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Perceived Social Support and Well Being in School; The Role of Students' Ethnicity

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This paper reports on the relationship between early adolescents' evaluation of the availability of instructional and social support from parents, teachers, and peers and their well-being. The main questions are whether indigenous and immigrant youngsters differ in their evaluation of the availability of support and whether the relationship varies by group. Participants in the study were 245 Dutch and 172 Turkish/Moroccan 10- to 13-year olds with a lower class background. Both Dutch and immigrant youngsters clearly distinguish between the various agents of support. Dutch youngsters report more instructional support from their parents than from their teacher, whereas immigrant youngsters report more instructional support from their teacher. Both for Dutch and immigrant students, parents were seen as the primary providers of emotional support. Reported well-being in the classroom was related to available teacher support and to the frequency of occurrence of learning-related problems.

KEY WORDS: social support; elementary school; immigrant students.

INTRODUCTION

Youngsters grow up in a multitude of social settings that shape their cognitions, feelings, and behavior through their perceptions and interpretations of these settings. By the time they reach adolescence students have had many favorable and unfavorable experiences in terms of the role of family members, teachers and peers in their learning and development, which have created diverse mindsets

that continue to influence their learning and development. They may either feel secure or insecure in terms of the availability of support from others, or they may feel surrounded by persons who provide for a cognitively and linguistically stimulating environment or by persons who do not care about their cognitive and linguistic competencies. Although our knowledge of such appraisals and the role they play in youngsters' learning and development is increasing (Boekaerts, 1992, 2003), it hardly can keep up with the recent growth in demand for knowledge and instruments by educators, policy makers, and youth counselors. They would like to avail of knowledge and instruments that facilitate their monitoring and guiding of adolescents' growth toward adulthood (Pajares and Urdan, 2003). In this paper we try to contribute both knowledge and an instrument with respect to young adolescents' perceptions of social support.

Social support refers to social assets, social resources, or social networks that people can use when they are in need of aid, advice, help, assistance, approval, comfort, protection, or backing. It summarizes information that one is cared for, esteemed and valued, and part of a network of communications and mutual obligations (cf. Cobb, 1976). As such, social support will contribute to well-being. Helgeson (1993), Van der Zee *et al.* (1997)

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and Wethington and Kessler (1986) showed that perceived availability of social support is a better predictor of well-being than actual support given. Moreover, the recipient may not appreciate all forms of social support or all forms irrespective of the provider. A study by Pierce (1992) showed that supportive behavior in the context of a conflicting relationship may be perceived as non-supportive by the recipient and may turn out to be less helpful than expected.

In the context of learning and instruction, social support may be highly valued by students, leading to motivation, cooperation and school adjustment. People differ in the social support they need in school to feel safe and accepted. Apparently in actual *learning* situations, students' need for social support affects the significance they attach to the perceived availability of social support. Several studies (cf. Boggiano *et al.*, 1989; Dweck, 1986; Sarason *et al.*, 1993) showed that students who focus strongly on the outcome of their performance feel more satisfied when they can show others how successful they were *without* help and support. These students may object to well-intended forms of instructional support, such as questioning, feedback and help, mainly because they view support as a signal of low competence or low regard in general. It can be assumed that students who consider social support in relation to their schoolwork as necessary and who can rely on social support in the school environment, appraise the school context as "supportive" of learning. Their satisfaction with the learning environment will be high, as reflected in their reported well-being in school. By contrast, students who perceive the school environment as non-supportive, while they feel the need for support, will report low well-being in school.

Generally young adolescents see parents as more important providers of social support than either peers or teachers (DuBois *et al.*, 1992). In the context of school and well-being in school, however, the teachers' role is important, both with respect to achieving academic goals (instructional support) and with regard to the regulation of emotional and social processes (emotional support) (Berndt, 1999; Furman and Buhrmester, 1992; Wentzel, 1994, 1998). Considering the important role of the teacher, we expect that reported well-being at school is strongly related to perceived instructional and emotional support from teachers, and to a lesser extent to support from parents and peers.

Dutch and Immigrant Youngsters

Research on social support has been mainly conducted with indigenous student populations (cf. Boekaerts, 1998; see, however, Williams, 2001). The

study by DuBois *et al.* (1992) is an exception in that a high percentage of the participants were of Afro-American origin, living in predominantly disadvantaged communities. However, the authors did not report on any group-related differences.

In the Netherlands, like in most other countries, many schools have an ethnically and culturally mixed population. Many immigrant students fall behind their Dutch peers and need extra support from teachers to prevent drop out (Alkan, 1998; Driessen and Withagen, 1999). In accordance with the earlier presented notion that need for support moderates the relationship between the perceived availability of support and well-being, it is important to know whether Dutch and immigrant youngsters differ with respect to perceived availability of social support from various agents.

As stated before, we predict for all young adolescents, irrespective of their cultural background, that the availability of social support provided by the teachers is important for their school-related well-being. It can be reasoned that this is even more the case for immigrant youngsters than for their Dutch contemporaries. Several researchers have suggested that the role played by immigrant parents in relation to their children's education differs from the role played by Dutch parents. Distelbrink and Pels (2000) reported that Turkish and Moroccan youngsters feel less supported by their parents in school matters than by their teachers and peers. Furthermore, it is evident that immigrant parents have limited knowledge about the Dutch school system (Veen, 1999) and that they also encounter language difficulties (Vedder *et al.*, 1996). Accordingly, it was hypothesized that ethnic minority youngsters, more than majority youngsters, perceive their parents as less important providers of social support and that their reported well-being at school is assumed to be less related to perceived availability of support from parents (see also Crul, 2000; Leseman, 1999).

The goal of the study is to contribute to the knowledge needed for creating learning environments that support students' well-being. In order to achieve this it is essential that researchers gain insight into the relationship between the desired and the perceived availability of instructional and emotional support from different agents and whether this relationship is similar for ethnic or cultural groups. This has resulted in 2 main research questions. The first question is whether Dutch and immigrant young adolescents have different perceptions of parents, teachers, and classmates as providers of social support in the context of school. The second research question is whether perceived availability of support affects well-being in the classroom in a similar way for Dutch and immigrant youngsters.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 413 10- to 13-year-old students from 27 elementary schools across the Netherlands. Their ethnic background was determined by their parents' birthplace. Out of them 172 had either a Moroccan or a Turkish background and 245 had Dutch parents. The data from Turkish and Moroccan students were aggregated because both groups are comparable in terms of educational achievements. Indeed, many aspects of their cultural orientation coincide, such as child-rearing practices and religion (cf. Tesser and Veenman, 1997; Vedder *et al.*, 1995). Schools were picked at random from a list of schools participating in a special reading program for disadvantaged students. In these schools especially Turkish and Moroccan students are over-represented. Participants' gender distribution is slightly in favor of boys. In our sample, boys and girls were approximately the same age ($M = 11.2$, $SD = 0.66$ for boys and $M = 11.1$, $SD = 0.62$ for girls). We found a relation between age and ethnicity, $F(1, 362) = 17.9$, $p < .01$. Moroccan and Turkish youngsters ($M = 11.3$, $SD = 0.71$) were significantly older than their Dutch contemporaries ($M = 11.0$, $SD = 0.57$). The latter finding reflects the achievement gap between Dutch students on the one hand and Turkish and Moroccan students on the other (Alkan, 1998). Within the Dutch school system this gap is reflected in age differences resulting from grade repetition.

Information about parents' educational qualification was scored on a scale ranging from 0 to 3 (0 = *did not complete primary school*, 1 = *did complete junior vocational stream*, 2 = *completed either a school for general secondary education or a senior vocational stream*, 3 = *holds a college or university degree*). We used the mean of both parents' scores as an indicator of SES. Not all youngsters were equally disadvantaged. Dutch parents achieved significantly higher levels of education ($M = 1.44$, $SD = 0.678$) than Turkish or Moroccan parents ($M = 0.77$, $SD = 0.550$; $t = 10.54$, $p = .000$). Ethnicity and SES were correlated in our sample ($\chi^2(6, N = 387) = 95.3$; $p < .000$). In both minority groups more parents completed only a lower vocational stream or did not complete primary education (immigrants: 92%; Dutch: 53%).

Instruments

To develop the scale for youngster's perceived need of social support and the perceived availability of social support we drew on previous work by Sarason *et al.* (1986; 1993), Cohen and Wills (1985), House and Kahn (1985),

DuBois *et al.* (1992), and Furman and Buhrmester (1992). We distinguished 2 functions of social support, namely instructional support aimed at better understanding and better task completion (Cohen, 1994) and emotional support referring to forms of communication (e.g., praise and other expressions of encouragement, reinforcement and admiration) that primarily boost a student's self esteem (Thompson, 1997).

The Perceived Need of Support Questionnaire included a number of self-report items on the frequency of occurrence of problems related to learning and instruction. These items elicited a judgment about the frequency of occurrence of situations that ask for either instructional or emotional support. For example, "How often do you have problems with your homework?" A four-point Likert scale followed this question (*never*, *not often*, *quite frequently*, and *very often*). The questionnaire contained 10 items (see Appendix A).

Principal Component Analyses (with varimax rotation) revealed that 7 problem situations were perceived as 1 factor (eigenvalue 3.13) that explained 44.7% of the variance. The factor defines the subscale frequency of problems in learning or instruction situations. Reliability (internal consistency) is good (Cronbach's alpha .79). The remaining items referred to the occurrence of emotional problems, but did not contribute to a reliable scale (Cronbach's alpha $< .6$), and therefore we did not use these latter items in further analyses.

The Student Perceived Availability of Social Support Questionnaire (SPASSQ) presents students with 11 school-related situations, referring either to learning situations (instructional support) or situations of emotional coping (emotional support). An example of instructional support is: "Whom can you go to when you need help with your homework?" A sample item of emotional support is: "Who shares your feelings when you are sad?" For each item, students indicate to what degree (*hardly ever*, *sometimes*, *often*, *always*) they consider each of 3 agents (parent, teacher, peer) as relevant support providers. This results in 33 responses (see Appendix A). Principal Component Analyses (with varimax rotation) was applied to the data of the SPASSQ. A minimum of 3 factors was needed to explain the underlying structure in the data. On the first factor items that referred to perceived availability of *social support from teacher* had high loadings. The second factor consisted of 11 items that concern *social support from classmates*. The third factor attracted items that refer to (social and instructional) *social support from parents*.

Although the analysis did not support the *a-priori* assumed distinction between instructional and emotional support, we have decided to maintain this distinction for support that is given by parents and teachers. This

Table I. Correlation Coefficients Between Perceived Availability of Elements of Social Support and Frequency of Experienced Problems in Learning Situations

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Instructional support parents	1.00	.65**	.66**	.52**	.47**	.26**
2. Emotional support parents	.63**	1.00	.61***	.61**	.41**	.03
3. Instructional support teacher	.30**	.37**	1.00	.65**	.48**	.24**
4. Emotional support teacher	.26**	.41*	.57**	1.00	.44**	.08
5. Social support classmates	.21*	.31**	.28**	.34**	1.00	.11
6. Frequency of learning-related problems	-.01	.03	.23	.18*	.23**	1.00

Note. In the lower half, coefficients for the Turkish/Moroccan group are given ($n = 142$), in the upper half for the Dutch group ($n = 180$).

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

decision is mainly based on the idea that differences in type of support from parents and teacher may be entangled with ethnicity. This distinction was not maintained for support from peers as we were mainly interested in perceived differences in the roles of parents and teachers as providers of support. Combining the items into a single scale would prevent the discovery of these more subtle ethnicity-related effects. Hence, 5 scales were inferred: instructional (5 items, alpha .78) and emotional (6 items, alpha .77) by teachers; instructional (5 items, alpha .75) and emotional (6 items, alpha .78) by parents; and social support by peers (11 items, alpha .86).

The *School Attitude Scale* (Vorst, 1990) was used to measure aspects of satisfaction while being at school. It consists of 3 subscales: *self-confidence* (a sample item is "I think I am good at explaining what I mean"), *motivation* (To get good grades I work hard for all school subjects) and *school adjustment* (I like the way my classmates treat me). Each scale contains 24 items. Response categories are "yes," "I don't know," and "no." Construct validity and reliability of these scales are good (Vorst, 1990). In our study Cronbach's alphas amounted to .83, .84, and .86, respectively.

Procedure

The questionnaires were group administered by senior students in education as part of their study requirements. Participants individually worked on the tests while seated in their classroom.

RESULTS

Perceived Availability and Perceived Need of Social Support

An important aim of the study was to investigate whether Dutch students differ from students with a

Turkish or Moroccan background with regard to both perceived need (i.e., frequency of problematic learning situations) and perceived availability of social support from different providers. Correlation coefficients were computed between perceived availability of support from various providers for the 2 groups. The results are given in Table I.

All correlations between measures of perceived availability of emotional and instructional support are substantial, meaning that youngsters who perceived a high availability of support from one agent were inclined to see other agents as providers of support. Remarkably, there is only a weak to moderate relation between frequency of needed instructional support and perceived availability of support. Comparing the correlations within the Dutch and immigrant groups of students, it can be noted that in the immigrant group correlations are generally lower. There is a marked difference in correlation between instructional support from teachers and parents (.66 in the Dutch sample vs. .30 in the immigrant sample). Furthermore, the correlation between emotional support from parents and teacher is higher in the Dutch sample than in the immigrant sample (.61 vs. .41, respectively). This pattern shows that the Dutch students perceive teacher and parents as more equal providers of both emotional and instructional support than the immigrant students do. Interestingly we also found a difference in correlation between perceived availability of instructional support from parents and the frequency with which students perceive need for this support (.26 vs. -.01 in the Dutch and immigrant students, respectively). Apparently, immigrant students perceive their parents less as providers of instructional support than Dutch students do.

Mean scores and standard deviations are presented in Table II. Primary school students reported perceiving most social support from parents and least from peers. However, the data show that Dutch students report a higher perceived availability of instructional and emotional support from parents, whereas immigrant students consider

Table II. Mean Scores and Standard Deviations on Perceived Availability of Social Support and the Perceived Frequency of Problems in Instruction and Learning Situations for Dutch Students and Turkish/Moroccan Students

	Dutch			Turkish/Moroccan		
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	SD	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	SD
Instructional support parents	189	2.83	0.69	153	2.60	0.71
Emotional support parents	189	3.17	0.66	153	3.05	0.64
Instructional support teacher	180	2.86	0.75	153	3.06	0.66
Emotional support teacher	188	2.27	0.71	151	2.59	0.72
Social support classmates	189	2.09	0.62	152	2.14	0.62
Frequency of learning-related problems	189	2.13	0.51	152	2.16	0.43

teachers as more important providers of both emotional and instructional support. Testing the contrast between the 2 groups overall, controlling for the effect of frequency of need for instructional support, confirmed this effect to be statistically significant: Pillais $F(5, 331) = 10.74$, $p < .01$. Univariate testing showed this effect to be statistically significant for perceived availability of the teacher as provider of instructional ($F(1, 335) = 7.07$, $p < .01$) and emotional ($F(1, 335) = 16.87$, $p < .01$) support. Furthermore, the effect was statistically significant for perceived availability of instructional support from parents ($F(1, 335) = 10.65$, $p < .01$), but not for emotional support ($F(1, 335) = 2.76$, $p > .05$). No significant difference between groups was found for the perceived availability of support by classmates ($F(1, 335) = 0.29$).

When the correlational data and the mean scores are combined, the resulting pattern suggests that the main difference between Dutch and immigrant students is in how the role of the teacher in providing both emotional and instructional support, and that of the parents in providing instructional support is perceived. Dutch youngsters will rely more often on instructional support from parents when meeting problems in learning situations, whereas immigrant youngsters rely less on parental support. The latter group is more dependent on instructional support from the teacher, whereas emotional support is perceived as more available from parents.

Social Support and Well-Being

The second research question concerns the relation between perceived need and perceived availability of support with well-being in class. Well-being has been operationalized in the School Attitude Scale in terms of 3 subscales: self-confidence, motivation, and school adjustment. In Table III mean scores and standard deviations for the 2 groups (Dutch and Turkish/Moroccan students) are given.

An overall effect of ethnic background was found on the 3 subscales: Pillais $F(3, 285) = -5.94$, $p < .001$. Univariate testing showed this effect to be statistically significant for *motivation*, $F(1, 287) = 5.83$, $p < .02$, but not for *self-confidence*, $F(1, 287) = 3.16$, $p > .05$, and *school adjustment*, $F(1, 287) = 0.13$. Turkish/Moroccan students scored higher on motivation than Dutch students (59.28 vs. 56.90) whereas both groups scored about equal with respect to reported school adjustment and self-confidence.

Table IV displays the correlation coefficients between perceived availability of support from different agents, perceived frequency of problems in instruction or learning situations, and the 3 measures of well-being in class. A clear negative correlation is found between perceived frequency of problems in instruction or learning situations with *self-confidence* ($r = -.41$ and $r = -.38$ for Dutch and Turkish/Moroccan students, respectively), and *motivation* ($r = -.34$ and $r = -.37$). For *school adjustment* these figures are less clear-cut ($r = -.20$ and $r = -.16$). Students, who reported a more frequent need for social support in the classroom, also reported low self-confidence, and were less motivated to do their schoolwork. In other words, these students categorized many classroom situations as situations where the help and assistance of others is necessary. They realized that they frequently do not understand things, cannot make their homework, and score below the mark. This categorization of classroom situations is linked to low satisfaction

Table III. Mean Scores and Standard Deviations on Well-Being in School for Dutch and Turkish/Moroccan Students

	Dutch			Turkish/ Moroccan		
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	SD	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	SD
All						
Self-confidence	149	56.94	9.14	145	54.96	7.43
Motivation	147	56.90	9.62	146	59.28	7.09
School adjustment	150	60.73	9.11	148	60.26	8.38

Table IV. Correlations Between Perceived Availability of Social Support and Perceived Frequency of Problems in Instruction and Learning Situations with Aspects of Well-Being in Class for Dutch and Turkish/Moroccan Students

Dutch students $n = 189$	Self-confidence	Motivation	School adjustment
Instructional support parents	-.16	-.01	.06
Emotional support parents	-.04	.08	.14
Instructional support teacher	-.13	-.01	.08
Emotional support teacher	-.05	.12	.28*
Social support classmates	.02	.04	.20*
Frequency of learning-related problems	-.41**	-.34**	-.20*
Turkish/Moroccan students ($n = 149$)			
Instructional support parents	.10	.10	-.04
Emotional support parents	.09	.13	.01
Instructional support teacher	-.06	.14	.15
Emotional support teacher	-.10	.11	.23*
Social support classmates	-.16	.00	.14
Frequency of learning-related problems	-.38**	-.37**	-.16

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

in school. No differences between Dutch and immigrant students were found at this point. Furthermore, the findings in Table IV suggest that students' self-confidence and motivation were not related to perceived availability of support from various agents. A moderate positive relation between emotional teacher support and school adjustment was found in both the Dutch ($r = .28$) and immigrant ($r = .23$) students.

The resulting correlation pattern suggests that whether or not students feel confident or motivated is largely independent of the perception of the availability of social support. Only low to moderate correlations have been found between school adjustment and perceived availability of support from teacher and classmates. However, we proposed earlier that the significance that students attach to the perceived availability of social support may vary, depending on the self-reported frequency of problems that occurred in learning and instruction situations, because the extent to which students actually have to cope with learning problems will have an effect. In order to get a more accurate estimate of the relations between perceived availability of support and aspects of school well-being we decided to conduct additional analyses in which relations between these variables were estimated after the effects of perceived frequency of problems in learning situations have been accounted for. Modified regression analyses were applied to the data. In a first step, each of the 3 measures for well-being in class were included as the dependent variables whereas ethnicity (Dutch vs. immigrant students) and frequency of occurrence of learning-related problems were added as predictor variables. Saving the non-standardized residual variance, the measures of the perceived availability of support from various agents were

included as predictors. These analyses were done for each of the provider groups (parents, teachers, and classmates) separately. The latter analyses resulted in an estimated relationship between perceived availability of support and aspects of well-being in class after the influences of perceived frequency of problems in learning situations and ethnicity have been accounted for. In a next round, the interaction effects of (1) ethnicity with perceived availability of support (from parents, teachers, and classmates, respectively) and (2) perceived frequency of learning-related problems with support were included. In a final step, variables that had a significant effect were selected for inclusion in a final regression analysis. The results of this final step are given in Table V.

With self-confidence as the dependent variable, an effect of perceived frequency of occurrence of problems with learning and instruction was found ($\beta = -.39$, $p < .01$). As confrontations with learning-related problems increase, self-confidence will decrease. With motivation as the dependent variable, effects were found for ethnicity ($\beta = .12$, $p < .05$), perceived frequency of problems with learning and instruction ($\beta = -.38$, $p < .01$) and emotional support by the teacher ($\beta = .18$, $p < .01$). Turkish/Moroccan students report a somewhat higher motivation (cf. Table III). When students meet more often learning-related problems, this results in a negative effect on motivation. A higher perceived availability of emotional support from the teacher has a positive effect on motivation. Finally, with school adjustment as the dependent variable, effects were found for frequency of learning-related problems ($\beta = -.28$, $p < .01$), support from classmates ($\beta = .15$, $p < .05$), and availability of instructional support from the teacher ($\beta = .18$,

Table V. Effects of Ethnicity, Perceived Frequency of Learning-Related Problems, the Perceived Availability of Social Support Provided by Teachers, Parents and Peers and the Interaction Effects of Ethnicity and Perceived Frequency with Support on School Adjustment, School Motivation and Self-Confidence

Dependent variables	Predictors	β	t
Self confidence	Perceived frequency of learning-related problems	-.39	-7.01**
	Ethnicity	.12	2.14*
Motivation	Perceived frequency of learning-related problems	-.38	-6.75**
	Emotional support teacher	.18	3.12**
School adjustment	Perceived frequency of learning-related problems	-.28	-4.73**
	Support classmates	.15	2.42*
	Instructional support teacher	.18	2.65**
	Perceived frequency* instructional support teacher	.18	3.03**

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

$p < .01$). Whereas frequency of being confronted with learning-related problems had a negative effect on school adjustment, perceived availability of instructional support from the teacher had a positive effect.

None of the comparisons showed that an interaction of ethnicity with perceived availability of support had a statistically significant effect on school well-being. Furthermore, the interaction of perceived frequency of learning-related problems with availability of support was shown to have a statistically significant effect in only 1 comparison. The effect of perceived frequency on school adjustment depended on perceived availability of instructional teacher support ($\beta = .19$, $p < .01$). Analyzing this interaction shows that students who combine a low-perceived availability of instructional teacher support with a high frequency of learning-related problems report a marked lower school adjustment than other students. Apparently, perceived availability of instructional teacher support is important for preventing frequent confrontation with learning-related problems from having a negative effect on school adjustment.

In conclusion, ethnic group differences were found with respect to perceived importance of various providers: Dutch students reported a higher level of both instructional and emotional support from their parents than immigrant youngsters. Immigrant students perceive their parents less as providers of instructional support than Dutch students do. Dutch students who viewed their parents as salient providers of social support are also inclined to view their teacher(s) as important supplier(s) of social support. The data show that Turkish/Moroccan students reported a somewhat higher school motivation than Dutch students. Furthermore, students' well-being was related to the perceived frequency of learning-related problems and reported school adjustment and motivation in the classroom were related to available teacher support.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study confirm that disadvantaged students and students with an immigrant background make a distinction between different providers of social support. Dutch students perceive more instructional support to be available from parents than immigrant students, whereas Turkish and Moroccan students perceive more support to be available from teachers.

Our expectation that ethnic minority students would more frequently report problems that occur with respect to instruction and learning than Dutch students, was not confirmed. A possible explanation is that due to the selection of participating schools from a list of schools that were eligible for participation in special intervention programs, the Dutch youngsters also are relatively disadvantaged. This may imply a more frequent confrontation with problems in learning situations, and as a consequence they hardly differed from ethnic minority students in terms of instructional and learning problems. Actually, in our sample description we pointed out that, although the Dutch students' SES was relatively low, it was clearly higher than immigrant students' SES. This information seems to undermine this first explanation for finding no difference. An alternative, methodological explanation is that the perceived frequency of learning-related problems does not correspond to the intensity of problems as observed by others or as assessed with tests. Jungbluth (1998) suggests that this is particularly true for immigrant youngsters. He showed that Turkish and Moroccan students' self-reports on learning problems tend to be more positive than self-reports of Dutch students with learning problems. Hence, minority students may report a perceived frequency that may underestimate real occurrence.

We found confirmation for our hypothesis that Turkish and Moroccan youngsters perceive lower levels

of availability of parental instructional support than their Dutch contemporaries do, whereas no such difference was found with respect to the availability of parental emotional support. The Dutch students view instructional support from teacher and parents as being about equal, whereas there is a marked contrast in level for the Turkish/Moroccan students. Interestingly, Dutch students link school problems more frequently with instructional support from parents than immigrant students do. Several studies (Crul, 2000) support the finding with respect to the parents but suggest that Turkish and Moroccan students receive school-related support from siblings instead. Examining support from parents may be too restricted, especially when it comes to learning-related support, and support from home in a more general sense may more adequately account for this support category. We therefore recommend that new studies should include the extra category "siblings" in the social support questionnaire when it is used with immigrant samples. The finding that for immigrant youngsters the frequency of occurrence of problems with learning and instruction is unrelated to the perceived availability of parental support seems to have special significance for attempts to strengthen parent-school contacts. Such contacts seek to strengthen parents' involvement with their children's learning. The finding can inspire us either to invest more in programs aimed at immigrant parents' involvement in their children's learning, and thus to establish a link, or to seek for alternative opportunities to strengthen a supportive environment for these youngsters' learning.

Students who reported that they frequently encounter problematic situations in the classroom (i.e., situations where they are confronted with miscomprehension, failure, high level of difficulty) have lower school satisfaction than students who do not frequently encounter these situations. Their self-confidence, as well as their motivation and school adjustment is negatively associated with the frequency of occurrence of problematic situations. However, only 2 of the 3 measures (school adjustment and motivation) were related to perceived availability of social support (i.e., support from the teacher) after the effect of frequency of occurrence of problems had been accounted for. What is the significance of school adjustment and motivation at school being related to perceived teacher support whereas self-confidence is not? The latter finding suggests that self-confidence is independent from the type of social support students perceive as available, but that the other 2 aspects of school satisfaction depend on specific cues in the learning environment that students use to determine whether school is a comfortable place to be. The availability of teacher support seems to be such a cue.

This latter remark, like some other earlier remarks, should be treated cautiously. The design of the present study does not permit conclusions in terms of causation or for that matter the direction of causation. We did not conduct pretests on any of the measures and hence we could not measure any change. It could well be that the well-being variables measured in fact refer to quite stable personal characteristics which are not easily affected by the support variables used in this study. This is another topic that we hope to address in further studies. We also need to further clarify the possible role of parents, peers and possibly siblings. Although we found differences between Dutch and immigrant youngsters with respect to their evaluation of the availability of support from these persons, the evaluations with respect to parents and peers were unrelated to their school-related well-being. With respect to well-being this suggest that similarity across ethnic groups in terms of the role of the perceived availability of teacher support is what counts and not differences between the groups in terms of the role of the perceived availability of support from the other persons. Although our finding is a step toward the conclusion that these other persons do not matter in terms of what happens to students in class, we clearly have insufficient evidence for such a generally defined conclusion. In follow-up studies we will include other dependent variables ascertaining students' academic as well as emotional characteristics, in order to find out whether indeed the differences between ethnic groups with regard to the perceived availability of support from parents and peers bare no relationship to their school life.

APPENDIX A: THE STUDENT PERCEIVED AVAILABILITY OF SOCIAL SUPPORT QUESTIONNAIRE

Items of the Frequency-of-Occurrence-of-Problems-with-Instruction-and-Learning subscale

1. *How often you do not understand a lesson?
2. *How often do you receive failing grades?
3. *How often does it happen that you want advice when you have a serious problem that you cannot resolve on your own?
4. *How often do you have problems with learning in school?
5. *How often do you have personal problems?
6. How often do you feel the need that someone else shows that he or she shares in your happiness about a good grade?

7. *How often do you have problems with your homework?
8. How often does it happen that you just can't get something right?
9. How often do you want others to share in your happiness?
10. How often do you feel the need to be comforted?

Items preceded by an asterisk are part of the eventual scale for the occurrence of problems with instruction or learning.

Example of Format of an Item

How often you do not understand a lesson?

0 never 0 not often 0 quite frequently 0 very often

Items of the Perceived-Availability-of-Social-Support Subscale

1. When you don't understand a lesson, who can you count on to explain it to you?
2. If you received a failing grade, when you thought your work was satisfactory, whom could you ask for an explanation of your grade?
3. Who encourages you when your performance is weaker than usual?
4. When you need advice, to whom can you turn?
5. When you are not able to complete your school-work, whom can you ask for help?
6. Whom can you go to with your personal problems?
7. Who shows that he or she is happy when you perform well?
8. Who is prepared to help you when you have problems with your homework?
9. When you just can't get something right, whom can you count on to show how it's done?
10. Who shares in your feelings when you are happy?
11. Who shares in your feelings when you are sad?

Example of Format of an Item

When you don't understand a lesson, who can you count on to explain it to you?

Parent	0 hardly ever	0 sometimes	0 often	0 always
Teacher	0 hardly ever	0 sometimes	0 often	0 always
Peer	0 hardly ever	0 sometimes	0 often	0 always

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