

Episode 391: How to Create Your Yearly Curriculum Plan

00:00 Planning Your Curriculum: An Overview

Linda Kardamis (00:00)

We've got to plan our content for the entire year and make it fit. How on earth do we do this? Well, we'll talk about it in today's episode. 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 Ashly, one of our mentors and team members. Ashly thanks for joining us today. So we are talking about this question. I've been asked it a few times on how do you create

Ashly Hilst (00:21)

Thanks so much for having me.

Linda Kardamis (00:29)

That document or plan. Ever every school it typically has a different name, different system. So we're really struggling with what do we call this? You might call it your year at a glance, your Gantt chart, your curriculum map. It's that plan that you create, most teachers have to create at the beginning of the year where it says, okay, what am I gonna teach when? And you know, what does this look like? And I've had quite a few people ask me, you know, how do you do that? Where do I start? I'm really overwhelmed.

or even just how do you do it? Because I really don't believe there's any one right way to do this. I will say that right up front. I'm gonna share with what I did, and Ashly's gonna share some of what she does. But this is just what we do. So this is not necessarily completely prescriptive and saying you have to do it this way, but I did think it might be helpful to just hear how we do it and how we do it a little bit differently, and then you can see if any of that is helpful for you. Ashly, do have any thoughts before we kind of dive into the step by step plan?

Ashly Hilst (01:25)

I think that sometimes this can be really overwhelming for teachers. I mean, when you have to take that high level, like I don't me personally, I like to get mired and dig into the units, but then when you have to look so big picture, it can be really overwhelming. So I'm actually really excited to hear how you do this. I fine I finally kind of came up with a system, but but yeah, it's it can be overwhelming.

Linda Kardamis (01:43)

Yeah. So here's some of the I'm just gonna kind of walk through the steps, like I said, that I used and we'll we'll just kind of share some thoughts. So the first thing I think is good to do is just look at your school calendar and see how what what days you have available. So simply getting out a calendar, marking off, you know, when do you or no when are you out of school? When do you have assemblies? There's always gonna be things you can't plan on, but just put everything on there that you know, like or X out those days that you know you have. So really you're looking for.

the most important thing is a count of the school days. How many actual days of class am I expecting to have? so that's that's kind of a pre-work. Then I highly, highly recommend do one subject at a time. I was just talking with a teacher in Teach 4 the Heart Plus and she's like, I'm so overwhelmed, but I have like eight subjects I have to do. and I'm like, pick the easiest one first. Like pick the one that you feel like, I think I kind of know what to do with this one.

Start there, especially if you're a new teacher or you're at a new school or a new position and you have to do a lot. start with whatever one seems easiest. So as you're going through your subjects, I think the next thing you want to do is get a really good understanding of the existing curriculum or material. And this will obviously depend if you have, you know, here's the curriculum and it's already pretty much laid out for you.

Versus if you're like, I just have standards and I have to make all the curriculum. In either way, you want to get some kind of idea of the scope. A lot of curriculums will have some type of pacing guide. This is how many days we recommend for each chapter. So you I will always start with what they recommend. So you're not starting completely from scratch and kind of start by looking through it for a few different things. You're looking for it, first of all, to say, do I agree? And based on your experience, you might be like, I have no idea. If you have no idea, just

Just stick with what it recommends to start. But if you're like, no, I know I need more time for that chapter. I actually don't, I actually don't want to do this chapter. Like, so you're looking for anything that's obvious that you know you want more time for, you want less time for. and then you're kind of also looking to see how those add up those number of days, how many days are in this curriculum plan and seeing how it compares, right? If the curriculum has, you know, 160 days and you've got 160 days, great.

But if you have more or less, then you have extra space or less, you know, so you're just kind of looking for how does that compare? And I think the other thing that you're looking at is are there other things you wanna add, right? So let's say, for example, when I taught English, I had a grammar curriculum, but I knew I also needed to teach writing. And I didn't have a curriculum for that. I was gonna be making that up. So it's like, well, how much time do I need for writing?

I decided I'm gonna do one day a week for writing. But anyhow, I had to figure out these are the number of days that I'm giving to writing. So now for my grammar curriculum, I only have this many days, right? So you have to do that kind of thinking. Are there things I wanna supplement? Do I wanna do a week-long project? Do I wanna do a week at the end of the year for review? Like you kind of are

putting in those pieces and figuring out how many days do I need for that? and then really, so that's kind of all your pre-work. And then we'll talk in a second about how we

We we put it all together. Ashly, do you have any thoughts so far as you're kinda listening to this so far?

Ashly Hilst (05:00)

I have a question for you. So practically speaking, like you said, like okay, get all those dates and get your school calendar and I've got that and have like a little notebook I keep that in. But like where do you like record that? Like do you do you just have like a notebook and you're just jotting down your ideas? Do you have an actual calendar that you're like filling out? Or like what's your the practical or yeah, how do you do that?

Linda Kardamis (05:02)

Okay.

That's a really good question. And it's been a few years since I've actually done this. I think it would, I think I would recommend you thinking what you would like. Like some people are very visual. I would get that I would just print out then like all the months and just like have it so you can see it, you know, and just like or one of those year, year at a glance things and and X them out. if it were me, I would probably just be making a bunch of notes. That's probably how I would be doing it.

or maybe and looking at a calendar with a bunch of notes just on a sheet of paper or on my computer if I was doing it on my computer for the for the pre-thinking. I'd be probably making notes of like I want this to be longer, this to be shorter, and kind of going from there. So at this point, you get you're kind of getting a lot of info, right? You're figuring out do I have extra days to fill? Do I need, do I have, do I have too many days, too much material and I have to skip something, right?

Ashly Hilst (05:59)

Okay. Good. That's helpful. That's helpful.

Linda Kardamis (06:14)

And what you need to do then is be really strategic. I'm gonna say two different things here. One, I'm gonna say don't stress too much because this is just your plan. It can adapt, especially if you're a first-year teacher, like or first time teaching this subject, it's definitely not gonna go according to plan. So don't like stress and be like, what if I picked the wrong thing? It's fine. But at the same time, the more

The better your plan is now or the closer it is, the easier it will be as you go through. So it is worth spending a little bit of time thinking. Like I said, okay, do I want more time for this? Am I like, I know I I want extra time for this chapter. This is a really key concept. I I want extra space for this. Or, you know, no, I actually don't think this is an important concept. We're just gonna cover that really quickly. I'm gonna X this out. You know, so just doing that, whatever is clear and obvious to you.

I would I would kind of just do that. I would go through it like a a round of that. Don't get, don't get too overwhelmed. Just do what is kind of clear and what is kind of obvious. And then you're doing your you're what you're gonna do then is make a best estimate of how much do I wanna spend time on each chapter, standard, topic, like however it's arranged for you. how much time on do I want to plan? And you just need to make sure it adds up to the number of days you have.

Or you could leave some margin. if you know, if you know you're gonna have calamity days, you know, it's okay if it adds up to maybe three to five days less because you're like, I could just use that to review at the end. but you wanna be within three to five days, I would say, of what you have where those numbers just kind of add up, right? Does that make sense? and then you like I said, you can finagle them. I got a couple extra days. Where might I wanna give myself an extra day? And just just put together that rough, rough plan.

Ashly Hilst (08:01)

This is so this is such an exciting part of teaching. Like I love curriculum development and I love like thinking and I love the how much it's one of my favorite things about teaching, how much autonomy we have with that, like getting to pick and choose.

Linda Kardamis (08:11)

Yeah. Yeah, it is really cool. And I think

if you had a teacher that like sometimes you you inherit somebody else's plans and that can also be a great place to start, right? But we do get to make it our own and say, I'm gonna do it differently. And I think that's a strength, right? 'Cause when we do what we are excited about and what we think is best, we're gonna be more aligned with it and it's gonna be better for our students.

Ashly Hilst (08:17)

Mm-hmm.

Yeah. Yeah.

Linda Kardamis (09:27)

So after that, I it's it's a very this is a very simple task. You're now going to kind of actually like map that onto the calendar. so this is where I definitely you want to actually have a calendar that you can see and you're kind of counting out, okay, eight days for chapter one, you know, that's it's gonna end on this date. And this is also where it really depends what kind of format your school wants you to do this in. you know, do they wanna it there's all kinds of different things. But basically I think it's very helpful.

Personally, and I was I was more of the type A, like, I'm gonna actually try to stay somewhat on schedule, but I liked knowing, you know, this is my target test date for chapter one. This is my target test date for chapter two. 'Cause I'll talk about in a minute. Then that helped me adjust throughout the

year just to know, am I ahead behind on target? Was just very helpful information. It wasn't a problem if I was behind, but I found that helpful to know. So I like to actually calendar out the and kind of have a like I said, an initial plan, not that you're gonna stick with it exactly.

But of where the different tests are gonna fall, you know, where the where the different chapters, concepts, you know, project, you know, week of this project, and just a rough, rough plan. Did you do something similar when you do this, Ashly?

Ashly Hilst (10:37)

Yeah. So I I also like to keep in mind like end of semester or end of if you do quarters, those types of things because I have that has definitely happened to me where I'm like, I'm I'm on track, I'm on track, I'm off track, shoot, I'm mid-unit, the semester's coming up, what do I do? So like, so I I again I'm the same, like I don't really care if I'm on track or off track necessarily, but knowing that is really important.

and so I I do use like a grid that's like a calendar, but it's just by week. And then I just have marked out like all those kind of key dates so that I know like, okay, I've got nine days to get through this unit

and then the semester's over, so I better make it work.

Linda Kardamis (11:13)

Yes.

my goodness. I'm so glad you brought that up. Right. Knowing your your quarter end dates is a super important thing. That should have gone back on step one, right? Having those semester and quarter end dates. Because yeah, ideally, you know, you're I mean, my rule of thumb is you want to get three tests a quarter. I mean, not everyone does that, but I think that's very important. I'm I'm the math person, so I'm very much into the grades being fair and having enough. So it ideally you're getting, you know, you're covering three topics, chapters, whatever it is.

Ashly Hilst (11:19)

Mm. Yeah. Yeah.

Linda Kardamis (11:41)

So yeah, you won't wanna be if you if you if your plan has chapter three finishing the second day of the the quarter, you might be like, yeah, I gotta I gotta finagle that a little bit, right? Yeah, for sure. Very, very, very true. So there you go. You put it all out there and and then you kind of have your plan. And at that point, your your curriculum map is is kind of done. I I would I didn't get too granular on it. I think I did, I did actually keep my notes. It's interesting. As I got.

Ashly Hilst (11:50)

Yeah.

Linda Kardamis (12:09)

As I taught the same subject multiple years, I would I would get a little bit more detailed. Like I did actually know lesson 30, you know, 13.1, I'm gonna spend two days on. 13.2 is a one-day lesson. This is a day and a half. Like I actually did keep track of that and I had that. but you don't have to get that granular unless you want to. but yeah, you have the calendar and you kind of know if you're on track. if you haven't taught it before and you don't want to get that granular,

What I would do then, okay, so now we're kind of transitioning into you have this yearly plan. Now you're sitting down to lesson plan for the first week of school, the second week of school, the third week of school. What does that look like? What do you just forget that this exists? Like how do you use it as a useful tool throughout the year? so one thing you can do if you haven't already planned that kind of more detail, like this is around how many days I want on each sub sub-subject, then what I would do is every time I start a chapter, I would look at, well, how many days had I planned for this chapter?

12:44 Creating a Yearly Curriculum Map

Ashly Hilst (12:44)

Mm-hmm.

Linda Kardamis (13:04)

Well, I had planned 12. Okay, well, what's in this chapter? What's a rough idea then of how I want to distribute these 12 days? Do I need an extra one? That's fine, you know. But you're gonna you are gonna be able to cover more material and cover more of the best material if you do that little pre-thinking instead of just being like, well, we'll start lesson one and we'll see how long it takes. That what when you kind of have that we'll see how long everything takes aspect, like once again.

Ashly Hilst (13:25)

Mm-hmm.

Linda Kardamis (13:31)

Dip teachers have different strengths, but the drawback of that is that what typically ends up happening is you end up leaving a lot of material on the table that you just don't get to. And my philosophy with using the, you know, yearly curriculum plan and then into lesson planning is I want to cover the stuff that's most important. And there are things all throughout the curriculum that are less important.

Not bad. It would be good to cover it all, but realistically, I'm probably not going to. And so I'm always recalibrating and looking for, hey, if I'm behind, what's going to go? And I don't necessarily want it to be chapter 13. It might be lesson 7.8 and lesson 8.4. Those can go. Or I might shorten these and just like, you know, we're not going to do surface area of this. We're just, we're just going to do surface area of the prism, not the, not the pyramids. You know, so I'm always looking for like, what am I going to cut?

Ashly Hilst (14:06)

Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Linda Kardamis (14:21)

Rather than just like, well, we'll get as far as we get. I think that that approach will help will help you cover more of what matters most. And and I I I personally that's my personal preference and it is my recommendation, although I'm not gonna be like crazy dogmatic about it. Do you have thoughts on that, Ashly? How do you approach that?

Ashly Hilst (14:38)

I

do actually, because so there's that saying that like whatever amount of time you have to do a thing is how long it's going to take. And so the thing about a curriculum map that you're trying to stick to is that it can kind of force you to get really creative and also make sure you're maximizing learning time in the classroom because you're like, I want to get through this in nine days. It's probably 11 days worth of material. What can I do? How can I make my transitions faster? How can I, you know, is there any fluff in my classroom I can cut?

Linda Kardamis (14:44)

Yeah.

Ashly Hilst (15:06)

I'm gonna start doing a do now because guess what? I don't have two minutes for them to unpack. So I'm gonna have something on the board that they need to start right. So it's these types of things where these fine, fine tuning, tweaking things that we get to do as teachers come into play when we're trying to stick to that. And so I I agree with you that we will get through not only better material, but more material. because we will sort of be, we won't just be like Laissez faire, like, as far as we get is as far as we get, you know. and having to cut things at the end. And then also, like we all know from experiences, especially at like a secondary level.

The stuff at the end is usually also important. And so if if consistently they're missing the stuff at the end, that's probably not a good thing. Like you wanna be very like purposeful in your how you decide what you're gonna cover rather than just, I ran out of time.

Linda Kardamis (15:50)

Yeah, it's a old I I feel like hearing this old kind of joke about history, like, well, we only ever get through up to the Civil War. Like nobody ever knows what you know, nobody knows what happened the last century. yeah, right. I mean that's and it's but there's that equivalent to that in every subject, right? Like we're just miss we're totally missing these pieces

Ashly Hilst (15:57)

Yeah. Yeah. Cold War didn't exist, but fine.

Linda Kardamis (16:08)

'cause it 'cause it's we kinda just we're like, well, I'll get as far as we can. So I think that's I think that's very wise. So yeah, I'm trying to think if there's any other other details. So so when when I'm I'll just

put myself in the mind of actually sitting down to do my lesson planning for a week, I would always start by looking at the yearly calendar. I would see, am I ahead? Am I behind? Am I on track? if I am, if I'm ahead, I mean that was very rare. I think I would just be like, well, there'll probably be a snow day. But if I am behind, you know, something came up, I needed more time, there's a snow day, I would often look and see, I I would normally target something. Okay, well, I'm gonna, I'm gonna accept this lesson. So I'll be, I'll be in minus one until we get there. or, you know, doing some kind of

kind of recommendation. But then I would be looking at, okay, what am I ex what do I want to do this week? And on my lesson planning, I would kind of have those big headings, you know, this is lesson 1.2 or this is this standard or this is this topic. So I would kind of do that for the week and then go back and figure out the details. And I and I do recommend that. I think if you're just like if you if you start picking activities before you've thought through like what the topic that you need to teach, then that is where you end up being like, my goodness, I just spent a week.

on this thing that really probably should have been a day, you know? So figure out how much time do I have and then and then put it in there. And then of course you do need room to adjust, right? I mean, I I'm interested your thoughts on this, Ashly, because there are those days where you're like, I thought they could get at this in a day and they did not get it. And I I really need to come back to it tomorrow. And I think that's where you need to be flexible and you need to be willing to say, everything just gets pushed back a day and I'm gonna have to find something to cut. You know, that's it's like an int

But I think it's better when that's like an intentional decision and not just like, well, we'll stay here

as long as we need, because like you said, we're things expand to take whatever time you will you allow for them. And sometimes you can really get stuck or or bogged down in that. How do you approach that when you know you need extra time for something

Ashly Hilst (17:52)

Yeah. Yeah.

it's also really tricky because if you've been teaching the same subject for multiple years at the same school, you might be like, I've got this locked in. It takes us exactly this number of weeks to get through this novel, and then up comes a sweet little precious class that just moves slow. I like my current freshman class. They are so intelligent and they work so hard and they take twice as long as every other class I've ever had. and the work is better.

and they're using the time well, but like it's so it's very interesting because you're you're like, I've got my plan, I've got it figured out, I've got my facing guide, and then there will always be something, you know, snow days, a really, you know, snowy winter, or a class that just moves at a slower pace. so I think A, like that's where those first couple of weeks of like assessing that class, like, okay, where where are we at? Because some years you might have to adjust more than others. so having those early assessments so that you can start to kind of get that in mind. And then I personally

because the school I work for is very small, every like any time choir's gone, half the school's gone. Anytime that, you know, the basketball team's out of town, half the school's gone. Like so it's it's for me, I had to create a structure where I had built in things that I thought were very, very valuable but could be done by the kids on a bus without me there. And so those, that's where I have my flexibility. Is those like kind of like built in. I usually keep them towards the end of the week because that's when most, you know, away games and choir events and all those things are.

So it's like a Thursday or a Friday, usually a Friday. That's when I have more of those things. And so then if I'm behind, I use those days. I'm like, well, I guess we're not gonna do these. And I'm not saying it's not, it's not busy work, it's not extra work, it's very important work, but it's work that they don't need me for. It's gonna be like the grammar training, it's gonna be vocabulary stuff, it's gonna be other things. But

Linda Kardamis (19:36)

Hm

Ashly Hilst (19:42)

That's where I'll say, okay, guess what? We're cutting the grammar, we're cutting the vocab because I've got to get through this novel or this writing unit or this whatever it is that I'm doing on. So for me personally, that's what I do. But that doesn't work for every teacher because not every teacher has that same scenario where they're faced with like half your class is there and half is not. and so, but I think just whatever it is, be aware of any types of routines that you can like mine for extra time.

Right. Like, okay, we're actually not gonna you know, I like to do quick rights and I'll give them five, ten minutes. Okay, here's your here's your prompt. Go. Well, if I'm behind, that's ten minutes that I can get back. And so I cut the quick rate. Are quick rights important? Yes. Do they strengthen our writing muscles? Yes. Can they be cut? Yep.

Linda Kardamis (20:25)

Mm-hmm.

Ashly Hilst (20:25)

So I like to kind of build that into my curriculum.

Linda Kardamis (20:27)

Yeah, that's really good. So two things I want to pull out of what you said you said so many good things. One was a principle that knowing it's important to know like your own subject and your own situation, right? And just like adapting things to that. But the second thing is it is I kind of assumed this at the beginning, but if you are newer to your subject, or if you're an elementary and you're like, math is my specialty, but not science.

Ashly Hilst (20:51)

Mm-hmm.

Linda Kardamis (20:53)

There is an I I kind of had an assumption that you know your subject well and you know what's important and what's not. And that actually might not be the case. So if if you are not aware of that really, like what matters in this subject, ask somebody, right? Like that you can you can you can ask someone else in a similar grade level or you know, like ask this subject that comes next, the fifth, you know, your fourth grade, ask the fifth grade teacher, hey, what do they really need to know coming into fifth grade?

Right, because that is what you said was really important. You're like, this is valuable work, but it's not necessary at or it's not as necessary, right? So we kind of have to, whether you're whether you really know this intent you are familiar with your subject or not, we need to have this hierarchy in our mind, right? Because we're never, we're rarely cutting on like unimportant things. Like nothing is unimportant.

Ashly Hilst (21:27)

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Linda Kardamis (21:44)

But there is more important and less important. And that's those are the things we're always questioning. Yeah, there's space for this, but what what goes if push comes the shove? The more intentional we can be, the more we know this matters, this matters. And some of that's a personal choice too. Like I think this matters, you might think that matters. And that's good. That's why we have different teachers. but yeah, that's that's really important, important to know.

I've loved your thoughts, Ashly. Any kind of final advice for people as we wrap up this episode?

Ashly Hilst (22:11)

I would just add one thing. So the way you sit down, you plan your curriculum map. One thing that I have found is if you batch plan an entire unit instead of trying to lesson plan just weekly, I found that to be a really effective trick. So I definitely just wanted to share that as like when you sit down with your curriculum map and you're like, okay, don't just think I've got to plan this week, think I've got to plan this unit.

And as much time as you can get, like give yourself an hour and get through as much of that planning as as you can. Because once your brain shifts into I am planning a unit on Lord of the Flies, you're so locked in, you're so focused. And every time you take a break and come back to it, your brain has to reintegrate, re-remember, what are we doing? What's that? What's the goal? And so that's just one trick I really wanted to share because it has changed. It has saved me hours of planning just by saying, I'm not planning by week. I plan by unit as much as possible. I give myself a time limit.

I plan the whole thing. I usually even that's the one thing, that's the one thing I'll do on a weekend. And I only do it one week into month, but I will like try to plan the entire unit because it has save it it will save me so much time. And that will also enable you to do what you've been saying, which is like, you know what? I I thought I was gonna have 12 days for this. I'm actually not gonna have 12 days. I'm gonna have 10. So I'm planning the entire unit. I know I need to lose two days. That doesn't just mean cross off two lessons. It might mean like remove this activity, remove this activity. And if you're planning holistically like an entire unit versus week, week, week, you can do that a lot more easily.

Linda Kardamis (23:30)

Yeah, that's such a good tip. And I feel like that's probably even extra relevant in certain things. Like like I'm picture yeah, a a unit on a book, it's it really is one thing. there's other curriculums where I I think what w what my main subject was math, and it really is more lesson-based, right? It's like you kinda it is almost just like seven individual lessons that add up to a unit. But yeah, spet and that could still have benefit in batching, but that when you have a

Ashly Hilst (23:38)

Mm-hmm.

Mm-hmm.

Linda Kardamis (23:55)

Like this is what I'm teaching. Yeah. That's what I would do with I guess that is what I would do with writing. It is like this is the writing, this this section of writing. Yeah. So that's a that's really good advice. Not just to think in weeks, but zoom out and do that big plan. And then that makes the weekly planning so much easier. You're just you're just kind of plugging it in. That's great.

Ashly Hilst (23:59)

Mm-hmm.

Linda Kardamis (24:12)

I hope you guys enjoyed this this episode. It's something a little bit different. If you have specific questions, feel free to reach out. We're happy to talk. You can leave comments and we'll

24:43 Adjusting Plans and Flexibility in Teaching

We'll we'll talk more. I'd love to also hear what you guys do. So feel free to leave comments sharing your tips or what it looks like for you, because it really is different. But I think it's helpful for us to hear how other people do things because then sometimes we'll pick up something that's really helpful. And I will say I meant to grab one of our lesson planners. If you like to lesson plan on paper, which it's so interesting, I always did it lesson planning on the on the computer, but there some people love to do it.

on paper and it's just a different experience. So if that's something you love, we do have pray and plan. This is my last year one. I said I forgot to grab it. we have two versions, the ultimate and lesson planner, that have place for they have really good amount of space for lesson planning. so if that's something you're interested in, go to [teach4theheart.com / planner](http://teach4theheart.com/planner) and you can check it out. hopefully by the time this goes out, I think we'll hopefully still have still have them in stock. So

All right, guys, well thank you so much for being with us. I look forward to speaking with you again soon. This episode was 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. We'll talk soon. In the meantime, teacher, 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.