Teach 4 the Heart Podcast Transcript

# Episode 409: How to Navigate the Holiday Season as a Teacher

**00:00 Welcome & Navigating the Holidays**

Linda Kardamis (00:00)
The holiday seasons can be wonderful, but can also be pretty stressful as a teacher. What do we plan? How do we deal with escalating behaviors? how do we stay sane? So we're gonna dive into all of this in today's episode. Well, welcome back to the Teach for 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 joined today by Julie, our podcast manager, to talk about how to navigate the holidays.

as a teacher and I know teachers handle this just in so many different ways. Julie, I'm curious for you as a teacher, what is your thought around the holidays? Is it kind of business as usual? Anything goes somewhere in between.

Julie Gouthier (00:43)
Yeah, so coming from a middle school background, we didn't have all of the little classroom parties and things that maybe elementary would have. And so we might have shortened schedules, but we didn't really have a whole lot going on outside of just the regular day-to-day bell schedule. But of course the kids the angst of like, we're about to be on break, it's like that's where the a little bit of the chaos would come in.

Um and so being from a tested subject, I knew I was like, I've got so much to get in before we leave for break, even though they're probably gonna forget a lot of what I did right before break. And so but I also love the holidays and I always tried to sprinkle a little bit of holiday magic into whatever we were learning. And usually like the day before break, if it's a half day or the you know, two days before.

Um, I taught science, so I'd always try to just incorporate something kind of holiday magical with science. So we would do like two truce and a lie winter themed or two truce and a lie science Thanksgiving stuff. So um yeah, I would try to sprinkle it in, but I would definitely make sure that my kids knew my expectations weren't going to change as far as behavior goes. Our structure for class looked a lot different in those last few days before breaks, but um, that doesn't mean we're gonna be crazy.

free for alls just running around the room. Uh so yeah, they knew my expectations, but I think they knew like, okay, we're gonna have some fun and science today. And it might not look like it always does. And that's okay.

Linda Kardamis (02:13)
Yeah. Yeah. I mean, you brought up so many great, great points in there. And we're gonna kind of dive into some of them in a little bit more detail. Um, I feel like my my costume actually was kind of a similar situation. I also was mostly in middle school. So we'd have kind of our class parties and stuff the last day. But leading up to that, I tried to keep things like mostly normal so it didn't like go off the rails. You know, we I normally was like, well, we still have you know these lessons to go to. But sometimes you find yourself with like, okay, we had a test on Wednesday and I have like one day. Like, what do I do with that one day? You know, so

We're gonna kinda talk about some of that like awkwardness of like timing before break and and and as well as behaviors, and then a little bit of just just kind of how do we ourselves, you know, deal with the craziness.

So so let's kind of start with talking in about learning and plans, right? How do we approach this? And Julie, I'm interested to hear a little bit more about what you were saying, but I do think that um I think

**02:52 Learning & Plans: Intentionality Is Key**

We the the key is intentionality, right? And looking at your curriculum and and it's really gonna be different. Like for me, when I calendar out my math class, you know, I'm often counting on some of those days before break, right? and I I'm like, no, we have learning materials still to do. so I I did not normally plan like, here we have a whole we're gonna do a whole week of other things. But sometimes that is how your calendar works or how or your curriculum lends itself to that, to to to having something like that.

Um, sometimes, like I said, it's like, okay, I just had a test. I'm not gonna start a new chapter two days before Christmas break. Right. Like, like where I need to find something else to fill this, right? Or um, I know at my with my kids, sometimes the week before Thanksgiving, if they just had it was just like a two day week and their teachers would plan, they used to do um Thanksgiving survival challenge and they do all these like STEM activities and stuff, like they'd make this a really fun thing.

a learning activity, but they're like, we're doing we're not doing regular school. We're doing this for two days. So that's like an almost opposite end of the spectrum where it's like we're doing complete something completely different. Um, or it really can be like business I've done business as usual and like we have the test the day before the party day. Like that that works too. I don't know. There's like such a range and I don't think there's like a right or a wrong, but I think intentionality is key because what you don't want to do is be like, I don't know what to do with these days.

I'm just kind of like, let's just do a crossword puzzle or like that's when things go really um I feel like that that doesn't normally go well when you when you're just like I don't really have anything planned or like I'm just trying to like make something up. I don't know. Julie,

Julie Gouthier (04:39)
Mm-hmm.

Linda Kardamis (04:40)
what advice do you have in in here?

**04:42 Adjusting Expectations & Project-Based Ideas**

Julie Gouthier (04:42)
Yeah, and like you don't have to abandon academic learning completely, but you definitely need to adjust your expectations realistically. You can't you

Linda Kardamis (04:50)
Mm, mm-hmm.

Julie Gouthier (04:51)
probably can't expect to have that big benchmark the day before Christmas break. Like that's probably just not gonna go over well. Kids are gonna be gone, leaving early, you know, to go on vacations. No one's gonna be focused. You're not gonna be focused. You're gonna be thinking about your shopping lists that you still have to get done. So I think adjusting your own expectations.

As you say, looking ahead as you plan out, if you know there's going to be assemblies on certain days, their focus is probably going to be pulled in multiple different directions. So taking a quiz that day might not be the most beneficial or the most accurate of what they actually understand about that topic. So just prioritize the time that you have. Um, and it's okay to you're not falling behind if you're not being incredibly rigorous all those last few days with what you're learning.

and it's okay just to take some time to create memories with your kids too. Um, that's just as important, even though we often forget about that.

Linda Kardamis (05:45)
Yeah. And if you are wanting to do something different, I do think this is an amazing place for some like project based learning, right? Because sometimes it's like, man, I don't know if have time for that in the class. but saying, okay, like let's what's something that I've been wanting to do, but it's like we don't have time for this in the regular, but we can do it in these, you know, last two days or last three days or whatever it is. I think that can be really great to as you were saying, like switch up the norm so it's not just like, okay, we're just trying to cause that that can

Sometimes it's what you need to do and it works, but sometimes it's like just trying to hold the norm till that last minute can can feel very difficult. And sometimes that's like you said, hard for people to stay focused and all of that. So sometimes just doing something different, something that is going to um allow your students to be creative in a different way or um yeah, just so so kind of thinking about

like what's something I wish I had space for, but but don't. And and is this, is this the right time? It may or may not be, depending on what you're thinking, but that maybe that is the space to.

**07:51 Classroom Management: Loosen Structure, Not Expectations**

you know, try some of those things, whether it is more academic goal, whether it's a more um community building or, you know, classroom culture building thing too. There's all kinds of goals we can pull in into the space that we might not have feel like we have space for the rest of the year.

So that's our thoughts on kind of learning and plans. Like I said, we could talk, we could talk probably for hours just about that, but hopefully that gives you some ideas and some things to think about.

Let's talk about the classroom management piece because we know closer it gets to a break, the trickier this can be. Um, but Julie, you said something that I thought was really good. You said you can loosen the structure of a lesson without losing loosening your expectations for behavior.

Can you explain that to people?

Julie Gouthier (08:14)
Yeah. So I think we're very routine driven, especially in the school world. Like we thrive on routines. A lot of students r really rely on those routines just to function. And so change can be scary. Um, but yeah, it's it's not gonna be an all or nothing mindset. Like it's not everything business as usual or the whole day is a free for all. And so like it doesn't have to be pure chaos. You're

Classroom structure is going to look a little different as far as the activities and the lessons. Like that's gonna change based on the scheduling of things, but your expectation for the behavior should not change. That should remain consistent no matter what day of the week or what time of the year it is. And so always, always holding true to those. when kids are all hyped up on sugar from their classroom parties or.

Halloween candy or whatever, you know, holiday break it is. And so um just yeah, like holding tight to those that way, that part, at least you can give yourself peace of mind, like okay, they might be a little hyper, um, but at least the behaviors I've stated my expectations, Other things might change, but at least that part, which is a really big piece of how your classroom functions, should still remain the same.

Linda Kardamis (09:32)
Yes. So a couple things in here. One would be too, if you are doing something very different, like Julie said, a different a different structure or like, hey, you know, we're doing project based and we maybe don't normally do this. Or um, like or whatever you're doing, whether it's normal or new, make sure you are very clear on the behavior expectations, right? You're probably gonna need to remind students of the behavior expectations more in the days leading up to a break than you would even normally, right? So make sure you think through, okay, what should this look like?

practice those expectations with them if you're doing something new, right? Does that make sense? So don't just be like, okay, I'm gonna let them work in groups, free for all, right? It's okay, what should this look like? How should this work? Right. Otherwise, it especially if this is a multi day thing, it's gonna devolve really, really quickly. Have you ever have you I've experienced that, Julie, where it's like I kind of started letting things go a little too soon. And it's just like, ooh, it that's that doesn't go very well, very well.

Julie Gouthier (10:30)
Yeah. So we we did a lot of these like tissue box projects. This was um a really fun idea that my coworker had come up with. And so the last few years is something that we've done. Basically, the kids would take a tissue box and each side was a different um a different aspect of the topic we were learning about. So we did organisms and environments. So one side would be biomes, one side would be living and non-living things in that biome, another might be the organisms that live in it. So we did like, you this really fun thing. They'd

have paper and then they'd have little um plastic animals that they'd glue on and then someone w might would bring glitter or paint from home and I was like, I don't know that I sh showed them how to like if you're gonna use these other supplies, like who's sharing the hot glue guns or like who has permission to get up and go um wash the paint and then who like who is sharing the scissors. And so I was like, hmm, these are procedures I probably should have thought of the first go round. And so of course

The first time we did it, my classroom looked like an absolute tornado had blown through and the kids were just all over trying to share things and who has a hot glue gun and you know, and it was just pure chaos. So I quickly learned the first time we did that, I was like, Okay, let's have some stations set up. Let's have expectations of who's using each supplies and when. And maybe we put the supplies on the desks instead of around the room. That way we're not getting up. And so you yeah, I

That was a little bit of a wake-up call for me. So yes, I have experienced it, Linda. Um, and it was not very fun, but hopefully now you can learn from our mistakes and be proactive and decide what um procedures are non-negotiable and um just let them know ahead of time this is the plan.

It's gonna look different than before, but hey, here's what I expect of you.

Linda Kardamis (12:17)
Yeah. that's so good. Yeah. It's thinking through those procedures and also giving yourself grace. Like, I did not this did not occur to me, but now I know. In next in third period, we're gonna do this differently. Or next year, you know, I know. So yeah, kind of learning from

Julie Gouthier (12:28)
Mm-hmm.

Linda Kardamis (12:28)
that. But as much as possible, thinking ahead, like what could what what could go wrong? What you know, what what can I what can I clarify leading into it?

There's one other aspect here, and then I'm I'm interested if you have any other thoughts, Julie, question management, but I

**12:36 Holding the Line Until Break**

Being very honest, just with how I know I am, and also with just what I've observed being in my own um kit, my own kids, and seeing classroom, you know, parties in the last day. Like, there is an element where at some point before break, behavior is probably gonna break down. Like the last three minutes before dismissal on the day before Christmas break are probably not gonna be super structured. They're probably gonna be a little bit just, you know, just a

Tiny bit crazy. Um, but recognize that like you don't want to hit that point five days before break, right? If you are at that like oh five, you know, five days before break, three days before break, even two days before break, like that's a long time to like you know what I mean? Like you don't want to be at that fever pitch. So like it is important to like hold your expectations, keep reminding of the behavior and like keep the behaviors like as

As as under control for as long as you can. Does that make sense though? It's like, um, you know, five minutes before you leave is not the same situation as four days before the break. And so, and so hold it. Don't, don't if if if you're like, well, break's almost here, is not almost here if you still have four more days to get through. So just just be careful about uh, like I said, I just encourage you to like hold those lines, keep things, keep things, um, keep behaviors where they need to be. Two minutes before

Julie Gouthier (14:03)
Mm-hmm.

Linda Kardamis (14:04)
you you can kind of you can kind of let go of.

Julie Gouthier (14:07)
Ja

Linda Kardamis (14:07)
We'll survive the last two minutes, you know.

Julie Gouthier (14:09)
Right. Yeah. So like teaching middle school, it's like that last week. We we might have dress up days too. And so if it's five days before and I'm still trying to, you know, wrap up some lessons and they're like, I'm wearing matching pajamas with my friend across the hall. Can we go take a picture? Like, no,

now's probably not the time for that. Or I brought a present for my friend. Can I go give it to like can we wait to can we just wait a little bit to the last day? Like now is not the time for all of all of the chaos to ensue. Like, let's it it might ensue, like you say, those last few minutes of school before

you know, we let out, but like, yeah, let's let's make sure we keep our structure as as normal as we can for as long as we can. But then also just know, keep your expectations realistic. It's probably not going to be all learning, all rigor on the very last day. So that's okay. And that's

Linda Kardamis (14:57)
Yeah.

Julie Gouthier (14:58)
okay.

Linda Kardamis (14:59)
Yep. Yeah, such is such a good point.

**15:01 Keeping Your Own Sanity**

All right, so let's move into this last section we're gonna talk about, which is kind of around um our own sanity, right? This can be a it's it's such an exciting time of the year if if you love the holidays. Um, although this is not even necessarily what we're gonna talk about here, but there's also an element of some people are dealing with a lot of grief during this time. That might be something that you're experiencing. but even if you don't have that part, there's just a lot of stress. You have all your personal to-dos that you wanna get done for the holidays.

plus all the school stuff going on. So let's just talk a little bit around um, you know, how do we keep our own sanity, stay encouraged, um, and not super stressed during these busy times, especially like before breaks.

Julie Gouthier (15:46)
Yeah, our personal schedules on top of the crazy school schedule, it just adds up and it can become so chaotic. So something that you've talked about, Linda, that came to mind for me is when you talk about how we feel like we have too much on our plate sometime, is just ask yourself, what do I realistically have time for? And that's a great question to ask yourself, both in the teaching world and then just in your personal life. Um, so you know, if you need to do work outside of work, decide when you're gonna do that and for how long.

Like keep you know it's gonna be a crazy season. So keep things low prep. Don't try to plan a whole new lesson with something you've never done before where you're gonna create all of the materials. Um, so like just be realistic with yourself and be honest with yourself of what can you realistically do without just killing yourself and you know, just taking time away from your family. Um, and then also

another thing to keep in mind, I think, is don't compare yourself to other teachers during this time. Like you said.

Others might be struggling with grief or they might just be like Santa's little elves. Like they love the holidays and so their classroom is gonna be decked out in all of the fun Christmas things and every lesson has incorporated some kind of fun festive. And so I think just in this season we were all experiencing different things and we all handle it different ways. So just um be mindful of that and how you run your classroom is gonna be different than everyone else's and that's okay. It does not have to look exactly the same.

Linda Kardamis (17:15)
Yeah, exactly. Right. If you love that and it gives you energy and you have space for it, go for that. But it doesn't have to be Pinterest perfect. You don't have to decorate your classroom. Like there's a lot that we don't have to do that we make we feel like. And yeah, I love I think being realistic is so important and recognizing if we try to do everything, we're not going to. We just don't get to pick what we do and don't do. It's just like whatever, whatever we don't get to. But but so sitting down and being like, okay, realistically, what can I do? And and what am I just gonna choose not to? And

**17:45 The True Reason for the Season**

That's way less stressful.

So um, I think another thing in the holidays that's really good to do is just um remind ourselves of the true reason for the season, right? Thanksgiving, we are thanking God for all his blessings. At Christmas, we're celebrating Advent. Like our savior came to live with us. Like these are amazing, beautiful things that we're celebrating and they can get lost in the shuffle. So, you know, you'll have those, those little moments when a song comes on or when you're

Teaching something about it. It just like kind of be in those moments and it let yourself experience that joy in those little moments and just kind of remembering what is this really about. I I think that can also be really helpful.

Julie Gouthier (18:21)
Mm-hmm. Yeah. And God's built in this time for us to rest too. Like we get so caught up. Like again, I taught a tested subject. So I was thinking, I've got so much to do before the break. We've got to get in all of this content. But that's that's not the time for that. And so um this verse came to mind was Matthew 634. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. And so don't get so caught up in thinking, okay, what do I have to do right after the break?

Okay, this is what I have to do right now to make sure we get to that point from A to B. And so just take time to breathe and rest in God's presence and enjoy what He's given you. And like you say, Thanksgiving, we're spending time to be thankful for all He's provided for us. And even though our

jobs can be chaotic and stressful at times, like just thankful that you're here in that position and um take that time to love on your students. Absolutely.

Linda Kardamis (19:14)
Yeah, I love that. Not worrying about tomorrow, like just taking it one day at a time. At the same time though, I think planning for the future can be wise, right? so we're not worried about all the things we have to

Julie Gouthier (19:26)
Mm-hmm.

Linda Kardamis (19:27)
get done tomorrow, but yet yet doing some planning and and some intentionality.

**19:30 Planning Ahead & Classroom Resets Workshop**

So

I've okay, one trap that I fell into sometimes, particularly before Christmas, is I remember once or twice, I like forgot to lesson plan for after Christmas.

So like my my habitual habit is always this week, I'm lesson planning for next week. So like by Friday, I wanna be done with next week's plans. If I don't, I gotta finish them over the weekend. So that's that's just like my pattern. But it was like the you it's like it's it's like I just gotta get to spring to to Christmas break. This is more for Christmas, I feel like, than I didn't this didn't happen for Thanksgiving. But I like, I gotta get to Christmas break. And then I realized, like, I d I didn't plan anything. Now I gotta do that over the break. And I think if you want it, I if if that's what you want to do, great. If you're like, I'm I'm just gonna do it over break.

But if you're like, no, I kind of want to be off some during this break. I don't want to, then it's like, don't forget that last week of Christmas break that you gotta, you gotta get ready for the, for the, for the week coming back. I just, I don't know how that happened. It just flew out of my mind. I was like, I have, I have extra time this week. Nope. I got to plan next week. So I think thinking ahead on your lesson plans. And then another area is um maybe doing a little bit of thinking ahead or planning to work on during break, um, behavior resets.

So that's actually a resource that I want you guys to keep an eye out. We're gonna be releasing in December a workshop called Plan Your Classroom Resets, which is something that you can do over the holidays, particularly the Christmas holiday. Although you could you could look at this and yeah, it's designed for over the Christmas holiday. And so you can um help you think through and when you come back for the break, doing a little bit of a reset to kind of reset behaviors after the crazy.

and kind of start back in. So that'll be a resource. Just just keep an eye out. We'll tell you about it on the podcast um as we get closer.

Julie Gouthier (21:11)
Yeah, I'm so excited for that. I think it's gonna be incredibly beneficial because the break itself, like I say, it's the time to rest, but it's also a time to reflect. Like we can plan for after break, but we don't have to worry about it. And so yeah, it's a natural time to think, okay, what did not go so well the first semester? What are things, procedures that I'd like to change, things in my classroom that happened that I don't want to happen again? So what do I need to do now to prevent that?

going forward in the second semester. And so yeah, that's a perfect time to have that reset and hopefully have a smoother second half if your first half wasn't so smooth.

Linda Kardamis (21:47)
Yeah, absolutely. So this is a good time to remind you if you're not subscribed to wherever you listen to the podcast, YouTube, Apple Podcasts, Spotify, subscribe to the podcast to get notifications.

Also, if you're not on our email list, if you go to teach4theheart.com you can sign up for any of our resources, that'll put you on the email list. Um, and then you'll be notified when these things are ready to go.

Well, guys, thank you so much. I hope there was a we talked about a lot today, Julie, but I hope there was at least something in there that you found helpful for you as you navigate this wonderful time of the year, but also uh can be kind of crazy and hectic too. So we hope this is helpful for you. 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. 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.