Wall. We've got five different portable walls. But I wanted to mention this one right here because one of your concerns about this particular one is all the information is there all at once.

Andrew Pudewa: Ideally, you would put things up as you introduce them and need them rather than pre-done too much. So with the younger children, even more important.

Julie Walker: And we've got the little stickers to go with it. . So as the students go through that. So if you are a homeschooling parent, you would give your student a blank Portable Wall [Tools for Young Writers]. You would keep these stickers yourself, put them away, 'cause these are not peel and stick, Andrew.

Once they go on the wall they don't come off. , . But then you just pass out the student, pass out the next unit that they're working on. So this is called our Tools for Young Writers. So Portable Wall. And then just a f really quickly, we, , with our Fix It Grammar, we thought it'd be really helpful for those that are going through our Fix It Grammar program have those same grammar rules at their fingertip. And so there they are.

Andrew Pudewa: All in one place. And I've, I've talked to kids who got that and then went off to college and that was one of the few things, their portable walls: the regular one and then the grammar one they took off to wherever they're going to college.

Julie Walker: and all that. And then just two other portable walls that we created that go along with the course, *Introduction to Public Speaking*. Here is now a *Portable Wall for the Public Speaker*, and then finally that goes with our *University-Ready Writing* course, *Portable Walls for Academic Writing*, and this talks about the stick and branch note-taking. This talks about just the formula for dis d d discovering how many sentences, or sorry, how many paragraphs you should write based on the number of words Minutes, are required by the professor.

Andrew Pudewa: And number of minutes that you want to have oh, also in the public speaking, . , exactly, minutes in the public [00:12:00] speaking.

Julie Walker:, so but I think even before any of these came about was this beautiful book, *A Word Write Now*. .

Andrew Pudewa: I love this book so much. Loranna Schwacofer was teaching in various settings, mostly tutoring, but she did a little homeschool, she did a little bit in schools. And

over time she realized that thesauruses can be a little bit less than easy for children to use. . . And you know how you look up in a thesaurus and you look for the word eat or something, you find a synonym, and, and it's *erode*, and you go, "Well, that's cool." And then you have "Whooping cranes erode small fish, insects, eggs of other birds."

So the thesaurus isn't as well organized for kids unless they have a pretty extensive understanding of the nuance of all these words. So what she did was she organized these words into character qualities. That way, if a student is writing about something and they can identify, oh, there's, there's bravery. This is a brave thing. They can go look up *courage* and find. And then in that section, they're divided into -ly adverbs, quality adjectives, strong verbs, and even some nouns. And so there's all these different character qualities, and it's just so useful. It is profoundly helpful.

And what we want is we want kids to have access to word lists, because what happens when you give kids word lists, they're looking for the thing they have to do in the checklist, so they see a word and think, "Oh, I think I know what that means. That's a pretty good word." And so it hops off the list, into their eyes, through their brain, out their fingers, and into their paper.

And this actually moves the word from kind of a passive vocabulary, "Yeah, I see that word, I kinda know what it means," into an active vocabulary: "I can speak or write that word." And there's an ownership. And so I just love this book so much.

Julie Walker: Well, and I love I think that what, as you're describing this book: words for cheerfulness, nouns, *buoyancy, congeniality, charm, cheeriness, friendliness*, Adjectives, *amenable, bouncy, carefree, cheery*. I mean, you just can't read this list without smiling. It's just so delightful. But I think what is also charming about this book, and *happy-go-lucky and interested and light-hearted and causes you to giggle*, now I'm on the word list, is that it is actually paper.

Andrew Pudewa: It is paper. And there's a table of contents of course, that has all of the character qualities. She very cleverly put an animal to illustrate as an icon for the quality.

Julie Walker: The cheerful clownfish.

Andrew Pudewa: She put excerpts from great literature.

Julie Walker: "Happiness does not depend on outward things, but on the way we see them," Leo Tolstoy. Tolstoy. . . ,

Andrew Pudewa: And at my suggestion, we put in a space for additional words so that a student can, you know, find a word that maybe wasn't in this book or was somewhere else in the book but it applies. And they can add to their own list as they go. And so I wish we sold 100 times more of this one.

Julie Walker: Well, we do include this in the premier package of the *Structure and Style for Students*, and every time one of our trainers goes out to train a group of teachers in a

classroom, we gift them with one of these, hoping that they'll have one for every classroom because this would be a great resource that should sit on every teacher's desk so that if the students need help finding just that perfect word, they can page through this.

Julie Walker: I mean, I've used this before in my own writing, so I love it. So for those that are looking for a digital option. Now, you know, we're kind of the company that really advocates paper and pen.

Andrew Pudewa: Paper, paper. And It's good stuff.

Julie Walker: Good stuff. It's why we invested in that printer. But we do have an app that we call the Writing Toolbox, Writing Toolbox, and in addition to the structural models and the stylistic techniques, it also has a word list, , I mean, a tho sorry, a built-in thesaurus. . And I wanna talk about this thau- this thesaurus for a moment. Let's look up the word cheerful.

It should be in here.

Andrew Pudewa: You know, I had a thesaurus, but someone stole it, and I have no words to explain how upset I am.

Julie Walker: I can't even imagine that, . So cheerful gives a definition as in happy as in happy and optimistic, and there's a whole list of words to adjectives.. Sorry. Synonyms to use for cheerful. And then, , one of the things that I like, so here's the word cheerful. . I can click on down below and I can pull up a list of -ly adverbs that go with cheerful. . Strong verbs, quality adjectives, and I don't know if you can actually see this, maybe we can zoom in a little bit, but you'll see there's a little green button here that says IEW verified. We did not import a thesaurus, you know, Oxford Dictionary or anything like this. We actually have one of our guys, and his name is Mark, and you know who he is, who vets all the words. And if a student or a teacher puts in a word that is not in here, he will decide whether or not it's worth researching it and then put in the word. We just want to make sure that the words in here are IEW-verified and appropriate.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, and appropriate, going to be useful for the people using the app. And this is an app, so you'd have to use it on a phone or an iPad or a tablet or anything.

Julie Walker: And there is a small fee for it, but it's a onetime \$1.99 just to acknowledge that there's some, a little bit of work that went into this. Gotta take care of Mark and his family, too.

Andrew Pudewa: \$1.99? \$1.99, one-time payment. You can't even buy half a cup of coffee for that anymore.

Julie Walker: No, no, you can't. But there's a digital option, but, you know, here we go. We are ready to give our teachers and our students the writing tools that they need to be successful, because that's how we want to have them leave their experience with IEW, maybe taking with them a Portable Wall to college.

Andrew Pudewa: Or two. They're small.

Julie Walker: Or if you're writing emails or articles, Andrew, you're having A Word Write Now sitting on your desk, not a bad idea. .

Andrew Pudewa: And I hope people grow up with the habit. I mean, part of what we're really trying to do is help children grow into adults who have the habit of kind of always asking, "Is this the best word?" as they're writing things. And that's a habit that's formed at a younger age. And, you know, if you have that habit, you could be your own AI. Like, you could write better than you could without yourself.

Julie Walker: Well, that wouldn't be artificial, though. Oh. It would be real.

Andrew Pudewa: It'd be real.

Julie Walker: You, you could be your own RI.

Andrew Pudewa: HI. Human intelligence.

Julie Walker: Human intelligence . Thank you, Andrew.

Andrew Pudewa: 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, or just visit us each week at IEW.com/podcast. Here you will find our show notes and relevant links. One more thing, would you please rate and review our podcast? This helps other smart listeners like you find us.