

Marshall Memo 1026

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education

March 4, 2024

In This Issue:

1. [A tribute to Harry Wong](#)
2. [I just taught that! Why don't they get it?](#)
3. [Can secondary students have civil debates on public policy issues?](#)
4. [Sharing our emotional preferences with colleagues and students](#)
5. [Building emotional intelligence](#)
6. [An acronym for emotional intelligence](#)
7. [Why unpacking emotions is helpful](#)
8. [Four ways to tap the brakes when emotions are getting us in trouble](#)
9. [What emotional intelligence is – and isn't](#)
10. [Manga books for younger students](#)

Quotes of the Week

“If you’re in a room with teachers and other leaders or parents, put your phone away. Put your laptop away. Be present. We tend to think that as leaders, we can multitask. But when you have families or teachers in the room and they notice you on your phone, it sends a message.”

Ignacio Lopez in [“Becoming an Emotionally Intelligent Leader,”](#) an interview with Naomi Thiers in *Educational Leadership*, March 2024 (Vol. 81, #6, pp. 16-20)

“Making explicit what has been an implicit aspect of your working relationship with your boss can create clarity and trust.”

Jeffrey Benson (see item #4)

“Becoming emotionally healthy and emotionally intelligent is hard work. That’s a hard sell in a culture that, over the past 30 years, has promoted the idea that you can gain mental health by taking a pill.”

Marc Brackett and Robin Stern (see item #5)

“When you are staring at a screen much of the day versus interacting with a live person, you miss out on important emotional currency.”

Marc Brackett and Robin Stern (*ibid.*)

“Our brains are wired to draw conclusions quickly. These judgments are not necessarily accurate but often feel as if they are, and they are responsible for many of our negative emotional states.”

Michael Wiederman (see item #8)

“We do not concede that teaching students to hold respectful discussions across disagreements is a lost cause.”

Paula McAvoy et al. (see item #3)

1. A Tribute to Harry Wong

On February 20th, renowned writer and speaker Harry Wong died at 92. Here are some quotes from his book *The First Days of School* (with his wife Rosemary Wong) and other writings:

- School is a concept wherein students are welcome to learn and enhance the quality of their lives without fear of intimidation or harm, guided by hospitable and caring people in a clean and orderly environment.
- The most important day of a person's education is the first day of school, not graduation day.
- Greet your students at the door. What you do the instant the student enters the classroom communicates immediately if the student is welcome there.
- It's very reassuring to your students that you know what you are doing.
- In an effective classroom students should not only know what they are doing, they should also know why and how.
- The number one problem in the classroom is not discipline; it is the lack of procedures and routines.
- A well-managed classroom is a task-oriented and predictable environment.
- The effective teachers spent time organizing and structuring their classrooms so the students knew what to do to succeed.
- Students like well-managed classes because no one yells at them and learning takes place.
- Effective teachers spend the first two weeks teaching students to be in control of their own actions in a consistent classroom environment.
- The three steps to teaching classroom procedures are (1) explain, model, or demonstrate the procedure; (2) rehearse and practice the procedure with your class; and (3) reinforce your students with praise and more practice until it becomes routine.
- Do *not* stop teaching to give out a consequence.
- Not all students complete their assignments, often because they either cannot understand the assignment or they fail to see the reason for doing it.
- One of the greatest gifts a caring teacher can contribute to children is to help them learn to sit when they feel like running, to raise their hand when they feel like talking, to be polite to their neighbor, to stand in line without pushing, and to do their homework when they feel like playing. By introducing procedures in the classroom, you are also introducing procedures as a way of living a happy and successful life.

[Back to page one](#)

2. I Just Taught That! Why Don't They Get It?

In this *Cult of Pedagogy* article, Alabama high-school teacher Blake Harvard describes the profoundly discouraging moment when a teacher has done what seemed like an excellent job explaining something and students, when asked a straightforward question, respond with a blank stare. “It can be momentarily debilitating,” he says. “Why don't they know this content? I just taught it to them. They should know this.” From hard experience, here are his explanations and suggested solutions:

- *Inadequate background knowledge* – Students are still novices with the new content that's being presented. They don't have the “velcro” to get a grip on it and they need to have the gaps filled. One way to do this before presenting new information is low-stakes pre-testing with a few questions or prompts that get students thinking about what they already know and prime their memories.

- *Limited working memory* – “When the novice student is required to ‘carry’ multiple bits or chunks of content in their working memory at any one moment,” says Harvard, “it can become very overwhelming and they may not even process any of the information.” The solution is breaking down the learning to smaller chunks – usually no more than four – for easier digestion.

- *The curse of knowledge* – This is when teachers assume students know the same information they know because it makes sense or it was discussed yesterday. The solution: turn the tables and think how you would feel if students were explaining something you just didn't understand – perhaps a new dance move or the meaning behind Taylor Swift's latest dis track about one of her ex-boyfriends. “That empathy,” says Harvard, “often helps me be much more understanding with my students, and I become more patient with reviewing material before moving on to newer content.”

- *Single-modality teaching* – Verbal explanations rarely suffice, especially when combined with overloading working memory. The solution is providing visuals – what psychologists call dual coding – in the form of a sketch, diagram, graphic organizer, or mind map – done by the teacher or by students. And don't get caught up in the “I'm not a good artist” trap, says Harvard. “The quality of the drawing or picture has nothing to do with its ability to help with processing... I've heard students say that they remembered a concept because their drawing was so bad.”

[“Why Students Give You the Blank Stare, and What to Do About It”](#) by Blake Harvard in *Cult of Pedagogy*, March 3, 2024

[Back to page one](#)

3. Can Secondary Students Have Civil Debates on Public Policy Issues?

In this article in *Social Education*, Paula McAvoy, Victoria Newton, Rachel Waltz, and Emily Grace (North Carolina State University), and Gregory McAvoy (University of North Carolina/Greensboro) report on their study of three approaches to getting middle- and high-

school students debating high-interest current controversies. Two were part of the annual Close Up program, which brings 20,000 secondary students to Washington, D.C. every year for a weeklong study of the federal government. The third was with Street Law, Inc., a non-profit that produces law and public policy classroom materials.

There are three reasons many middle- and high-school teachers are leery of having classroom discussions on hot topics:

- Discussions will get too heated, especially in these polarized times, and the class might get out of control.
- Only a handful of students actually want to discuss politics, and those students will dominate while others won't discuss and/or are passive onlookers.
- Like adults, students' opinions are entrenched and discussions won't change any minds or serve an educational purpose.

To the surprise of many participating teachers and students, each of the the discussion formats produced robust, civil discussions with high student engagement and significant learning.

Here's how the discussion formats work:

- *Structured Academic Controversy* (SAC) sets up two sides of an issue – for example, Should voting be compulsory in our country? Students are given materials that explain reasons for and against the question. Pairs of students are randomly assigned to one side of the issue and matched with a pair studying the opposite side. Using the texts, one pair presents the best reasons for its side while the other team takes notes. The other team then repeats this process. The pairs then reverse positions and present new reasons for each side. Finally, the two teams drop their roles and all four discuss possible consensus positions. The aim of the activity is collaboration – to become familiar with competing views about an issue and work together to become more informed.

- *“Close Up” Deliberation* is framed to invite a range of options on an issue – for example, What actions (if any) should the government take to address climate change? Students receive materials that explain the issue and multiple policy options. Students work in randomly assigned groups of 5-6, or in groups that include students who will likely disagree. Students share out at the start and again at the conclusion. The aim of the activity is consensus – developing a policy that each group can endorse.

- *Team Debate* is framed to set up two sides (pro/con) of an issue – for example, Should our state's minimum wage be raised to \$15 per hour? Students receive materials that explain the issue and contain reasons for and against. Students first divide into two like-minded teams to develop their best reasons and arguments. Then the two teams face off in a whole-class debate during which each student must stand and speak for 30 seconds. The aim of the activity is to be declared the winner by a panel of their peers.

The authors report on what they found in surveys and interviews at the Close Up and Street Law sites:

- On the concern that discussions would get out of hand, teachers and students reported that the structure and explicit norms maintained and reinforced civility. In both settings,

strong majorities of students said their views were respected and they liked the structure.

- The structure and rules included in these formats got all students participating. One teacher said that assuming most students wouldn't participate underestimated them.
- The team debate, in which every student was required to stand and speak for 30 seconds, involved some "productive anxiety," but the result was high engagement and students said they enjoyed it.
- The SAC format "created an atmosphere of collectively doing something hard," say the authors. When the debates were over, groups applauded each other, gave hugs, and debriefed challenging moments.
- Survey responses revealed that many students hadn't taken part in classroom discussions in the past and felt good about doing so now.
- On the question of entrenched views, surveys and interviews revealed that most students were political novices whose views were still taking shape; they were eager and curious to hear and discuss different viewpoints, and some modified their views.

"We are living in an era in which the ideological middle has disappeared from politics," conclude the authors, "and our own representatives seem to be abandoning norms of civility. But we do not concede that teaching students to hold respectful discussions across disagreements is a lost cause. Through researching structured methods of political discussions such as SACs, Close-Up deliberations, and debates, we have seen that teachers and students alike are able to participate in these discussions with interest, respect, and even curiosity about diverse perspectives."

["Discussing Politics in Polarized Times: How Structure Can Help"](#) by Paula McAvoy, Gregory McAvoy, Victoria Newton, Rachel Waltz, and Emily Grace in *Social Education*, January/February 2024 (Vol. 88, #1, pp. 24-29); Paula McAvoy can be reached at pmcavoy@ncsu.edu, Gregory McAvoy at gmcavoy@uncg.edu.

[Back to page one](#)

4. Sharing Our Emotional Preferences with Colleagues and Students

(Originally titled "The Emotionally Intelligent School System")

In this *Educational Leadership* article, veteran educator Jeffrey Benson lists some emotional intelligence skills for working successfully in schools:

- Identifying our own strengths and needs;
- Recognizing colleagues' verbal and non-verbal communication styles;
- Showing that we understand others' perspectives;
- Expressing our feelings directly and respectfully;
- Predicting and evaluating outcomes of our actions.

Benson remembers that as a principal, he complained a lot about his boss, and was grateful when a mentor was blunt and specific helping him fix his own part of the problem. This sensitized him to the importance of scoping out a superior's standard operating procedure:

- What does my boss most want and need from me in my current role?

- What does respect for their position and authority look and sound like?
- What are their non-negotiables? Current priorities? Urgent items?
- Their decision-making style? Are they big-picture or detail-oriented?
- Open door for dropping in?
- Prefers to hear a concern early, or only along with a solution?
- Preferred way of following up? Reaction to being prompted about follow-up?
- How can my boss best hear critical feedback?
- Preferred way of being contacted with non-critical information: e-mail, a note, hallway conversation, phone call, voice message, making an appointment?
- How does my boss identify in terms of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, etc., and in what ways does that matter in our work together?

“I suggest sharing your answers to these questions with a trusted peer who has the same supervisor,” says Benson. “You may find areas of absolute agreement, and together develop strategies to effectively get what you need from your supervisor...” Benson also suggests asking the boss about preferences on some of these items to see if you’ve judged them correctly. “Making explicit what has been an implicit aspect of your working relationship with your boss can create clarity and trust.”

As a principal, Benson realized that he needed to make his own standard operating procedures and preferences explicit to his colleagues. He tried to keep the list short:

- I like to start and end meetings on time, and when we take a two-minute break, I mean 120 seconds (unless there’s a strong preference otherwise).
- I won’t remember everything mentioned in hallway conversations, so please follow up with a note or e-mail.
- During the day, I take 15-minute breaks from meetings and communication to focus deeply on a task or simply rest my mind. When I have my “Break” sign on my door, please knock only for an emergency.

There were other items, including his non-negotiables. “The most important goal, however,” says Benson, “more than any one element of my SOP, was to be sensitive to how my style – my hierarchical power – could impede or benefit the functioning of the school. We could all exercise our emotional intelligence for the greater good.”

He believes teachers should also communicate their SOPs to students, in developmentally appropriate ways, for example:

- The ways students can help each other without needing permission;
- How to let the teacher know they’re going too fast, inadvertently hurt a student’s feelings, assigned too much homework;
- Boundaries for joking and teasing among students.

“Being explicit about your SOP can be one of the most enduring lessons in emotional intelligence students will experience,” says Benson: “You model self-awareness, integrate your SOP into your daily behaviors, and explicitly help your students learn to work better with adults.”

[Back to page one](#)

5. Building Emotional Intelligence

In this *Psychology Today* article, Marc Brackett and Robin Stern (Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence) say the concept of emotional intelligence is quite recent. They trace it to a 1990 article by Peter Salovey and John Mayer arguing that feelings can be harnessed to improve one’s life. Five years later, Daniel Goleman popularized the idea in his book *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. This line of thinking shifted the long-standing Freudian belief that emotions are a cauldron in our unconscious over which we have little control.

Now “emotions have a seat at the table,” say Brackett and Stern. “Parents want their children to have emotional intelligence, and the new field of social and emotional learning is helping teachers bring it into classrooms.” Adults see its importance in relationships and choosing a partner, and leaders recognize its role in decision-making, teamwork, and productivity. Recent research shows a correlation of emotional intelligence with personal health, happiness, and effectiveness.

Despite this growing awareness of the centrality and malleability of emotions in daily life, mental health in the U.S. has been declining in recent decades, especially among young people – a trend that emerged before the pandemic. Brackett and Stern believe there are several reasons:

- The world is “exponentially more complicated today than even 30 years ago,” they say. “There are more reasons for kids and adults to be anxious and overwhelmed” – climate change, school shootings, political polarization, and more.

- Digital technology is definitely part of the problem, they believe: “When you are staring at a screen much of the day versus interacting with a live person, you miss out on important emotional currency.”

- Social media platforms build their algorithms to keep people “in a state of emotional upheaval,” say the authors. “Research has shown a correlation between anxiety and time spent on social media.”

- “Becoming emotionally healthy and emotionally intelligent is hard work,” say Brackett and Stern. “That’s a hard sell in a culture that, over the past 30 years, has promoted the idea that you can gain mental health by taking a pill... You can’t hold a one-hour workshop or put kids in a circle to talk about their feelings and call it EI. Emotional intelligence consists of a set of skills that advance developmentally, as people do, and their teaching has to be aligned with social and cognitive development. Just being aware of emotions is not enough. And you can’t teach EI to children unless you teach adults first; parents have to live it at home, teachers have to model it in school.”

Brackett and Stern say the first step to building emotional intelligence is naming our feelings. “The more readily a person can recognize and label their emotional responses to life’s

roller coaster,” they say, “the better able they are to address those feelings while experiencing them, so as not to be overwhelmed by them... All emotions are data and information. There are skills that can help people use them wisely, but every one of them has to be learned.”

“A Brief History of Emotional Intelligence” by Marc Brackett and Robin Stern in *Psychology Today*, March/April 2024 (Vol. 57, #2, pp. 26-27); Brackett can be reached at marc.brackett@yale.edu.

[*Back to page one*](#)

6. An Acronym for Emotional Intelligence

(Originally titled “Giving Educators Permission to Feel”)

In this article in *Educational Leadership*, Marc Brackett (Yale University) says it’s helpful when educators can tune in to strong emotions. He and his colleagues at the Center for Emotional Intelligence developed the RULER acronym for unpacking EI:

- Recognizing emotions in your own thoughts and physiology, and recognizing others’ emotions through facial expressions, body language, voice tone, and behavior;
- Understanding the causes and consequences of our emotions;
- Labeling emotions with precise feeling words; “When we label emotions precisely,” says Brackett, “things go better.”
- Expressing emotions according to social norms and cultural contexts;
- Regulating emotions with helpful strategies.

“Most of us didn’t have a formal education in emotional intelligence,” says Brackett. “But good news: these skills can be acquired at any age. Educators from all backgrounds find them accessible – and sometimes life-changing. These are real *life* skills, not ‘soft skills.’”

[“Giving Educators Permission to Feel”](#) by Marc Brackett in *Educational Leadership*, March 2024 (Vol. 81, #6, pp. 34-39); Brackett can be reached at marc.brackett@yale.edu.

[*Back to page one*](#)

7. Why Unpacking Emotions Is Helpful

In this article in *Psychology Today*, psychotherapist/educator Katrina McCoy says that “finding more precise labels for our emotions can help us feel better – both in the moment and over the long term.” Psychologists call this *emotional granularity*, and studies show it can play an important role in well-being. For example, more precisely defining a general sense of feeling *angry* in a conflict with a friend – is it *disappointment*, *shame*, *sadness*? – is helpful in dealing with the situation. A 2015 study showed that people who named their emotions more specifically had less-severe episodes of anxiety and depression.

What’s the mechanism? “The more accurately we can describe our emotional experience and the context in which the experience is happening,” says McCoy, “the more information we have to decide what will help.” The same bodily signals – flushed face, rapid heartrate, sweaty palms – can mean different things depending on the context. Being hungry

can make us more susceptible to anger. Differentiating between mild annoyance and outrage can help us decide on the best course of action – letting it go versus advocating for change.

How can we develop emotional granularity? McCoy suggests expanding our vocabulary for common emotions and thus tuning in on the deeper meaning of an emotion – for example:

- *Anger* – rage, indignation, vengefulness, wrath?
- *Sadness* – despair, disappointment, sorrow, grief?
- *Happiness* – joy, contentment, pleasure, exhilaration?
- *Fear* – anxiety, dread, terror, apprehension?

“Perhaps when you next notice that nagging, nameless emotion,” says McCoy, “you will skim this list of emotion words to find the ones that resonate.”

“Why You Should Expand Your Emotional Vocabulary” by Katrina McCoy in *Psychology Today*, March/April 2024 (Vol. 57, #2, pp. 27-29)

[Back to page one](#)

8. Four Ways to Tap the Brakes When Emotions Are Getting Us in Trouble

In this *Psychology Today* article, clinical psychologist Michael Wiederman says that being aware of one’s emotions is the first step in emotional intelligence. He suggests four ways to build self-management skills on that foundation when emotions are running high:

- *Pause to mentally distance.* Consciously engage your cerebral cortex to prevent your limbic system from running the show. You might ask yourself a question, imagine what you might look like to others, or picture stepping out of the physical space associated with this particular emotion.

- *Take control of your self-talk.* “We’re frequently unaware of how much chatter goes on in the background of our minds,” says Wiederman, “...flashes of thought about what’s happening, what should be, or how right we are and how wrong someone else is.” Tuning in on this self-talk and pushing back is an important skill, because otherwise it will drive an unhelpful emotional response.

- *Enlist partners.* A critical friend can help when emotions are getting the best of us, perhaps through an agreed-upon signal. It can be irritating to be called out when we’re keyed up, says Wiederman, but “instead of responding defensively, focus on the fact that this person is offering a gift – one that you asked for! – and is taking a risk. Respond with grace and gratitude.”

- *Cultivate curiosity.* “Our brains are wired to draw conclusions quickly,” says Wiederman. “These judgments are not necessarily accurate but often feel as if they are, and they are responsible for many of our negative emotional states.” Making an effort to be curious about what’s motivating others is a good strategy, and also makes us more empathetic in fraught situations.

“A common thread across these strategies,” concludes Wiederman, “is the ability to recognize an emotional storm and decide to shift to conscious intentionality rather than

reactions. Like any skill, it requires practice, and there will be lapses along the way. However, the benefits, both professional and personal, can be immense.”

“You’ve Named Your Emotions – What Now?” by Michael Wiederman in *Psychology Today*, March/April 2024 (Vol. 57, #2, pp. 30, 44)

[Back to page one](#)

9. What Emotional Intelligence Is – and Isn’t

In this *Psychology Today* article, Peter Salovey, currently president of Yale University, describes his work as a young psychologist mapping the new territory of emotional intelligence. He and John Mayer discerned four major clusters:

- Identifying one’s own emotions, and those of others, through verbal and nonverbal means;
- Understanding how emotional vocabulary gets used, how emotions transition over time, and what happens when emotions are aroused – for example, shame leading to anger, jealousy embedding envy;
- Managing emotions, one’s own and those of others;
- Using emotions to solve problems or make decisions.

Once emotional intelligence was described, psychologists saw that it was more than a personality trait and was distinct from intelligence as measured by IQ tests. Over the last 20 years, it’s become clear that high emotional intelligence predicts positive outcomes in school, with friendships, at work, contributing creatively to a team, being less aggressive, abusing substances less frequently, even relating well to a stranger.

“There has been a lot of playing with the construct of emotional intelligence,” says Salovey, “– for example, regarding the features as traits. But that does not yield any unique information. I think it’s best to stick to a definition of EI based on skills and abilities.”

“Emotional Intelligence Is a Skill Set” by Peter Salovey in *Psychology Today*, March/April 2024 (Vol. 57, #2, p. 30)

[Back to page one](#)

10. Manga Books for Younger Students

“Manga has never been more popular,” says Brigid Alverson in this *School Library Journal* article, “and the variety never greater.” But most English-language manga books are for teens and adults. Only recently have publishers catered to elementary and middle-school students. Alverson recommends these titles for grades 1-8:

- *Disney Manga: Stitch* by Yumi Tsukurino, grade 1 and up
- *Chi’s Sweet Home* by Konami Kanata, grade 2-6
- *Miraculous: Tales of Ladybug & Cat Noir* by Koma Warita, illustrated by Riku Tsuchida, grade 3 and up
- *Lovely Muco!* by Takayuki Mizushina, grade 5 and up

- *Alice in Kyoto Forest* by Mai Mochizuki, illustrated by Haruki Niwa, grade 5-8
- *Yokai Cats* by Pandania, grade 5 and up
- *Alpi the Soul Sender* by Rona, grade 5 and up
- *Dragon Quest: The Adventure of Dai* by Riku Sanjo, illustrated by Koji Inada, grade 5 and up
- *Dragon Quest Monsters+* by Mine Yoshizaki, grade 5 and up

“Manga Sweet Spot” by Brigid Alverson in *School Library Journal*, February 2024 (Vol. 70, #2, pp. 24-28)

[Back to page one](#)

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About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo is designed to keep principals, teachers, superintendents, and other educators very well-informed on current research and effective practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 54 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, writer, and consultant lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

To produce the Marshall Memo, Kim subscribes to 60 carefully-chosen publications (see list to the right), sifts through more than a hundred articles each week, and selects 5-10 that have the greatest potential to improve teaching, leadership, and learning. He then writes a brief summary of each article, pulls out several striking quotes, provides e-links to full articles when available, and e-mails the Memo to subscribers every Monday evening (with occasional breaks; there are 50 issues a year). Every week there's a podcast and HTML version as well.

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Core list of publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

All Things PLC
American Educational Research Journal
American Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
AMLE Magazine
ASCA School Counselor
ASCD SmartBrief
Cult of Pedagogy
District Management Journal
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Week
Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis
Educational Horizons
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
English Journal
Exceptional Children
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Ed (formerly Ed. Magazine)
Harvard Educational Review
Independent School
Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy
Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk (JESPAR)
Kappa Delta Pi Record
Kappan (Phi Delta Kappan)
Knowledge Quest
Language Arts
Learning for Justice (formerly Teaching Tolerance)
Literacy Today (formerly Reading Today)
Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
Principal
Principal Leadership
Psychology Today
Reading Research Quarterly
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
School Administrator
School Library Journal
Social Education
Social Studies and the Young Learner
Teachers College Record
Teaching Exceptional Children
The Atlantic
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The Journal of the Learning Sciences
The Language Educator
The Learning Professional (formerly Journal of Staff Development)
The New York Times
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Time
Urban Education