

Episode 375 – Why Building Relationships Isn't Fixing Your Classroom Problems

00:00 The Importance of Relationships in Teaching

Linda Kardamis (00:00)

As teachers were often told, just build relationships as if that's going to solve all of our classroom management and other classroom problems. But that is not enough in and of itself. We talk about why and what we need to do in addition in this episode. Well, welcome back to the Teach 4 the Heart podcast where we tackle teaching challenges from a biblical perspective. This episode is brought to you in partnership with the Herzog Foundation.

I'm here today again with Sarah Humes, one of our Teach 4 the Heart team members and Teach 4 the Heart Plus mentors. Sarah, thanks for being with us again. So we wanted to talk today about why building relationships is not by itself fixing all our classroom problems. Because as we continue to talk and work with teachers, we notice that this advice teachers get a lot. Now we do believe in building relationships. That's really important. We can talk about that.

Sarah Humes (00:31)

Thanks for having me.

Linda Kardamis (00:52)

But why do you think that just, why do think this has become just the end all be all advice? And why is that not enough? That's what we're gonna dive into. What comes to your mind, Sarah?

Sarah Humes (01:05)

Well, I think that is such an important piece of advice because it is foundational. And honestly, I wonder if it's become such a highlighted piece of advice because we live in a world that kind of skips over relationships. know, we're very much online, we're very much tech oriented. And I just wonder if that's why it's being highlighted so much more right now.

Linda Kardamis (01:29)

Yeah, that might be. And I think, too, about pendulum swings, right? Like, there might have been a time where it's a recognition that, like, wow, teachers aren't building enough of a relationship. And that is a, I completely agree, like, that's not good if we don't have relationships. But then sometimes things like that tend to pendulum swing, where now it's like, all you have to do is build relationships. Like, and it's like such a focus. this, that's what we're picking at is we don't believe that that just by itself.

is going to be enough to create a conducive learning environment, right? If all you do is build relationships, ~ then it's probably not gonna be enough. Sarah, have you ever experienced that in your classroom?

Sarah Humes (02:10)

Yeah, because I am a very I'm a highly relational person and I actually love building relationships with my students all of them even the ones that might drive other teachers crazy, but if I build my relationships with them, but I don't have an established plan or procedures in place or you know things like that my my first couple years my classroom was

chaos because I had great relationships with my students, but my classroom was a mess.

Linda Kardamis (02:48)

Right, right. Because, we kind of talked about this before in a previous episode when we talked about what are some of the differences between parenting and teaching. And we said, you don't have just one or two or even four students you're dealing with. You're standing in front of a class of 20, 25, 30 students. And just because they like you doesn't necessarily mean that they are gonna respect your authority, that they're going to listen, that they're gonna actually do their work. That requires more than just

showing them that you care, although that is very, very important, right? So yeah, I think this is just something that teachers are a little bit fed up of hearing, right? Kind of tired of hearing just build relationships as if that is all that they have to do because they're doing it. They're trying really hard. They're having these relationships and then it's still chaos. It's still not great.

Sarah Humes (03:44)

Yeah. I mean, when it comes down to it, like if you think about it, it is, I mean, it might arguably be one of the most important parts. Like I kind of think about it as like a foundation, like of a house, but just because you have a foundation doesn't mean you can live in that house. You don't have any walls, you don't have a roof. ~ It's not functional.

Linda Kardamis (04:06)

All right, so I hope you're getting from us, build relationships. That's super, super important. I think of a whole story I could tell where, you know, it's like I didn't have relationship, I went to a kid's game, I mentioned it to him, and then that kind of turned things around. So like, that is not to be underestimated, the power of the relationship. But these other pieces also have to be in place in order for you to have that calm, conducive learning environment that we need for our students to succeed. So that's why...

We teach building relationships, but we teach a whole lot more too. And in particular, our 10 commandments of classroom management, which if you missed episode 373, that's a great one to go back and listen to. There's a lot of pieces that we need. So we're gonna talk through now, what are

some of those needed pieces in our classroom management ~ in addition to just building relationships? And the first one I think of is we need clear expectations. So we need to know

where is the line? We need, and I think there's so many times where I think back and I'm like, yeah, I remember a kid putting their head down in the desk and thinking, is that okay? I don't know, should I say something? Right, like a lot of times we might think we know what to expect, but we haven't actually defined it. So knowing where is the line, where do I wanna hold it, that's kind of the first step.

Sarah Humes (05:24)

Yeah, and you know, one of the things I don't know if you ever have found this to be the case, but if you're only running your classroom based on relationships, your expectations would not be clear and the same for every student. And that's that, you know, if you are trying to run a fair and chaos free classroom, that that's an issue because you have students that you're closer to and students that you're not. And

05:03 Beyond Relationships: Essential Classroom Management Strategies

Linda Kardamis (05:39)

Hmm

Sarah Humes (05:53)

That would be a real issue. So clarifying your expectations and teaching them explicitly across the board, of course, with the exceptions of those who need them for, know, 504 or an IEP, that is so powerful, I think. And it gives you confidence in your teaching too. Like, this is what I expect and this is what you need to do. Yeah.

Linda Kardamis (06:19)

Right, right. So saying,

having that standard for your classroom and like, okay, we're gonna, we're gonna hold you accountable, right? I like you, I care about you. But if that mentor not friend relationship, right, I'm gonna, I'm gonna hold you to these expectations, which brings us to another needed piece, which is consistent enforcement, right? And like you were saying, yeah, if it's just based on, we could get really inconsistent and really unfair kind of quickly if we're not careful there. So our desire is to be consistent, right? And that means consistent,

Sarah Humes (06:26)

Yeah.

Linda Kardamis (06:49)

with every student is roughly the same except for intentional deviations, but also consistent on our mood, right? So we're not just like, I'm feeling good today. Everything's fine. I'm in a bad mood. So I'm

coming down crazy hard, right? Just saying, okay, I'm gonna be consistent. And in that way, we show our students if every time, if this is the line and when students cross it, we deal with it the same way.

It does not keep any issues from happening. Issues are still gonna happen. But students start to realize, okay, I see the line. And it really does diminish the issue. The majority of students will, okay, we'll start to meet those expectations, which is incredibly helpful.

Sarah Humes (07:28)

Yeah, and I think that the thing I love about that is we talk so much about being kind and firm. And that's where that lets us do that. If our students know what to expect and we're like, OK, this is what we expect and we're going to hold you accountable that there's no surprises and students like, OK, yeah, I know this is what you want. And I've seen that time and time again as I've.

clarified my expectations and held students accountable. There's so much less arguing about that's not fair. This is not what, you I've just loved watching the change in my classroom as I've implemented clear expectations.

Linda Kardamis (08:11)

Yeah, it is really interesting. There's like, there's always a lot going on like underneath, subtext to our actions and then like this underneath communication. you know, I think with both kids and teenagers, they would never say, I want someone to really, but they do. Like when you're in that, when you establish that just consistent, clear expectations, consistent enforcement, students like that. They do. They like that it's safe, it's secure. They know what to expect.

They know how to succeed and it creates an environment where they can actually listen and focus. So yeah, they might not, at first you get, sometimes I always use the analogy of like you're fishing, like when you're reeling in a fish, it's like flopping and all. So when you first start to make some changes, they're gonna act like this is the end of the world. But once you can establish that, think it makes, I think everyone is better and even a little happier for it in the end.

Sarah Humes (08:54)

Thank

I absolutely agree. And I remember that even from my own days as a student. I loved the teachers who had great order in their classroom. It just made me feel like I could learn better there. So I loved creating that for my own students.

Linda Kardamis (09:22)

Absolutely. And I think in the end, you respect those teachers a lot, right? And that actually helps the relationship. So sometimes we're afraid, I'm going to damage my relationship by holding students accountable. And yeah, there's sometimes that like intermediate space where it's like, we're changing the relationship. But those are the teachers you think back, you're thankful for, you go back and see them. You know, it's really, ~ it's really worth

10:39 Establishing Clear Expectations and Consistent Enforcement

Which brings us to the next piece that I think is zined. There's probably more than this, but the four things I thought of, clear expectations, consistent enforcement, number three, consequences. So like we have to be willing to give consequences. And I know this is out of vogue, but it shouldn't be. This is an important piece of our classroom management. It is not the whole thing. It's not the only thing you do, right? But it is a piece that matters, right? Students, are consequences in life.

And so there should be consequences in our classroom, right? If there's a problem that's going on. And once again, the key is consistency, right? I know where and when, and I'm consistent with the consequences. And that just helps everybody

and grow and ultimately succeed.

Sarah Humes (11:23)

Yeah. And personally, I love having, this is why I love having the plan written down because I think I may have mentioned this on the podcast before, but I was that teacher that literally had tears in my eyes every single time I had to write a student up or give them a detention. And, it was so hard for me to do that, but it got a lot less difficult because I'd say you did this.

you knew that this was going to occur, this was your consequence, you know? And it was written, we had already pre-planned it. And that took the pressure off of me. It was no longer an emotional thing. It was transactional and it was on them. They made the decision and it was still difficult for me. But it was transactional and I was just like, I'm sorry that you made the decision, but these are the

the consequences that we have previously set in place.

Linda Kardamis (12:28)

Yes, and I can

so relate. think I've shared before too, the first time I had to give a kid a detention, I literally had to call my husband and be like, like I needed a pep talk. I don't know what I wanted him to do, but I was just like so scared to do it. I so did not want to do it. And I guess it got like a little easier, but honestly, it never got easy for me either. Like, but those, that's why number four of our needed pieces is a pre-planned response. And when we work with teachers in classroom manager 101, we have you write down

Sarah Humes (12:40)

Thanks.

Linda Kardamis (12:57)

how am I going to respond to all of these common issues, right? And not everything is right away a consequence, but you plan. Where does the consequence fall? And you set it in a place that you're

like, this is good and right. Like you're deciding in a non-emotional moment, this is where it goes. And so then when you're in the moment, when you're frustrated or scared or you feel bad, you're like, no, I already planned it. Like you said, I'm just following the plan. Everyone knows.

Sarah Humes (13:10)

Mm-hmm.

Linda Kardamis (13:25)

Everyone's on the same page and honestly, if I were to not follow it, that wouldn't be right or fair. And so that really helps us be consistent, especially for those of you that like us have those little bleeding hearts. I struggle a little bit with it.

Sarah Humes (13:36)

Yes, or for the teachers,

the teachers that reach out to us that struggle with anger. This is a great way to help diffuse that too. mean, there are all kinds of emotional levels that this helps us. Cause I mean, really the emotional responses, if we're being honest, our students find them funny. They talk about it afterwards. They're like, did you see how so-and-so blew up today? Can we just talk about that? They do.

Linda Kardamis (13:41)

Hmm.

Yes.

Yes.

Sarah Humes (14:05)

You know, I've heard them talk about it in my class about other teachers and I'm like, what have they said about me? You know, did you see Mrs. Humes crying again? You know, and so it just this helps set it in a in a better way so that we can do it without the emotionalness and of whatever line that is, whether it's anger or that bleeding heart or.

you know, wherever we fall, the annoyance, it just helps us to just deliver it matter-of-factly.

Linda Kardamis (14:38)

Right. And I think that is so important when we can deliver consequences calmly and even empathetically. It's not that it doesn't guarantee the students going to like reflect and learn, but it takes away the distractions, right? When we are either angry or like there's something just off in how we go to them. It's like you said, it's very distract instead of being like, yeah, I kind of screwed up. They're telling a funny story for the rest of the day. Right. And it's a way to deflect and distract them. And so the more we can remove that, it gives up.

Sarah Humes (14:44)

Yes.

14:44 The Role of Consequences in Classroom Management

Yeah.

Linda Kardamis (15:08)

better chance of them actually thinking about, know, maybe I actually did deserve this and this is why and this is what I want to do differently next time for sure. Sarah, any kind of final thoughts or advice for teachers on, I mean, like I said, building relationships is so key, right? It helps everything that we're doing. But when you're getting those answers of like, that's all, it's okay to recognize, no, that's not it.

~ We have to be ready for that practical management aspect of it too. But yeah, any final thoughts that you have as we wrap this one up?

Sarah Humes (15:44)

Yeah, I just, one of the things that I've loved about thinking as I've managing my classroom is how much a classroom management plan reflects the gospel in the Bible. And I just want to encourage teachers to really maybe ponder about that because God loves us. He wants a relationship with us, but he also has a plan and

Linda Kardamis (15:58)

Hmm.

Sarah Humes (16:14)

some rules for us and some natural consequences for us. This is not just something human. Like there's a reason we need to have this. And it's for our students' safety and protection. And we build a deeper relationship with them when we are seeking to have a plan in our classroom that will eventually

make us closer to them. It's very similar to the gospel if you really dig into it.

Linda Kardamis (16:48)

Yeah, man, now I wanna do a whole episode just on those connections between plastic management and the gospel, yeah. I think, I do think sometimes that those rules and consequences, I don't know, depending on your background, sometimes it's easy to almost like pendulum swing away from those, right? Because maybe growing up we were lacking in grace, right? But recognizing like those are God's good gifts to us, those clear expectations that he gives.

Sarah Humes (16:52)

I think.

Yeah.

Linda Kardamis (17:15)

And a lot of the purpose of the law was actually to show us where we were wrong, right? To clarify, where are we falling short, right? And those rules and consequences, just like in life, like they can't save us, right? The rules, the law could never save, but it shows us where we fall short. honestly, that is exactly what we can do in our classroom with it, right? We're showing students, hey, you're falling short. And we pray that that's actually a step in pointing them to realizing, hey, I do fall short. I need a savior.

Whether you can say that in a Christian school or you can't in a public school, you're still living that out. I think that's actually part of a reason why in the secular world people don't like consequences, right? They don't want that pointed out that I fall short. Like that's the cardinal sin is saying that I'm not enough. But we know as Christians we're not and that's okay because he is.

17:58 Connecting Classroom Management to the Gospel

Sarah Humes (17:58)

them.

Linda Kardamis (18:06)

Well, thank you, Sarah, so much for having this conversation. Thank you guys for listening. If you are saying, okay, wow, I want to do some of these things, I want clear expectations, I want consistent reinforcement, I don't know what consequences to use, how do I write a plan? We would love to help you. I have a few resources real quick I want to mention. So first of all, that 10 Commandments of Classroom Management episode is a great place to start. Just hop back up a few episodes to 373.

We also have a full playlist that kind of explains it in more detail on YouTube. That's at [teachfortheheart.com / playlist](https://teachfortheheart.com/playlist), as well as a starter pack that goes with this. You can find all these links in the show notes. And then if you're like, nope, I'm ready. I want your help. Classroom Management 101 is where we walk you through it step by step with wonderful mentors like Sarah and the rest of the team. And so we'd love to help you there. So you can go over and check that out at [teachfortheheart.com / CM 101](https://teachfortheheart.com/CM101). The link will be in the show notes. And if you use the code,

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