

# Fostering Emotionally-Healthy Learning Environments for Teachers and Students



Randall Davis, University of Utah

randall.davis@utah.edu

Intermountain TESOL Adult and Higher Ed

Mini-Conference, April 9, 2022

<https://www.esl-lab.com/speaking-events/>

# Purpose

Fostering Emotionally-Healthy  
Learning Environments for  
Teachers and Students

---

1. Recount the physical and emotional challenges of completing an ultramarathon.
2. Thread these experiences into the goal of fostering healthy learning environments at home, in schools, and our communities.

# Five Keys – Self-Awareness

1. Realize that I could be wrong about so many things and people and not even know it.

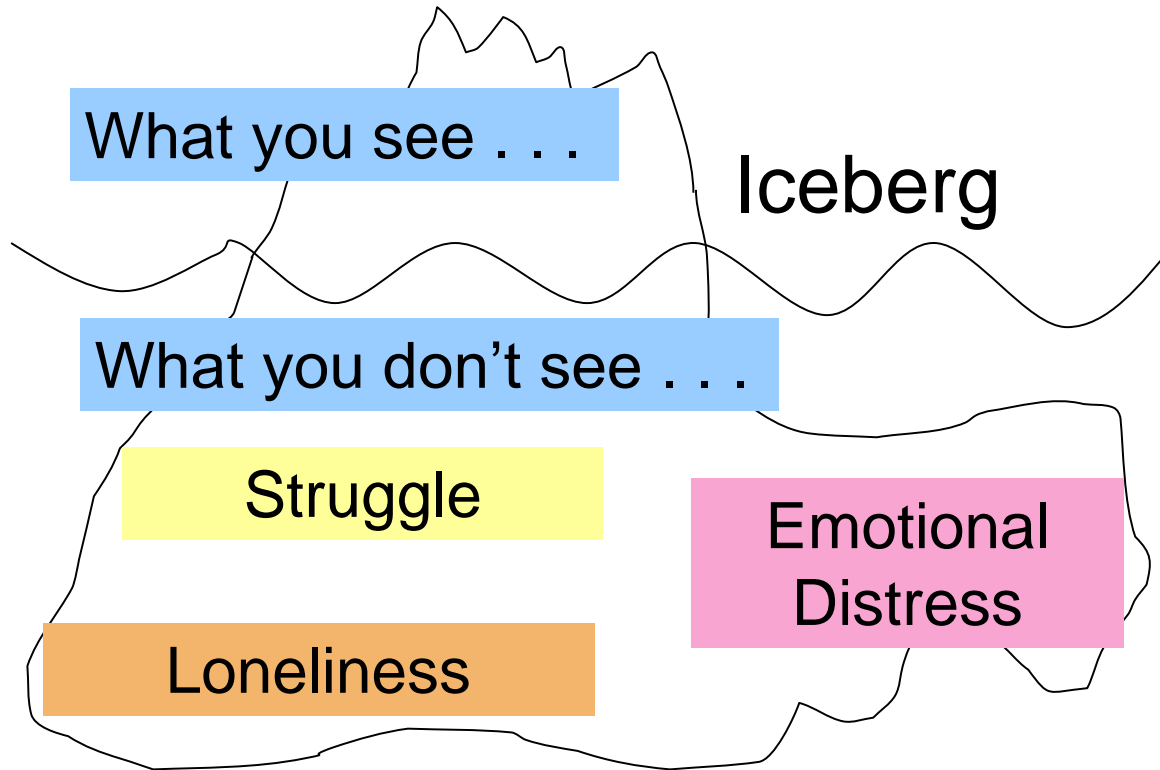
# Point

---

We are often so unaware on how unaware we really are: at work, at home, and in friendships.

- Lack of awareness
- The illusion of knowledge

# Understanding Others



# Thought

---

“The only true wisdom is knowing that you know nothing.”

- Socrates, Greek Philosopher

# Application

---

- ❖ Accept the limitations and boundaries of your knowledge on the experiences of others.
- ❖ Become more humble and open to new ideas.
- ❖ Be more vigilant to notice the early signs of emotional distress.

# Five Keys

1. Realize that I could be wrong about so many things and not even know it.
2. **Be authentic and vulnerable.**



# Thoughts

“We often wear ourselves out trying to be someone we aren’t or aren’t meant to be.”

- *We pretend to **be** what we aren’t.*
- *We pretend to **know** what we don’t know.*

# Brené Brown

Researcher on Vulnerability, Shame, and Courage

“Many of us live in fear —the fear of looking weak, flawed, and imperfect.”

“Vulnerability is the birthplace of innovation, creativity and change.”



*Vulnerability > Authenticity*

# Application – Tasteful Vulnerability

---

- ❖ Authenticity builds honest human connections with others and greater trust.
- ❖ Authenticity attracts real people.
- ❖ Authenticity helps you wear the same face no matter what the circumstances.

# Five Keys (Support)

3. Create realistic goals and expectations.

# Learning Dilemma

---

Sometimes, we create unnecessary ambiguity for students to overcome, especially in testing situations.

**People sometimes make unfounded assumptions and blame teachers for why they struggle.**

## TEACHER TRAINING:

Recognize that teachers are human beings with skills to be developed; they are NOT a problem to be fixed.



**Speakers lecture on things that are irrelevant to the teachers' needs.**

**CONDUCT A NEEDS ANALYSIS:**  
Determine what teachers need in advance of any training.



# Application

---

- ❖ Create clear and reasonable goals with ongoing communication and support to achieve them.



# Five Keys

3. Create realistic goals and expectations.
4. Express deep compassion for others.

# Situations

---

Human beings often misunderstand the perceptions, feelings, and needs of others, especially when they struggle personally, academically, and professionally.

# Be Careful not to Stereotype!

*A mental picture that is often not true. Stereotypes can also hurt.*

- *“You know how students are from that that country.”*
- *“The most effective teachers are the ones who use technology.”*
- *“Ah, that student (teacher) is just lazy and can’t bother to do the work.”*

# Treating People with Dignity and Respect

---

**Golden Rule** – Treat others the way YOU want to be treated.

Platinum Rule – Treat others the way **THEY** want to be treated. This accommodates their feelings and personal struggles and their self-worth.

# Buddhist Monk Thich Nhat Hanh

“Deep listening is the kind of listening that can help **relieve the suffering of another person**. You can call it compassionate listening. You listen with only one purpose: **to help him or her to empty his heart**. Even if he says things that are full of wrong perceptions, full of bitterness, you are still capable of continuing to listen with compassion.

Because you know that listening like that, you **give that person a chance to suffer less**. If you want to help him to correct his perception, you wait for another time. For now, you don't interrupt. You don't argue. If you do, he loses his chance. You just listen with compassion and help him to suffer less.

One hour like that can bring transformation and healing.”

# Application

---

- ❖ Learn about others and their lives. Validate their perspectives, their struggles, and their challenges.
- ❖ Sit with people in their discomfort and pain, and just seek to understand them. People's struggles often hide in plain sight.
- ❖ Build a culture of check-ins where people feel safe to voice concerns.

# Five Keys

4. Express deep compassion for others.
5. **Dare greatly.**

# Steps to Greater Personal Growth and Human Connections

1. Realize that I could be wrong about so many things and people and not even know it. (Self-Awareness)
2. Be authentic and vulnerable. (Authenticity)
3. Create realistic goals and expectations. (Support)
4. Express deep compassion for others. (Empathy)
5. Dare greatly. (Courage)



"The mind, once stretched by a new idea, never regains its original dimensions."

- Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr.

