

Teach 4 the Heart Podcast Transcript

Episode 356 – 5 Things I Wish I Knew as a New Teacher

00:00 Introduction to Teaching Challenges

Linda Kardamis (00:00)

Here's some things we really wish we would have known as new teachers. Well, welcome back to the Teach with a 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. We also want to thank our sponsor, The Collaborative. The Collaborative unites Christian Ed leaders from faith-based schools to strengthen their communities and elevate the educational experience. Through a members school community, events, and mastermind, The Collaborative aims to establish and implement a collaborative vision for K-12 Christian education.

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01:20 The Balance of Kindness and Firmness

I'm so excited to be joined today by Julie, one of our newest Teach 4 the Heart members, ~ team members that is, and our new podcast manager. Julie, thank you so much for being with us here today.

Julie (01:32)

Thank you for having me.

Linda Kardamis (01:34)

And we're really excited to talk about some things that we wish we would have known when we were new teachers. And it's been a little while for me, a little bit less long for Julie, but in both cases, I think all of us can think back and think, man, what are there some things that I wish I would have known when I started teaching? I kind of had to maybe learn them the hard way. ~ And so I really think if

you're a new teacher, you're going to find a lot of helpful things in this episode. But even if you're not a new teacher, I think you're really going to enjoy this episode as well.

So the first thing that we're gonna talk about is, the first thing we wish that we would have known is that you don't have to choose between being kind and being firm. And I think that particularly when I started teaching, I don't know if I would have said that outright, but I kind of had that in my mind that, you know, there's like this strict teacher and I was like, I don't wanna be that, I wanna be nice, but yet I hadn't really thought through the need to be both. That I really needed to be, yes, I...

I don't have to give up being kind in order to be firm, but that I need to be firm. I need to have clear boundaries and hold students to them or things are going to go bad really quickly. And that's what happened to me. I've said it many times. If you listen to the podcast, it was around October when the principal called me into his office and said, you got to muster some authority because this is not, this is really bad. And that was just like an awful moment, but I, needed that. needed, I, I'm glad he did that. I needed, I needed to learn from that, but kind of learning that I need to be,

I don't have to give up being kind. I can continue being kind and caring for my students, but I absolutely have to be firm at the same time, or it's just absolutely going to fall apart. What's your experience with that, Julie?

Julie (03:13)

~ Very similar, honestly. ~ Yeah, I had this idea in my mind of like the teacher stereotypes where it was the two extremes. Either I was going to be the really nice pushover that every student loved or I was going to be the really strict disciplinarian, ~ you know, that kids respected. And it took me a while to realize, no, you really have to be the perfect blend of both of those. And I feel like the best teachers are the ones who recognize which you need to be in that moment.

And I also think it's important to note, like when we say being kind, it's not trying to be the kid's friend. Like that'll get you in more trouble than not. Like when we say being kind, like being respectful and empathetic and showing that we genuinely care. And then in the same way, like when we talk about being firm, it's not strictly about punishment. It's about setting those high expectations and holding them accountable. And what's kind of funny, I think it's a little bit ironic, but when we talk about

holding kids accountable. I feel like that is one of the kindest things that you can do for a kid, to say, I care about your success enough to hold you to these standards and I'm going to help you get, to that point of success and I'm not going to compromise my expectations because it's in place for your benefit. So, ~ yeah, I feel like it's, you have to be the perfect blend. You have to be firm in your expectations, but empathetic in your delivery. And I wish.

Someone had told me that from the get-go because it took me some time to realize that.

Linda Kardamis (04:44)

Yeah, and I love how you said that. Firming your expectations, but kind in your delivery, right? And I also love how you said ~ it's about really caring for our students and what's really best for them. Not what's easy in the moment, but recognizing I love you enough to hold you accountable. But I'm not, don't have to do it in this knock, knock over your head way. Unless that's really what they need in the moment. Normally what they need is just that calm, ~ holding them accountable. That's awesome.

05:12 Don't Let the Small Things Go

So number one, you don't have to choose between being kind and firm, and in fact, you really shouldn't try. You really need to be both. Second thing I know I wish I would have learned is that you can't let the little things go, particularly when it comes to behavior. And I have quite a few behavior-related things I wish I would have known, because that was my biggest struggle when I first started teaching. We have some other things we'll talk about later. But when it comes to not letting the little things go, there were so many things in the beginning of school

that I didn't think was a huge deal and I didn't want to make into a big deal. I remember seeing a kid put their head down on the desk and thinking, that's fine, right? Do I really, like maybe they're tired. They can listen with their head down, you know, or a couple of kids whispering. was like, I don't, I don't want to, the school I had done my internship at gave detentions for literally every time someone talked. And I thought that was way over the top. I was like, I'm not going to do that. Okay. So, so I just let it go, but that was a problem in letting all those things go. It was partially because I didn't want to be

too crazy, which that would have been, honestly, I think, too crazy, but also because I hadn't thought of an alternative. I thought, I know I don't want to give it to tension for them talking, but I hadn't figured out, what are you going to do instead? So instead I just let it go, thinking it wasn't a big deal. And that's such a rookie mistake because it's not a big deal then. But I this so many times, little problems don't stay little. Not in the classroom, especially at the beginning of the year. So if you let those things go,

They grow. And before I knew it, I was in the principal's office because ~ so much was going. I remember trying to start class and I couldn't even get everyone's attention because they were just, they were not paying any attention to me. I did not have any authority because they had given it all away by letting all the little things go and they just snowballed completely out of control. So it is really, really important to have a plan. And as it came through, I came up with a plan that I was like, no, this is fair. This is a way that I can deal with it. We talk about the warning system all the time on the podcast.

is what I use, but there's so many different ways to do it. But it's like, I needed to have a plan instead of, I'm not going to do the detention, but I am going to address it in these ways so that we can nip the problems in the bud before they become really out of control.

Julie (07:17)

Right. And I've heard it said before that what you accept becomes acceptable. And I was like, oh man, that's good. Someone should have told me that. I wish I knew that because, I mean, it's true that you're going to get the behaviors that you tolerate. You know, if you don't address them, then they're going to go, oh, okay, she's fine with that. Cool. Then I'm going to continue doing it. And then it catches on. And then everyone's talking during the lesson and you're like, wait, how did we get here? You know, this is not okay. So yeah, like you say, those small behaviors.

Linda Kardamis (07:21)

Mm.

Julie (07:45)

can become big, they can snowball and not necessarily all of them. And like you said, you kind of have to pick and choose what is it you're going to address. ~ But I mean, if it's going to affect the safety or prevents others from learning ~ or communicate, disrespect is OK. Those are things that you're going to need to address. So some things that come to mind, like safety-wise, where are they going to put their backpacks? It might seem small. that kid has their backpack in the middle of the aisle.

Well, that could become a safety thing later on. So how are we going to address that before there's just backpacks all over the room? And then having side conversations while you're trying to deliver a lesson. might seem small in the moment, but you don't want the whole class to get off task. And that's going to prevent others from learning. They might get distracted trying to listen in on whatever the juicy gossip is of middle school. Or if you hear another student

insult their classmate and you just thought, I'll just deal with that later. Well, you're kind of communicating that disrespect is okay in your class and by not addressing that in the moment. So yeah, it may seem small, but like you say, it can grow into something bigger. And a lot of times, your campus might have something in place, like a flow chart type situation for you to navigate these, but not always. if I had something in place to help me,

address those small behaviors from the get-go, I would have been way less frazzled and frustrated and reacting in a way I probably shouldn't have when things escalated.

Linda Kardamis (09:22)

Yeah, for sure. And this is why we now help teachers with this. So in classroom management 101, we help teachers think through, first of all, expectations, like what should I expect? Because there's certain things that, yeah, where do I want to draw those lines? What is OK and what isn't? And thinking through all that. And then thinking through, OK, what do I do when students cross the line? How can I be prepared so that I can be consistent? So if you feel like you want help with that,

We would love to have you join us in Classroom Management 101. You can go to [teach4theheart.com / cm101](http://teach4theheart.com/cm101) and use the code podcast to get a discount on your enrollment. We also have a free training. If you're like, I'm not quite ready for that. I wanna hear a little more about this first. If you go to [teach4theheart.com / free](http://teach4theheart.com/free), you can get that free training, how to reduce disruption so you can actually

teach. We kind of just go into it more detail, explain how it works, and you can kind of check that out too. So yeah, don't let little things go, and I love that.

10:12 Ensure Procedures Are Followed

What you accept becomes acceptable. So think through what exactly you want to accept and what you don't. Number three ~ is this. So third thing we wish we would have known when we started teaching is you don't only need good procedures, but you also have to work hard to ensure they're followed. So for me personally, I was very good with coming up with procedures. I have a mind that thinks through like, what will work? How do I like arrange things like so that they're really efficient? So I had efficient procedures, which if you don't, that's important. You need efficient procedures.

But I had the procedures, but I didn't, I was not prepared to make sure students actually followed them. So I would teach the procedure and they would kind of follow it and I'd be like, okay, moving on. And so they kind of degraded in time and were only half followed. And that's really not good because first of all, that obviously introduces a lot of chaos if students aren't actually following your procedure, but it also sends these really bad intangible signals. It basically, if I say this is the procedure and then I let you not follow it,

Then I accepting, once again, it's back to that, right? I'm making it acceptable. But beyond that, I'm also sending these big intangible signals that say, don't actually mean what I say. You can get away with not following instructions. We don't take this that seriously. I'm not going to hold you accountable. And those are not the types of, that's not what we want to say, right? We want to say the opposite. We want to say, I do mean what I say. I am going to hold you accountable. We take learning seriously. And so it takes a lot of work and effort to ensure that procedures are followed, right?

teaching and reteaching. takes insisting. It takes asking students to redo it when they don't do it correctly. But that is really, really worth it. And even if you're listening to this episode in September and you say, we're already falling apart, this is a great time of year to say, OK, I'm going to do a reset. I'm going to really work on these procedures and really insist that students follow them. It's hard, but it's really, really worth it and pays huge dividends for the rest of the year.

Julie (12:08)

Yeah, I agree. mean, it's like coming up with the procedures is half the battle, but the arguably more difficult half is making sure that, it's followed through. you know, I come from a middle school background. I taught middle school science. And I remember hearing people say, well, you have to make sure students practice your expectations, practice these procedures and routines. And I thought, am I really about to have 13 year olds practice how to get a pencil?

You have to decide what's best for your class based on your students and their age level. But I think about it more so, if you're teaching a sport, so if you're a coach, you're not going to tell them, dunk the basketball. Well, OK, how do I do that? What does it look like? ~ And so constantly reminding them of, hey, this is how it's done. ~

repetition ~ and then modeling it, you as the teacher, but then also them as the student. I feel like it's so important because you can't tell them the one time and expect them to remember it. Like I don't remember things that I've been told one time. Like, no. So, just constantly throughout the year revisiting that and having them practice. ~ I feel like it's so important. And then also too, to extend a little grace.

from time to time because it might be a crazy week with homecoming have dress-up days and that sort of thing. But also thinking about how patient God is with us when we mess up and we make mistakes and He extends the grace in teaching us over and over again even when we mess up. ~ I feel like it's also important to keep in mind when we're addressing these things.

Linda Kardamis (13:47)

Yes, that's so true, right? God is so patient with us. I think that's so important to remember and also kind of accepting that the way we wish things are isn't the way it is. In other words, like we wish that we could tell students something one time and they would just do it or they would remember it. Like that would be so nice, but it's just simply not realistic. And if we expect that to happen, that way we're gonna be continually frustrated. So just recognizing.

Even high school students, like they need more careful explanations than we think they do. They need things spout out. They need us to hold them accountable. We're gonna have to fight these little battles and just recognizing and accepting that is how it is. And it just is what it is, can then help us to engage in it in a productive way instead of continually being frustrated by it.

Linda Kardamis (14:50)

America turns 250 years old next summer. And as we approach this incredible milestone, the Herzog Foundation is launching the Freedom Tour—a national event series celebrating the history and hope of America. It's a powerful reminder that our freedoms—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—aren't government-made, they're God-given.

The Freedom Tour invites you to experience how faith shaped our founding- and to carry that message into your classrooms, your homes, and your communities.

And that's not all. Starting this summer, the Herzog Foundation is also releasing a new video series called Faith & Freedom 250. Every Friday, you'll hear voices from across America—teachers, parents, pastors, and leaders—sharing powerful stories from our nation's history and reminding us why our founding values still matter today. Learn more and follow along at FreedomTour250.com.

15:34 Don't Be Afraid to Ask

So that brings us to number four. And number four, I'm gonna let Julie talk about

She has so many good thoughts on this and that is don't be afraid to ask. Julie, what are your thoughts here on this one?

Julie (15:47)

Yeah, so when I first started teaching or just like starting any new job, I feel like a lot of times I go in with this preconceived idea of, if I ask for help, then it looks like I don't know what I'm doing, you know? But I feel like reframe our state of mind where, you know, asking for help, it's not a weakness, it's showing humility that, you you acknowledge that, there's probably people who know what they're doing way more than I do and can offer solid advice.

And I have to give a shout out to my team that I taught with my first year because they taught me so much. teaching middle school science, I was like, I don't know how to classify stars. That's not something that I learned in college. so taking the time to sit down with your colleagues and go through and ask questions, whether it's something as simple as like, hey, where do we keep the pencils? Or, hey, can you help me with this classroom management situation?

more often than not, you're going to find that your coworkers want you to be successful and they are absolutely willing to help you and they have the knowledge and experience. So, you know, they're willing to share. So don't be afraid to ask them. But also, I feel like one group of people you could ask are parents. So a lot of times we might have this idea of, the parents are against us, like, they're going to

take the kid's side or they're gonna, which in some cases, maybe, we've all had situations like that. But a lot of times if you just check in with that parent, like, hey, I noticed your kiddo is kind of off today, just checking in. Is everything okay at home? Is there anything I can help with? And asking parents in that situation is gonna create a partnership and show the parents, oh, this future really cares.

And so taking that step to reach out to parents for that or even for supplies. I found that that was really successful. You know, I was spending so much money myself buying supplies for the classroom as we'd run out. And one of my coworkers said, why don't you send your Amazon wishlist to the parents? And I thought, okay, I mean, I don't want to be like, oh, hey, Santa, can you give me these, these things that I want? But the parents were really responsive, you know, And again, it's kind of like you're inviting them to be.

part of your classroom experience. And a lot of times you're gonna get things that could be really useful for your class. But then I feel like the most important out of all of these is knowing that we can ask God for the things that we're struggling with. He already sees what we're going through, balancing being a new teacher and learning all of these new processes and systems just kind of finding ourselves as a teacher. And if we just ask him for

peace and guidance and strength and wisdom. He's going to offer that if we just ask. so I feel like just not being afraid to ask for help when you need it, no matter who it is you're asking help for can be such a game changer when you're new teacher.

Linda Kardamis (18:43)

Yeah, I totally agree. I think ~ one of the group that I think sometimes we feel nervous asking is our admin, particularly when there's an instruction we're given that we feel like we don't understand. We either don't understand or we feel like it's unfair or it doesn't make sense. Like, why are we have to do this? Or we feel like it's cumbersome. I really recommend going to your admin and asking more questions because I've seen so many times with teachers that we coach, especially on Teach 4 the Heart Plus, where they ~

~ there's like a misunderstanding. I'm like, I don't think that what you're hearing the admin ask you is what they're actually asking you and going and like asking more questions. Hey, what exactly do you mean by this expectation? And if you're still confused, like, can you help me figure out how this would work in my classroom? Because I'm hearing I have to do this, this and this. Is that what you're actually expecting? So clearing up some of that, you might be surprised. It might really help alleviate some of those things you're concerned about.

19:38 Prayer

And then the last thing you mentioned, prayer. That was actually one of the things that I had too for one of the things I really wish I would have known is just how much I needed God and how powerful prayer is. I think this is something where, you know, as you go through your Christian life, you just realize that more and more. But I really think when I first started teaching, I did pray, obviously.

but not realizing like how important that is. was almost, that's like the most important thing on my to-do list. And it's something that was, that is, it's not just all, it's all I can do is pray. No, like prayer is the most important work I can do for myself, for my students, for my classroom, and just valuing that because it's so, valuable.

Julie (20:20)

Yeah, and I feel like being proactive in your prayer too versus reactive. if you just make time to start your day, you know, with a prayer, whether it's one that you have pre-written and taped to your desk or just, know, whatever comes to mind when you're driving, to work. ~ Just knowing that he knows what's ahead in that day. You know, we might think we have it all planned out, but life throws us curveballs and we don't know what the day looks like ahead. So just, you know, asking for his guidance throughout the day.

Rather than being reactive and being stressed and like, ~ god, why why is this happening? Which of course we know he accepts all kinds of prayers But ~ I feel like it just kind of centers your heart and gives you peace going into the day ~ If you even start your day with prayer

Linda Kardamis (21:05)

So there's so many more things that we could say around things we wish we knew when we first started teaching, but the last one we want to talk about today has to do with our time. And it's just this idea that it is so important to set boundaries around your time and to realize that you can't say yes to everything. And I do think, you know, one of the advice that I sometimes hear people giving to all teachers and newer teachers is don't take any work home.

But to be honest, as a first year teacher, that might not be realistic. I know I was very good with my time, but my first year teaching, I had to take some work home. There's just no way, unless I stayed at school really late, which I didn't want to do, there's just no way I would have been able to do that. ~ So there's just a lot of extra work your first year. So first of all, it should get easier. The first year is the hardest. All the curriculum is new. Everything is new. But it's still important, even though you know, okay, I'm going to have to work extra hard and more hours this year.

you can still be really strategic in how you do it. So one thing I recommend is planning your work hours ahead of time. So you get a sense even a couple of years into the school year, how long things are going to take. And so recognizing, okay, I am gonna leave work at these times. I'm gonna work one hour in the evening or I'm gonna work four hours on the weekend because I really need that. But like basically choosing how...

how long you're going to work ahead of time, especially if you're married or have a family that you're working with too, so they can know what to expect and kind of putting some of those boundaries there. Or it could be as simple as like, I'm gonna stop working by nine. Like just kind of think, what do you need to be able to have balance and be able to get your work done and also have time when you're not working? What you don't wanna do is feel like you always have to keep working and you're never done. So you kind of need to kind of think through that. And the other thing on there, ~

is just realizing that you can't say yes to everything. If you say yes to everything, you're saying no to things without realizing it. You might be saying no to sleep. You might be saying no to your sanity. Might you be saying no to having enough energy to actually disciple your students? You can't possibly do everything. So being wise and praying about what extra responsibility should I say yes to? What projects that I might really have this great creative idea? Is this the year to do it? Keep in mind, this is not the only year you're going to be teaching word willing.

Some things are amazing ideas and they're better year two. You you're gonna get through year one and then get more creative year two. So recognizing, I'm not saying you have to do that, but just recognizing you have choices and you can't say yes to everything. So being really wise and prayerful about what you do say yes to and what you say no to as well.

Julie (23:44)

Right. And I think also being flexible, you know, whenever you create those boundaries, you know, what week one expects of you is going to be different from, you know, a few months in what you're going to need. And so just being open to change what your boundaries are, whether it's, you know, extending your work time at home or recognizing, this is not good for my family, you know, and then being willing to scale it back. you know, just being cautious, I guess.

~ and not thinking, I have to stick to this plan. This is what I came up with. ~ but just being open with yourself of, my expectations have changed because life at work has changed or life at home has changed. so, being willing to kind of flex that time is important too.

Linda Kardamis (24:32)

Yeah, I totally agree with that. And in our planner, I don't know if you can see this in the Pray and Plan planner, we have a block for this. And the idea is you do it every week. So like every week you think, does a balanced life look like this week? Because you're right, it changes and it morphs as you go from week to week and month to month and different seasons throughout the year. So yeah, thank you so much for bringing that up. That's so important. If you feel like you need more help thinking through, man, how do I manage my time? We have a free training.

~ that will really help you kind of save time and not feel as overwhelmed. So you can get that at teach4theheart.com / save time. my goodness, there's so much more we could say. Any final words of advice, Julie, as we wrap up this episode?

Julie (25:12)

I would just reiterate what you said when things get easier. I mean, it's such a steep learning curve. I mean, there's so much you can prepare for in college, but my gosh, there's so much that you do not get prepared for, especially kids. My goodness, they throw things that you never would have expected or planned for, just knowing to rely on God, rely on your coworkers, and it will get easier. You'll become a pro in no time.

Linda Kardamis (25:35)

Absolutely. Well, thank you guys so much. I hope that these tips have been helpful for you. And if you'd like to get some of the different resources that we mentioned, the free trainings, our courses, you can check all of those out at teach4theheart.com / three five six. This episode is 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. If you've enjoyed this episode, you can help us reach more teachers by subscribing to the podcast.

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