

Learn about IEW's Online Classes.

Transcript of Podcast Episode 328

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.

Well, dear listener, today is one of those When-Andrew's-Away podcasts, which means he's out traveling the country, speaking at a homeschool convention, or busy doing something other more important than gracing us with his presence in our podcast studio. And so what I normally do ... I looked around the office to see who I could record, and I hope you don't tune us out today. I hope you'll stick around because I think you'll be really excited about our special guest. And actually we flew her all the way from Virginia to be here. And our guest today is Denise Kelley. Denise, welcome.

Denise Kelley: Hello. It's good to be here.

Julie Walker: Denise has been a longtime member of our IEW team. Denise, you started officially working in an event coordinating capacity.

Denise Kelley: It'll be thirteen years in August.

Julie Walker: Thirteen years. And of course, as what often happens in our company, people move from position to position when more important or more, I don't know, maybe they are more important roles. I would say in this case it's definitely a more important role that we've moved you into. And actually, Denise, you wear two hats for our company.

You are our senior product manager, which means all of our new and revised products ... is something that you oversee. Comes across your desk; you edit them. You work with designers; you work with illustrators. You are basically the guy sitting on the logs, making sure they don't get jammed up, and you move projects forward.

Denise Kelley: Yes, that's me, either that or the guy on the runway, making sure the planes come in and go out.

Julie Walker: That's true. That's true. And we definitely have many jets lined up on our runway, don't we?

Denise Kelley: Yes, yes, we do.

Julie Walker: Job security. But Denise, you have another really important role with our company. And that is you are the director of our online classes, our IEW online classes. And so that's what I'd like to talk to you about today.

Denise Kelley: Okay. Well, I love our online class department, and I've been doing that for quite a few years too. So I'm excited to be here and talk about online classes.

Julie Walker: Now you know, Denise, but perhaps our listeners don't know that when we started our online class department, it was with a little bit of dragging his feet. Andrew was not entirely convinced that students would be engaged in a online platform.

Denise Kelley: Yeah. And interestingly enough, that was my attitude as well, but being a good employee, I kept that to myself when you approached me and asked if I would be interested in the ground floor of creating an online class department. And I had taught for years, local classes. And I couldn't imagine how it would work that students would be in an online class. They would be communicating with the teacher through chat. Of course, they could hear the teacher; they could see the teacher, but they weren't actually talking to the teacher. And computers hadn't been a big part of my life at that point.

So I couldn't really imagine how that would work. And I would say that the first semester that I taught, I was pleasantly surprised, and really from then on, I just have been such a lover of the online class idea and just really seeing how useful it can be to people that ... Maybe they don't have IEW classes being offered in their area or people that are ... You know, we have in our online classes, which I know we'll talk about, but our teachers are excellent, and they've been trained well. And so by having those class options, it doesn't matter if you don't have a teacher that is in your area, but I was sold pretty quickly.

Julie Walker: Well, and we felt compelled to begin to offer online classes, not because we thought we should do this as a company, but so many of our families were knocking on our door saying, can you please; can you please? And I think it's because they know that excellence is our middle name at the Institute for Excellence in Writing. And they wanted to be sure they were excellent classes. And I think that was also Andrew's reluctance.

He wanted to be sure they were excellent classes. And so we were very careful right from the very beginning to only choose the very best instructors. Most of them at the ... And at least initially were instructors that Andrew knew personally, knew that they had many years of teaching experience. They knew IEW really well. And they also—which is super important as a teacher—they had a lot of energy. And so when the students would be a part of their class, remote learning, they would feel a part of it.

Denise Kelley: Yep. And we really do focus on interacting with the students. We don't want the online live experience to be no different than watching a recording. And so that is something that we train our teachers. And even go back and watch their classes and make sure that they are meeting that high standard of the interactive part of teaching live.

Julie Walker: Right. Well, and there are several distinctives; there are several things that we do that is a little bit different than any other online class program. I mean, that's true for anyone. First of all, our classes are live. They are recorded so that if students miss a class ... Talk about that for a moment.

Denise Kelley: So we do record our classes for a number of different reasons. This doesn't happen often, and yet it's happened enough that I'm very thankful that this option is there.

Sometimes we have students in our class that are in a brick and mortar school. They're not homeschooled, so they're not available at class time. Sometimes we have students on the other side of the world, and unless they're willing to get up at three o'clock in the morning to watch the class, they have the recording that they can watch.

And then they are required to get their work in at the same time as the other students. And they have access to the teachers for any questions, that kind of thing. Though I will say over the years, I have seen students in other countries than the United States get up at odd hours to join the class.

And so that's been fun, that aspect of it. And then we also have the recordings there so if a student is sick or for some reason can't come to class, they can watch the recording. We have it there so that parents are able to go back and review a recording if there's a problem, or if normally they would want to keep up with what the student is doing, but they can't sit in, in the live class.

And then the other thing is sometimes on our homework assignments when we give them feedback, we might say, "You need to go back and watch this section and week whatever class," to help them review and be able to move forward.

Julie Walker: So having a live class is one of the distinctives, and the recordings are only available to enrolled students.

Denise Kelley: Right. Yes. Only to the enrolled students. They're not, other than sample classes that we put online on the website, they're not available for anybody else.

Julie Walker: And then another distinctive is, of course, the caliber of the instructors. We touched on that a little bit. Do you want to just explain a little bit more about your team?

Denise Kelley: Well, I can't do anything but sing praises about my team. We've really worked hard at creating community among the online instructors in the department.

Julie Walker: How many instructors do you have now?

Denise Kelley: We have fifteen. I believe it's fifteen for the fall, and as we've already said, those instructors are carefully vetted. They have to have certification as the accredited IEW instructor, but that's like the very first thing that I look at. So just because there's been certification there, it doesn't necessarily mean that that's a given for hiring an instructor. And so, we have interviews,

Skype interviews with video cameras on and just a lot of back and forth before taking it to you and to Andrew and with my recommendation of hiring a new instructor.

And so I just I feel that process has evolved over the years. And we have just an amazing team. I mean, I'm just sitting here thinking. You know, different names are going through my head, and I can honestly say that we have just an amazing team.

Julie Walker: And the kids love their instructors, and Andrew has come home from conventions ... just kids coming up to him and just talking about how much they love Mrs. Kelley or how much they love Mrs. Martin. And they just, it just doesn't matter who the instructor is. They love their teachers.

Denise Kelley: Yep. And that's true. And like I said, that was one of the things that really surprised me: was getting to know the students on a personal level. So Toolbox is the LMS [learning management system] that we use, and there's a messaging option in there. And there's a lot of back and forth between the instructor and the student and to the point that sometimes they're sending us pictures of things that they've done.

And, of course, this is another thing that I love and, again, has kind of evolved. When we turn our classes, our classrooms on, when we open our classrooms, it's usually ten to fifteen minutes before classes start, and the instructors have learned, been taught that they have to be there, and that time is their time to get to know the students on a personal level and just seeing the students talking back and forth and their excitement about what they've done that week.

And I've taught for myself many years, and the instructors often will make notes on the students. We have index cards that we fill out for the students so that we can keep straight who's doing what, especially if you're teaching multiple classes, and I just really love that.

And there are times where ... might check in on a family that their mom has cancer. And so, there's a lot of stress happening. And so it is that we just try to really personalize the experience.

Julie Walker: Great. So talk about the curriculum.

Denise Kelley: The curriculum that we are using now for online is the SSS *Structure and Style for Students* that is relatively new. And that was a big change a couple of years ago. We had to switch over from the curriculum that we had before, the *Student Writing Intensive* and *Student Writing Continuation Courses*. And with any change, at the beginning it was a little overwhelming to revamp all of the assignments and checklists and PowerPoints, but very,

Julie Walker: So it was a lot of work for your team.

Denise Kelley: very quickly, we saw the benefit that was going to happen from that. And so, yes, that is, we've taken that SSS curriculum and tailored it for online classes. There are some assignments that Andrew gave in the SSS videos that we've stretched out for over a couple of weeks because we have a different time schedule than he does, and we have thirty weeks. So that's what we're doing.

And this fall we have a 1-A, 1-B, 1-C, and then 2-A and 2-B, and we'll have one more year to get the 2-C developed for online. And we also use *Fix It! Grammar*, which as Julie said at the beginning of the podcast ... I'm the senior product manager, so I could do a whole podcast on *Fix It! Grammar* because that's been a huge project that my team has worked on.

Julie Walker: And you have Denise; we did record that.

Denise Kelley: Yes, we did. I know. That's why I know I could fill up a whole podcast just talking about *Fix It!*

Julie Walker: link in the show notes [\[00:14:01\]](#)

Denise Kelley: So that is definitely part of the class every week. The students come to class with their *Fix It!* assignment already finished. And then we have ... In the PowerPoint we go over that particular week and answer questions. We do exercises that would have to do with *Fix It!* and what we're doing isn't just pushing a product. What we're doing is really working hard at helping the student to take the knowledge and have it transfer into the writing. So a grammar punctuation program is worthless if it never is carried over into the real world. So when we grade their papers, the students are familiar with the comments that we're making because we use the same type of language that is used in *Fix It!* And so for example, when we're teaching comma rules, we have abbreviations for those comma rules. When they may make a mistake in their paper with that particular comma rule, we're gonna use the same abbreviation. So it's just constantly going around, and so they're recognizing in *Fix It!* what they need to be putting in their writing.

Julie Walker: And so I guess I would just mention perhaps the fourth, and this is, I'm sure, I could come up with a longer list of distinctives, but our classes are limited. We don't have a lot of room.

You mentioned fifteen instructors, and this is not the core thing that we're doing here at IEW. We really are ... 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, and online classes are an extension of that.

That is, a material is the highest level of help that we can help parents and teachers. If they're enrolling their student in the online classes, then they're getting a lot of help, but we want to make sure they're high quality. So we limit the number of offerings.

Denise Kelley: Yes. And I, and that's definitely what I was going to say as a follow-up: It has been very intentional. So we have forty-two classes, and that's our fourteen, fifteen teachers that we have. Many of them teach more than one class in a week, sometimes two to three, so ... But it has been very intentional that we really did hit a point a couple of years ago where it just exploded on the online classes.

The waiting lists were very long. And so I was very aware that even though we were trying to grow the department, and we did want to give people what they needed, that we wouldn't take away from the excellence that we were offering in the classes. And so we do try to add classes

and add new teachers, but it has been something that we are also trying to do it slowly so that it continues to have the reputation that we have had really from the very beginning. And that is that our online classes are very high quality.

Julie Walker: Right. And so we typically open registration. It's kind of our little joke. We open it on April 1. That way, if we have glitches—because we do have glitches with our website—because so many people are trying to get on all at once to get into these classes. But April 1 every year is when we open up classes for the fall. So we have, our registration has been opened now for several months, and many of our classes are already full, but there are still spots available.

Denise Kelley: Yes, there are spots available. Our spots fill up quite quickly. So certainly don't wait past April, May. Sometimes there are spots still in the summer, but then you have to take what's left because they do fill up the first day of registration. This year we were forty-eight percent full by the end of the day. And so that means you don't have as many options when you go looking for times and days for the classes.

Julie Walker: We offer classes Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. We find that Mondays are often holidays. And then what do you do about classes on Mondays if it's a holiday? Well, that's easy. We just don't offer classes on Monday. Classes meet one day a week. They're about an hour. They start on time, and they end about an hour later.

Denise Kelley: Yeah, there, it is an hour because we have to move out of the classroom so that other classrooms can open. So we do, and just for the scheduling for the families that are in our classes, it's an hour class, and they get on early to chat, because they love doing that.

Julie Walker: If we are full, and oftentimes we are by the time we hit July and August, classes begin middle of August; take a nice, long, leisurely winter break; and then they're done at the end of April. So it's thirty weeks, but we start early in August, which is pretty typical. That's when a lot of schools start, is the middle of August, and then end before ... We try to end before May. Yeah.

Denise Kelley: Yeah. So two semesters, fifteen weeks each semester, and we do take a pretty solid Christmas break, which we've found just benefits everybody.

Julie Walker: Denise, I wanted to mention one thing really quickly before I kind of give my pitch, "Take an IEW online class because they're amazing!" Who are these classes for? I think that we have tried to not encourage special needs or foreign language students to take these classes because they are rigorous.

Denise Kelley: Well, they are rigorous. And in fairness to the student, they're just not set up to meet those needs, but the wonderful thing about the IEW company is we have instructors on the website that tutor. And really both of those situations would do well, better than in a situation with a lot of classmates that are going at a certain pace, and they're not able to do that, to have a tutor.

And so that's what we encourage is that they would look at that list and find a tutor for them.

Julie Walker: So we'll put a link again in our show notes of our list of over four hundred accredited instructors that offer either private tutoring, local classes, online classes. All of our IEW online instructors are on that list. Some of them teach additional classes, but we, of course, are so grateful for their work to make our online program just top notch.

Denise Kelley: Yes.

Julie Walker: And I just love it. Well, Denise, thank you for taking some time to be with us today, to talk about our online program. Parents, if you are interested in perhaps enrolling your student, it's IEW.com/online. And there you'll find the cost of the classes, when they're offered, what days of the week,

Denise Kelley: what teacher

Julie Walker: what teacher, right, and what level, what curriculum you need to purchase. And I think that's really important to mention is the cost of the classes does not include the curriculum. You will need to make that separate purchase. And as Denise mentioned, it's *Structure and Style for Students* and the *Fix It! Grammar*. It's a great combination.

And we're just so pleased. And I think if Andrew were here, he too would sing your praises, Denise and just, again, mention how many people have come up to him and thanked him for offering these online classes. So on behalf of Andrew Pudewa, I thank you, Denise, for making this such a great program.

Denise Kelley: Oh, well, thank you. Thank you for having me. I love talking about online classes as you can tell.

Julie Walker: Yes, thank you.

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