

Episode 401: "Other Teachers Make it Look Easy. What am I Doing Wrong?"

00:00 The Challenge of Comparison in Teaching

Linda Kardamis (00:00)

Teachers make everything look so easy. What am I doing wrong? Let's talk about this question 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. We also want to thank our sponsor, Liberty University. Teachers change lives every day, and Liberty University's School of Education is preparing the next generation to make a lasting impact. Whether you're just starting out your teaching journey, advancing your career,

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I'm

joined again today by Sarah, one of our amazing team members and a Teach 4 the Heart Plus mentor. Sarah, thanks for joining us again today.

Sarah (01:00)

Thanks for having me.

Linda Kardamis (01:02)

So today we want to talk about this question that we get a lot, whether formally or informally. And I think if we're being honest, all of us maybe have asked us at some point. But it's sometimes teachers will come to us and say, Man, like it looks so easy in the teacher across the hall's classroom, or you know, I see my friends on social media and it seems like everything's going great for them. Why is everything so hard? and this can this can be a

When they say everything, they can mean different things by that, right? Sometimes but a lot of times it's it's behavior issues, right? Or it's or it's time. I'm that this is taking I'm I'm exhausted. I can't get everything done, or my kids are not listening to me. This is just so crazy. And so I kind of want to address this question from two sides. So to to frame our conversation today, we're gonna start first

around that how should we be thinking about that comparison and and kind of our heart attitude towards it.

And then I wanna kind of switch gears and think through well, sometimes we actually are missing something that they've figured out because they've been doing it longer or that, you know, whatever it is. and so we're gonna also talk about that that aspect as well. So let's kind of start out with that mental spiritual aspect and maybe thinking a little bit about the dangers of comparison and how this is this is not actually a a helpful thing to think about. I have a lot of thoughts, Sarah, but what comes first to your mind?

Sarah (02:29)

Well, I mean, first of all, when you start comparing yourself to someone else, there's so many things that might not line up. You might be an art teacher and they might be a math teacher. and those two classrooms are completely different. You might have, you know, not only that, but you have 20 different kids in your class who are completely different.

And your temperament and their temperament and going back to the body of Christ, you know, you have different skills and they have different skills. It's just when we start to compare ourselves with others, we diminish who we are. And we also it's almost like a

covetousness, like we want what they have instead of trying to cultivate who we are.

Linda Kardamis (03:27)

Yeah. Yeah, that I I agree with all of that. Someone said comparison is a thief of joy. And I'm like, I think that's very true, right? Cause it's always, yeah, it we always see someone that might be better at this than that. But like you said, God has given us different strengths and weaknesses, right? That

Sarah (03:43)

Okay.

Linda Kardamis (03:44)

teacher across the hall, there's probab honestly there's things they're probably b they're better at than you, but there's things that you're better at.

Then that they're not. So it's like there's God's given us different strengths and weaknesses. And there's an aspect where we need to just understand and embrace that, right? Another thing I think about is we might not see the whole picture, right? especially

Sarah (04:04)

Yes.

Linda Kardamis (04:05)

if you're looking at someone on social media and they're posting their highlights, right? Or or there's these really amazing pictures. Look at this beautiful room. You don't know what else is going on. Like you don't, you know, so we have to be careful too of just thinking we might see the picture. Or here's this.

We might not know all the work and effort that it took for that teacher to get to that point. You might not know what their first year or their second year looked like teaching. and so, so yeah, kind of just wishing we were right where they were right this moment is it's not helpful. It's not realistic. And it and it so we gotta push back, I think, in our own heart against against that comparison.

Sarah (04:43)

Yeah, it's almost like when you see someone at the gym who has been, you know, who has this incredible incredible physique, but they've been working out for 20 years. And, you know, it's like how much professional development has that teacher put in to become who they are? How much you know, how many revisions of their classroom management plan have they put in? So yes, I completely agree with what you're saying.

Linda Kardamis (05:11)

Yes. So I hope that this is making sense for like when you're finding yourself saying, why does it look so easy for someone else? We gotta kind of take that check and realize we don't have the full picture. I'm I'm maybe I'm these comparisons are not super helpful. But on the flip side, we also should be, I think Sarah, you mentioned this, be curious. Like, why are they doing something that I can learn from them? Right? Is there something, is there a skill they've developed that I can also develop? Is there something

A different way they handle things that I might want to try. So let's talk for just a moment and we're gonna kind of zero in a little bit more on the classroom management piece for now of what you might be missing. Cause sometimes there are pieces that, like, yeah, they figured it out. It might have taken them a long time, you don't know, but that that took some time. And I think I've told this story on the podcast before, but I was observing in a school last school year.

05:41 Learning from Others: Curiosity Over Comparison

And it was very interesting because I was I was there to help one of these teachers who was just struggling with classroom management. They were new, they were kind of figuring it out. And the kids were giving them a really, really hard time. I mean, I felt I felt bad. but and I said, I want to see how these kids act for other teachers. So I w I watched them then walk into the next classroom over and they behave very differently. So I do think there is an aspect where yes, there's different kids, and there's so many things where we shouldn't compare, but we do have

There are things that we can learn and do that can make a difference. I hope that's not that shouldn't be discouraging. That can be encouraging, if that makes sense.

Sarah (06:43)

It completely does. And I I'm always so

thankful for your mentorship, Linda, because when I was really struggling with my classroom, that was one of the things you encouraged me to do was and I don't even know if you remember this, but you had encouraged me to go observe the students I was struggling with most in another classroom.

And so I had someone cover a class for me so I could go watch them in my friend Teresa's classroom because she has amazing classroom management skills. And I'm actually tearing up just a little bit because I'm so thankful that you encouraged me to be curious instead of beating myself up. And I learned so much from her. She had been teaching for 20 more years than I had been.

And she had great systems in place in her classroom. And I was like, look at how well they respond to that. And so I was able to bring some of those into my classroom. And as a result, my I I didn't feel bad about myself. I was I tried to really approach it with compare or with curiosity and say, how can I bring these into my classroom in a way that's authentic to me because we're completely different people, but

It really did help my classroom run smoother. I I started posting things up on the board and things that my students were a little they didn't have the proper communication in my classroom. And I didn't realize that because I was new and there was just things that I needed to learn from other teachers.

And so I was really thankful that you had encouraged me to do that.

Linda Kardamis (08:25)

That's so neat. I do not remember that conversation, but I'm really

Sarah (08:27)

I

Linda Kardamis (08:28)

glad. And so that's a that's a good point right here. So if you're listening to this and you're like, yeah, I feel like this. There's a teacher across the hall. I can identify someone that's like, yeah, that I know it's better over there. Maybe do it, do it. I I'll suggest it to you guys since I don't remember suggesting it to there. Yeah, go see if you can see if your admin will be like, Hey, I wanna, I wanna, I wanna go observe their class or or talk to them. Hey, what are you doing? How do you handle this specific problem?

08:55 Classroom Management: Strategies for Success

I don't know what to do with it. How do you guys handle it over in your classroom? Especially, I would say, especially in secondary when they're the same kids are going, but even in elementary, I do think it doesn't have to be the same kids. It's still really valuable if you're like, man, that teacher, you know, she seems to really have figured a lot out. You can do, you can do the same thing. So that's neat. Let's talk

through a few things. so I definitely highly recommend that. So go do that. Go actually observe someone.

because that's gonna be so personalized to you. A few things came to my mind though, too, of things you might want to questions you might want to ask yourself. So, one question is, are you both kind and firm? So I we talked about this on the podcast before, but it's bur, it's worth considering again, right? Sometimes we get this tension in feeling like, well, I don't wanna be mean, right? Or like I I want kids to think I'm nice. And so we feel like, well, I'm being nice by just letting stuff go.

Right. And we like it's I mean, it's just I will raise my hand. I still struggle with this, even with like my own children. so but it's like we gotta fight back against and we have to recognize the most kind thing to do is to be both kind and firm, right? We're not being mean, we don't have to start screaming at the kids. That's not effective anyhow. Like we right, we're we don't we can should be kind, but we also need to be firm. And so if you've been feeling like it's an either or

Or like, I don't want to be mean. You need to recognize, like, no, it's not mean to hold kids accountable, to insist is actually the kind thing to do because it's what they need. It's what the classroom needs. it's as we were talking about in the last episode, we're helping them develop the fruit of the spirit and and self-control. so yes, thank you. Am I kind and firm, or am I scared of being mean? And so it's a lot making it's totally throwing off my demeanor.

Sarah (11:25)

Yeah. And I think, you know, we'll probably touch on this a little bit later on, but I think that being kind and firm becomes so much easier when you do have a written plan. Because I I just have found having that plan written down empowers me to be more firm because then it takes the emotion out of me deciding. And I'm like, but it says we've talked about this, you know, we these procedures were taught.

that this is what happens in the classroom. And then it's just me reinforcing. It's not me having to actively make a decision. And I don't feel like it is ever based on the student or the their actions in that moment. It was based on what we did predecided in the future. So it makes it much easier

Linda Kardamis (12:13)

Yes.

Sarah (12:14)

to be kind and

Linda Kardamis (12:16)

Yeah, so let's jump right to that. Yeah. Do you have a plan for how to address misbehavior? And then do you follow it? Right. And we we what another thing that we say a lot, but it's so important, right? If I don't have a plan, if I'm just stepping into the classroom saying, like, hopefully I'll be able to deal with whatever happens, then I'm just reacting. And then I'm also often reacting according to my defaults,

which are for me, it's I don't want to deal with it. For some people, it's yelling. It's I mean, we all have different defaults, but our defaults aren't

You know, if we're not naturally commanding our classroom beautifully, right? If we're in this situation where we're comparing and we're like, I'm falling short, it's probably because this is not happening naturally, right? So that's why

Sarah (12:51)

I

Linda Kardamis (12:51)

we need a plan. And and so I I just I cannot recommend that enough. and we'll share some resources here in a little bit. But yeah, our stop the chatter workshop will help you make a plan specifically if talking is an issue in chatter. and then in classroom management one on one, we help you make a plan for

As many areas like we help you think through. We're like, here's all the areas you can think through, and you can pick and choose like which areas you need you need and which ones apply to your classroom. But we really help you think through think through everything. So yeah, that's that's so so key. another area that I think about is that's sneaky is procedures. So procedures are really sneaky because

We I mean, we know it's good to have good procedures just to keep things running smoothly, but there's this other thing happening underneath, right? If I say this is the procedure, but then I don't actually like kids only kind of half follow it and it's just kind of like fine, right? I just move on, then I'm sending these signals to my students that it doesn't actually matter what I say, you can get you know, you can get away with stuff, you don't really have to follow our classroom expectations.

And those signals quickly die, they they they pick up on that and they try more and it just it just kind of goes really quickly. So it is really important that we actually insist that our procedures are followed. And we can link to an episode where we kind of talk through the four-part system for teaching procedures. so that if you need to reteach some, you can do this at any point in the year. We're like, okay, we're gonna like fix this, we're gonna reteach these procedures, and kind of get back on being insistent. that can really, it's not just about procedures, it translates then into

just kind of them taking you more

seriously and the expectations more seriously across the classroom.

Sarah (14:26)

Yeah, I completely agree with that. Cause I mean, when you are encouraging and insisting that your procedures are followed, it's gonna give you like a confidence that is going to show your students that

you are you know what you're doing, that you are a capable person. and so we have to be like you said, it can be very sneaky, especially

certain times of year when we are all feeling a little worn down, we have to be careful that we don't just let things slip because the students are tired, we're tired. I think of that area between Thanksgiving and Christmas when everyone's just like, can we do this another day? But things kind of go off the rails then. And it's because I think a lot of times we're just like, whatever, you know?

But if we can stay consistent, I think that our classrooms would run so much more smoothly and it would just be that safer kind of place that that we're looking for for our students.

Linda Kardamis (15:30)

Yeah, yeah, I think you're absolutely right. Right. We can fall off this bandwagon too, even if we started off strong. And so yeah, it is so keeping that there just helps, yeah, keep everything everything on track. Man, there's there's so much more that we can say. one other aspect though I'd encourage you to think through is are your behavior expectations clear or confusing? this is another thing we talked about last episode with talking. You know, we said like sometimes

I don't even know in my own mind if something's okay. I remember the first time a kid put their head down on in on the desk in my class. And I remember literally thinking, hmm, is that am I okay with that? Do I want to do, you know, and I'm I'm having this like mental battle and like trying to decide on the spot, you know, and and and when we and it we can't we can't hold lines that we don't even know where they are. And there, and that's something where you have to pick like,

Some of these don't even have a right or a wrong. it's just some some are clear and obvious, but some aren't. And it's just really you deciding like where do you want to draw the line in your classroom? Like this is where we pick our battles, but we do, it's so valuable to think this through. And It's like a step what we often just skip over and just think, yeah, I know what I expect and jump right to the how do am I gonna deal with it? But if we don't stop and crystallize, no, where actually is the line and what am I gonna allow and what am I not?

then we kind of shoot ourselves in the foot. So that's another thing when we do classroom management one on one and we do the plan, we really also think through, well, what should I expect? where do I want to draw the line? So I I think that's really important too.

Sarah (16:55)

Yeah, absolutely. And can you explain that procedure to the youngest of students? Because, you know, sometimes it's just so hard to make sure that it is crystal clear. So absolutely.

Linda Kardamis (17:09)

Yes, so these are just a few areas you can think through. If it is classroom management, that's the area that you're struggling with in comparison. and if you want some help with these, we have two things coming up. One, we have our stop the chatter workshop in about one week. We're going to be

doing it live. it's available on demand other times, but being there live is just fantastic, where we actually kind of walk you through this specifically with the areas of chatter and blurting. So if chatter and blurting are an area a trouble area, we'll walk you through. You'll walk out with your plan all ready to go.

that one area. So you can get information about that in the notes, or I believe the link is [teachfortheheart.com / stop chatter](https://teachfortheheart.com/stop-chatter). we also have classroom manager one one which is our comprehensive system where we do it not just with chatter but with everything else, right? Disrespect, students wandering around procedures. Like we kind we walk you through all the steps and all the different pieces. so you can find out more about classroom manager one one at [teachfortheheart.com / cm one one](https://teachfortheheart.com/cm-one-one) and you can get info about that over there.

Sarah, any kind of last words of encouragement you have before we wrap up?

18:05 Encouragement and Resources for Teachers

Sarah (18:09)

Yeah, you know, I know it can be really tempting, like when you're listening to an episode like this and just feel maybe like maybe a little discouraged, or like, I don't want to take, you know, another class or I don't want to do this or I don't want to do that. But I just want to encourage your hearts right now. I just I think about where I was, you know, back in 2018.

when or it might have been 2019 when you were like encouraging me to go to go observe my friend Teresa. And just the other day my friend Emily asked if I would come give her some pointers on classroom management. And and it just stemmed because of something that happened in children's church. And it was just really cool. Like as we work on honing these skills,

We're gonna become more like the people that are that we're like aspiring to be. And so you might feel like a little downtrodden right now, like, this is so much work. But every every minute that you invest is going to replicate itself tenfold.

And it's worth it if you can invest this time and stop the chatter or classroom management one-on-one or even even the time you spent listening to this podcast. And if you can implement implement these things, they're gonna they're gonna make you a better teacher. And I just want to encourage you of that because I just think about how little I knew then and how much I know now. And the fact that I get to share what I know with other teachers. And that just makes me so excited. And I want that for you too.

Linda Kardamis (19:54)

That's awesome, Sarah. Thank you. Thank you for sharing that with us. And I hope you guys have found this episode to be really helpful and that it will, like I said, encourage you and give you some ideas of things. And hope we'll see you in either Stop the Chatter or Classroom Management 101 if you need some extra help. Well, this episode has been 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. Thank you for being with us. We look forward to being with you again 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.