

Episode 377 – Is It Really Possible to Reduce Disruptions?

00:00 Classroom Dynamics: The Impact of Teacher Authority

Linda Kardamis (00:00)

Sometimes kids are so badly behaved, we might wonder, is it even possible to reduce disruptions? Well, I recently observed the exact same students act very differently in two different teachers' class, so maybe it's more possible than we think, and we're gonna dive into it today. 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 with Beki Jones, one of our Teach 4 the Heart Plus mentors and team members. Beki, thank you so much for talking with us about this today. So I was recently in a school coaching some teachers in their classroom management. So I got to observe a lot of different classrooms and had some really interesting takeaways. And one of them I wanted to talk about here today kind of had it around this idea of watching the same group of kids. It was a actually fourth and fifth grade combo class. Go from one classroom.

Beki Jones (00:31)

Happy to be here.

Linda Kardamis (00:53)

to another classroom, to another classroom, and just seeing how differently the same group, which was a pretty, I would call them a challenging group, but how differently they behaved in two different classrooms. So in the ~ one classroom, the teacher was young, inexperienced, and I could tell had started off, or he had shared with me that he kind of started off a little easy, didn't want to be mean, wanted that, you know, kind of wanted that friend demeanor. I can relate, this is how I started to.

And there was a lot of ~ misbehavior. And I could tell he was really working hard to rein it in, but it was only kind of working. There were a lot of disruptions. It was just, there was a lot of disruptions. They weren't really respecting his authority. A lot of almost like, you know, just really poking at him repeatedly throughout the class. And it was just really challenging. And I could tell, I encouraged him, said, keep going. But it was just a really challenging scenario. The kids were really, really difficult.

Next door, there was a teacher who'd been there a long time. The admin said, ~ or he'd been teaching for a long time. He said, this is a veteran. He's really good. So I asked him, said, can I just watch these kids in your classroom and see how they are? And it was just crazy, the night and day difference, how they acted in his classroom. They were very well behaved overall. They sat, they listened. They did not push back the same way that when he said something, they...

all right, this is what's going on. It was such a big difference. And so I was just thinking about how I think sometimes we wonder, is it the kids? And yes, it is. Kids are harder, 100%, 100%. But there is still a lot that we can do as teachers that can have the same group of kids behaving very differently. And we're gonna kind of dive into that today. Beki, have you ever observed something similar to that?

Beki Jones (02:47)

~ absolutely.

So, so much where it's just as a specialist, like I would walk into different classrooms and pull kids and see kids and just be, when you walk in, the room feels different depending on the teacher demeanor. And that doesn't mean that there's one right way to teach. Absolutely not. But the way Jonathan and I, my husband also teacher talk about it is you own the room. You need as a teacher to learn how to own the room, how to run it.

how to express both with body language, with tone of voice, with ~ your physical space, the way that you interact with it and move around the room, you need to learn how to own it. And when you can learn how to do that, it can automatically just reduce those small disruptions that might have come up in a different classroom. And because you're starting in a different place, the level of disruption that the class reaches

is significantly different. And I've experienced that myself with kids that I pull who are problems elsewhere. And then when they come to my room, I have developed a pretty good demeanor as far as like, nope, when we're here, these are my rules. This is what we do. And they don't act out in the same ways with different teachers in that manner. So yeah, I've totally experienced that. And like you said, that expectation is huge.

Linda Kardamis (04:04)

It is. Yeah. And I really want to dive into the expectation. I like how you said that owning the room. That's a great way of thinking, just kind of what this difference. So I want to kind of go through what are some of the differences I observed and kind of talk through some of these and you're hitting, yeah, you're seeing the same exact things, Beki, in your situation. And it was even reminding me of ~ when I first started teaching, the difference between my first year and my second year. So same teacher, same kids, because I had a lot of the same kids, but just different teacher demeanor.

from one year to the other. And when I restarted that second year with differently, that made a big difference too. So like, I guess I'm hoping to encourage all of you guys out there that yes, it is harder, but yes, we can still do a lot to make it better. And so let's kind of dive into what are some of these differences here. ~ expectation, let's start with expectations because that is really one of the biggest, biggest things I think is what are we,

Beki Jones (04:48)

Mm-hmm.

with it.

05:03 Setting Expectations: The Key to Classroom Management

Linda Kardamis (05:03)

expecting of our students. And another way to say that is, what are we putting up with? And that was like the biggest thing I almost was coining this ridiculous phrase. I don't really recommend using this phrase, but like our put up with it-ness. Like, what am I willing to put up with? Like, like, we got to change this. I got to say, no, I'm not putting up with this. And I think it's easy when you're first starting out or just, or sometimes even over time, you know, you're used to better groups and you know, you have a harder group.

Beki Jones (05:07)

Mm-hmm.

Bye!

Linda Kardamis (05:31)

where it's just like, ~ this is fine. It's OK if they do this. And it's like, no, it's not. And sometimes we don't realize that till we're already like 10 steps further than we wanted to be. But we kind of got to just raise ourselves up, own the room, and say, no, I'm not putting up with this. This is not OK. And that was a big difference. In the one classroom, it's like this had become the norm. This had become the expected behavior. Now we're trying to fight it back. Whereas in the other room, as soon as it started, it was just like, we're not.

Beki Jones (05:41)

Mm-hmm.

Linda Kardamis (05:59)

doing this and it starts with our kind of internal expectation of, I'm not putting up with that. Or, I don't know what to do, I guess I have to put up with it.

Beki Jones (06:09)

Mm-hmm. And I know you've talked about this as well, that we have an idealized like, this level of disruption, we're humans, we might talk out a little bit, that's okay. But the key there is that might be okay in time, but you need to set the expectation bar higher than that initially. Make sure that your kids understand you are in charge. Make sure that they understand that...

There are things that are and aren't allowed and there will be consequences and warnings and whatever it is that you have in place if they don't follow that rule. And then in a few months, you can kind of settle into a pattern of like, okay, that small little whisper to a friend of like, I don't have a pencil, can I have one? When they weren't supposed to be talking, now that's fine. At the beginning of

the school year, when you're starting fresh with a group of kids and you're establishing that you do own that room, you can't do that. You have to call them on it. Now it doesn't have to be severe, but it can be a quick like, hey, Johnny.

whatever it is, however you get their attention, however you call them out about it, but you have to make sure that you're setting that bar higher than you're like, I'm okay to live here. If you set that bar here, they will go lower. Cause this human nature, like we all do that. So you have to understand that.

Linda Kardamis (07:18)

Yes.

Yes, that's such, such an important point. Right. You can always lower it later. You can always let them do more later, but getting it back is so, so hard. So, better to start with, I'm not putting up with anything, and then go from there. So, the second difference I noticed was approach. So, the first teacher, ~ you know, as I was talking to him, said, man, I really, I feel bad.

I don't want to be mean." So it was this kind of feeling like, and I can 100 % resonate with this too because I still feel like this and have to fight myself about it, it feels mean to get on kids. But the other teacher didn't feel like that. He said he had this understanding, this isn't mean. Okay, now I'm not talking about actually being mean, okay? In this scenario, no one was being mean. That was off the table. So if you're really being mean, you need to deal with that. But in both of these cases...

The one felt like it was mean to just simply hold students accountable. And the other one recognized this is not mean. It's important that I insist on this behavior. It's worth investing in because it's actually going to further my relationships and allow us to do more. Like they understood that I have to do this. This is really important and it's not mean. But I think it is natural for some people don't struggle with this, but some of us, depending on our personality, we do struggle with feeling that it's mean and we have to remind ourselves of the truth. It's not.

Beki Jones (08:39)

Mm-hmm. I 100 % agree with that and that I'm the type of personality where I haven't struggled with that. I'm very clear with my class that I'm in charge, but they know I love them so much. I think, again, I totally get that struggle. I totally understand where that comes from. But I think just like you said, that self-talk, that reminding yourself, this is not mean, this is loving. And honestly,

I firmly believe kids get that. It might not be surface level get. Like they probably don't have that level of cognition, but way deep down when you hold a line and say, care enough about you, maybe not verbally, but I care enough about you not to let you get away with this, that speaks love. Like that is much like God the Father speaking to us where it's.

He doesn't give up on us. We mess up and mess up over and over again. He's like, no, I'm holding this line. I'm reminding you of my standard. I'm not letting you get away with it. That's the same love we need to show to our students. And it feels harsh sometimes to be like, nope, you can't get away with

that in my classroom. It's not OK. Here are the results of your choices. You made these choices. But again, I firmly believe kids can, in the depths of their soul,

sense that love that you're bringing when you truly are, when it is not a question of being mean, when you truly are loving them through your firmness.

10:02 Approach and Confidence: The Teacher's Mindset

Linda Kardamis (10:02)

Yeah. even if the kids don't recognize it now, it's still true, right? Even if they don't have that maturity quite yet, even though most of them do, they can sense that. It's true, right? Because we are loving them enough to do what they need, not what they want in the moment, right? It's the same thing. I mean, if we let our kids eat cake every day for breakfast, this is not actually loving. It's not actually good for them.

Beki Jones (10:07)

Yes.

Mm-hmm.

Yes. Well, honestly,

using analogies like that that are super understandable, even to little kids can be so helpful in explaining to them how you're loving them. Because if you ask even young kids, if I let you eat ice cream and only ice cream every single day, is that good? Like, is that going to be good for you? And so walking through that analogy of like, I'm giving you these expectations and I'm expecting these things of you because it's good for you.

And so bringing that analogy to a child level, I think is super helpful to helping them develop that metacognition of like, okay, I'm thinking about my thinking and understanding why she's not letting me do this now. It can be helpful if you're trying to, if you're worried that they're not seeing the love, that can be a helpful thing too.

Linda Kardamis (11:09)

Yeah.

Yeah. So expectations were different. Approach was different. Another piece was confidence. So the one teacher did not look very confident because he wasn't. And once again, that was me when I started to, I was like, I don't know what to do. And when we don't know what to do, students sense that and it encouraged, so they try more and then you don't know. It's, yeah, they can sense whether you have confidence or not. The other teacher was very confident in his authority. That's part of owning the room. Like, nope.

Beki Jones (11:39)

Mm-hmm.

Linda Kardamis (11:40)

Like I'm clearly the one in charge here. And that comes from inside. Now the tricky part though is if you don't have confidence, how do you manufacture confidence? And this is why we teach making a classroom management plan. Because a lot of times that lack of confidence comes from, well, I don't know what to do, so I'm not confident. But once you've written down, this is what I'm going to do, you still have to build your confidence, but that's like a huge first step. Okay, I at least know what to do. And then as you start to do it, your confidence starts to build, okay, I can do this.

Beki Jones (12:04)

Mm-hmm.

Yeah.

Linda Kardamis (12:10)

I know what I'm going to do. And so that's the biggest thing we recommend. Write down what you're gonna do. Make an actual plan. ~ And we're actually gonna talk about, actually doing a chatter workshop. So here coming up, actually tomorrow, if you're watching this later, you can probably grab the replay, where we're gonna walk you through how to do this with just that common problem, chatter and blurting. So if you're like, where do I start? That's a great place to start. But yeah, writing it down, practicing it, that can build your confidence.

Beki Jones (12:33)

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

I like that you said practicing it. I think that one's really a huge key there of like, I have a built-in, again, Jonathan's a teacher, so we practice with each other all the time. It's really helpful. But if you don't, finding a friend, even if they're not a teacher, you can practice like, what am I gonna say? How am I gonna say it? Ask them about your body posture because body language is huge. Again, in owning the room, you need to make sure, and it doesn't have to be like military-esque, but you need to make sure that your body isn't.

Linda Kardamis (12:53)

Mmm.

Beki Jones (13:04)

showing that you're not as in charge. Like you have to demonstrate that. And honestly, I would highly recommend, and I've done this more for interview things than for actual teaching things, but videotaping yourself and then rewatching it. And again, when I've done it for interview things, it's a little painful. I don't like watching it. It's not fun to see like, I did that that way. That's awful.

But it's one of the ways that we can learn from ourselves. Like, well, no wonder the kids didn't listen to me. my goodness. I can't believe that I expressed myself in that way. Whether it's the words you're saying or again, your body language is huge. That can be another way that you're practicing so that you can see what is it that your kids see? Why aren't they responding to you in the same way that they respond to the person across the hall? And then

If your principal allows it, go watch the person across the hall and see how they're interacting differently. Like these are things that they take time, they take vulnerability and a lot of it, but they can really help you grow in your craft.

14:57 Insistence and Results: Nipping Problems in the Bud

Linda Kardamis (14:57)

Yeah. that's great advice, Beki. I love that. So confidence was very big difference. Another thing was just insistence. So this kind of ties into some of the other ones, but just the one teacher was kind of trying to be more insistent, but I could tell that was not how he started. He's trying to come back and make this up for it, kind of letting a lot go ~ or saying it, but then it happens again. Whereas the other teacher was just very insistent. So as soon as something started to happen, just

kind of dealing with it right away. He was nipping problems in the bud before they became problems, right? And the other one, we were already way far down this road because a lot had been let go. Once again, that was me, no judgment, ~ but this is the difference, right? So really being insistent, really keeping things under control. ~ That made a big difference too.

Beki Jones (15:48)

think part of that is also just a mindset shift that you need to have in your own mind. And I will say this is one of the hard things when you do have kids where you're being insistent and they do say no anyway. Because like you said, Linda, there is a kid issue where we can't control it all. And I have definitely had kids just out and out refuse. And it is stressful and it raises the blood pressure and it's really hard. But I will go into any situation with a kid where I'm redirecting them.

and I come in with an assumption that you are going to do what I say. Now in my heart of hearts, when I approach certain kids, I know for sure that this might not happen the way I want it to. And I know you might not do what I am telling you to do. And I have to be prepared for, okay, so what do I do next? But my body language, again, my assumption, the way I'm interacting with you isn't like, are you gonna do this? I really hope you do this. It's no, you're gonna do this. And then I walk away.

Linda Kardamis (16:34)

Yes.

Beki Jones (16:35)

and I don't stand there and create a power struggle fight situation where I'm standing there to make them do it. I assume they're going to. I have that confidence portrayed. I'm insisting that they follow

these directions and then I leave to give them the opportunity to do so. And again, if they don't, then there's a whole nother set of things that has to happen and it's not easy. But I think you're on something there where you just have to assume what you're saying is gonna go. You own that room.

Linda Kardamis (17:02)

Yeah, I love that, that thought, right. I'm just assuming that that is the key to this, right? This assumption that this, you have to believe that you can do this. You have to have that belief. And like I said, if you don't have that belief, that's why you go back and get this, make the plan and you practice and you get better, but that is so huge. Yeah, that's a great observation. So the last thing, we can talk about more, but we have to skip to the last one.

Beki Jones (17:13)

Mm-hmm.

Yeah, develop it. Yes.

Thank

17:29 Building Relationships: The Balance of Firmness and Fun

Linda Kardamis (17:29)

which is the results. I just noticed such a big difference then in the results. And the thing that I most wanted to point out though, is the teacher that was actually more firm and more strict was able to joke with his class, be more relaxed with his class, let them get a little crazy and bring it right back in if he wanted to. He had more opportunity to mentor the students, have a relationship with them, you know, there's potential for spiritual impact. Like all of that worked better in that class.

Beki Jones (17:40)

Mm-hmm.

Mm-hmm.

Linda Kardamis (17:57)

than

in the first. And so I just want to point out, like, often our heart is in the right place, right? I want students to be able, I want to be able to do this fun stuff with them. want to, but if we don't first establish this order, we end up not being able to do that, or we're trying to, and it's just miserable for everybody. Versus when we do it this way, when we are insistent, confident, we hold kids accountable, we can normally end up doing more. We can back off if we want, and it's okay.

because we own that room, because we've established this in the first place.

Beki Jones (18:31)

I think that's such an important observation. And I think you really hit on one of the fears of teachers who aren't wanting to take that further step toward firmness because they're afraid they'll lose out on that relationship. And speaking from personal experience, you don't. Like your kids and the relationship you have with them can just be so deep and so meaningful because there's a level of trust there in.

I don't have to be in charge as the student. I can trust that you're in charge and so I can be more free and open and vulnerable and safe in that space as opposed to walking into a classroom where there's a really nice lady up there but I don't even know who's in charge here. That can be really scary for some kids. That can be really an intimidating reality. And again, we're humans so sometimes we really like the things we shouldn't but...

they can feel like they like it. They can think they even like this chaos and this craziness, but there's a lot of them who really they don't and they would really rather have somebody be in charge and love them in that way. And again, like you said, it's not even that you're just always in charge, like my mission minded, I'm on track, we're only doing academic, there is no fun. You can open up that geocular side so much and have so much fun with it. But I do want to say one caution.

Jonathan and I both have that type of personality with our kids. Jonathan did one year have one of the hardest years of his teaching career where he had a group of kids that had, it was just a really hard cohort, had been since kindergarten and there were about five boys in it that really made it even harder than it was. Like it was, it was a lot. And he came to the realization like, I can't joke with this group.

and it hurt him. It was really hard for him to pull back on. was like, I can't get to the level of control that I need where I can open up to that side. And that can be reality for certain cohorts at the beginning of your journey in this process, especially ~ there are times where it's like, I can't teach the way I want to. I can't teach the way I know that I have been able to before or my dream of what I can in the future. And that's okay. Like if you're not there right now, that doesn't mean you won't ever be there.

Linda Kardamis (20:10)

Hmm.

Mm-hmm.

Beki Jones (20:36)

It could be a cohort. could be just where you are in your development of your journey in creating space and time to work on these strengths or eventual strengths. ~ But just know there are situations where it doesn't look like you want it to. And that is okay and part of life and part of teaching. So I just want to give that encouragement in case you're like, but I'm not seeing that or feeling that in my classroom. What do I do? Sometimes it does just happen that way.

Linda Kardamis (21:06)

Yeah, that's a, I'm so glad you brought that up, because that's realistic, right? I mean, it's like, it does depend on the group of kids. It depends on so many factors, how far you're able to get in that. ~ Yeah, that's such a practical thing to realize. But realizing you'll be able to do more than you would have if you would have just let everything go, right? It's all relative. So see it along that way instead of, yeah, yeah, that's great, great encouragement. Well, I do hope that you guys will be,

Beki Jones (21:23)

Mm-hmm. Yes. Yeah.

Linda Kardamis (21:34)

with us in the chatter workshop. It's called Stop the Chatter. It's a workshop. It's one hour. It's tomorrow night if you're watching this when it comes out. Otherwise, hopefully the replay will be available. If you go to teach4theheart.com / chatter, Beki's been working on it. I've been working on it. We're really excited about it. We're gonna take, hopefully Lord willing we can get it all in in one hour where you're actually gonna sit down. We're gonna walk you through making a plan for how are you gonna deal with chatter? How can you kind of reset things in the beginning, in the middle of the year to try to get like a good little step right away?

And we're gonna kind of, what do you do when students argue with you? So we're gonna walk you through all of that. And our goal is that you would leave with a plan that you can implement the very next day and kind of get things going back in the right direction. So we really hope you can join us for that.

Well, thank you guys so much for being with us. This episode is brought to you in partnership with the Herzog Foundation. All views and opinions are our own and don't necessarily reflect those of the Herzog Foundation. I just realized I don't know if I gave you guys the link to the chatter workshop. is teach4theheart.com / chatter, teach4theheart.com / chatter, or you can find the link in the show notes. I look forward to being with you guys again soon. In the meantime, 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.