

Taking Heart – Dealing with Feeling

Sonali Bhatia



Talking over a story I had just narrated to my Class 5 students, I asked, “*How did the King and Queen feel?*” On listening to their responses, I realized that the children were unable to distinguish physical or sensory feelings from emotional ones. So, for example, they said, “*The King felt the soft bed*” or “*The Queen felt the hard floor*”.

I explained that I had not asked about *what* they were feeling, but *how* they were feeling – i.e., I wanted to know if they were *happy, sad, angry, jealous, frustrated*, etc.

The students were fascinated with this idea, and we went over the entire story again, slowly, analyzing the feelings of the various characters at each stage. We also scrutinised the interplay between the characters, and how the feelings of one character affected the feelings of another. The response to this discussion made me want to take it further, and have the children examine their own feelings and the feelings of those around them. It is easier to cope with one’s emotions if one can put a name to them, understand why they are occurring and how they influence one’s family, friends and environment.

So I asked each child to draw a grid. The horizontal rows had the characters – ‘**ME**’, ‘**MUMMY**’, ‘**DADDY**’, ‘**BROTHER**’, ‘**SISTER**’, ‘**PET**’, ‘**TEACHER**’, ‘**NEIGHBOUR**’, ‘**FRIEND**’. The vertical columns mentioned various moods – ‘**HAPPY**’, ‘**SAD**’, ‘**ANGRY**’, ‘**JEALOUS**’, ‘**EXCITED**’, ‘**EAGER**’, ‘**DISAPPOINTED**’. The children had to fill in as many blanks as they could – answering questions like ‘*What makes Mummy angry?*’ and so on. In a word or two, they had to try and mention what made the people in their lives get positive or negative feelings.

The children got completely engrossed with the task. I allowed them to share their answers with their own friends or with the entire class if they wished to. (Yes, I allowed them to talk softly with each other while the task was in progress! The idea was learning to share and cope with feelings, and sometimes, talking it over with a friend or a peer helps!) For many of them, it was the first time they were actually thinking of their parents or teachers as human beings with feelings – and not as disciplinarians, role models, or simply individuals to be taken for granted to fulfil their needs. Also, for some, it was the first time they were trying to put words to what was intangible within themselves.

The bell rang for the period to end, and the children had to leave the room and go to another class. While everyone else packed up and headed out of the door, one little fellow refused to budge from his seat. “The bell has rung,” I informed him. “You have to go now, or you’ll be late for your next class.” He simply shook his head and waited till all his classmates had filed out. Then, he turned to me and said, “Help me...”

“With what?” I asked.

He showed me the grid he had made. While he had managed to fill in something for everyone else, the **‘MUMMY’** row was blank. “I don’t know how my mother feels. Help me to know how she feels.” “Why don’t you know how she feels?” I asked. “Because she always says bad things about me,” came the reply.



Slowly, after many questions from me, he managed to reveal this much – that his mother exaggerated his every behaviour to the last degree, and came up with a much amplified consequence of the same. For example, if he fell down and grazed his knees, as young boys are habituated to doing, she would say, “What if you had broken your leg and had to miss school for months?” Or if he didn’t complete his homework on time, she would say, “If you continue like this, you are going to fail and lose a year.”

Not having met the mother, I didn’t want to make any judgements. I had to help the child cope with what seemed to be a barrage of negative statements. After some thought, I told him, “Maybe it’s because your mother always wants the best for you and is worried about you. Maybe she feels it is her responsibility to help you grow up well.”

“But she says bad things,” he protested, puzzled about how pessimistic statements could harbour constructive intentions.

“That is her way of showing she cares about you,” I explained. “Next time something like this happens, try to understand that.”

He then left for the next class with a note from me to his teacher, explaining why he had been delayed. He didn’t raise the topic again, and I didn’t want to pry into his family matters, so I didn’t ask him, but I hope his talk with me helped improve his relationship with his mother at least a little.

I often think about this incident. I started with a story about a King and a Queen, and ended up trying to analyse a child’s mother’s feelings and assist him with tackling what were possibly some hurtful experiences. How did this happen? I guess it was because, at some point, the children’s responses pushed me towards altering my lesson plan. Instead of going ahead with the next story, as previously intended, I took up the issues that came up with this one.

I also realized the importance of talking to children, of clarifying aspects like emotions with them. It’s easy to get caught up with academics, prearranged timetables, marks, grades and ranks – but, as educators, we need to take some time out to know what’s going on in our children’s hearts as well. A child is a complex being, and when we place too much emphasis on intellectual characteristics, we tend to neglect the emotional and the spiritual faculties.

Such neglect is detrimental – or even crippling to the development of society. It is what leads to deeper problems like low self esteem, which in turn gives rise to teasing or bullying. Children who aren’t in touch with their own feelings cannot empathise with others, thus they shun, taunt or browbeat those who are more vulnerable than they are. So, younger students or freshers get ragged. While growing up, they, in turn, ridicule their juniors and thus the vicious cycle continues. Such behaviour leads to reduced academic performance, dropping out, emotional or physical illness, and in extreme cases, severe depression culminating in suicide.



According to the *National Center for Education Statistics, USA*, emotional bullying is the most prevalent type of bullying, and such victims display a range of responses, even many years later. These responses include difficulty in trusting others, aggressiveness, isolation and lack of assertiveness. It is obvious that maladjusted individuals cannot contribute to society to their full potential, even as adults.

On the other hand, should children learn to recognize and name their own feelings, and share these with their teachers and classmates in a healthy, compassionate atmosphere, this bleak scenario can change. They will be motivated to value others' feelings and in the process, understand their own better. This leads to helping those who need help, to looking upon those who are economically or physically challenged with empathy and raising the general standard of well-being, both within the four walls of the educational institution and humanity at large.

Taking the extra time out to understand and deal with feelings isn't a digression from the syllabus or the *necessary work* of the school. It is a vital part of education, and forms the essence of successful teaching-learning and the whole process of growing up. It is probably the most important contribution a teacher can make to help mould the future citizens of the world.

As educators, we have the opportunity to shape a generation – and maybe generations to come. Let's use that opportunity well. Let's create wholesome human beings who are also well-adjusted citizens. It's in our hands to do so.

Sonali Bhatia conducts workshops for students and teachers on a wide range of topics related to 'Reading for Pleasure', 'Literary Activities', 'Dramatics', 'Storytelling', 'Creativity in the Classroom', etc. She is a freelance writer and has published articles on various aspects of education and child-centred topics. Sonali lives in Bangalore.

Lesson Plan on Dealing with Feelings

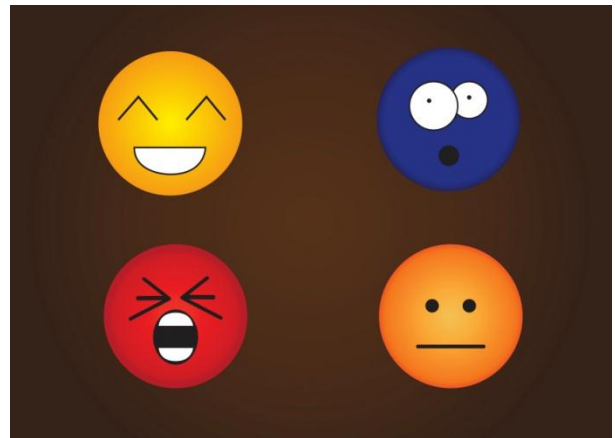
Sonali Bhatia



Children should learn to examine their own feelings and the feelings of those around them. It is easier to cope with one's emotions if one can put a name to them, understand why they are occurring and how they influence one's family, friends and environment. Different activities for dealing with feelings in class have been listed below:

1. An Introduction to Feelings – individual, simple

An individual experiences various feelings – happy, sad, angry, frightened, curious ... the list is endless. Draw faces with these feelings – possibly simple faces, emphasising the eyes, lips and eyebrows. You can also take help of emoticons, printed and stuck on flashcards. Use each of these feelings in a sentence. Demonstrate these feelings with your facial expression and body language.



2. a. Role-play with Feelings – group, simple

Simple life situations can be created in which various feelings are brought out, and the entire group shares the emotions. For example: a cricket match in which the entire class supports the Indian team. What are the feelings as the bowler runs up, as the batsman hits a six, as a wicket falls...?

2. b. Role-play with Feelings – group, complex

The same situations used for the previous activity can be made a bit more complex. While half the class supports one team, the other half supports the opposing team. What are the feelings as there is a boundary scored, as the third umpire's decision is awaited, as there is a controversy, like a batsman being adjudged *out* erroneously...? How do the feelings of one side affect the feelings of the other? Does one side's smugness make the other side more frustrated? How can we cope with such feelings and their escalation? How can we put ourselves in someone else's shoes? Other possible situations for role-play: *bullying, road-rage, sharing things, sibling rivalry, etc.*



3. a. Feelings Grid – individual, simple

This is a simple grid with feelings and characters as topic headers. What the child might write for **'MUMMY'** has been filled in as an example. The list of feelings and that of people whose feelings can be analyzed are both endless. As the children progress, they can analyse the feelings of more *remote* people like the van driver, the shopkeeper, the traffic policeman, or the beggar, whom they come across every day but might not have thought about before.

	HAPPY	SAD	ANGRY	EXCITED
MUMMY	When I win a race	When she is sick	When I don't listen to her	When granny comes over
DADDY				
TEACHER				
FRIEND				

3. b. Feelings Grid – individual, complex

This is a more complex grid, involving how the child's feelings affect others.

It needs to be flexible so as to give more space. The child thinks of instances where one family member has affected another's feelings and writes about them.

If the children are familiar with the technique of *Mind-Mapping*, these could be presented as *Mind-Maps* using various colours and connections instead of a grid.

WHEN I AM	HAPPY	SAD	ANGRY	EXCITED
MUMMY IS	<i>Angry – I spoilt my clothes while playing Holi.</i>	<i>Upset – I didn't get chosen for the class play.</i>	<i>Angry – My sister and I fought.</i>	<i>Anxious – I was running on the road waiting for my friend.</i>
DADDY IS				
TEACHER IS				
FRIEND IS				

4. Board Game – individual or group, complex

This game is like *snakes and ladders*, where positive feelings result in upward movement, and negative feelings result in downward movement.

The children need *a rough book, drawing sheet, chart paper, ruler, pencil, eraser, sketch pens, gum, dice* and something to use as counters – *like pebbles or buttons*. It helps to have a *snakes and ladders* board as an example, but it isn't necessary.

The steps to making the game are as follows:

(Please see the example to understand how the finished game looks.)

i. In the rough book, the children list out situations and the feelings that these bring about. These include situations which provoke both positive and negative feelings.

For example – ‘Win a race – *happy*’, ‘Miss a friend’s birthday party – *disappointed*’.

ii. They then draw a grid on the drawing sheet. If desired, they number the individual rectangles. If it is possible, they could be given computer printouts of the grid with the numbering.

iii. In pencil, they write the situation in one box, and the feeling in another, according to the following guidelines – positive situations below, positive feelings on top; negative feelings below, negative situations on top. They could make a little drawing of the situation and the face with the feeling if they have enough space, and choose to do so.

iv. They ensure that they have done the work according to the guidelines. This is an important step as otherwise the game goes wrong.

v. They then colour code the situations, using one colour for positive situations and feelings and another for negative situations and feelings.

vi. They connect the situation to the feeling, using a downward or upward arrow. Positive situations lead upward to positive feelings. Negative situations lead downward to negative feelings. Again, this is done in pencil first and then in sketch pen.

vii. They stick the drawing paper on to the chart paper.

viii. They play the game, taking it in turns to roll the dice and move along the board. If they land on a positive situation, they go upward to a positive feeling. If they land on a negative situation, they go downward to a negative feeling. (Landing on a situation leads to movement. Landing on a feeling itself is treated as a normal move, to await the next throw of the dice.) The one who reaches the finish line first is considered the *winner*.

ix. Their feelings as they play the game could be discussed in details.

Example of the game

70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	FINISH
69	68	67	66	65	64	63 SATISFIED	62	61	60
50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59
49	48	47	48	45 CHEAT IN A TEST	44	43	42	41	40
30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39
29	28	27	26	25	24	23	22	21	20
10	11 HELP A FRIEND	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
9	8	7	6	5	4	3 GUILTY	2	1	START

In this example, one positive situation *Help a friend* is placed in rectangle **11**. It corresponds to *Feel satisfied* in rectangle **63**. The two need to be connected with an upward arrow. Hence, someone landing on rectangle **11** moves directly to rectangle **63**.

Similarly, one negative situation – *Cheat in a test* is placed in rectangle **45**. It corresponds to *Feel guilty* in rectangle **3**. The two need to be connected with a downward arrow. Someone landing on rectangle **45** moves down to rectangle **3**. There can be several positive and negative situations, corresponding to positive and negative feelings respectively.



Though the game might sound a bit complicated, if it is done step by step, children of Class 5 (and older) can be instructed to make it. They really enjoy creating and playing with their own game, which is a reflection of their own feelings!

So, do enjoy discussing feelings with your students – and don't hesitate to mention your own feelings as well, which would develop and enrich the teacher-student bond to a great extent.

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Words Section



Qualia (noun)

Meaning

- a quality or property as perceived or experienced by a person, typically used in philosophy.
(*Oxforddictionaries.com*)

Origin (and additional information) ~ The term's first known use was in 1665-75. It was derived from Latin *quāle*, which is the neuter singular of *qualis* meaning *of what kind*.

It is a term used in philosophy to refer to individual instances of subjective, conscious experience. Examples of qualia are the *pain of a headache*, the *taste of wine*, or the *perceived redness of an evening sky*.

Daniel Dennett, American philosopher and cognitive scientist, writes that *qualia* is "an unfamiliar term for something that could not be more familiar to each of us: the ways things seem to us."

The importance of qualia in philosophy of mind comes largely from the fact that it is seen as posing a fundamental problem for materialist explanations of the mind-body problem. Much of the debate over their importance hinges on the definition of the term that is used, as various philosophers emphasize or deny the existence of certain features of qualia. As such, the nature and existence of qualia are controversial.

There are recognizable qualitative characters of the given, which may be repeated in different experiences, and are thus a sort of universals; *Clarence Irving Lewis* called these "*qualia*". The quale is directly intuited, given, and is not the subject of any possible error because it is purely subjective.

Words Section

Daniel Dennett identifies four properties that are commonly ascribed to qualia. According to these, qualia are:

- a. **ineffable**; i.e., they cannot be communicated, or apprehended by any other means than direct experience.
- b. **intrinsic**; i.e., they are non-relational properties, which do not change depending on the experience's relation to other things.
- c. **private**; i.e., all interpersonal comparisons of qualia are systematically impossible.
- d. **directly or immediately apprehensible in consciousness**; i.e., to experience a quale is to know one experiences a quale, and to know all there is to know about that quale.

Usage ~

- i. *It is possible that qualia qualities are dimensional.*
- ii. *Some people argue about qualia, which is a term referring to the qualitative feel of consciousness.*
- iii. *Setting aside for a moment the problem of qualia, what consciousness and self entails is actually remarkably well agreed upon.*

Derivatives ~ *quale*, singular