



Book Recommendation

Atlas of the Heart by Brené Brown

“Having access to the right words can **open up entire universes.**”

The books of Brene Brown, the renowned research professor at the University of Houston, exemplify the full import of these words. Personally, reading her titles such as *The Gifts of Imperfection*, *Daring Greatly* and *Rising Strong*, three titles among many, profoundly opened up for me the universe of understanding of my emotions.

In this book, *Atlas of the Heart*, Brown shares her research findings into the language of human experience in a way that is relatable and compassionate. I cannot be sufficiently grateful to her for the gift of the insights she brings. She knows that “Our understanding of our own and others’ emotions is shaped by how we perceive, categorize and describe emotional experiences – and these interpretations rely heavily on language.” And furthermore, “How we interpret and label our emotions can determine how we experience them.” Clearly, with this understanding, we can use language in such a way to assist ourselves to interpret our emotions in a way that is self-compassionate. By sharing her researched understanding of emotions in words that connect rather than divide us, she has given us all a way to communicate that retains and honours our personal dignity.

Brown’s humanity is on display and is such a comfort to all of us ‘lapsed perfectionists’! She too has felt/does feel, this way! An example of her reassuring, affirming style is evident in her discourse on worry: “Worry is the thinking part of anxiety. Worry is described as a chain of negative thoughts, about bad things that might happen in the future”. How clearly explained! Add to this understanding of worry, her interpretation of stress: “I always assumed that my emotions responded to my body freaking out. But really, my emotions are responding to my thinking assessment of how well I can handle something.” This link between worry and stress, written in everyday language by a ‘real’ person, has the capacity to unlock a universe of understanding. With this understanding, in this instance, we can see that a change in our thinking, over which we have control, can result in a change to our stress level. In this way in her book, we have been granted an actionable way to take control of our emotional lives.

Her language defining ‘compassion’ and ‘empathy’ was so impactful that I have copied them onto a file card and carry them with me everyday! Look at this: “Compassion is fuelled by understanding and accepting that we’re all made of strength and struggle – no-one is immune to pain of suffering”. And this important distinction about empathy: “We need to dispel the myth that empathy is ‘walking in someone else’s shoes’. Rather than walking in your shoes, I need to learn how to listen to the story you tell about what it is like in your shoes and believe you even when it doesn’t match my experiences.” What an enlightened, humbling distinction.



Atlas of the Heart richly defines language in a way we at **my manifesto** choose to use. It is affirming language. It is inclusive language. It is ennobling, not diminishing – a balm for your spirit and a way to connect with others. As educators, we know that the best, most effective learning occurs in an environment in which the learner feels safe. Brené Brown creates that safety and the learning she offers is deep and lasting.