

Motivation and the Four Forms of Relevancy

Transcript of Podcast Episode 358

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 students to become confident and competent communicators and thinkers.

Julie Walker: So Andrew, this is one of those episodes where we are actually replacing an older episode with the same episode but newer, updated content.

Andrew Pudewa: And why do we do that, Julie? Why don’t we just let everybody search the archives? Because nobody does.

Julie Walker: Nobody does.

Andrew Pudewa: I know when I look at the podcast menu for the day, what came on the day, and I look and see what’s interesting, and then I choose what to listen to ... And you know, you go to some people, and they have 280 episodes; I’m not scrolling through every one of those blasted episodes. So just to keep, you know, keep the important ideas ...

Julie Walker: Fresh.

Andrew Pudewa: Fresh, yeah. And you call it the

Julie Walker: “exploding ladder.”

Andrew Pudewa: Exploding ladder. So we add a podcast, and we take away an old podcast.

Julie Walker: Right.

Andrew Pudewa: And you know, I think that’s very dangerous because if you were, you know, climbing a ladder, and it was exploding from the bottom, you’d be stuck in the air. Like you’d never get off the roof. But I do see why we want to, you know, revisit those ideas, especially for new listeners that are just finding us.

Julie Walker: Right. And you know, you and I both kind of do the same thing. We project our habits and behaviors on others. And I know that when I find a new podcast that I’m really enjoying, I want to go all the way back to the beginning. Well, in our case, that’s three hundred episodes. No, can’t do it. So not only can you not do it; you can’t do it because we’ve exploded some of those rungs, and here you are up with us. So stay with us as we talk today about the four forms of relevancy.

Andrew Pudewa: The four forms of relevancy. So this is a small piece of what began a long time ago, a conference talk I did for many years called “Teaching Boys and Other Children Who Would Rather Be Making Forts All Day.” And in that talk the first half or a little bit more than half was about the neurophysiological differences between boys and girls, how we see differently, hear differently, handle stress and pain very differently, and the impact of that on teaching both boys and girls.

And we’ve addressed this. We’ve had Dr. Sax on the podcast. The second half of the talk was on the art or science, or art science – techniques of motivation with the four forms of relevancy, the three laws of motivation, and the two secret weapons.

But because we mercifully try to limit our podcast to about twenty minutes, which is the length of time for a nice little walk or to cook dinner or whatever you do when you’re listening to podcasts, we will extract from that talk. But you know, I always like to say this doesn’t replace the value of listening to the original version, which we have a good, solid, recorded online available: “Teaching Boys and Other Children Who Would Rather Be Making Forts All Day.”

Julie Walker: Yep. Link in the show notes.

Andrew Pudewa: And then because I know that I said what I said in that talk, I might just say some different stuff in the same zone, in the same context.

Julie Walker: Exactly. So four forms of relevancy. Now let me just ... Before you jump into these, are these in any particular order? Is there a hierarchy? Are there some that are better than others?

Andrew Pudewa: Yes. When I say *relevancy*, I am talking about that quality that makes teaching things and learning things easier. So you know, if you are finding something interesting, or it’s applicable or relevant, useful in some way, it’s easier to teach that and learn that, especially if you’re the student, right?

And we all experience this. We have a class where we just learned things easier, and there are reasons as to why. And then we have a class where we just got through it and don’t feel like we necessarily learned anything, but we somehow passed it. And now we can just let it all go. So what is that intangible factor that makes learning easier? And when learning is easier, then the teaching of it is easier. And I chose the term *relevancy* to encompass that whole idea of interesting, applicable, meaningful, useful. And over the years I kind of, you know, I first identified three, and then I realized there’s actually four.

And so we will start with the highest, best, most effective form of relevancy, and that is **intrinsic relevancy**. It’s just in you. It’s part of who you are; it’s the way you were made. We have these things. We watch children, and we see some children who are just naturally interested in certain things and other children who are just not naturally interested in those things.

Why? Well, it’s part of the magnificence of being an individual, created uniquely. And you know, I would argue that each of us has a mission in life, a purpose. You know, we were created

with a purpose. If you don't believe that, I suppose you could believe that, you know, we are all evolved, and we all have a different purpose that has become a part of that.

But I mean that kind of doesn't even make sense to me. But being created with a purpose, that makes a whole lot of sense. And that creates an awareness of, and gives people a self-identity that's so important to just overall well-being and success in life, however you want to define that.

So one of the things, you know, I look for as I say, "Aha! This child is intrinsically interested in this thing ..." We don't necessarily know where it came from and why all children are not the same, but we can capitalize on that. And you know, there's a few examples that I would use ... one example from my own life.

My mother said that I was begging for a violin from the time I could talk. Well, she was a piano and voice teacher, so I lived in a musical world. But why was I begging for a violin? Well, I don't know. Maybe it looked cool or sounded cool, or I saw someone playing it, and they looked cool. I don't know where it came from. But I will tell you this: the trajectory of my life was so significantly influenced by growing up playing the violin.

I am relatively certain that we would not be sitting here today. IEW would not exist. Everything about my life would've been completely different if I had not grown up playing the violin. And you know, so my parents had both the desire and the means to help fulfill that interest by providing violin lessons for me at a younger age, and it unquestionably affected my destiny.

So that's kind of one example. Another example that's a little more general is we see that most boys, whether you try or whether you try to prevent it, are naturally attracted to things like weapons and trucks and machines and big powerful things that make noise.

Julie Walker: Dinosaurs.

Andrew Pudewa: Dinosaurs. Yeah, now it's not that there aren't girls who are also interested in that kind of thing, but it's almost universal that you find that boys are. So you know, when you can discover, oh, here's a child that has a strong interest in big vehicles, well then, what would you do? You know, if they're young, you'd go buy, get some books from the library or something on, you know, various tractors and excavators and Caterpillar-type of bulldozers and let them enjoy that.

Now, that may or may not be something that lasts through time, and they may go through a dinosaur phase. But during that time period because that interest level is intrinsically high, it's easier to learn stuff about that. I'll give you another example. So my grandson is a very, very smart kid, and he got into a *Star Wars* phase. But that disappeared pretty quickly, and he is now in a *Lord of the Rings* phase. And I think he has listened on his little audiobook thing to the entire *Lord of the Rings* trilogy at least two or three times all the way through, maybe more. He actually can quote chunks of the poems and songs. And so he is just very much obsessed with this.

Julie Walker: Wait. You mean he actually listened to the songs? He didn't just skip them?

Andrew Pudewa: Well, one of the advantages of audiobooks is you can't skip stuff quite so easily as you can if you're just turning pages. His mother has made the stipulation that he cannot see the movie until he reads the book with his eyes. And he is explaining to me that this just doesn't seem fair. And it can take him twenty minutes or longer to read one single page of this huge book. But he's determined. But now here's the interesting thing. He got for his tenth birthday a *Lord of the Rings* chess set.

Julie Walker: Oh, nice. Wow.

Andrew Pudewa: And this just kind of merged together his love of games and competition with his imagination. And he just started playing chess three, four, five hours a day. And so, here's the true confessions. I have had for all of my children this standing deal: The first time you beat me fair and square, no spotting, no help, just even Stephen game, you win a hundred dollars. And none of my children did it before the age of twelve. Only Aiden last week

Julie Walker: Oh, no.

Andrew Pudewa: He pulled out this *Lord of the Rings* chess set, which has all these weird looking pieces. Like the bishops on one side are Gollums, and the knights don't really look ... I mean, the knights kind of look like Black Riders. The rooks are taller but weird. I mean, all the pieces are just kind of weird. So anyway, I'm playing chess. And of course, he's got to be the good guys with Gandalf as the king over there, or the (unintelligible).

And I've got Sauron. And anyway, I'm just playing chess with him. And I'm a little confused about the pieces because I'm not used to this weird looking pieces. So anyway, I miss it. I totally miss it. And he forks my queen. And I lose my queen. And then he toasted me. He traded all the pieces, and I just kept losing. And I had to go and get a hundred dollar bill from my car and hand it to him, which he was pretty ecstatic about, especially since he's saving to buy a horse

Julie Walker: Oh, boy.

Andrew Pudewa: ... which is not a month-long savings project.

Julie Walker: No.

Andrew Pudewa: But you know, I look at that, and I say, okay, he was motivated there. His intrinsic love of games and his intrinsic love of the *Lord of the Rings* universe – I'm sure that'll fade over time, but I suspect when he – if and when he has kids, you know, he'll reactivate. And then of course, he was extremely motivated by a different form of relevancy ...

Julie Walker: Yeah, no doubt.

Andrew Pudewa: ... to keep playing me.

Julie Walker: Yes. Does that hundred-dollar arrangement work for subsequent games?

Andrew Pudewa: No, it's a one-time accomplishment, and now his little sisters are determined they can do this too.

Julie Walker: Oh, no doubt.

Andrew Pudewa: They're far away from it, of course. He's actually got the chess mind that he ... I think it's genetic because his other grandfather, both of his uncles – they could toast me in chess easily and have for many years. There's just something in there genetically, but anyway. So there's that intrinsic relevancy; you didn't have to try and encourage him to work hard at improving his chess game, right? So there's an example, you know. With academics, you know, I think we can understand that there may or may not be things that are intrinsically interesting in that way. He's working really hard to read the *Lord of the Rings* book, and it's coming from inside.

Now the next form of relevancy is really close to that, and sometimes there seems to be an overlap. And that is **inspired relevancy**. So you know, I think the hundred dollars ... If you beat grandpa in chess, that's inspiring. That is motivating as it is, but it's a little more external, right? I think we could all look back and say, you know, I remember this teacher. I loved this one teacher from ___nth grade.

Why? Well, there's something about that teacher. That teacher probably loved teaching. That teacher probably loved their content. And they were just able to be enthusiastic so that you kind of got sucked into that enthusiasm. And you know, it's interesting. When we hang out with people whom we love or respect in some way, we just kind of naturally want to be interested in what they know about or what they're interested in. And this extends to friendships. I think it extends to teachers certainly.

You know, there's even been a case where I as an adult would hear someone talk about something that I didn't really know much about. And I thought, wow, I really want to learn more about that because that person was able to present useful information in such an exciting way that I'm now motivated to go study and learn maybe from less engaging material because I was inspired by that one person.

I think we all share those experiences. A pastor at a church can do that for us, and we hear a sermon and think, ah, I've got to go read that again. Or I want to, you know, read something that, you know – He referenced a book, and then we ... So there's that power of inspiration. And those are really the two highest and best forms of relevancy.

Julie Walker: Right. And I just need to insert something here, Andrew. And you are a very humble man, but you inspire so many people toward better learning, toward memorizing poetry and speeches. And that course that we have, that *Linguistic Development through Poetry Memorization* – you talk about that as being your favorite. That is very inspiring. So many people have said to us here at IEW how inspiring you are as a teacher to students.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, part of your job is to be sure I feel good, but I will comment on that only to just say I am very grateful. And I'm humbled when I hear that because I realize a few

things. Number one- I have never, ever woken up in the morning and had the thought, “I want to inspire somebody to do something.” That’s just doesn’t enter my frame. So when I walk into a classroom, the last thing I would think is, “I want to inspire these children to enjoy writing.”

I mean, that’s just a stupid thought. In my experience I would never do it. So any ability that I have is something that is—I wouldn’t say *peripheral* but—incidental to my goal, which is to try and teach them something useful and maybe make them laugh a little bit. You know, I will walk in, and I will work hard to smile at kids and tell a couple jokes and have them like me only because I know that likability helps a lot with persuasion as well as education.

And you know, so I don’t wake up trying to inspire people, but the fact that people are inspired, I think, is a testament to a methodology and a little bit of a personality. And you know, I often take the reverse track: like, this is going to be hard, and you’re probably going to hate it. That way nobody’s disappointed, right?

Julie Walker: Right.

Andrew Pudewa: Right? Okay, fine. So there is that power of inspiration. And it’s almost like if you try to be that way, you probably fail. But if you do the right thing, you’ll accidentally be that way. And then you also have your own little stories and your own little testimonials and things. I mean, my big thing right now is to try to inspire people to learn more about health, nutrition, fitness, and well-being because my learning about that has improved the quality of my life so significantly.

But it’s really hard to convince someone to stop eating junk food if they’re not ready. So you know, I was thinking about that. Like, here’s a mom or a teacher, and they really want their kid to just do this academic thing or stop doing this other thing. You can’t. You just cannot force people to change. So I think that falls into that whole zone of leadership too.

You look at really inspiring leaders, and they’re not trying to legislate good for people. They’re very often trying to be an example, use language, use their actions to demonstrate the best way to do something. So that’s inspired relevancy. And the sad thing is that some things you have to learn are just not interesting to anyone, right? So you know, I don’t particularly like biology unless it pertains to health and nutrition and wellness. But general biology I would find rather boring to have to learn or teach. I would probably not choose to go take a class in it or ...

Julie Walker: With apologies to our science teachers out there.

Andrew Pudewa: Well you know, so as a homeschool parent, what I would do is I would look for someone who loves that and try to convince them to teach or at least to influence my kids a little bit. So you know, we were never into big co-ops with, you know, a lot of organization. I was more into brokering deals, right? So, oh, you’re a nurse. Oh, you’ve got three teenagers. Oh, you probably like biology. Oh, I love biology. Fantastic. Tell you what: You take my teenagers and teach them biology. And I’ll take your teenagers, and we’ll do writing and Latin or Shakespeare or something. And we’ll just share our love of stuff.

Because if I were to teach science to my teenagers, the lesson would be, this is really a stupid waste of time. We'll just pretend that we've done it already so we can get ahead and go read a real book, you know? So I think that if we, you know, either in schools ... And schools generally tend to try and find teachers that love what they're teaching; I mean, a good school would work on that.

You can't hit a hundred percent, but that would be an ideal. In the homeschool world we have to maybe work a little bit harder to find someone. But yeah, my kids had opportunity to hang out with someone who loves drama. They had opportunity to hang out with someone who loves art, had the opportunity to be with someone, you know, who really loved science.

So they got that opportunity to be inspired in things that I might or my wife might not have been able to do or to that degree. But there are some things that are not interesting to anyone, but you have to learn them anyway.

Julie Walker: Right.

Andrew Pudewa: You know, multiplication tables or spelling rules. Rules, that's kind of oxymoronic.

Julie Walker: So we resort to a lower form of relevancy.

Andrew Pudewa: So we go down one notch, and that would be contrived. **Contrived relevancy** really just means you make a game out of it.

Julie Walker: I like games.

Andrew Pudewa: And you do. You do. We all like games. We all like games. And what's interesting about games is that if it's set up well, it can cause people to pay attention to and therefore learn at least a little bit, if not more, about something that they had no intrinsic interest in. And so we can contrive motivational systems. You know, and this goes all the way back, and we see it all the way up to, what was it? The Pizza Hut Reading Challenge.

Let's get kids to read books by giving them free pizza if they read so many books over the summer. Stuff like that.

Julie Walker: My boys did that.

Andrew Pudewa: And, you know, I think that's valid. A lot of us have to do things. And we don't necessarily do them because we want to or because someone inspired us, but there is some associated but different benefit from accomplishing that. You know, some people, their whole job is like that. Like, you know, yeah, I do my job. I don't love it, but it pays the bills, and I gradually get better at it.

And as you get better at it, you like to do it a little more. And you know, I respect people who do kind of hard or tedious or physically demanding jobs day after day after day after day. So there's economic motivation. In fact, you know, all of us sitting in this room right now, we love our job.

Julie Walker: We do.

Andrew Pudewa: I mean, we love working here. But if there weren't a paycheck every couple weeks, we would probably have to go do something else.

Julie Walker: Right? Yep.

Andrew Pudewa: So I think that economic systems as a way to create a game are very valid for kids. You know, I taught Latin for many years. And I wanted the kids to do the homework, but I don't have any leverage. I mean, if they don't do the homework, what can I do? I can't punish them. I can't force them. I suppose I could call their parents and beg the parents to try to make them do it. But you know, that's not going to work. But if they don't do the homework, they won't learn the Latin. If they don't learn it, they're not going to enjoy it.

If they don't enjoy it, they're not going to continue. So I just said, look, we're going to have a Perfect Homework Challenge. If you turn in your homework every single week for the entire semester, I'll take you all out to Chili's for lunch. Well, that's not a huge deal, but you get this positive peer pressure.

Julie Walker: Yeah. Right.

Andrew Pudewa: And it's like, well, I'm in this class with these fourteen, fifteen other kids, and everybody's doing their homework. Why? Because we are going to get to go to lunch, you know, with Mr. Pudewa. And he's going to pay for it. And that's just cool, right? And it's going to be a little party or a little celebration.

So there's that combination of kind of an economic benefit, but more – I moved it into positive peer pressure. You don't want to be left out. You don't want to be the one kid who, you know, forgot or got lazy and now doesn't get to go to lunch with everybody else. You know, and truth is, a couple of them failed. And I said, okay, you can make it up by doing extra.

Julie Walker: Oh, very good. Yep.

Andrew Pudewa: I gave some extra thing. So they, you know ... There's that type of thing. You know, I think we see ... In writing classes we see positive peer pressure. You know, I will read students' compositions, and then some other kid will be like, oh, I want to hear him read mine. And so, you know, I'm contriving that. I'm manipulating the situation so that the kids want to be acknowledged. And that's pretty much what we all want. I mean, at the end of the day what do we want to hear at the Final Judgment? "Well done, good and faithful servant." Well, that's what kids want to hear too: "Well done."

Julie Walker: That's right. I do want to mention that for students who want to participate in a way to get that "well done" from here, from us here at IEW, we have our *Magnum Opus Magazine*.

Andrew Pudewa: Right. And we have annual essay contests. And you know, an essay contest is another idea in terms of an external, contrived motivation. Hey, there's an essay contest, you know, pro-life essay contest; you know, Daughters of the American Revolution; local library; Chamber of Commerce. I mean, lots of people do this thing. And you know, a parent could say, hey, enter the essay contest. You could win five hundred bucks. You could win a hundred bucks. Or they could say, you know what? Enter. You could win a hundred. I'll give you twenty just for doing it.

Julie Walker: Nice. Yep.

Andrew Pudewa: Right? And you know, some people say, oh, you're bribing a child. Right? Okay. I challenge that because bribery is when you pay someone to do something illegal or immoral, right? This is neither of that. This is saying, I will affix a tangible, meaningful, motivational element to a hard thing that will help encourage you to do it. And I have all sorts of ... many, many stories about parents using economic systems to successfully motivate kids. And what's interesting is after a while the kids don't need the economic system anymore.

But you kind of create a game. There's more we could say about games. But we're coming to the end of time. So we'll touch on the last, the fourth form of relevancy, which is the least effective. And that is **enforced relevancy**. That's where you basically say, learn this or suffer ...

Julie Walker: Okay. Okay.

Andrew Pudewa: ... a penalty of some sort. And you know, I would be the first one to say that I have fallen into this and say, you will get that math done, or you will not eat food again, ever. You know, of course, I'm bluffing. But you know, there's that wielding of power. The problem, I think, is that for a lot of us, we came through school, and that seemed to be the thing that was always in the background. Like, you have to take biology, or you can't graduate from high school. Furthermore, you have to get a good grade because if you don't get a good grade in biology, it'll bring down your GPA. If your GPA is too low, you won't get into college.

If you don't get into college, then the best you're ever going to do is assistant manager at Denny's, living a life of poverty and misery or something, right? And there's this background fear that is at the core of institutionalized education for many people. Okay, so all right. I can play that game. I'll take biology.

But the result is usually superficial, temporary learning. There's nothing to stick to. There's no intrinsic relevancy. There's no inspiration. There's not even any contrived application. It's just do this, or suffer the negative consequences. And so, you know, I think we have that as a last resort, but it's never the best method for real learning to occur. And so we want to avoid it because, you know, basically when you say do this or suffer, a child is very likely to say, well, I'm going to suffer if I do it. And I'm going to suffer if I don't do it.

And I'm just going to suffer. And I hate everything about this. And then, you know, you can spiral down into a pretty negative attitude. I think a lot of kids, you know – oftentimes they will come out of a educational environment pretty negative about almost everything. And they come into a different environment. Maybe it's a charter school that's different, or maybe it's a hybrid school, or maybe it's homeschooling. And they almost need to undo that for a while.

You know, you hear this term *unschooling*. A lot of people think it means you sit around and do nothing all day. No, I would say unschooling would be a period of time where you can somehow work to undo the negative, ineffective motivations the child has been experiencing so that you can then start anew and learn better, hopefully touching on things the child has an intrinsic interest, hopefully being able to expose them to things which inspire them to learn.

If you have to, create a game, an economic system, a challenge, something like that. And then avoid as much as possible falling into that “learn this or suffer,” going kind of backwards. So a lot more that could be said on that subject.

Julie Walker: And a lot more you have said in other talks, which we will, of course, link in our show notes. So 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 in iTunes, Google podcasts, 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.