

Episode 351—Why Kids Behave Better for the Teacher Across the Hall

00:00 Introduction to Classroom Dynamics

Linda Kardamis (00:00)

Do you ever feel like kids behave for the teacher across the hall, but not for you? Do they have something magical that you don't have? Well, no, but there are some things that are going on that you can learn to do. So let's talk about it today. Welcome back to the Teacher 4 the Heart podcast, where we tackle teaching challenges from a biblical perspective. Why are we here? Because we don't believe that our spiritual walk and teaching profession should exist in two separate domains. Rather, the hope we have in Christ should change how we approach everything, not just at home, but at school as well.

So join us as we explore both the spiritual and practical sides of key teaching challenges, integrating them together so we can succeed at teaching, glorify God, and make a lasting difference in our students' hearts and lives. This episode is brought to you in partnership with the Herzog Foundation. Today I'm so excited to be joined by Ashley, one of our team members and Teach for the Heart members. Ashley, thank you so much for being with us today.

Ashly Hilst (00:51)

Yeah, thanks so much for having me. I'm really excited.

Linda Kardamis (00:54)

So we're going to be talking about this topic of why does it sometimes seem like kids behave for teachers across the hall, but we are struggling to get them to focus. Ashley, have you ever kind of seen this dynamic play out?

Ashly Hilst (01:09)

Absolutely. ~ I've seen it as a first year teacher. I was the teacher that was like, why are they behaving for Mrs. Romero and not for me? So yeah, absolutely. And then just, it's really common.

Linda Kardamis (01:21)

Yeah, and definitely me too when I first started out, like, my goodness, I cannot get these kids to behave. And then you see the same kids with another teacher, like, why are they listening so well? Am I doing something wrong? Sometimes we even ask, do I have the wrong personality? Is it just something innate they have that I don't? And typically, no. I guess certain personalities can make it easier or a little bit more challenging, but you don't have to have this magical personality or just have this, it's not that. That's not what the difference is.

But there are some things that are happening that are making that difference. And one of the things that I've kind of figured out over the years is that there are a lot of intangible signals that we as teachers put out there for our students that they pick up on all the way from kindergarten all the way up through

12th grade. They pick up on these signals pretty quickly and we don't always even realize we're sending them. Sometimes we're telling students with these signals,

I'm competent, I'm capable, I expect a lot from you and I'm gonna hold you accountable. That's what the teacher across the hall is doing. ~ But sometimes we send these other signals that actually say unintentionally, I kinda don't totally know what I'm doing, I'm not quite sure what to do to get you to behave, you can probably get away with a lot. And those are obviously not the signals or sometimes we send a combination of those signals.

02:43 Understanding Subtle Signals in Teaching

So we wanna talk about what's going on, what is causing...us to maybe give the wrong signals and how can we give those right signals that make it suddenly way easier like it seems like it sometimes seems like it's so easier for that teacher but it's because there's a lot happening underneath the surface.

Ashly Hilst (03:00)

Yeah, it's a lot of not like no visuals, right? You wouldn't visually see it if you visited the classroom. Yeah.

Linda Kardamis (03:00)

So.

Yeah, exactly. And if you observed, you would start to notice some things. But right, there's a lot of things that they did that maybe already happened, or they're just part of what they're doing. And you wouldn't see them just popping into the classroom, but they're there. And that's what's making such a difference. So we're going to go back and forth and share. have a whole bunch. Ashley has a whole bunch of these things. We're going to talk about what are some of these intangibles, and how can you start to make them part of your classroom. So one that comes to mind ~ right off the bat.

that is intangible, I'm gonna say this, is actually our confidence. So when we don't know how we're going to deal with an issue and we aren't sure if we can get a student to behave, that confidence really is that intangible signal. So students really pick up on that, you know, that lack of confidence versus when we get to the point where we're like, nope.

I am going to be able to deal with this. know what I'm going to do. If you do this, this is what I'm going to do and it's going to be fine. That confidence projects in a very different way to students as well. So think that's one intangible right off the bat. And we're going to kind of talk in a minute about, well, what do I do if I don't have confidence? How you can build that up.

Ashly Hilst (04:15)

Yeah, I think that confidence, and this is why I think we see the issue more with first-year teachers, right? Because like for myself as a first-year teacher, I didn't know what I was doing and kids picked up on that. And so it's over time, you will gain confidence, but then there's also things you can do right away to gain that confidence.

Linda Kardamis (04:22)

Mm-hmm.

Yeah, so let's talk about some of those things. I one thing that you can do is, first of all, when we work with teachers in our program, we start with expectations because you need to first be really clear on what you expect from students. I remember my first year teaching something simple like a kid putting their head down. And I remember like kind of trying to teach, but by some simultaneously thinking, is that okay? Do I care if their head's down? Is it all right? Maybe they're tired. Should I make them sit up?

I hadn't thought that through. didn't know it. So I was not confident at all in what I should do. So I think it really starts with clear expectations for myself that I can then articulate to my students of where is the line? What behavior am I okay with in my classroom? And what behavior is not okay? And sometimes we're so general. Be respectful. Well, what does that mean? Is calling you bro respectful or not? What am I okay with? What am I not okay with? What does this look like?

And kind of getting really clear on that, think it's a really important first step.

05:33 Establishing Clear Expectations

Ashly Hilst (05:33)

Yeah, I think that you mentioned we have to be clear in our expectation. Like we have to know what is okay. ~ But then also it's something that is so simple, but we just have to tell the students. It's amazing how much different the behavior will be if you just tell the student, I expect you to X because then they know what the expectation is. Whereas before some of those misbehavior issues aren't actually them trying to be pills or difficult. They just didn't know that that wasn't okay to do. And so as soon as you said that.

This is what you need to do. It changes things. It starts to shift.

Linda Kardamis (06:06)

Absolutely. And sometimes we think, think especially with older kids, we assume, ~ you know, they're high school juniors, they're high school seniors, they know how to behave. Maybe. But if you're not clear in your expectation, you can't hold them accountable to that. So like really being clear ~ with what you expect exactly. And it can be so valuable before you do an activity, even if you've already. Well, the first time you do it, you've got to teach your expectations. You've got to. But then even if it's like, well, we've done this a lot of times, but it's like being clear, hey, remember, we're about to do this.

Ashly Hilst (06:28)

Yeah. Yeah.

Linda Kardamis (06:36)

and we're going to this, this, this, and this. That is so clarifying for everybody and can make such a big difference, something you might not even pick up on if you were observing somebody, but that's so, so key.

Ashly Hilst (06:48)

And one of the things that I actually stole from elementary teachers is because you mentioned like secondary students, you'd think they'd have this figured out, but elementary teachers are so specific about what they want the students to do with their bodies. And so I actually stole that for my, do SSR, sustained silent reading. And when we start SSR, as I begin to circulate, I'm reminding the students, remember SSR means books open, eyes on the page, mouths.

Linda Kardamis (07:01)

Mmm.

Ashly Hilst (07:14)

closed, like literally, and I just list the physical, what does it physically look like for you to be following my expectations? And it's astonishing. Like I was shocked when I started doing that because it seems so like juvenile. It's not. It's so helpful. They're like, yeah, eyes on the page. yeah, mouth closed. Like it's so silly, but it works.

Linda Kardamis (07:30)

Hahaha!

that makes so much sense, right? Just what am I actually doing with my body in this activity? Makes so much sense. Yeah, so thinking through, maybe I need to be a little more clear. Maybe I actually need to spell out if I'm getting annoyed at them for doing something that I actually specifically say, we're not doing it this way. We're doing it this way instead. So really important. So that is so clarifying for your students. Also gives you, so once again, starts to build that confidence too, and it sends the right signals. Okay, this is what they expect. But then,

Ashly Hilst (07:37)

Mm-hmm.

Linda Kardamis (08:01)

you need to know what you're gonna do when students don't meet those expectations. So another thing, I mean there's so much we can talk about here, but I think this is another really big key, is thinking through how am going to respond when students fail to meet my expectations? And in classroom management 101, we actually go through pretty much every area we can think of so that you are prepared for literally everything. But if you're like, okay, that feels overwhelming, you can start by just thinking like what are the top three to five...

misbehaviors that I deal with in my classroom. mean, talking should definitely be one of them, you but like, what are like these kind of top things? And then what am I going to do when students do that? And

the magic isn't necessarily on having the exact right thing. It's on just having a plan and being like, okay, now I know what I'm going to do. Because when, and this is where, you know, once you get to be really, really good at customer management, you have so many tools in your toolkit. You're just like, I can just pull out whatever to it. It's like a master chef that doesn't need a recipe.

08:52 Building Confidence and Classroom Management

But when we're first starting out or we're just been struggling lately and we're not, we honestly don't have confidence, we need that plan because then we're like, okay, I might not feel super confident, but I do know. And so I can kind of like bolster my confidence. Yes. I know what I'm going to do. I'm going to gather my courage and I'm just going to do it. And I'm going to do it with confidence because I already thought about it. And I, this, and I believe that this is a good plan. So that can make such a big difference.

Ashly Hilst (09:19)

And it does give you that confidence because then when the misbehavior happens, there's no panic. There's no like, shoot, I'm thinking and you're on the spot. You know how to respond. So you're way more likely to respond in the right way. If you have a plan ready to go, this is what I'm gonna do. This is what I'm gonna say.

Linda Kardamis (09:34)

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Now, back to our program.

10:09 The Role of Respect in the Classroom

Ashly Hilst (10:09)

Yeah, I think one of the biggest things for me is respect. And this is difficult because this is one of those intangibles. But I think a big reason why students will behave for one teacher and not another, ~ it's not even so much about relationship, right? Because I had a really good relationship with my sixth period class, my first year teaching. They loved me and I loved them.

They were the worst. They did not behave for me. So it's not that relationship isn't important. Relationship really is important. But like there's an element of like respect that has to come into play. And that is a difficult thing to like, well, it's all the intangibles. It happens under like the radar. It's not something where you walk out there and you're like, you will respect me. That's not how it works. And so it is a really tricky thing, but I do think it's one of the key things. ~ I would be curious to hear your thoughts on building

respect, like how you see teachers are able to build respect with their students.

Linda Kardamis (11:04)

Yeah, I think all of this ties together. And obviously being someone worthy of respect is really helpful, right? And I don't think if you, don't think demanding respect typically works very well, but you demand it in other ways. You command it and you earn it, I think by being clear, being clear in your expectations and then holding students accountable consistently. I think that really builds respect and helps them see, okay,

~ You know, my teacher, yeah, they are going to hold me accountable. And then also by being good at what you teach, caring about your subject and like helping them understand it. So if like, if you're like great at, you know, the classroom management skills, but you like hate your subject or like, or you just like, you just make it boring or like you just, you know, you really are not explaining it and everyone's so confused. It's going to be hard. They're going to be frustrated. So I think that's really important too.

Ashly Hilst (11:58)

Yep. Yeah.

Linda Kardamis (12:01)

~ And all these things can kind of work together.

Ashly Hilst (12:05)

Yeah, that is really interesting. The idea of engagement being an important way to build respect. I don't think that's something I would have directly thought of, but anecdotally, I see that now that you mention it. I can think of examples over my life, you know, in a teaching career where I saw teachers who just, you know, they didn't have the respect of their students because they're all he does is drone at us or all she does is like make us read the textbook. so having that attitude of I'm here and I care about you and I'm trying to craft engaging lessons, even if we don't do it well all the time.

does matter and does contribute to respect. I also think ~ that respecting the students is a huge way to build respect because ~ if they feel disrespected, they will not respect you. And this, mean, maybe I do not experience as much with elementary, so I'm not sure how much that comes into play, but especially in the teenage years when they are really learning the levels of like authority and they're starting to say like, okay, I know you're in charge of me, but.

Linda Kardamis (12:41)

Yes.

Ashly Hilst (13:03)

I also have a lot of say in what happens here. And so they kind of push boundaries a little more. And so I think if you show them, respect you, and therefore I expect you to respect me back. It's a mutual respect that can go a really, really long way. My litmus test for that is like, would I talk this way to a colleague? Like, how is my tone of voice? What's my word choice?

And if not, if I'm talking down to them or if I'm belittling them, even we do it subtly as teachers, like, well, that's a stupid thing that we don't mean to, but we can easily slip into that just because we're in charge and they're not and they're kids and they're kids. ~ But I think that that's a really big part of it.

Linda Kardamis (13:43)

think you're right. That's a really good point. ~ just, I know this is what you mean, but just to clarify for everybody, know, respecting the students, like that does not mean we let them do what they want, right? But it does mean that like, it means that we're gonna hold them accountable. We're gonna expect a lot about them. We're gonna believe in them. And we're gonna kind of communicate that confidence to them, right? Like you said, the way we, it's more about the way we do it. If we're just, you know, lambasting them, lecturing them all the time, talking down to them, like that's gonna erode that respect versus

Ashly Hilst (13:53)

Exactly.

Linda Kardamis (14:13)

you know, dealing with the issue, but in an attitude of like, believe in you. yeah, you're going to do this. I know you can do it. And just having that level is totally different. You're right. That is a really good point.

Ashly Hilst (14:22)

Yeah.

Yeah. And it's very much like, we're still the ones in charge. It's like the way, but it's the way, think about like how you'd want your boss to treat you. Like you don't want your boss to like talk down to you or act like you're incapable or, you know, or even just like, you know, you shouldn't have done that. That was really stupid. Why'd you do that? You want someone to have like, to come to you. Yes, I'm in charge, but I respect you as a person. And so we're going to have like good discussions and respectful discussions and

Linda Kardamis (14:29)

Yes.

Ashly Hilst (14:47)

tone of voice is appropriate and I show that I value you and things like that. And so we're very much still in charge for sure.

14:54 Avoiding Dead Space and Maintaining Engagement

Linda Kardamis (14:54)

Yes, absolutely. So another area that I know you want to talk about and I want to talk about was this idea also of being organized and of avoiding dead space in the classroom. Because when you are like, ~ when there is dead space in the classroom, nothing's happening, that is just inviting chaos. Actually, I think you weren't you weren't in it really well. You're just like, no, that's I forget how you weren't in it exactly.

Ashly Hilst (15:04)

Yes.

Linda Kardamis (15:19)

But yeah, not having that dead space because, it's so important to be organized. I'm just thinking of like the flow of the classroom. If we have the next activity ready, if we're going from thing to thing, if we're wandering around, like, I mean, it happens to the best of us. You can't find something. But if we're always like looking for something and like all this dead space is being created, that not only creates that space for students to like, I'm bored. I gotta do something. But it also, it does kind of erode that like, oh, they lost everyone. We're all gonna do that.

But if that's happening all the time and you're creating that extra chaos, that really is another layer. That's not the right direction that we want to go.

Ashly Hilst (15:56)

Yeah, I can't remember exactly how I phrase it either, but just over the years, I have learned to dread any dead space. Like the best classes, when I get to the end of a class period and it's just been, and I'm just like, yes, that was beautiful. Cause let's admit that we don't do this all the time and that's okay. It's progress, not perfection. But ~ it's always when I had the stuff lined up, I had it ready to go. I chunked my time. So there wasn't like, you're going to spend 30 minutes reading. It was like, okay, maybe you spend.

10 minutes reading, but then you stop and you do a turn and talk or you answer a question or we rotate through the room doing something like getting some of that movement in. And then, and we do that the entire class period consistently. That's when I just, that's when there's way less behavior issues. ~ And I really feel like successful as a teacher.

Linda Kardamis (16:46)

Yes, yeah, so important just to be organized, have that, not have that dead space. That makes such a big difference. So there's so much more we can say and in a minute we're gonna get Ashley's kind of final thoughts on this, but I kind of wanna wrap this up and just saying if you're listening to this and saying, okay, wow, there's a lot of good thoughts here, like what do I do with this? A couple things. First of all, I would love to invite you to a free training we're doing called Back to School Classroom Management and Motivation next week. So we would love to invite you to that. It's absolutely free. You're get more details and help with this. That's at teach4theheart.com.

is where you can sign up for that. But as you think about the start to school in particular, you really want to make sure that you are starting off right. Like that moment those students walk into the classroom, that is such a magical moment. Like those first 10 minutes, that first hour you have with ~ them, they are checking you out. They are looking for those intangibles. And so being ready to go.

Being prepared we don't have time to talk all about this but being prepared to teach procedures and insist that they're followed have your expectations clear Consistently deal with things according to your plan all that is so so important So once again, we recommend coming to that free training. It's kind of a

first step We also have classroom management 101 We talked about getting clear on what do you expect and then how am going to handle with it? You can do that on your own, but if you're like, I want some help with that

18:04 Proactive Classroom Management Strategies

We have a program called Classroom Management 101 that will help you walk through all of that. You can go to [teach4theheart.com / cm101](http://teach4theheart.com/cm101). And if you use the code podcast20, you can save 20 % on your enrollment. But yeah, this is a great time of year to kind of get ready because that back to school is a great opportunity to start off right instead of kind of, oh, you know, getting a little bit behind the eight ball as it were and having to kind of make all that up. Ashley, do have any final thoughts as we wrap up this episode?

Ashly Hilst (18:28)

~ One thing that we haven't covered directly that I do think is also important is that ~ teachers who cut off misbehavior before it starts. I think that's another really big thing where it would be subtle and you might not notice it. ~ But I think it's really important and I think that's why we sometimes see ~ kids behaving differently for one teacher versus another. It's not that they weren't going to do that misbehavior in, you know, Mrs. So-and-so's class. It's just that Mrs. So-and-so saw it coming.

Linda Kardamis (18:39)

Yes.

Ashly Hilst (18:56)

and she cut it off before it was able to actually grow. And so I think that's another thing. It's encouraging to remember that because you can kind of stop personalizing it. Sometimes it feels like, my gosh, I'm just a failure. No, you're not. The kid was going to behave exactly the same way in the classroom down the hall. You just have to practice identifying what is that. And one of those things is the downtime, right? Like being aware. Don't give them downtime. That doesn't give them a chance to misbehave. But the other thing is also just observing. ~ Johnny's looking fidgety.

Linda Kardamis (19:11)

Mmm.

Ashly Hilst (19:25)

Okay, so maybe Johnny needs an errand or ask Johnny to pass out the papers or you can tell Johnny is poking someone. Just be like, hey, Johnny, why don't you come over here and do this and that? Just those little things that are really subtle and often nobody would pick up on it, especially if they don't know your students well, like they wouldn't know why you sent Johnny to the office. But you know, it's because Johnny was about to really make the classroom chaotic and you just cut it off at the pass. So think that's another really important aspect.

Linda Kardamis (19:51)

that's a great point, right? So starting to develop those skills, that observation, noticing what are those warning signs that are coming up before something happens. That's great. And I think another prevention tool that we didn't get to talk about too much either is dealing with problems while they're small, especially in beginning of the school year. I think a big mistake is like, ~ I totally did this. It's just a little whispering. It's not a big deal. I don't really need to deal with it. And we hear this advice, don't sweat the small stuff. That's great advice in life, not good advice.

Ashly Hilst (20:05)

Yes.

Linda Kardamis (20:18)

for setting up your classroom in August and September. Not good advice. We really do need to sweat the small stuff. Deal with stuff while it's small before it's a big deal. And that shows students, yeah, no, this isn't how we're gonna do it. We're gonna do it this way. We're gonna take our learning seriously. We're gonna respect each other and all of that. And that does cut off a lot of things as opposed to when we let it go, it starts to snowball and get bigger and bigger and bigger.

Ashly Hilst (20:41)

And in September, like we have to remember, like it's almost like we're retraining the kids how to do school. You would think they would know they've been doing it for five, six, 10 years. No, in September they come back and they are in summer mode. So it is our job as teachers to say, no, this is how we do things. I know I taught you this last year. Like at least for me, I have the same kids four years in a row, cause it's a small school.

Linda Kardamis (20:46)

Yes.

Ashly Hilst (21:01)

~ But you know, maybe they're brand new kids. So another teacher taught you this last year, but I'm going to reteach you. This is how we behave in class. This is what we do. And it is that that's why September is probably one of the most exhausting times for teachers, because that's when you are the you have to be the most locked in the most focused on teaching those expectations and holding students accountable. And it can be tiring, but it's worth it because then after that they settle into the flow and they know what to do. And they're just in school mode and they then they behave for you.

Linda Kardamis (21:30)

Yep, I love that. It's not easy, but it is so worth it. And I hope that's what you walk away from this is not like, my goodness, like, I hope you walk away with thinking, okay, I can be that teacher across the hall. It's just gonna take some work, some practice, but I can get there in a year or two. Like I can work at this and get better. And that can absolutely be you. They don't have something magical that you don't have. You just gotta keep working and developing these skills.

So Ashley, thank you so much for being with us and thank you guys for listening. It's been a pleasure. I can't wait to talk with you again soon and I hope to see you at that free back to school classroom management and motivation training. Go to [teach4theheart.com / training](http://teach4theheart.com/training) to sign up for that. Well, this episode has been brought to you in partnership with the Herzog Foundation. All views and opinions are our own. Don't necessarily reflect those of the Herzog Foundation. We look forward to being with you again soon. In the meantime, teach to remember God is at work in you and through you and he's using you to make a difference. Keep your eyes on him and teach for the heart.