文字與感情
Words and Feelings

Ann Heron
Department of English
The Hong Kong Institute of Education

Abstract
This paper argues that young children have deep feelings and that teachers of young children can play an empowering role in assisting children to deal with their emotions. The paper suggests how this can be done through enriching the existing curriculum and giving children the language they need to understand and express their feelings.

Introduction
A Hong Kong child is taken care of by a loving foreign helper. When the child is about a three-year-old, the mother decides that she wants to take care of the child. She does not renew the helper’s contract. Nobody mentions the helper again.

Is the above of any importance to you, as someone who educates young children? Try the following quiz to find out.

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Children have feelings.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Children have strong feelings for the person who takes care of them.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Children can feel that someone loves them.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Children can feel love for someone else.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Children can feel fear.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Children can feel hate.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Children feel bad about loving someone parents dislike.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Children feel they are bad to have such feelings of love.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Children will begin to hate themselves.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Feelings of hate will make a child depressed or aggressive.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Children are Cute
Some people do not like to think that children have strong feelings. Sometimes, when teacher educators ask pre-service teachers why they want to teach, they give the reason, “Because the children are so lovely and innocent.” This view of children is dangerous. Denying that children have strong human feelings builds a wall between them and adults. If children feel that we
adults see them only as cute - how can they tell us their feelings, especially bad feelings? As Hurst (1994, p.179) has observed, "Understanding children as people is the starting-point for deciding how to teach them."

**Words and Feelings**

Those who work with young children know that young children have strong feelings. But how can teachers help? The most important thing we can do is to give children the power of words. We can give them the language to talk about their feelings. If they do not want to talk to others about their feelings, they can still use the language to talk about their feelings to themselves. Teachers can also help through words to let children know they are not alone, that other people have the same feelings. Self-understanding can empower children to manage themselves and understand others (Goleman, 1995, p.46).

**Mourning Loss and Death**

I have been collecting stories of childhood from Hong Kong education students for some years. Several stories tell about the death of a grandparent or a pet. But the child's mourning is overlooked. Parents say things such as, ‘Oh, never mind, we will buy you another rabbit.’ They do not try to understand the child’s pain at losing that particular rabbit. Parents in the stories also do not talk to children about the pain of losing a relative through death or divorce.

**Developing the Curriculum**

Early childhood practitioners have the chance to talk about strong feelings. Such talk can be developed from the curriculum. Here are two examples. The first comes from science and the second from literature. Kindergarten textbooks usually have content on the seasons, but the books are often quite boring. They talk about leaves falling down in autumn. The truth is that we can see fallen leaves during all the seasons in Hong Kong. The importance of the seasons is surely that children learn about the cycle of life: birth, life, death, rebirth. The seasons give us the opportunity to talk about growth, death and loss, and new growth.

Story books also give us this opportunity to talk about death, loss, and mourning. A suitable book is the beautiful picture book The Snowman (Briggs, 1978). Children find the topic of snow interesting because we do not have snow in Hong Kong. But this also removes the story from Hong Kong. Distance makes it is easier for the children to talk about the meaning of the story. At the end of the story, the teacher can ask children to talk about all the things the boy and the snowman enjoyed together. Then the teacher can ask about the sad ending, how the boy felt, and how the children felt upon hearing the sad ending. The teacher can ask when the boy might think about the snowman again, and who he can talk to about his sadness. The teacher can raise difficult issues. Would some people laugh
at the boy’s sadness? Is the boy’s feeling still right? Is it better to never have a friend, or to have a good friend and then lose him?

Valuing Children’s Feelings
The important thing is that children learn that people have strong feelings, and that they are right to feel sad when a loved one goes away or dies, even if close others do not share their feelings. The teacher, through the powerful story above, is helping the child to accept his feelings. The teacher helps by giving the child words. Even if the child cannot talk about his feelings, he can think about them as painful but of value. He does not need to hate himself for his feelings, or turn the hatred out against others (Moghaddam, 1998, p.360).

Bad Feelings
Stories can also be used to help children deal with bad feelings caused by the arrival of a new baby, or step-parent. The child is supposed to love the new member of the family although the new person has taken the child's place in the family. The fear of losing the love of parents and feelings of jealousy towards a baby or step-parent are powerful emotions. The child can feel overwhelmed - overpowered - by such feelings. Research shows that the opportunity to name, and then think about such feelings, are the first steps towards learning to manage, or soothe the self (Goleman, 1995, p.260).

Forced Control
Children need to learn control through knowledge, not control through suppression - hiding of feelings. All feelings will come out of the body in some way. If a child feels that he was wrong to love his foreign helper, he will feel self-hatred. When that feeling is unbearable, he will turn his hatred towards foreigners. If he is forced to deny his feelings against the new baby, he may look for a smaller child to bully in the nursery or kindergarten. If he cannot hate his step-parent, he can be naughty with his teacher (Moghaddam, 1998, p.478).

Accepting
“...a child can experience her feelings only when there is somebody there who accepts her fully, understands her and supports her.” (Miller, 1994, p.35).

Teachers can empower children by helping them to name and understand their strong feelings, and by re-assuring them that other children and adults have the same feelings. Only then can teachers try to help children to deal with their human emotions in a way that builds, and does not destroy.

References

