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Developmental and gender trends in emotional literacy and interpersonal competence among Japanese children.

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This study explored cross-sectional gender and grade level trends in emotional literacy and interpersonal competence among 913 elementary and middle school students in Japan. Students were presented with two hypothetical scenarios involving mixed emotions and potential interpersonal dilemmas. Results indicated that older children possess greater emotional literacy when compared to younger children. Additionally, girls identified a greater number of emotions, were better able to identify mixed emotions, and were more likely to identify empathic interpersonal behaviours. These gender and grade level considerations may be incorporated into social-emotional learning curricula to enhance the utility and effectiveness of programs for diverse populations.

Keywords: social and emotional learning; social-emotional development; gender differences, emotional literacy, interpersonal competence

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Introduction

The use of school-wide preventive approaches to facilitate prosocial behaviors, teach social-emotional competence, manage problem behaviors, and establish a positive school climate has been gaining increasing popularity in schools. In particular, social and emotional learning (SEL) has emerged as an approach to foster positive school-based outcomes by improving students' social and emotional competencies and is implemented in many schools around the USA and other countries across the world (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2005). Research suggests that social and emotional learning is related to various positive youth outcomes (eg. Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Izard and colleagues (2001) found that 5-year-old children's ability to recognize and interpret facial

expressions and emotional cues predicted social behaviors and academic competence at 9-years-old. Similarly, trait emotional intelligence (i.e., emotion-related self-perceptions and dispositions) was positively related to adaptive coping skills and negatively related to frequency of somatic complaints and depressive thoughts among adolescents (Mavroveli, Petrides, Rieffe, & Bakker, 2007). Schools are thus becoming increasingly interested in employing SEL as a way to promote emotional literacy and reduce problem behaviors.

From a cultural perspective, SEL programs focus on Western societies' conceptions of appropriate emotional competencies and interpersonal skills (Saarni, 1997). Many SEL programs embrace competence-promotion approaches—teaching children the skills to identify, control, and channel their emotions in positive, healthy ways (Durlak et al., 2011; Hoffman, 2009). The SEL literature often recommends use of 'I' statements to express emotions and utilize conversational skills to understand other's feelings (Hoffman, 2009). However, cultural variations exist in the understanding, expression, and management of emotions and the assumptions promoted in the SEL literature may not fully reflect the cultural diversity of youth participating in SEL programs worldwide (Saarni, 1997). Cultural and social processes needs to be considered in the development and implementation of SEL programming (Bernal, Trimble, Burlew, & Leong, 2003; Sue & Zane, 1987). For example, patterns of interpersonal communication are largely determined by culture (Pumariega, Rogers, & Rothe, 2005). Cultures provide disproportionate 'primes' to emphasize the dominant social expectations and practices (Morling, Kitayama, & Miyamoto, 2002). These cultural affordances (i.e. practices and experiences that encourage culturally specific patterns of behavior) contribute to cultural and social differences in communication and interaction between individualistic and collectivist cultures (Kitayama, Mesquita, & Karasawa, 2006).

In Japan, cultural affordances in schools have historically reflected greater emphasis on promoting positive emotions, such as unity, happiness and enjoyment (Lewis, 1995); conflict resolution in Japanese classrooms for instance, tends to focus on interpersonal unity (Tsuneyoshi, 2001). Similarly, suppression of emotions is more accepted and considered an appropriate strategy for achieving social harmony in collectivist cultures (Trommsdorff & Rothbaum, 2008). However, when individuals are encouraged to suppress particular emotions, there is a greater likelihood of compromised social-emotional functioning (Chaplin & Cole, 2005), particularly when the suppressed emotions are negative (John & Gross, 2004). As a result, there is an increasing interest in Japan to teach students about the various aspects of emotions in SEL curricula, including the healthy expression of both positive and negative emotions (Harada & Watanabe, 2011).

While there is increasing evidence on the effectiveness of SEL programs in improving social and emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, and academic performance among students (Durlak et al., 2011; Harada & Watanabe, 2011), most of the research in the area has been conducted in the United States. A meta-analysis of 213 SEL programs found that 187 studies were conducted with young people in the U.S. compared to 27 studies conducted outside of the U.S. (Durlak et al., 2011). Empirical evidence that examines the developmental and gender trends of SEL among culturally and nationally diverse populations is still limited, and there is a need for more research to critically evaluate how SEL develops in different cultures and contexts so as to better inform the implementation of SEL programs around the world. The purpose of this

research is to explore SEL among children and adolescents in Japan, with a particular focus on emotional literacy and interpersonal competence.

Existing literature suggests there may be gender and age effects on the development of emotional literacy and expression among young people. Cognitive complexity, executive functioning, and emotional understanding become increasingly sophisticated throughout development (Thompson, 2011). For example, children as young as 5 years old begin to understand and identify the emotions of others (Wintre & Vallance, 1994); as they grow older, they come to believe that people can experience mixed emotions (Pons, Harris, & de Rosnay, 2004; Wintre & Vallance, 1994). Similarly, Naka (2010) found that older children had a greater variety of ways to express their feelings compared to younger children. These age-related trends have also been confirmed in cross-cultural research (Koike, 1997; Tsukamoto, 1997). However, research suggests that the extent of gender differences in emotionality among children is subtle (Brody, 1997). A meta-analytic review of gender differences in emotion expression revealed there are significant but small gender differences, with girls showing more positive emotions and internalizing emotions than boys, compared to boys who tend to show more externalizing emotions (Chaplin & Aldao, 2013). In particular, girls are more emotionally expressive (Casey, 1993), tend to smile more than adolescent boys (LaFrance, Hecht, & Levy Paluck, 2003), and are also more likely to verbally communicate their emotions (Zeman & Shipman, 1996).

There is currently limited research on how children's emotional literacy and interpersonal competence develop and change, particularly among Japanese youth. The purpose of this study was to explore grade level and gender differences in emotional literacy and its relations to interpersonal social skills amongst Japanese children and young people.

Method

Participants. The sample consisted of 913 first through ninth grade students attending elementary and secondary schools in three urban cities in Japan. From first through ninth grade, there were 76, 78, 86, 84, 84, 79, 134, 138, and 152 children, respectively. The sample was comprised of 52% male participants.

Measures. A questionnaire utilizing hypothetical scenarios with open-ended questions was administered to assess children's abilities to identify emotions, explain the rationale for those emotions, and identify methods of expressing those emotions. Male students were given scenarios that presented male characters, while female students were given scenarios that presented female characters. Two scenarios were presented in which characters faced potential interpersonal dilemmas. These scenarios were developed specifically to include interpersonal conflicts that Japanese children might encounter in their daily lives. In particular, the interpersonal conflict for both scenarios stem from the mismatch between effort and outcome, reflecting the high value Japanese society places on effort and achievement. Story 1 depicted a character that studied hard for a test but scored lower than a friend who did not study at all. Story 2 depicted a character that did not practice at all for an upcoming track race but placed first, whereas his/her friend practiced extensively but finished in sixth place. Participants were asked to list the emotions that the main characters may have experienced, explain why the characters may have felt that way, and describe how the characters may have approached their friends and talked to them about the situation.

The questionnaire was administered class-wide in schools during one 30-minute session. Trained graduate research assistants led each session. Before students were allowed to begin, each student received a copy of the questionnaire and instructions were read aloud. The students completed the questionnaire independently and were not allowed to discuss the scenarios with each other. No information was collected that could be used to identify individual children.

Data Analysis Plan. The survey consisted of open-ended questions yielding qualitative responses. The third author first coded the qualitative responses according to Naka's (2010) categorization system (described in results section). Two graduate research assistants then independently coded the responses. The rate of agreement between the three independent coders was over 80%. The coders then discussed discrepancies and made corresponding modifications to coding to create a final dataset. Once the qualitative data were coded, data were screened for missing data, outliers, and to ensure that all assumptions associated with the analyses were met using IBM SPSS Statistics 20.0 (IBM Corp., 2011). For the analyses conducted in this study, list-wise deletion was used for any missing data still remaining. This resulted in a smaller sample size for the Story 2 Question 2 analyses (n = 718). Once data were screened and it was determined that data were adequate for the proposed analyses, a series of two-way ANOVA and Pearson's chi-square test analyses were conducted.

Results

Emotional Literacy

Grade level differences in emotional literacy were examined using an open-ended question format. Students' responses were divided into three categories utilizing Naka's (2010) categorization system: internal emotions, behavioral/external emotions, and interjections (Table I). Internal emotions were further categorized as positive, negative, or neutral (Table I; Watanabe, 1958).

Story 1. A two-way ANOVA was conducted to examine the effect of gender and grade level on number of emotions identified. The interaction was nonsignificant ($F(8, 882) = 1.05$, $p=.40$); however there were significant main effects by gender and grade level ($F(1, 882) = 4.55$, $p<.05$; $F(8, 882) = 6.33$, $p<.05$, respectively). The adjusted R^2 was .048. Girls identified a greater number of emotions overall compared to boys (M=2.83; 2.66, respectively). When emotions were broken down by category, results revealed boys identified more emotional interjections than girls (M=.07; .03, respectively), using terms such as "yay!" and "boo" to express their emotions (Figure 1). In contrast, girls identified more internal emotions (M=1.90; 1.82, respectively) and external/behavioral emotions (M=.92; .80, respectively). Examples of verbatim responses for internal emotions and external/behavioral emotions include: "mad," "disgusted," "proud of my friend," "why was my score low?" and "next time I will do my best."

Table I. Classification of Emotions

Type of Emotion	Definition		Examples
Internal	Internal state and evaluation	Negative	Sad, mad, disappointed, disgusted, worried, irritated, inferior, guilty
		Positive	Happy, delighted, proud, lucky, amazing, thankful, sweet, admirable
		Neutral	Impossible, no idea, mysterious, strange, unexpected, complicated
External/Behavioral	Behaviors; expectations; desires; questions; obligations		Next time I will do my best. Why was my score low? I should study harder.
Interjection	A brief and simple expression or verbalizations		I did it! Lucky! Yay!

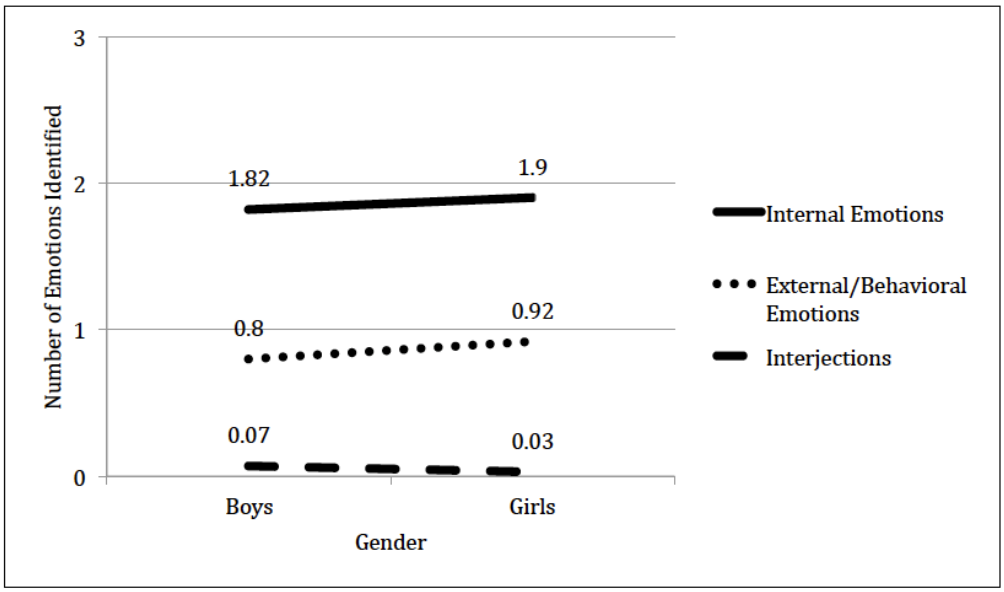

Figure 1.Mean number of emotions identified by gender (Story 1)

Students in the upper grades identified more emotions than those in the lower grades. Figure 2 shows grade level fluctuations in internal and external emotions, whereas the number of emotional interjections identified was low across grade levels. In particular, older students identified a greater number of internal negative emotions (e.g. “disappointed,” “disgusted”) compared to younger ones.

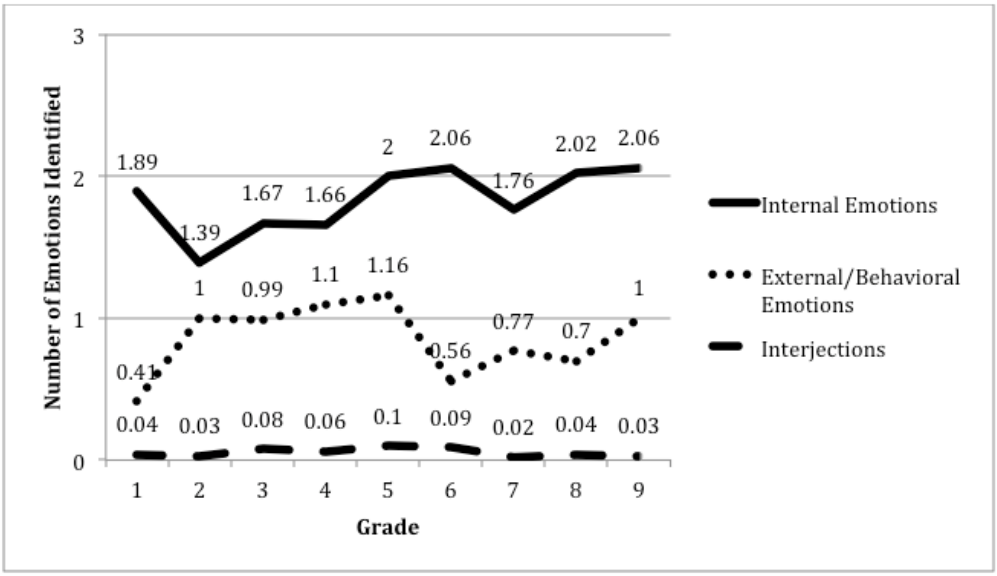

Figure 2. Mean number of emotions identified by grade (Story 1)

*Story 2***.** A two-way ANOVA was conducted to examine the effect of gender and grade level on number of emotions identified. The interaction was nonsignificant ($F(8, 699) = .551$, $p=.82$); however there were significant main effects by gender and grade level ($F(1, 699) = 7.26$, $p<.05$; $F(8, 699) = 4.72$, $p<.05$, respectively). The adjusted R^2 was .045. Girls identified a greater number of emotions overall compared to boys (M=2.68; 2.47, respectively). When the emotions were broken down by category, results revealed boys identified more emotional interjections than girls (M=.44; .37, respectively) (Figure 3). Girls identified more internal (M=1.59; 1.44, respectively) and external/behavioral emotions (M=.72; .57, respectively) than boys. Verbatim responses include “guilty,” “worried,” and “mysterious”.

Students in the upper elementary grades (grades 3-5) identified more emotions overall than those in the lower elementary (grades 1-2) and middle school grades (grades 7-9). Across grade levels, students identified more positive emotions than any other emotion type, with upper grades identifying a greater number of internal positive emotions (Figure 4). Students in the upper grades also identified greater numbers of internal negative emotions. Furthermore, middle school students identified fewer interjections compared to elementary school ones.

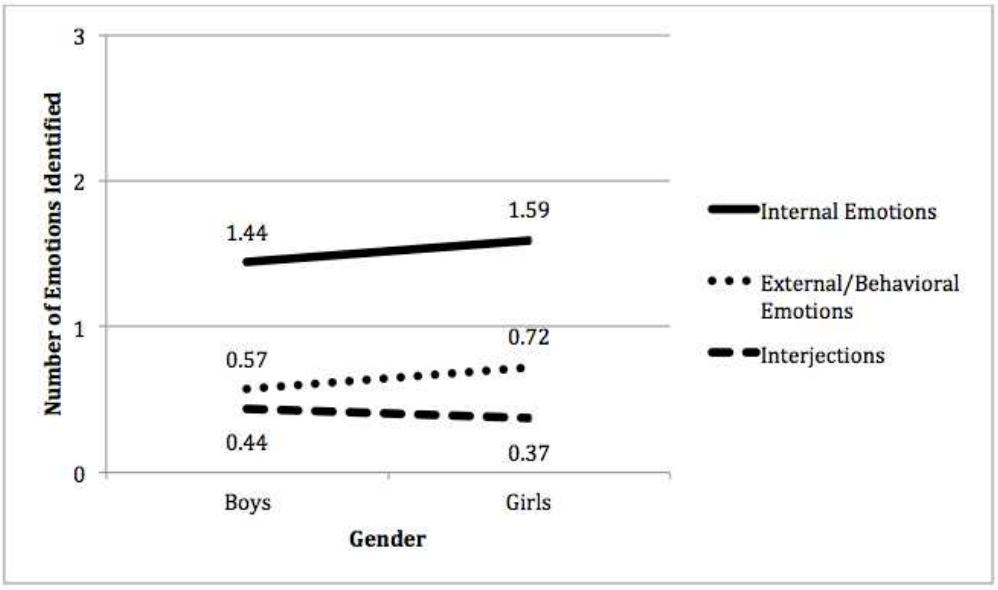

Figure 3. Mean number of emotions identified by gender (Story 2)

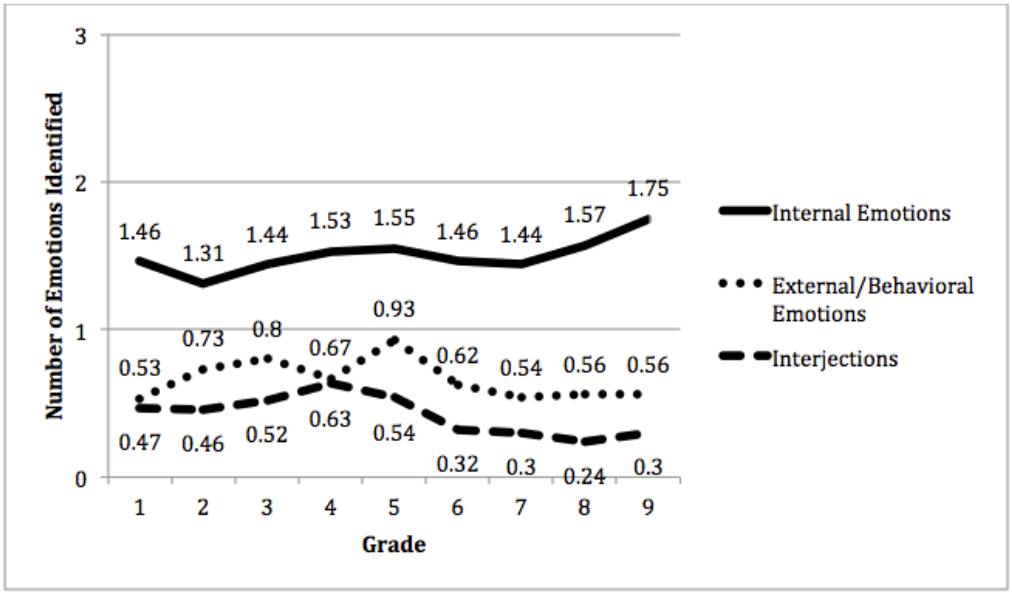

Figure 4. Mean number of emotions identified by grade (Story 2)

Understanding of Mixed Emotions

Stories 1 and 2 both presented a situation that involved unexpected outcomes.Students who study hard or prepare very well for an upcoming event or exam are generally expected to perform better than those who do not. However, in both of the stories, the character that did not prepare or study outperformed the character that did. These scenarios were intended to elicit mixed emotions. In Story 1, the main character may feel frustrated that he/she did not perform well but feel happy for his/her friend who did. In Story 2, the main

character may feel happy that he/she placed first in the race but experience guilt that his/her friend practiced extensively but placed sixth in the race. To examine whether students could identify these unexpected outcomes and realize that the main character could experience mixed emotions, they were asked *why* the characters felt the way they did.

*Story 1***.** The reasons students identified were coded in one of the following four categories: (i) mixed emotions positive, (ii) mixed emotions negative, (iii) no identification of unexpected outcome or mixed emotions, (iv) misinterpretation of question, other, or no response (Table II).

Table II. Classification of mixed emotions

Category	Perspective	Sample Responses	Samples responses
		Story 1	Story 2
Expresses confusion about the unexpected outcome	Positive	I studied hard for the test but I didn't get a good score. Next time I'll study harder.	I'm happy I won the race even though I didn't practice.
	Negative	I studied hard for the test but I didn't get a good score. It's not fair.	I feel bad that I won because I didn't even practice.
Does not express confusion about unexpected outcome		I earned a low score. I'll try harder next time.	I'm happy I won the race. I'm happy I could run the race with my friend.
Misinterpretation (i.e., responses that do not address the question or clearly misinterpreted the story) or other (i.e., responses that do not fit the above categories)		What a surprise. That test was hard.	I must have been lucky this time. It was a fun race.

Pearson's chi-square tests revealed significant differences between mixed emotions by gender [$\chi^2(3, N=867) = 13.62$, $p<.01$; Cramer's V = .125] and grade [χ^2 (24, N=869) = 90.24, $p<.01$, Cramer's V = .186]. Overall, students identified far more negative mixed emotions than positive mixed emotions. Girls identified more positive mixed emotions (e.g., "I studied hard for the test but I didn't get a good score. Next time I'll study harder"), whereas boys were more likely to identify no mixed emotions or misinterpretations, other, or no responses (e.g., "I earned a low score," "that test was hard!"; Figure 5). There were no significant differences by gender on identification of negative mixed emotions (e.g., "I studied hard for the test but I didn't get a good score. That's not fair"). Students in the lower elementary grades (grades 1-3) were more

likely to identify no mixed emotions and misinterpretations, other, or no response, whereas middle school students (grades 7-9) were more likely to identify positive and negative mixed emotions (Figure 6).

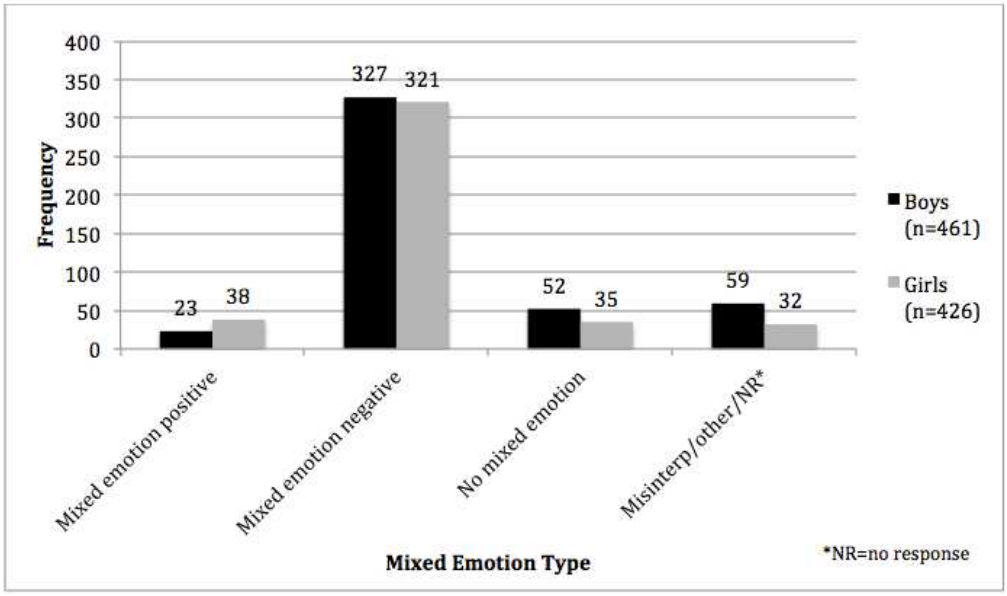

Figure 5. Frequencies of mixed emotions by gender (Story 1)

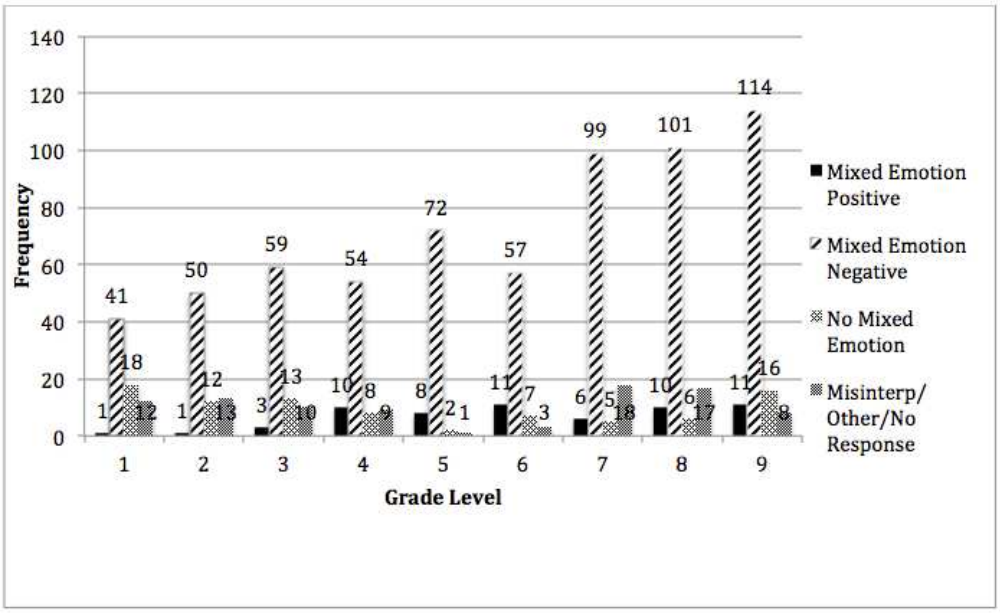

Figure 6. Frequencies of mixed emotions by gender (Story 1)

Story 2. Pearson's chi-square tests revealed significant differences between mixed emotions by gender [$\chi^2(3, N=421) = 9.71$, $p<.05$; Cramer's V = .155] and grade [$\chi^2(15, N=421) = 37.96$, $p<.05$; Cramer's V = .187]. In contrast to Story 1, students identified more positive mixed emotions (e.g. "I'm happy I won the

race even though I didn't practice") than negative mixed emotions (e.g., "I feel bad that I won because I didn't even practice"). Girls identified more mixed emotions, whereas boys identified more misinterpretations, other, or no responses (e.g. "I'm happy I could run the race with my friend"; Figure 7). Students in the upper elementary grades (grades 4-6) identified more positive and negative mixed emotions, whereas those in the lower elementary grades (grades 1-3) were more likely to report misinterpretations, other, or no responses (Figure 8) (Data was not available for Grades 7 through 9 for this survey item).

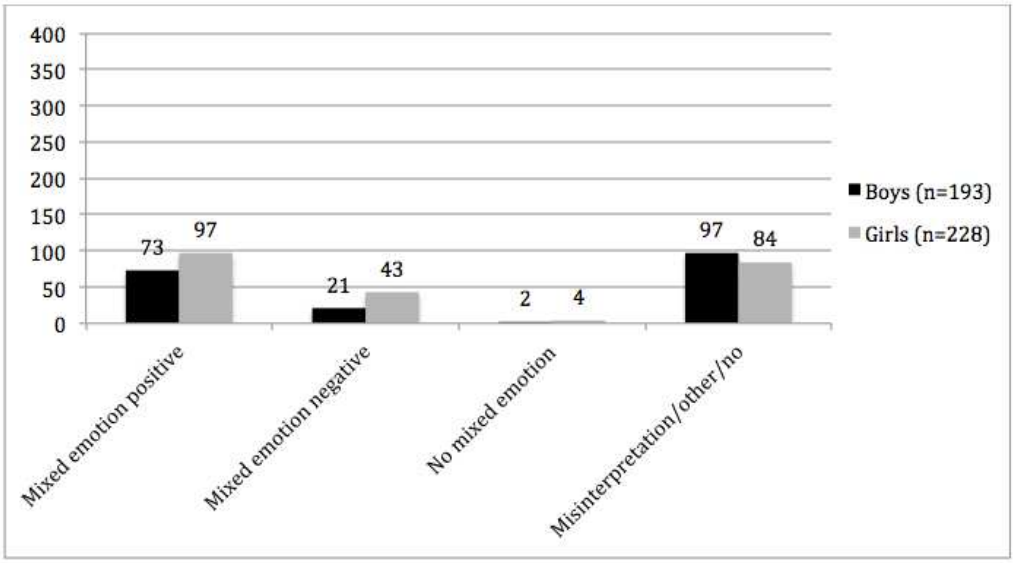

Figure 7. Frequencies of mixed emotions by gender (Story 2)

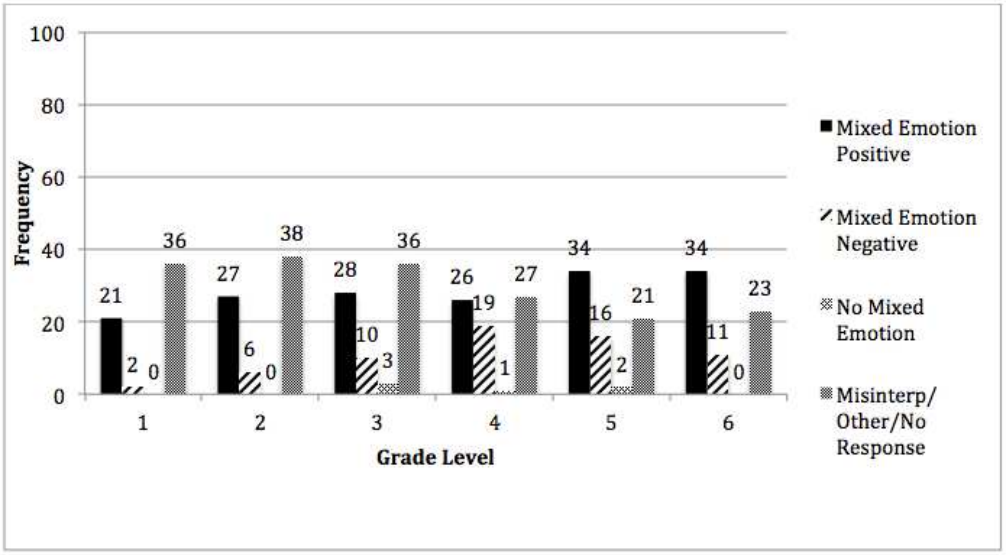

Figure 8. Frequencies of mixed emotions by grade (Story 2)

Interpersonal competence

Interpersonal competence was measured by an open-ended question asking children to indicate how the characters might have approached and talked to their friend about the hypothetical situation.

*Story 1***.** Children's responses were coded into the following categories: (i) empathic, (ii) questioning, (iii) self-talk, (iv) aggressive, and (v) avoidant, other, or no response (Table III). Pearson's chi-square tests revealed significant relations between the type of interpersonal competence by gender [$\chi^2(4, N=866) = 16.88$, $p<.01$; Cramer's V = .140] but not for grade [χ^2 (32, N=868) = 46.68, $p>.05$, *ns*]. The most commonly identified interpersonal competence was empathic, with 52% of boys and 63% of girls identifying this behaviour. Girls were more likely to identify the empathic skill, whereas boys were more likely to identify the questioning, self-talk, and aggressive behaviours (Figure 9).

Story 2. Pearson's chi-square tests revealed no significant relations between the type of interpersonal approach by gender [$\chi^2(4, N=369) = 10.63$, $p>.05$, *ns*] nor grade [χ^2 (20, N=369) = 54.42, $p>.05$, *ns*]. The majority of children identified the empathic interpersonal approach (77% of boys and 84% of girls; Figures 11 and 12).

Table III. Classification of interpersonal competence behaviours

Category	**Content**	
	Story 1	**Story 2**
Empathic	Praising friend's effort to maintain a good relationship	Speaking words of understanding because the friend made effort but did not get a good result
Questioning	Asking why the friend was able to get a high score	Asking why the friend did not get good results
Aggressive	Making hurtful statements to make the friend feel bad	Making hurtful statements to make the friend feel bad
Self- talk	Talking about their own grade and how they will try harder next time	N/A
Bragging	N/A	Boasting to friend that own result was better than their friend's
Avoidant	Avoiding talking about the test results	Avoiding talking about what happened to friend
Other	Responses that did not fit in any of the above categories	Responses that did not fit in any of the above categories

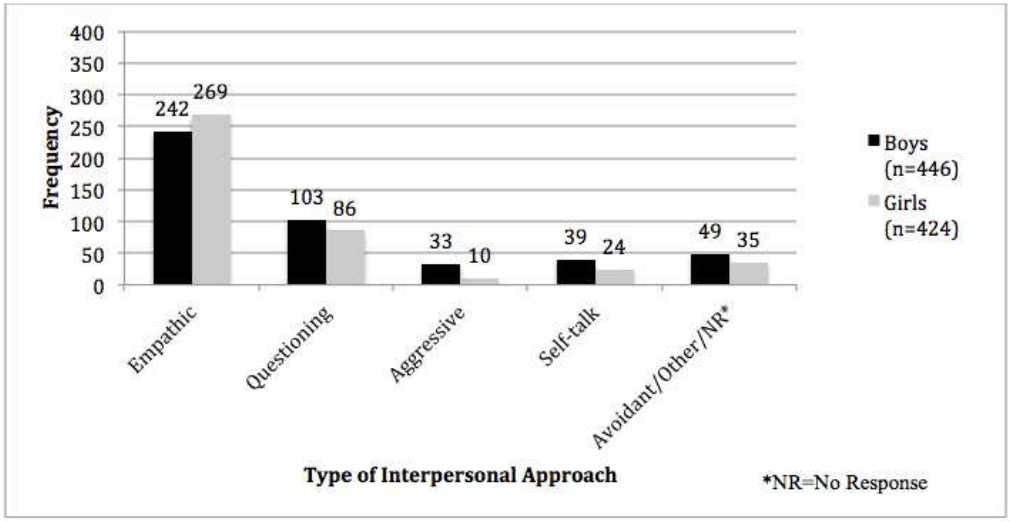

Figure 9. Frequency of interpersonal competence by gender (Story 1)

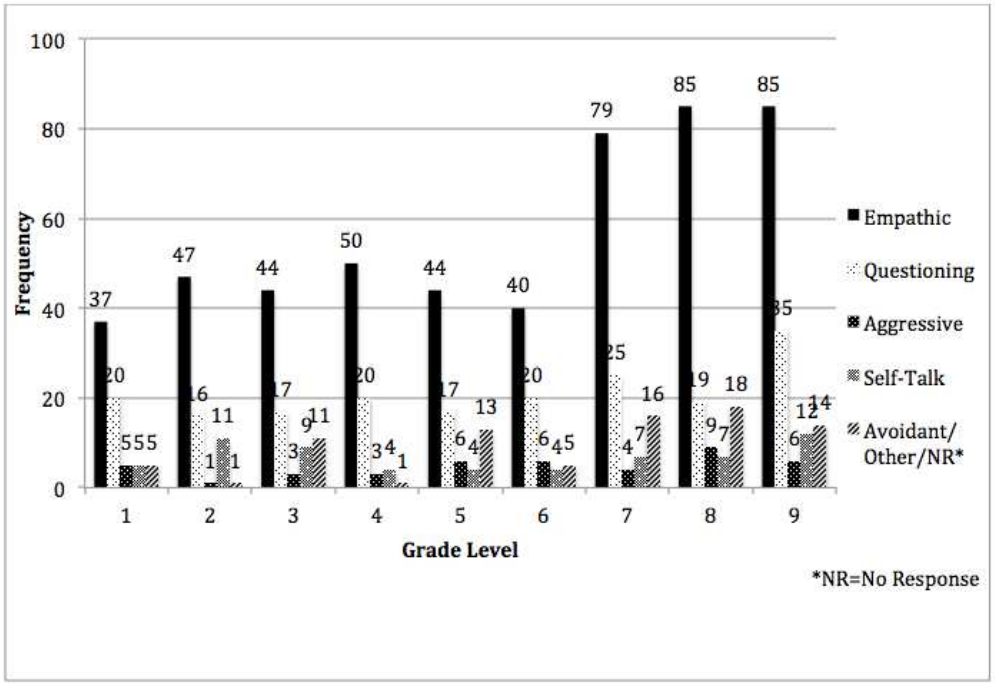

Figure 10. Frequency of interpersonal competence by grade (Story 1)

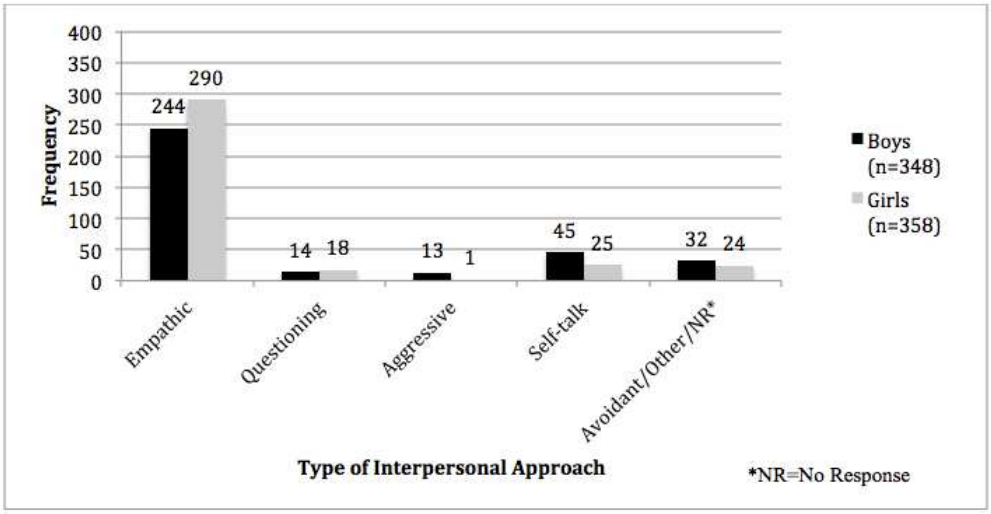

Figure 11. Frequency of interpersonal competence by gender (Story 2)

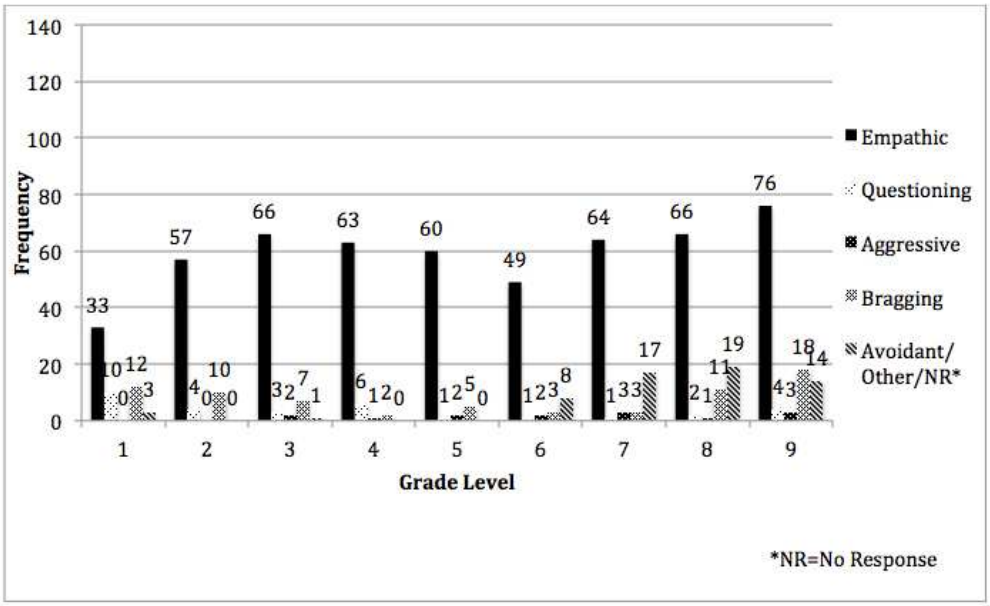

Figure 12. Frequency of interpersonal competence by grade (Story 2)

Emotional Literacy and Interpersonal Competence

To examine whether the ability to identify mixed emotions were related to interpersonal approach, a series of Pearson's chi-square tests were conducted. In Story 1, Pearson's chi-square tests revealed significant relations between mixed emotions and type of interpersonal approach [$\chi^2(12, N=868) = 48.70$, $p<.01$, Cramer's V = .137]. Students who identified positive mixed emotions were more likely to identify the empathic interpersonal behaviour. Students who identified negative mixed emotions were more likely to identify the questioning interpersonal behavior, while those who did not identify mixed emotions identified

self-talk more frequently. In *Story 2*, Pearson's chi-square tests revealed no significant relations between the identification of mixed emotions and type of interpersonal competence [$\chi^2(12, N=367) = 14.92$, $p>.05$, *ns*].

Discussion

Grade Level Trends in Emotional Literacy and Interpersonal Approach

Consistent with previous research (e.g. Denham, 2007; Pons, Harris, & de Rosnay, 2004), older students identified a greater number of emotions and were more likely to elaborate on the complexity of mixed emotions. From infancy through adolescence, cognitive complexity, executive functioning, and emotional understanding become increasingly sophisticated (Thompson, 2011), which may contribute to older children's ability to identify a greater number and variety of emotions. Although newborns and infants are capable of displaying rudimentary empathic responses, it is not until elementary-age that children begin to empathize with individuals even when the other person is not physically present (Hoffman, 2000).

Furthermore, across grade levels, students identified a greater number of internal emotions than external/behavioral emotions. This may be reflective of the relative importance of context and environment (i.e. cultural affordances) on emotion identification and expressivity. For example, certain characteristics of parenting and discipline approaches are correlated with preschool children's identification of internal emotions versus external/behavioral emotions (Zahn-Waxler, Friedman, Cole, Mizuta, & Hiruma, 1996). Specifically, Zahn-Waxler and colleagues' research found that parents from the United States were more likely to encourage emotional expressivity, which was correlated with aggression in children (i.e., external/behavioral emotion). Japanese children tended to exhibit more internal emotions, and Japanese parents tended to emphasize psychological discipline, such as guilt and anxiety induction. Furthermore, results from the current investigation may suggest that we underestimate Japanese children's ability to identify internal emotions such as happiness, anger and guilt, because they often do not express these emotions outwardly.

When presented with a scenario in which the main character studied hard but earned a lower score than his/her friend who did not study at all, students tended to report more negative emotions, such as remorse, jealousy, and frustration. Older children identified a greater number of negative emotions than younger ones. Furthermore, the rationale for their emotions tended to also be negative; younger children tended to not identify mixed emotions or misinterpreted the question. In contrast, when presented with a scenario in which the main character did not prepare at all but outperformed his/her friend who prepared extensively, students tended to report more positive emotions and their rationale for their emotions tended to also be positive. Elementary school students identified more external emotions and interjections, whereas middle school students identified more internal positive and negative emotions.

Older students are more likely to consider social rules and expectations when evaluating the correctness of one's behaviors, compared to younger students who are more likely to focus on whether the individual's behaviors led to a desired goal (Lagattuta, 2005). In this study, upper elementary students were better able to identify mixed emotions. In particular, they were more likely to express a mixture of happiness and guilt or confusion. These mixed emotions reflect the conflict that many older students identified as a

result of the expectation that effort should lead to success and those that do not put forth effort do not deserve to win over others who tried harder. These conflicts are particularly salient in Japanese culture where success is attributed primarily to effort rather than ability (Berns, 2013). Taken together, these results suggest that older students have greater emotional literacy, particularly in identifying both positive and negative emotions, as well as having greater ability to take into consideration their friends' feelings rather than focusing solely on their own emotions.

No significant differences by grade level were found for interpersonal competence. Though relatively few researchers have explored the normative development of social skills (Lamont & Van Horn, 2013), previous research suggests that social skills develop steadily during the elementary school years, with pronounced growth between first and second grade (Chan, Ramey, Ramey, & Schmitt, 2000). Similarly, Berry and O'Connor (2010) found that children demonstrate sharp increases in social skills between kindergarten and first grade and between third and fifth grade. These studies measured social skills as a unitary construct, whereas the current study examined specific interpersonal behaviours in response to interpersonal dilemmas. It is plausible that children's overall social skills develops throughout their elementary and middle school years, but their specific interpersonal responses to potentially conflict-provoking social situations develop prior to elementary-age.

Across grade levels, the majority of students identified the empathic interpersonal behavior, reflecting their desire to maintain a good relationship with their friend despite an unfortunate and frustrating outcome. In Japanese classrooms, conflict resolution tends to focus on interpersonal unity (Tsuneyoshi, 2001) and students are encouraged to focus on positive emotions. The study's results suggest that even among very young students in first and second grade, many were able to identify the empathic interpersonal behaviour, embracing the cultural expectations set forth by their learning environment.

Gender Trends in Emotional Literacy and Interpersonal Approach

Gender differences in emotional identification and expression have been reported in numerous studies (e.g. Else-Quest, Hyde, Goldsmith, & Van Hulle 2006; LaFrance et al., 2003). In the current study, girls identified more emotions (both internal and external), particularly negative, compared to boys. Furthermore, girls were more likely to identify mixed emotions, whereas boys tended to identify no mixed emotions or misinterpreted the question pertaining to mixed emotions. Girls were more expressive, using full sentences to describe the characters' feelings compared to boys, who tended to use more interjection statements without elaborating on the associated emotions.

When presented with a scenario in which the main character studied hard but did not achieve a positive outcome, girls were more likely to identify the empathic interpersonal behaviour, whereas boys frequently cited the questioning, self-talk, and aggressive behaviours. These results may reflect girls' tendencies to consider their friends' feelings despite having an unexpected and disappointing outcome for themselves. These tendencies may also stem from social expectations of girls needing to "play nice." For example, teachers rated preschool girls who were less likely to vent their emotions as more socially competent (Denham et al., 2003). In contrast, boys tended to focus on their own feelings and responded

interpersonally to meet their own needs. When presented with the scenario in which the main character's friend placed sixth in a race despite having practiced extensively, boys and girls both identified the empathic behaviour most frequently. Both boys and girls identified words of sympathy and encouragement for their friend, setting aside the main character's fortunate and positive outcome of winning the race despite not preparing at all.

These findings are consistent with research on gender differences in expectations of emotional identification and expression. In individualistic cultures, such as the United States and many European countries, girls are expected to be more emotionally expressive (Brody & Hall, 2008), show more empathy and sympathy (Zahn-Waxler, 2001), and are encouraged to show positive emotions such as happiness and contentment (Chaplin, Cole, & Zahn-Waxler, 2005) compared to boys who are encouraged to express greater externalizing emotions. In collectivist cultures, such as Japan and other Asian countries, these expectations persist but are less pronounced than in individualistic cultures (Fischer & Manstead, 2000). For example, in Japan, girls tend to discuss their interpersonal relationships with each other more frequently than boys and express feelings of worry and concern more openly (Sawada, 2009). In contrast, boys are generally expected to display less emotions and are allowed to express their emotions behaviorally such as outward displays of anger or disgust (Brody, 1999).

Relations between Emotional Literacy and Interpersonal Competence

The identification of mixed emotions was related to interpersonal competence only in the scenario that yielded a negative outcome for the main character. Participants who thought the outcome of the story was unreasonable but tried to interpret it positively, were able to identify ways of communicating to the friend in empathic and socially acceptable ways. These results suggest that children must understand *why* the characters experienced the identified emotions to be able to select appropriate ways of interacting with peers and dealing with difficult situations (Ciarrochi, Chan, & Bajgar, 2001).

Students who interpreted the unexpected outcome negatively, tended to identify less empathic interpersonal behaviours and instead, identified more questioning behaviours. Rather than considering their friend's feelings, they used more questioning behaviours to make sense of the unexpected outcome and alleviate their own confusion. In contrast, students who interpreted the unexpected outcome positively also identified confusion, but may have prioritized their relationship with the friend before attempting to alleviate their own confusion. Students who did not identify mixed emotions were more likely to identify the self-talk behaviour, discussing their own outcome with their friend rather than speaking about their friend's outcome. In collectivist cultures, these approaches are generally considered less desirable than empathic approaches because focusing on one's own needs is viewed as disrupting the harmony of social relationships (Kitayama, Mesquita, & Karasawa, 2006).

Implications in Educational Contexts

This study contributed to our understanding of cultural differences in developmental and gender trends in social and emotional learning and the importance to take these into consideration when

implementing SEL programmes in different contexts. The SEL literature often recommends using 'I' statements to express one's emotions (Hoffman, 2009). In collectivist cultures, focusing solely on one's own needs and emotions is considered undesirable because it disrupts the collective harmony of social relationships (Trommsdorff & Rothbaum, 2008). This study found that despite girls identifying more negative internal emotions, boys had more difficulty identifying mixed emotions and tended to identify inappropriate interpersonal approaches. The self-talk and questioning behaviours assert one's emotions and situations and seek to alleviate one's confusion. These behaviours may be considered appropriate in Western cultures; however, implementation of SEL programs with culturally diverse children may need to consider the impact of collectivist perspectives on the appropriateness of children's emotional expression. Cartledge & Loe (2001) suggest that educators ought to embrace peer connectedness and emphasize the responsibility children have for each other.

Developmental considerations may also assist interventionists in designing SEL programs. Older children tended to identify more negative emotions, particularly in the scenario that yielded an undesirable outcome for the main character. Suppression of negative emotions in collectivist cultures may be considered an appropriate strategy for achieving social harmony (Trommsdorff & Rothbaum, 2008). However, given that Japanese schools are now increasingly interested in teaching children about healthy and appropriate expressions of both positive and negative emotions (Harada & Watanabe, 2011), educators and practitioners may consider incorporating discussions with older children regarding mixed emotions and interpersonal behaviours that assert both their own negative emotions as well as words of empathy toward their peers. Suppression of emotions affect adolescent's overall psychological wellbeing (Chaplin & Cole, 2005), and teaching adolescents appropriate ways to express their negative emotions may be one way to contribute to the overall psychological health of Japanese young people.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

There were several noteworthy limitations to the current investigation. First, data for the current study were collected concurrently; therefore, we were unable to utilize time series analyses, which would have enabled us to examine the development of emotional literacy and interpersonal competence over time. Additional studies utilizing longitudinal designs are needed to better understand the processes of children's emotional literacy and interpersonal competence throughout their development. Furthermore, the relatively small sample size within each grade level limits the generalizability of the study's findings. Additional studies are needed with larger samples in each grade to further our understanding of grade-level differences in emotional literacy and social competence. Several limitations are related to the survey design. The survey presented two scenarios written in the third person. Results may have differed if the survey was presented in first person. Furthermore, one scenario presented a spelling test and the other scenario presented a sporting event. Older children may have placed greater importance on the spelling test due to increases in academic rigor during middle school. Future studies may incorporate experimental conditions in which children are given the same scenarios with different outcomes to control for task variance.

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