Teaching and Teacher Education 53 (2016) 41–50

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Teaching and Teacher Education

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/tate

Differences in classroom removals and use of praise and rewards in American, Chinese, and Japanese schools

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Classroom removals, school suspensions, and conduct problems are much more common in American schools.
- Teachers' use of praise and rewards are more common in Chinese schools.
- Greater use of praise and rewards correlates positively with teacher–student relationships.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 25 February 2015
Received in revised form
3 September 2015
Accepted 10 October 2015
Available online xxx

Keywords:
Classroom management
Cultural differences
School suspensions and removals
Praise and rewards
Student behavior problems

ABSTRACT

Students' perceptions of teacher–student relationships, frequency of conduct problems, and their teachers' use of classroom removals, school suspensions, praise and rewards were examined in this study of 3,588 elementary- and middle-school students in China, Japan, and the United States. As predicted, American students reported the greatest frequency of conduct problems and of classroom removals and suspensions. Chinese students reported the most positive teacher–student relationships and their teachers' greatest use of rewards and praise. Cultural values that likely contribute to these differences are discussed.

1. Introduction

Positive reinforcement and punishment are the two most common evidence-based behavioral techniques for managing student behavior, with both techniques found in nearly all models of classroom management and school discipline. This is supported by research demonstrating that the most effective teachers use a combination of positive reinforcement (e.g., praise and rewards) and punishment (e.g., response cost, verbal reprimands, time-out) to prevent and correct misbehavior (Bear, 2015; Brophy, 1996; Epstein, Atkins, Cullinan, Kutash, & Weaver, 2008; Landrum & Kauffman, 2006). However, common types of positive reinforcement and punishment, and especially the latter, are not without criticism. In particular, in recent years the popular practice in the United States of suspending students from school as punishment for misbehavior has been the subject of harsh criticism. Often associated with the zero tolerance approach to school discipline, a major limitation of this practice is that suspensions decrease opportunities for students to learn and bond with others in school. This is supported by research showing that the frequency of

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[1] The 2011 version of the DSCS-S (Bear, Gaskins, Blank, & Chen, 2011) was used in the current study. The more recent 2014 version (Bear, Yang, Mantz et al., 2014) includes the following subscales: Teacher–Student Relationships, Student–Student Relationships, Fairness of Rules, Respect for Diversity, Clarity of Expectations, School Safety, School-wide Bullying, and School-wide Engagement. Studies are currently underway to provide evidence supporting those factors among Chinese students.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2015.10.003
0742-051X/

suspensions is associated with negative student outcomes such as non-completion of school, juvenile delinquency, and incarceration (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Fenning et al., 2012; Skiba et al., 2011).

Although less strident, criticism of the systematic use of praise and rewards, and particularly tangible rewards, to manage student behavior also is fairly common. For example, in his classic literature review on the use of praise and rewards, Brophy (1981) concluded that its effectiveness at the classroom and school-wide levels "has been seriously oversold" (p. 19). More recently, Adelman and Taylor (2010), co-directors of the national Center for Mental Health in the Schools in the U.S., cautioned that schools should not "over-rely on extrinsics to entice and reward because doing so may decrease intrinsic motivation" (p. 65) – a concern voiced by many researchers of the past (e.g., Kohlberg, 1984; Montessori, 1912/1974; Piaget, 1932/1997) and present (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999a, b; Dweck, 1999; Kohn, 1999). Researchers (e.g., Bear, 2010; Osher, Bear, Sprague, & Doyle, 2010) also have questioned the general effectiveness of school-wide approaches that emphasize systematic and frequent use of tangible rewards to manage student behavior, including the increasingly popular School-Wide Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) approach (Sugai & Horner, 2009; Sugai et al., 2010). Those researchers argue that there is little empirical evidence showing that tangible rewards improve school climate or lead to lasting improvements in student behavior.

Despite controversy over their use, classroom removals, school suspensions, and the systematic use of praise and rewards are commonly used in American schools to manage student behavior, as evidenced by the widespread popularity of the zero tolerance and SWPBIS approaches. However, very little research has explored their use in other countries. Thus, it remains unknown if those techniques are more specific to some countries and cultures than others. In the current study we were particularly interested in investigating their use in Chinese and Japanese schools. This was not only because those two Eastern cultures present a contrast to Western culture, but also because research has generally found less aggression and fewer conduct problems in those countries compared to in the U.S. (Chiu & Chow, 2011; Rescorla et al., 2007). For example, whereas Japan and China ranked 1st and 4th respectively for the fewest behavior problems among children in 31 countries, the U.S. ranked 20th (Rescorla et al., 2007). Such disparities in student behavior between countries raise the question of whether or not differences also might be found in schools' behavior management techniques. The primary purpose of the current study was to address this question.

1.1. Cultural differences in classroom and school removals

Classroom and school removals are fairly common in American schools. For example, Little and Akin-Little (2008) found that 56% of American teachers reported referring a student to the office in response to behavior problems and 39% reported sending a student out of the classroom and into the hallway. The average U.S. school has 355 office disciplinary referrals per year (School Wide Information System, 2013), and it is estimated that approximately 3.3 million students receive one or more out-of-school suspensions each school year (Losen & Gillespie, 2012). In another study, 39% of American public schools reported using suspension for 5 days or more, expulsion, or student transfer in response to a behavior problem (Robers, Kemp, Rathbun, & Morgan, 2014). Estimates on the number of students removed from the classroom or school in China and Japan are unknown, but researchers have reported that the practice is rare (Akiba, 2004; Akiba, Shimizu, & Zhuang, 2010). Although this is likely due to infrequent behavior problems, cultural differences in how teachers view classroom removals also may play a role. For example, Kyriacou (2010) surmised that Japanese teachers' unfavorable perceptions of school removal were related to Japanese teachers' attributions of student misbehavior. He found that most Japanese teachers attribute behavior problems primarily to parents "who do not instill pro-school values" (p. 216). In attributing behavior problems to the home, Japanese teachers believe that sending students home is of little value in correcting misbehavior and might cause more harm than good.

Another possible reason why classroom and school removals would be much less common in China and Japan than in the U.S. is because removals are inconsistent with the highly prized cultural value of social harmony – a Confucian value shared by Chinese and Japanese cultures (Crystal et al., 1994; Muhtadie, Zhou, Eisenberg, & Wang, 2013; Triandis, 1995). When viewed in light of this cultural value, detaching students from their peers and teachers by removing them from the classroom is culturally inappropriate (Akiba, 2004; Akiba et al., 2010; LeTendre, 2000). Moreover, such removal is likely to induce intense shame – a negative self-conscious emotion related to student behavior more in Japan and China than in the U.S. (Bear, Uribe-Zarain, Manning, & Shiomi, 2009). As such, removals not only decrease academic instruction and increase exposure to parents who lack pro-school values, but also detach students from classmates and their teachers. School removals also fail to address the perceived primary causes of misbehavior (i.e., the home and detachment from others). Attributing misbehavior primarily to the home and to the lack of attachment to the school stands in contrast to American teachers who most frequently attribute misbehavior to student's lack of self-control, which is an attribution often used to rationalize and justify punitive consequences (Reyna & Weiner, 2001).

We know of no studies that have compared the extent to which classroom removals and school suspensions are used in the U.S. compared to China or Japan. Clearly, forms of punishment, such as verbal reprimands, extra work, lost of privileges, and demerits are widely used in Asian countries characterized by hierarchical roles and influenced by Confucian values (Sun, 2015). This would include China and Japan. However, several recent cross-cultural studies have indicated that punishment in general is a more common classroom management technique in Western countries than in China and Japan. In a series of studies examining differences in teachers' classroom management between Australia, China, and Israel, researchers found that Australian students (i.e., Western students) reported the greatest use of punishment (Lewis, Romi, Katz, & Qui, 2008; Lewis, Romi, Qui, & Katz, 2005; Riley, Lewis, & Wang, 2012; Romi, Katz, & Qui, 2009). Likewise, several studies reported that Japanese teachers, compared to American teachers, prefer constructive dialogue (i.e., talking to the student after class while inquiring about reasons for the behavior in concerned and problem-solving manner) instead of using punitive consequences for misbehavior (Akiba & Shirnizu, 2013; Kyriacou, 2010; Okano & Tsuchiya, 1999).

1.2. Cultural differences in praise and rewards

Research, as reviewed above, suggests that Chinese and Japanese teachers are less likely than American teachers to remove students from the classroom for misbehavior. This is likely due to less disruptive behavior in the classroom and also to the cultural values that oppose this practice and the policies that support it. However, much less is known about differences in teachers' use of praise and rewards across countries. As discussed below, one might argue that either lesser *or* greater use of praise and rewards might be found in Chinese and Japanese schools compared to American schools.

1.2.1. Why might less praise and rewards be found in Chinese and Japanese schools?

If a primary function of praise and rewards is to prevent and manage student misbehavior, as claimed by many Western researchers (e.g., Akin-Little & Little, 2009; Epstein et al., 2008), it seems plausible that there would be less *need* for the use of those techniques in Chinese and Japanese schools. That is, beginning in the early grades Chinese and Japanese students exhibit few behavior problems. This is commonly attributed to cultural values that permeate those societies. Chinese and Japanese cultures share the same Confucian heritage that emphasizes not only social harmony, but also filial piety and self-discipline (Crystal et al., 1994; Muhtadie et al., 2013; Shin, Lee, & Kim, 2009; Triandis, 1995). Reflecting filial piety, Chinese and Japanese students are expected to convey the same level of respect and self-discipline toward their teachers as they should toward their parents (Hui, Sun, Chow, & Chu, 2011). Conversely, Chinese and Japanese teachers are expected to assume a parental orientation with their students, and one that emphasizes promoting children's development rather than only managing their behavior (Lewis, 1995; Riley et al., 2012).

Ample research shows that students exhibit fewer behavior problems and higher academic achievement in classes in which they highly respect their teachers and when teacher–student relationships are positive (Hughes, 2012; Sabol & Pianta, 2012). Respect of teachers and positive teacher–student relationships not only motivate student engagement and achievement (Cornelius-White, 2007; Demanet & Van Houtte, 2012; Demaray, Malecki, Davidson, Hodgson, & Rebus, 2005; Spilt, Hughes, Wu, & Kwok, 2012; Zhou, Lam, & Chan, 2012), but also foster students' internalization of their teachers' values (Hughes, 2012; Wentzel, 1997, 2006; Zhou et al., 2012). It is in this manner that positive teacher–student relationships and respect of teachers prevent behavior problems and develop self-discipline while also inculcating cultural values.

Several cross-cultural studies have found that compared to students in Western countries, students in Eastern countries have greater respect of teachers (Chen, Greenberger, Farruggia, Bush, & Dong, 2003; Shin et al., 2009) and view teacher–student relationships more favorably (Jia et al., 2009; Shin et al., 2009; Yang et al., 2013). Among those studies, Chen et al. (2003) found that Chinese students are more likely than American students to identify a teacher as a "very important person" in their lives and to value their teaching, support, and motivational efforts toward their learning. Lewis et al. (2008) also found that Chinese students, compared to Australian students, are more likely to believe that their teachers' disciplinary actions are justified. Similarly, Zhou et al. (2012) found that Chinese students, compared to American students, viewed their teachers' corrective responses to behavior problems as less controlling and in turn reported that they were more motivated in their classrooms despite the use of corrective procedures.

For sake of maintaining social harmony in school and exhibiting the Confucian value of self-perfection, Chinese and Japanese students are expected to exhibit self-discipline and to help ensure that their classmates do the same (Chen & French, 2008; Chen, Huang, Chang, Wang, & Li, 2010; Yu, 2008). As such, norms supporting compliance, academic achievement, self-discipline, and social harmony are developed and supported by students and teachers throughout the school year (Chen & French, 2008; Ran, 2001). These norms are common in Chinese and Japanese schools (Chen & French, 2008), and research has shown that they are critical to preventing aggressive and disruptive behavior (Dishion, Piehler, & Myers, 2008; Espelage, Holt, & Henkel, 2003). Such norms found in Chinese and Japanese schools stand in contrast to the antisocial norms found in many American classrooms that normalize and foster aggressive and disruptive behavior and low academic achievement (Barth, Dunlap, Dane, Lochman, & Wells, 2004; Chen, Chang, Liu, & He, 2008; Dishion et al., 2008). Classes characterized by aggressive and disruptive behavior are especially detrimental to low achieving groups of students (Chen et al., 2008).

Finally, in explaining the finding that only one of twelve secondary school teachers in Hong Kong interviewed reported the use of praise in classroom management, Sun (2015) cited the Chinese proverb "praise enervates but criticism builds character" (p. 101). Sun noted that many Chinese teachers view the use of praise as contrary to the Chinese value of modesty and unnecessary in classrooms characterized by clear expectations and rules and by punitive consequences invoked upon students who fail to follow them by exhibiting self-discipline.

In sum, given fewer behavior problems, greater respect of teachers, students' greater acceptance of disciplinary actions, greater self-discipline, and stronger norms supporting social harmony, it is likely that there is less *need* for Chinese and Japanese teachers, compared to American teachers, to remove students for misbehavior and to use praise and rewards in a systematic and frequent fashion to prevent behavior problems.

1.2.2. Why might praise and rewards be found more often in Chinese and Japanese schools?

One might also argue that the frequent use of praise and rewards in Chinese and Japanese schools helps explain why Chinese and Japanese students exhibit few conduct problems and otherwise exhibit behaviors consistent with the Confucian values of social harmony and self-discipline. That is, their teachers might use praise and rewards frequently and in multiple ways to prevent behavior problems, such as when teaching and reminding students of classroom rules, reinforcing social cognitions and emotions associated with respect and self-discipline, and developing strong teacher–student relationships and prosocial norms in the classroom. Although less cross-cultural research supports this argument compared to the counter argument above, several supportive studies exist.

In a study that specifically examined the use of praise and rewards, Lewis et al. (2005) found that Chinese students, compared to Australian and Israeli students, reported greater praise and rewards from teachers for students' good behavior. Several studies also indicated that Chinese teachers are more inclined than American teachers to manage student behavior using general proactive techniques (i.e., praising desired behavior) instead of reactive techniques (Lan et al., 2009; Teddlie & Liu, 2008). Although not a cross-cultural study, Ding, Li, Li, and Kulm (2010) similarly reported that "praising good students and using stars, flowers, and other prizes as positive incentives" was one of the two most common techniques Chinese teachers used to handle misbehavior (the other was "staring at the student and expecting his/her self-awareness"). They also found that Chinese teachers viewed the use of praise/rewards to be the most effective technique for handling misbehavior, especially in elementary school.

1.3. Hypotheses of the current study

Based on previous studies, we first hypothesized that Chinese and Japanese schools have fewer conduct problems and more positive teacher–student relationships compared to schools in the U.S. Second, we hypothesized that Chinese and Japanese schools have fewer classroom removals and school suspensions than American schools. However, we made no predictions regarding differences in the use of praise and rewards between countries in light of research indicating that *either* lesser or greater use of praise and rewards in Chinese and Japanese schools, compared to

American schools, may be expected. Third, we hypothesized that within each country the use of praise and rewards would correlate positively with students' perceptions of favorable teacher–student relationships and negatively with conduct problems.

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

The American sample included 525 students in five elementary schools and 542 students in five middle schools drawn throughout the state of Delaware. Five of the ten schools served students from urban areas of the state, three served students from suburban areas, and two served students from both suburban and rural areas. Based on two survey items that asked students to identify their race/ethnicity and gender, the sample's racial composition of American elementary students was: 57.1% Caucasian, 28.2% African American, 5.5% Hispanic, 3.6% Asian, and 5.5% "other, including mixed race." The sample's racial composition of American middle school students was: 59.2% Caucasian, 27.2% African American, 6.8% Hispanic, 2.6% Asian, and 4.8% "other, including mixed race." The elementary school sample consisted of 53.1% males and 46.9% females, and the middle school sample consisted of 51.5% males and 48.5% females.

The Chinese sample was drawn from the city of Foshan, Guangdong Province, which has a population of 5.68 million. It included 426 students (44.6% males, 55.4% females) in five elementary schools and 616 students (54.5% males, 45.5% females) in five middle schools. The Japanese sample was drawn from the cities of Kobe (population 1.5 million) and Yokohama (population 3.7 million), and consisted of 633 students (48.4% males, 51.6 females) in five elementary schools and 844 students (51.1% males, 48.9% females) in five middle schools. Racial composition of the Chinese and Japanese samples was not obtained because researchers in China insisted that 99%–100% of students were of Chinese descent (and approximately 98% Han) and researchers in Japan insisted that over 95% of the students were of Japanese descent. In the U.S., elementary schools included grades 3–5 and middle schools included grades 6–8. In China and Japan, elementary schools included grades 3–6 and middle schools included grades 7–9. To include students of the same grades across the three countries, students in grades 6 and 9 were excluded from the study. All schools volunteered to participate upon invitation from their respective school district's department of education and the country's participating university for the research study. The human subjects committees of the researchers' home universities in China, Japan, and the U.S approved the research.

The American and Chinese students were the same as those included in a recent study of differences in students' and teachers' perceptions of conduct problems, teacher–student relationships, and student–student relationships (Bear, Yang, & Glutting et al., 2014). However, not all of the students in the previous study completed measures of the use of praise and rewards and of classroom and school removals. Therefore, the current study included only those students who completed all measures of the current study. The Japanese sample was not included in the previous study nor has it been included in any published study.

2.2. Measures

Students in China, Japan, and the U.S. completed the Delaware School Climate Survey–Student version (DSCS-S; Bear et al., 2011). This survey is designed to provide schools with a measure of multiple aspects of school climate, including teacher–student relationships, student–student relationships, and fairness of school rules. Additional information about this survey, including evidence of the validity and reliability of scores, can be found in its technical manual (Bear, Yang, Mantz et al., 2014). In the current study we used the 2011 version of the DSCS-S, which consisted of only four school climate subscales (Teacher–Student Relationships, Student–Student Relationships, Fairness of Rules, and Conduct Problems).[1] We analyzed data from the two subscales, Teacher–Student Relationships and Conduct Problems, that were of particular interest in the current study and that were found to be valid and reliable across Chinese, Japanese, and American samples. The Teacher–Student Relationships subscale included six items tapping teacher–student relationships at the school-wide level (e.g., "In this school teachers care about their students."). The Conduct Problems subscale consisted of four items (i.e., fighting, stealing, bullying, cheating; for example, "Fighting is a problem in this school."). On both subscales, students responded using a 4-point Likert scale with 1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 2 = *Disagree*, 3 = *Agree*, and 4 = *Strongly Agree*. In a previous study of students' perceptions of school climate in China ($n = 2192$) and the U.S. ($n = 3253$) (Yang et al., 2013), confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) supported the factorial integrity and reliability of those two subscales, including across gender, race/ethnicity, and grade level. In the current study, CFA also supported the validity of these two subscales among the Japanese students: $\chi^2 = 625.14$ (84, $N = 1818$), $p < .001$; confirmatory fit index = .940, root mean square error of approximation = .050, standardized root mean square residual = .060.

In addition to items on the teacher–student relationships and conduct problems subscales, two items were added to the school climate survey to assess students' perceptions of classroom removal/suspension and three items were added to assess the use of praise and rewards (see Table 1 for items). Students were asked to indicate how often every item happened during the past week on a 4-point scale, with 1 = *never,* 2 = *1–2 times,* 3 = *3–5 times,* and 4 = *6 or more times*. Participants completed the *DSCS-S* in their classrooms or a school computer lab, with their teachers administering the survey. Teachers were provided with a script to read to the students, which ensured the confidentiality of the students' answers.

3. Results

Results are presented separately for scores on subscales assessing conduct problems and teacher–student relationships and for individual items tapping classroom removals, school suspensions, and use of praise and rewards. This was done for two primary reasons. First, differences in specific forms of classroom/school removals and use of praise of rewards were of particular interest in the study, thus warranting item-level analyses. Second, whereas analyses of variance (ANOVA) were appropriate for examining mean differences in the conduct problem and teacher–student relationship subscale scores, nonparametric tests (i.e., Kruskal–Wallis test and Mann–Whitney U test) were more appropriate for examining differences in scores for the individual items assessing classroom removals, school suspensions, and the use of praise and rewards. Extreme skewness and kurtosis in individual items supported our use of nonparametric statistics and treating the individual items as ranked ordered and ordinal data. For example, for Japanese students in elementary school, skewness was 15.61 and kurtosis was 292.08 for the item "Someone was suspended out of school."

In testing statistical significance of differences between groups, we used the Bonferroni inequality to control for Type I error rate, with overall alpha set at .05. Thus, each of the 42 comparisons in the study (6 for teacher–students, 6 for conduct problems, and 30 for classroom removals, school suspensions, and use of praise and

Table 1
Mean ranks and Kruskal–Wallis test results between countries for students in elementary and middle school.

		Mean rank			χ^2
		U.S.	China	Japan	
1. Someone was sent out of class because of misbehavior.	Elementary	915.57	701.12	751.92	83.69*
	Middle	1628.88	825.46	813.73	918.59*
2. Someone was suspended out of school.	Elementary	894.84	761.36	728.57	167.72*
	Middle	1587.77	842.49	826.78	1029.94*
3. The class was rewarded for good behavior.	Elementary	778.54	858.90	759.39	14.67*
	Middle	891.36	1210.01	993.88	104.34*
4. Teacher praised or rewarded a student for good behavior.	Elementary	696.10	983.31	744.04	114.65*
	Middle	839.57	1324.28	947.07	247.63*
5. I was praised or rewarded for good behavior.	Elementary	785.43	884.58	736.39	30.39*
	Middle	1050.12	1178.09	920.45	82.88*

Note. *$p < .001$; In elementary schools, n = 535 for U.S., 426 for China, 633 for Japan. In middle schools, n = 542 for U.S., 616 for China, 904 for Japan.

rewards) was tested at the .001 level (i.e., .05 ÷ 42 = .0012). Below, results of differences between countries and grade levels in conduct problems, teacher–student relationships, classroom removals and school suspensions, and the use of praise and rewards are presented. Those results are followed by correlations between praise/rewards, teacher–student relationships, and conduct problems. Correlations with classroom removals and school suspensions were not examined because we predicted no or little use of those practices in China and Japan.

3.1. Mean differences in conduct problems and teacher–student relationships

As predicted, greater conduct problems were found in American schools than in Chinese and Japanese schools. At the elementary level, American students reported significantly greater conduct problems ($\overline{X}$ = 9.64, *SD* = 3.22) than Chinese students ($\overline{X}$ = 7.13, *SD* = 2.63), $F(1, 949) = 167.70$, $p < .001$, Cohen's *d* effect size (*ES*) = .85, and Japanese students ($\overline{X}$ = 9.06, *SD* = 2.33), $F(1, 1156) = 12.35$, $p < .001$, *ES* = .21. The conduct problems reported by Japanese elementary students were significantly greater than those reported by Chinese students, $F(1, 1057) = 157.94$, $p < .001$, *ES* = .77. At the middle school level, American students reported significantly greater conduct problems ($\overline{X}$ = 11.24, *SD* = 2.36) than Chinese students ($\overline{X}$ = 9.82, *SD* = 2.63), $F(1, 1156) = 91.94$, $p < .001$, *ES* = .57, and Japanese students ($\overline{X}$ = 9.46, *SD* = 2.43), $F(1, 1444) = 185.61$, $p < .001$, *ES* = .74.

Also as predicted, at the elementary level Chinese students reported more favorable teacher–student relationships ($\overline{X}$ = 20.64, *SD* = 2.54) compared to American students ($\overline{X}$ = 19.84, *SD* = 3.16), $F(1, 934) = 17.68$, $p < .001$, *ES* = .27. Although differences between Chinese and Japanese students were not predicted, we found that Japanese students reported less favorable teacher–student relationships ($\overline{X}$ = 18.99, *SD* = 3.26) than Chinese students, $F(1, 1043) = -76.71$, $p < .001$, *ES* = .56. At the middle school level, Chinese students reported more favorable teacher–student relationships ($\overline{X}$ = 18.88 *SD* = 2.83) than American students ($\overline{X}$ = 15.80, *SD* = 3.47), $F(1, 1143) = 273.66$, $p < .001$, *ES* = .97, and Japanese students ($\overline{X}$ = 15.26, *SD* = 4.05), $F(1, 1506) = 367.31$, $p < .001$, *ES* = 1.04.

3.2. Differences in classroom and school removals and in use of praise and rewards

Results of Kruskal–Wallis tests yielded statistically significant differences between the three countries in responses to each of the five items tapping classroom removals, school suspensions, and use of praise and rewards. This was found at both the elementary school level and middle school level (see Table 1), as reported below.

3.2.1. Differences in classroom and school removals

As predicted and shown in Table 2, American students reported greater frequency of classroom removals and school suspensions compared to Chinese and Japanese students (all *p*'s < .001). Differences were greatest in middle school, as observed in the magnitude of the *Z* scores and response percentages to each item. For example, 50% of American students in elementary school and over 90% in middle school (see Table 3) reported that a student was sent out of class at least once during the past week. Conversely, between 69% and 76% of Chinese and Japanese students reported that this *never* occurred. Differences in out-of-school suspensions were particularly striking, especially in middle school. Whereas 80.8% of American students in middle school reported that someone was suspended from school during the past week, only 10.7% of middle school students in China and 8.2% in Japan reported the same. In elementary school, 21.7% of American students reported that a student was suspended, whereas less than 5% of Chinese students and less than 1% of Japanese students reported the same.

Only one significant difference in classroom removals and school suspensions was found between Chinese and Japanese students. In elementary school, Chinese students reported more frequent use of school suspensions. There were no significant differences in middle school. However, it is important to note that although more frequent school suspensions were reported in Chinese than in Japanese schools, the frequencies of elementary classroom removals and school suspensions were small in both countries. Indeed, the percentage of Chinese and Japanese students across grade levels reporting that suspension *never* occurred during the past week ranged from 89.3% (in Chinese middle schools; 95.1% in elementary schools) to 99.2% (in Japanese elementary schools; 91.8% in middle schools). The percentage reporting that removing a student from the classroom *never* occurred during the past week ranged from 69.0% (Japan, elementary) to 75.6% (Japan, middle school).

3.2.2. Differences in praise and rewards

Chinese students tended to report more frequent use of rewards and praise compared to American and Japanese students. This was consistently found in responses to two of the three items tapping rewards and praise and in both elementary and middle schools (see Tables 2 and 3). Exceptions were responses to the item "The class was rewarded for good behavior." For this item, differences were less consistent, with Chinese students reporting significantly more frequent use of classroom rewards than American middle school students and Japanese elementary students; however, differences between Chinese and American elementary students and between Chinese and Japanese middle school students were not statistically significant at the .001 level set for the study (but were significant at the .05 level). As seen in Table 3, approximately 90–95% of Chinese students in elementary school reported that a student, him/herself,

Table 2
Follow-up Mann–Whitney test results between countries for elementary and middle school students.

		U.S. vs. China			U.S. vs. Japan			China vs. Japan		
		Mean ranks		Z	Mean ranks		Z	Mean ranks		Z
1. Someone was sent out of class because of misbehavior.	Elementary	533.73	404.85	8.31*	644.84	525.31	6.96*	509.74	543.61	−2.23
	Middle	824.44	363.99	24.63*	1075.94	512.19	26.77*	769.98	754.04	.91
2. Someone was suspended out of school.	Elementary	511.92	431.73	7.39*	645.92	524.42	11.68*	543.14	521.16	4.28*
	Middle	805.74	380.44	24.06*	1053.53	525.63	27.35*	770.55	753.65	1.47
3. The class was rewarded for good behavior.	Elementary	454.83	502.08	−2.82	586.70	573.53	.71	570.32	502.87	3.82*
	Middle	484.26	663.30	- 9.85*	678.60	750.42	−3.45*	855.21	695.96	7.52*
4. Teacher praised or rewarded a student for good behavior.	Elementary	403.57	565.26	−9.45*	555.53	599.38	−2.33	631.55	461.66	9.33*
	Middle	435.94	705.81	−14.37*	675.13	752.50	- 3.63*	926.97	647.07	12.82*
5. I was praised for rewarded for good behavior.	Elementary	451.06	506.73	−3.27*	597.36	564.68	1.76	591.35	488.71	5.77*
	Middle	543.29	611.36	−3.76*	778.34	690.62	4.28*	682.33	875.22	−9.23*

Note. *$p < .001$; In elementary schools, $n = 535$ for U.S., 426 for China, 633 for Japan. In middle schools, $n = 542$ for U.S., 616 for China, 904 for Japan.

Table 3
Percentages of responses by elementary and middle school students across countries.

		United States				China				Japan			
		Never	1–2	3–5	6 +	Never	1–2	3–5	6 +	Never	1–2	3–5	6 +
1. Someone was sent out class because of misbehavior	Elementary	50.0	32.8	8.6	8.6	74.6	21.6	2.4	1.4	69.0	213.2	5.4	2.4
	Middle	6.4	31.0	29.2	33.4	72.5	22.6	3.6	1.3	75.6	16.5	5.1	2.8
2. Someone was suspended out of school.	Elementary	78.3	14.1	5.5	2.1	95.1	3.5	1.2	.2	99.2	.8	0	0
	Middle	19.2	38.9	19.9	22.0	89.3	9.3	.8	.6	91.8	4.2	2.3	1.7
3. The class was rewarded for good behavior	Elementary	23.6	41.7	18.1	16.6	10.3	54.5	16.9	19.2	20.1	49.8	19.1	11.1
	Middle	49.5	38.9	8.1	3.5	21.8	54.1	16.0	8.1	40.7	43.2	11.9	4.2
4. The teacher praised or rewarded a student for good behavior	Elementary	16.6	35.4	22.5	25.5	4.2	21.6	22.8	51.4	4.3	40.9	35.1	19.7
	Middle	38.1	41.3	15.5	5.0	8.0	39.8	25.3	26.9	30.4	42.3	19.2	8.1
5. I was praised or rewarded for good behavior	Elementary	26.9	37.3	20.4	15.4	11.5	48.4	26.5	13.6	23.2	49.9	19.3	7.6
	Middle	45.9	36.9	10.2	7.0	29.5	55.7	11.9	2.9	56.1	33.3	7.4	3.2

Note. $n = 535$ for U.S., 426 for China, 633 for Japan. In middle schools, $n = 542$ for U.S., 616 for China, 904 for Japan.

and the class were praised or rewarded for good behavior. In middle school, over 90% of Chinese students reported that *a student* was praised or rewarded during the past week, with slightly fewer reporting that the *class* was rewarded (78.2%) or that they were *personally* praised or rewarded (70.5%). Although over half of elementary and middle school American students also reported that a student, and himself/herself had been praised at least once during the past week, American students reported less use of each of those techniques compared to Chinese students. For rewards at the class level, those differences were statistically significant in middle school ($p < .001$) but only marginally significant in elementary school ($p < .05$). No significant differences in the use of praise and rewards between elementary American and Japanese students were found (see Table 2). However, significant differences were found in middle schools although this varied by item. That is, as shown in Tables 2 and 3, whereas American students, compared to Japanese students, reported greater frequency of their teachers praising or rewarding another student, they reported less frequency of themselves being praised or rewarded.

As seen in Table 4, across all three countries and in both elementary and middle schools, praise/rewards correlated significantly and positively with teacher–student relationships. Likewise, at both grade levels, teacher–student relationships correlated significantly and negatively with conduct problems. Praise/rewards did not correlate significantly with conduct problems, with the one exception being in Chinese elementary schools (−.19, $p < .01$).

4. Discussion

Consistent with previous research (Chiu & Chow, 2011; Rescorla et al., 2007), students in the U.S. reported greater conduct problems in their schools than students in China and Japan. As expected, students in China also reported more favorable teacher–student relationships than students in the U.S. However, Japanese students reported less favorable teacher–student relationships than American students. Of greater contribution to the cross-cultural research literature on classroom management and school discipline, we found marked differences between countries in classroom removals, school suspensions, and the use of praise and rewards. Those differences and how they might relate to conduct problems and teacher–student relationships are discussed below. This is

Table 4
Correlations among variables for American, Chinese, and Japanese students in elementary and middle school.

	United States			China			Japan		
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Positive techniques	–	.15*	.00	–	.14*	−.19*	–	.29*	−.09
Teacher–student relationships	.38*	–	−.21*	.24*	–	−.35*	.32*	–	−.31*
Conduct problem	−.06	−.13*	–	−.08	−.18*	–	.02	−.08*	–

*$p < .01$.
Note. Coefficients for elementary school students are above the diagonal and coefficients for middle school students are below the diagonal.
$n = 515$ US. elementary and 531 middle school students; 421 Chinese elementary and 614 middle school students; 624 Japanese elementary and 894 middle school students.

followed by a discussion of factors beyond the use of praise/rewards that might account for fewer behavior problems in Chinese and Japanese schools.

4.1. Cultural differences in classroom removals and school suspensions

In light of the greater number of conduct problems in American schools compared to Chinese and Japanese schools, it makes sense that a greater number of American students are removed from their classrooms and suspended from school. However, many researchers assert that classroom removals and suspensions occur too often in American schools, reflecting unreasonable zero tolerance policies and practices that are applied not only to serious transgressions and disruptive behavior but also to relatively minor behavior problems (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Skiba et al., 2011). This view is consistent with the great disparity we found in classroom removals and school suspensions in American schools compared to those in China and Japan. Such disparity is perhaps best seen in 81.8% of American students in middle school reporting that a student was suspended during the past week compared to 10.7% of Chinese and 8.2% of Japanese students in middle school.

Although we did not examine the behaviors that led to classroom removals and school suspensions, it seems unlikely that all of the suspensions in American schools were for serious behaviors that would justify either classroom removal or school suspension (in either of the three countries) because of their harm to others or disruption to teaching. This is supported by school suspension data from the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE, 2014), which reported that approximately 14% of students in the state (in which the American sample attended school) were suspended in-school or out-of-school during the 2012–2013 school year. It is unclear what behaviors led to those suspensions, as the state reported only the number of suspensions that constituted either (a) criminal offenses, such as weapons, drugs and assault, and (b) noncriminal offenses that are deemed serious yet noncriminal by the DDOE, including offensive touching, bullying, fighting/disorderly conduct, possession/use of alcohol or tobacco, and vandalism (together, those five offenses comprised 92.4% of the suspensions in the serious and noncriminal category). Of 51,165 suspensions in 2013, 584 (1.1%) were for criminal behaviors and 10,765 (21%) for noncriminal, yet serious, behavior problems. Thus, almost 80% of suspensions were for *other* behaviors—those not viewed as criminal or serious enough to warrant reporting to the state. Based on national studies of behaviors that most often lead to office disciplinary referrals (Harrison, Vannest, Davis, & Reynolds, 2012), we suspect that those other more minor behavior problems were primarily acts of noncompliance and disobedience such as arguing with the teacher, not completing assignments, skipping class, and verbal bullying.

We speculate that whereas serious conduct problems and perhaps more minor ones *are* found more often in American schools than Chinese and Japanese schools, what distinguishes American schools from those in China and Japan the most with respect to classroom management and school discipline is that minor behavior problems are handled differently when they occur. That is, whereas students in American schools are often removed for such behaviors, students in Chinese and Japanese schools remain in their classrooms. This might be attributed largely to differences in school disciplinary policies in which Chinese and Japanese teachers are expected to handle issues of discipline themselves, and classroom removal and suspension are not options except in rare circumstances. Just as removing a student from the classroom is likely to reflect poorly on the effectiveness of Chinese and Japanese teachers in managing student behavior, so too is suspending a student from school likely to reflect poorly upon school leaders, as well as the entire school. But perhaps more importantly, removing the student might be viewed as contrary to the aim of developing supportive teacher–student and student–-student relationships and developing self-discipline.

Clearly, future research is needed, and especially studies examining if cultural differences are specific to the use of classroom removals and suspensions or apply to other punitive techniques and the use of punishment in general. As reviewed in the introduction, several studies have reported that punishment in general is a more common in Western than Eastern countries (Lewis et al., 2008, 2005; Riley et al., 2012; Romi, Lewis, & Katz, 2009).

4.2. Cultural differences in the use of praise and rewards

In elementary and middle schools, Chinese students, compared to American and Japanese students, tended to report greater use of praise and rewards by their teachers. This was consistently found across two of the three items assessing use of praise and rewards, with results being less consistent on the item assessing use of rewards for good behavior at the classroom level. Findings were less consistent and more complex with respect to differences between American and Japanese schools. At the elementary school level, no significant differences were found between American and Japanese schools. At the middle school level, Japanese students, compared to American students, reported that their teachers praised or rewarded a student *more* frequently, but they also reported that *they* (i.e., themselves individually) were praised or rewarded *less* frequently. Indeed, 56.1% of Japanese middle school students responded *never* to the item "I was praised for good behavior." These findings seem inconsistent in that one might expect that if Japanese students report a higher frequency than American students of teachers praising students in their classroom, they also would report that they, themselves, are praised or rewarded more frequently than American students. We can only speculate why the above inconsistency in responses to two items about praise and rewards occurred among Japanese middle school students. Perhaps Japanese students are less likely than American students to present themselves in a favorable or socially desirable manner. Obviously, future research is needed to replicate our findings. If replicated, additional studies also are needed to provide insight into why Japanese middle school students report that they seldom receive individual praise and rewards.

4.3. Teacher–student relationships and conduct problems: relations with praise/rewards

In each country, teachers' use of praise and rewards correlated positively with teacher–student relationships. We do not make causal inferences here, as praise and rewards may enhance the quality of teacher–student relationships, or conversely, positive teacher–student relationships may increase the likelihood that teachers use praise and rewards more frequently. A bidirectional relationship is likely. The rather surprising finding was that with the exception of Chinese elementary schools (in which the correlation was −.19), the use of praise and rewards failed to correlate significantly with conduct problems. Finding little correlation between use of praise and rewards and conduct problems supports Brophy's (1981) conclusion that the effects of praise and rewards on student behavior in the classroom "has been vastly oversold" (p. 19). This does not mean that when used wisely and strategically, praise and rewards are ineffective in preventing and correcting misbehavior. In fact, ample research shows that they are effective for those purposes (Akin-Little & Little, 2009). However, it does

indicate that multiple factors influence their effectiveness and influence conduct problems in general. They include the manner in which teachers use praise and rewards (e.g., targeted toward the individual or group, and what contingencies are employed) and students' preferences and experiences with praise and rewards and whether they perceive them as controlling or informative (see Bear, 2010 for review of those factors). However, we submit that the actual *need* for their use in managing student behavior in the classroom is a more influential factor in the relationship between conduct problems and the use of praise and rewards. That is, a number of factors beyond teachers' use of praise and rewards largely accounts for differences in student behavior both within and between countries.

For example, as reviewed in the introduction, research shows that there are fewer behavior problems in classrooms and schools in which students highly respect their teachers, value self-discipline (as seen in both academic achievement and conduct), and in which norms promoting prosocial behavior, self-discipline, respect, connectedness, and academic achievement are well-established. These characteristics are more likely to be found in Chinese and Japanese schools than in American schools. Researchers commonly attribute this to the Confucian values of social harmony, filial piety, and self-perfection. Those values influence how teachers manage student behavior, including their reluctance to remove students from the classroom and their emphasis on establishing strong teacher–student relationships. They also influence student behavior in a number of other ways, such as through parenting and in community norms. In cultures such as China and Japan in which the above values are strong, pervasive, and inculcated early and throughout children's development, fewer conduct problems are found, especially those inconsistent with the above values. In turn, teachers can focus less on preventing and correcting misbehavior via use of teacher-centered techniques. This is despite class sizes that are commonly reported as nearly twice the size of those in the U.S. (Ding et al., 2010). With less time spent correcting misbehavior, teachers are able to devote more time to teaching academic skills and cultural values, such as those taught in national moral education curricula in the two countries (Camicia & Zhu, 2011; Maosen, Taylor, & Shaogang, 2004).

4.4. Limitations

Several limitations of the study warrant caution in generalizing findings to other populations and settings. Primarily, the study relied upon students' self-reports. As such, students' perceptions of the use of classroom removals and of praise and rewards were assessed rather than the observed use of those practices. Unbiased observations of classrooms would be preferable for valid assessment. However, classroom observations are not without their own limitations. Most notably among them is the effect of observers or cameras on students and teachers, as well as the cost of conducting the observations and coding the data. Moreover, research shows that behavior is influenced more by one's perceptions of the environment than by reality per se (Bandura, 1986, 1997; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). As such, how positively a student perceives a teacher, including the teacher's perceived use of praise, rewards, and punishment, is likely more influential than the actual amount of praise, rewards, and punishment the teacher uses.

Another limitation of self-reports is that they are subject to a social desirability bias. It is unknown if such bias is greater among Chinese and Japanese students than American students. This is a particularly interesting point because Chinese and Japanese students presented the most favorable responses. Perhaps greater social desirability exists in more collectivistic cultures in which there is greater concern than in individualistic cultures about how the group (e.g., class or school) is viewed by others. Likewise, out of respect for authority, there may be a greater desire not to shed a negative light on the teacher or school. Additional studies, including observational ones, are needed to explore this possibility.

Several additional limitations of the study relate to the measures employed to assess conduct problems, teacher–student relationships, classroom removals, school suspensions, and the use of praise and rewards. Primary among them are that few items assessed each of those constructs, restricting the extent to which each construct was assessed and the reliability of the measure. Also, each measure was based on Western research and theory. It is likely that measures would have included different items, such as different forms of punishment and conduct problems, if they had been developed based on research in China and Japan.

Another limitation of the study was that analyses were at the individual level, limited to students in only five elementary and middle schools in each country, thus not allowing for multilevel analyses of data that would examine classroom and school level effects. In general, however, research on school climate tends to find that although classroom and school level effects are important, individual level effects account for much greater variance (Koth, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2008).

We also did not examine the influence of groups or cultures within each country. For example, we did not examine how conduct problems, teacher–student relationships, and classroom management techniques in American schools might vary as a function of racial and ethnic differences. It is well established that a greater percentage of African–American students are removed from classrooms and suspended from school compared to Caucasian students (Gregory, Cornell, & Fan, 2011; Skiba et al., 2011). However, it is unclear if this might relate to differences in teacher–student relationships and the use of praise and rewards. It also is unknown if there are differences in classroom removals, suspensions, teacher–student relationships, and use of praise and rewards between ethnic groups in China and Japan. Studying such differences was beyond the scope of the current study, and was greatly restricted by the Chinese and Japanese schools simply noting that over 95% of their students were of the same ethnicity, and the schools not agreeing to include items on the survey that identified race/ethnicity.

Finally, we did not examine differences across countries in the systems and structures for the particular schools in our study, which may have impacted students' perceptions. For example, middle school Chinese students typically stay in the same classroom throughout the school day (Carman & Zhang, 2012), whereas most American students change classrooms and teachers. We also suspect that Chinese and Japanese teachers and not principals handling behavior problems, except for the most serious ones, might largely explain fewer classroom removals and especially suspensions in Japanese and Chinese schools. That is, those practices are seldom an option for Japanese and Chinese teachers. Future research is needed to examine the extent to which these and other practices, systems, and structures account for differences in the use of positive and punitive techniques, teacher–student relationships, and conduct problems.

5. Conclusion

Findings provide insight into differences between China, Japan, and American schools in teachers' classroom management strategies, as well as in teacher–student relationships and conduct problems. American students reported the highest number of classroom removals and school suspensions. This is likely the result of greater conduct problems in American schools but also may be attributed to pervasive cultural differences between Eastern and

Western countries. Chinese students reported the highest use of praise and rewards by teachers. Unsurprisingly, and especially in light of the positive correlation found between teacher–student relationships and the use of praise and rewards, Chinese students also reported more positive teacher–student relationships than American students. Interestingly, although greater use of praise and rewards were found to relate to more positive teacher–student relations, such use was not generally related to conduct problems. Together with the findings on classroom removals, school suspensions, and conduct problems, this finding should cause American educators to ponder the sufficiency of the systematic and frequent use of classroom removals, suspensions, praise and rewards as primary means of managing student behavior, and to consider greater emphasis on developing teacher–student relationships and self-discipline. This would include an emphasis on practices such as teachers making sincere and sustained efforts to communicate caring, warmth, and support toward all students (Sabol & Pianta, 2012); being attuned to social network dynamics that are harmful to students and responding immediately, such as in bullying (Norwalk, Hamm, Farmer, & Barnes, 2015); and teaching social and emotional skills (Wentzel, Battle, Russell, & Looney, 2010). Such emphasis is consistent with the Social Emotional Learning approach to preventing behavior problems (Bear, Whitcomb, Elias, & Blank, 2015; Williford & Wolcott, 2015) and is supported by ample research (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011).

Acknowledgments

Authors would like to thank Morihiro Okada at Tokyo Iryou Gakuin University in Tokyo, Japan, and Reiko Yoshikawa at Tokai University in Kanagawa, Japan for collecting data in Japan. We also thank the Delaware Department of Education, Dover, Delaware, for their support in the collection of data.

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