

Swedish primary school pupils' inter-ethnic relationships

PAUL VEDDER¹ and MINA O'DOWD²

¹*Leiden University, Leiden, The Netherlands*

²*Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden*

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The aim of the Swedish educational policy is educational participation and academic achievement for all children, irrespective of ethnic background. Majority language instruction is an important tool used to achieve this goal. We argue that taking lessons in Swedish-as-a-second-language (S2) sets children apart in their class and limits their possibilities to interact with Swedish children and the immigrant children, who do not receive S2-lessons. In accordance with the contact hypothesis, we assumed that this limitation would have a negative impact on peer evaluation of these pupils' social competence. 394 children in ethnically mixed classes (grades 4–6) participated in the study reported in this article. As hypothesized, S2-children's sociability was evaluated significantly lower than that of Swedish children. Immigrant children, who do not have S2-lessons, do not have significantly lower scores. These findings were confirmed, using teachers' evaluations of children's social competence. It is suggested that more research is needed to investigate whether communicative skills, academic competence, or, perhaps, the organizational consequences of extra language lessons play a role in children's assessments of peer social competence.

Key words: Sweden, elementary school, immigrant children, language proficiency, social competence.

Paul Vedder, Leiden University, Center for the Study of Education and Instruction, P.B. 9555, 2300 RB Leiden, the Netherlands. E-mail: vedder@fsw.leidenuniv.nl

In most countries, schools stress the importance of social adjustment, peaceful and orderly coexistence, and collaboration as prerequisites for social cohesion and nation building (Hofstee, 1992; Eisikovits, 1995; Jönsson, 1995). This is also true of schools in Sweden. Schools are institutions in which children from a variety of cultural backgrounds meet. This aspect of schooling is especially vital for immigrants, as it brings them in contact with the majority culture. In Sweden, where one fourth of all immigrants are 15 year old or less (Statistics Sweden, 1997), this aspect of schooling plays a significant role in the acculturation process in the lives of immigrant children.

Sweden is a country in which a great deal of emigration as well as immigration has taken place (Arbetsmarknadsdepartementet, 1988, in Sirén, 1991). In the sixties and seventies Sweden welcomed substantial numbers of foreigners as a source of inexpensive labor. At present, 19 percent of the 8.8 million Swedish inhabitants are of foreign origin, i.e., they are foreign citizens, they were born abroad or they are the child of at least one parent who was born abroad and has immigrated to Sweden in 1968 or later. Most immigrants live in or near big cities. Sweden is considered to be a country, in which there is a great deal of tolerance towards a broad variety of ideologies and different ways of living (Pettersson & Riis, 1994). Ethnic conflicts, racism and discrimination are scarce, although certainly not absent. In Sweden there is a rather strong commitment to the dissuasion of racism and discrimination (Skolverket, 1993). Teachers and other educators emphasize the importance of children getting along well with each other, and it seems as if they are successful in this regard (Löfgren, 1991). Nevertheless, a recent study by Virta and Westin (1998) showed

that 13–18 year old immigrant youths in Sweden experience discrimination and that the amount of discrimination experienced influences the psychological well-being and school adjustment of these youths.

American studies show that personal characteristics, such as physical appearance, skin color, and hair type greatly influence children's evaluations of other children and consequently affects inter-ethnic relationships (Aboud, 1994). Another important characteristic for children, when they establish and maintain peer relationships, is academic achievement (Byrne & Griffith, 1966; Dors, 1987). If many children in a particular ethnic group have considerably lower achievement levels than their peers, these children will have a rather weak or problematic social position in a class. This fact may give rise to a situation, in which children may appear to have difficulty in interacting with children of another ethnic group, due to characteristics, such as skin color and hair style, when the low achievement levels that these children have are actually the source of conflict.

Kromhout and Vedder (1995) showed that children's proficiency in the majority language may also play a role in establishing or avoiding interethnic relations. The so-called contact hypothesis explains why this may be the case. This hypothesis states that the actual contact between children is a powerful tool that can be used to improve children's interethnic relationships (Allport, 1979; Slavin, 1979; Phinney & Rotherham, 1986). Although it is rarely used in explaining problematic inter-ethnic relationships, it goes almost without saying that a lack of proficiency in a common language between children, in this case, the dominant language, will hamper contact between pupils. As

such, the inability to make contact through a common language can be seen to be a predictor for the establishment of less than optimal interethnic relationships.

There are no studies available, which explore the impact of these factors on inter-ethnic relationships in Swedish primary schools. It is, however, rather unlikely that school achievement plays a role in establishing and maintaining friendly interethnic relations. There are at least two reasons for this. First of all, the achievement levels of immigrant children in Sweden are not substantially lower than that of Swedish children (Löfgren, 1991; Taube, 1995). Secondly, grading and certification does not play a role in Swedish primary schools, which may make school achievement a less obvious characteristic in Swedish schools than in schools in many other countries. In that which follows, the focus is mainly on ethnicity and Swedish language proficiency, seen as possible criterion used amongst children to evaluate peer relationships. Swedish language proficiency is an obvious characteristic, which distinguishes children from one another in Swedish schools, due to the manner in which it is dealt with at the school level.

All pupils, who speak another language other than Swedish at home and who are judged to have insufficient Swedish language skills, have the right, according to Swedish law, to Swedish-as-a-second-language lessons. Pupils' teachers and principals select pupils for participation in Swedish-as-a-second-language instruction. Newly immigrated children, on the other hand, often start school in special preparatory classes, in which they learn to communicate in Swedish. When they become pupils in a regular class, they may receive up to four Swedish-as-a second-language lessons a week. These lessons often entail that pupils leave their classrooms for periods of time throughout the school day and the school week. Participation in Swedish-as-a-second-language lessons is based on teachers' and principals' assessments of pupils' needs. The policy and practice that entails that children frequently leave their classroom for Swedish-as-a-second-language lessons and return to the classroom after these lessons makes 'not being sufficiently proficient in Swedish' highly significant and apparent, even to children. (This group of pupils is henceforth referred to as the S2 group. The group of pupils with an immigrant background, who do not receive Swedish-as-a-second-language lessons, is referred to henceforth as NoS2.) Unfortunately, no studies exist, that have investigated the extent to which teachers' assessments of pupils' Swedish language proficiency, used as selection criterion for Swedish-as-a-second-language lessons, are correct. We assume for the purposes of this study, however, that the teachers have made valid assessments. The main question to be investigated in the present study is whether or not Swedish language competence is used as a criterion amongst children to evaluate peer social competence. We try to validate the findings by comparing these with teachers' evaluations of the same pupils' social competence.

METHOD

Subjects

In the original study, sociometric data were collected for children in grades four, five, and six (ages 10–13) in six elementary schools in the Stockholm region and in three schools in Gotland, an island southeast of Stockholm in the Baltic Sea. A total of 671 children participated (see Vedder & O'Dowd, 1996). In this study we have only used data, which include children in ethnically mixed classes, since we assume that children in these classes have sufficient opportunities to make evaluations of both Swedish and immigrant children, both those included in the S2 group and those who are included in the NoS2 group, with regard to their peers' social competence. The schools in Gotland were all Swedish. In two other schools a total of six classes were all-immigrant classes, of which one was mono-ethnic. The sample we used contains data from three 4th, six 5th, and five 6th grade classes. In Table 1 we present a further description of the pupils. Children are distinguished by gender, by grade, by ethnicity, and by S2 or NoS2 participation. The criterion used for children's ethnicity was mothers' country of birth.

The table shows that the representation of grades in the sample is not well balanced. The proportion of 4th graders is about 20 percent and of 6th graders about 50 percent. Overall the gender distribution is well balanced. However, the group of Swedish pupils is more well balanced than the immigrant group. As far as the Finnish and the Assyrian groups are concerned, it is particularly unbalanced. In these groups, more boys than girls receive S2-lessons. Participation in S2-lessons is not equally distributed between ethnic groups. Only seven percent of the Finnish children receive S2 instruction, while 60 percent of the Assyrian, 91 percent of the Greek and 56 percent of the other immigrant children receive S2 lessons.

Schools were not willing to provide information on parents' educational background. All of the schools, however, with the exception of one, agreed to give us an estimate by class of the proportion of parents in each of three categories: less than 10 years of formal education, 10 to 13 years of formal education, and more than 13 years of formal education. The average proportions for the three categories were 44 percent, 38 percent, and 18 percent, indicating that the educational background of most of the parents ranged from a rather low to a medium level. Parents' level of education tends to be lower as the number of immigrant children

Table 1. *Characteristics of the subjects*

	Girls	Boys
Grade 4	37 (47%)	41 (53%)
Grade 5	67 (52%)	63 (48%)
Grade 6	86 (46%)	100 (54%)
Total	190 (48%)	204 (52%)
Swedish children	105 (50%)	103 (50%)
Finnish	10 (37%)	17 (63%)
Assyrian	41 (44%)	53 (56%)
Greek	5 (46%)	6 (54%)
Other immigrant *	29 (54%)	25 (46%)
Total immigrant children	85 (46%)	101 (54%)
Immigrant children with S2	42 (43%)	56 (57%)
Immigrant children without S2	43 (49%)	45 (51%)

*The category entitled 'other immigrants' mainly refers to immigrants from a variety of Western European countries, Morocco, the former Yugoslavia, and Chile.

in classes increases. The Pearson *p.m.* correlation between proportion of immigrant children in the class and the proportion of parents estimated to be in the first category of educational background amounted to 0.75 ($n = 13$, $p = 0.003$). The correlation between the latter variable and the proportion of S2-children in the class was 0.61 ($n = 13$, $p = 0.03$).

In three schools, teachers were asked to rate their pupils' social competence. Twelve teachers participated in this exercise.

Instrument

The Revised Class Play scale (RCP) was used to study inter-ethnic relationships. This instrument, which was originally developed by Masten *et al.*, (1985), is used to ascertain children's social competence. The version used in this study consists of 32 one-sentence descriptions of behavior. We used a version, which was originally translated and adapted for the Netherlands by Aleva (1992). It was decided that this version, of which 24 items stem directly from the Masten *et al.* version, would be more valid in Sweden, as the Netherlands and Sweden are two modern, Western European welfare states, which resemble each other in terms of education, social policies, and value orientation (Halman, 1994). Most of the items describe behavior that is socially competent, according to Western norms, and are labeled 'sociability/leadership'. The other items describe behavior that is socially incompetent, according to Western norms, and are labeled either 'aggressive/disruptive' or 'sensitive/isolated'. Below all of the role descriptions for each of the clusters, as originally identified by Masten *et al.* (1985), are listed.

Sociability-Leadership

1. Good leader
2. Everyone likes to be with
3. Has many friends
4. Everyone listens to
5. Good ideas for things to do
6. Makes new friends easily
7. Someone you can trust
8. Helps other people when they need it
9. Can get things going
10. Plays fair *
11. Likes to play with others rather than alone*
12. Usually happy
13. Makes other children laugh

Aggressive-Disruptive

1. Picks on other kids
2. Too bossy
3. Teases other children too much
4. Gets into a lot of fights
5. Loses temper easily
6. Shows off a lot
7. Interrupts when other children are speaking
8. Does not obey the teacher
9. Always tries to get attention *
10. Talks a lot
11. Sticks his/her nose in things that are not his/her concern

Sensitive-Isolated

1. Often left out
2. Feelings get hurt easily
3. Usually sad
4. Rather plays alone than with others

5. Very shy
6. Someone you don't know well *
7. Rarely says something
8. Doesn't react to teasing *

For the Swedish version, the role descriptions were translated and back-translated to ensure comparability with the original versions.

The intercultural and cross-cultural validity of the RCP has been extensively reported in other publications (Vedder & O'Dowd, 1996; Vedder, 1999). In Appendix 1, as an example, we present the outcomes of the principal components analysis (rotation varimax), using the data of all children irrespective of their ethnic background. Comparable analyses were done using subsamples of Swedish children, immigrant children, boys, and girls. The factor analyses yielded the three expected factors that previously have been found in many other studies (Masten *et al.*, 1985; Aleva, 1992; Chen *et al.*, 1992; Krispin *et al.*, 1992; Kromhout & Vedder, 1996). Reliability estimates (Cronbach's alpha) of the factor scales ranged in the distinguished groups between .71 and .92 (Vedder & O'Dowd, 1996). The factor analyses, as well as the subsequent reliability analyses, led to the omission of five items. (These items are indicated with an asterisk in the list).

Procedure

The instrument is administered in school classes. Each of the children receives two papers: one that contains a list of the items and one with a list of the names of their classmates. The latter has two functions. Firstly, it will serve as a reminder, so that the children will not forget to include those classmates, who do not happen to be present on the day in question. Secondly, each child is identified with a number on the list. The children are instructed to use the number by which their classmates were identified instead of their names, when they make their choices. This measure was taken to guarantee confidentiality for all those involved in the study. The children are asked to pretend to be directors of a play. Each item represents a role, such as 'Teases other children too much'. The children are asked to write the number of one boy and one girl for every role, choosing the classmates who most closely resemble the description. Given gender preferences and an uneven gender balance in classes, boys and girls would not have equal chances to be chosen, were not children asked to choose both a boy and a girl for each role. Children are not allowed to choose themselves or anyone who does not belong to the class.

The teachers completed a rating task using a five-point scale, ranging from none (1) to very much (5). They rated all the children in their class on the three forms of behavior assessed by the RCP: sociability-leadership, aggressive-disruptive, and sensitive-isolated. Teachers were informed of children's scores on the RCP only after they had completed their rating task.

Scoring

Scoring the RCP is done in two steps. Firstly, the number of times each child was chosen for a particular role description is determined as well as the gender and ethnicity of their peers who have chosen them. The resulting scores are standardized by class and sex through a *z*-score transformation procedure, to control for variations in the number of those who have chosen (the choosing children in a class) and the number of candidates (children of the same sex who can be chosen).

Table 2. Univariate effects of the six dependent variables of social competence with S2 as the independent variable

	df	F	P	Obs. Power
Socswe	2388	7.77	0.00	0.95
Socimm	2388	5.01	0.01	0.81
Aggrswe	2388	0.75	0.47	0.18
Aggrimm	2388	1.01	0.37	0.23
Senswe	2388	0.44	0.65	0.12
Senimm	2388	0.56	0.57	0.14

RESULTS

Comparing Swedish, immigrant, and S2-children

We conducted a MANOVA in order to investigate what influence being an immigrant pupil and having S2-lessons has on peers' evaluation of pupils' scores for sociability leadership (soc), aggression-disruptive behavior (aggr), and sensitivity-isolation (sen). We distinguished three groups of pupils: Swedish pupils (Swe), immigrant children without S2-lessons (NoS2) and immigrant children with S2-lessons (S2). We refer to this factor as the S2 factor. In the analyses of the social competence scores of children in these three groups, we distinguish between the scores given by Swedish children and the scores given by immigrant children. This leads to six dependent variables: scores for sociability-leadership given by Swedish children and those given by immigrant children (socswe and socimm), scores for aggression-disruptive behavior given by Swedish and by immigrant children (aggrswe and aggrimm), and sensitivity-isolation scores given by Swedish and by immigrant children (senswe and senimm). The analyses will show whether the ethnic background of the evaluators (or the choosing children) makes a difference for the scores of the Swedish, NoS2-, and S2 children who are the candidates (or the chosen children). A second factor included in the MANOVA is gender. From earlier studies with the RCP in other countries, we know that evaluations of children's social competence depend on this factor (Vedder, 1999).

The multivariate analysis of the six variables of children's social competence yielded a significant multivariate effect for the first factor (S2), $F(12,768) = 2.02$, $p = 0.02$; a non-significant effect for the second factor (gender), $F(6,383) =$

0.10, $p = 0.99$; and no significant interaction effect, $F(12,768) = 0.01$, $p = 0.97$.

Significant univariate effects of the first factor were found for two of the dependent variables: socswe and socimm. An overview of all effects is given in Table 2.

The results of the post hoc Scheffé tests are presented in Table 3. This table also reports the means of the Swedish, NoS2-, and S2-children. It also presents the differences between the means as an effect size. As far as children's social competence scores are concerned, it makes no difference if the children are girls or boys. In regard to the scores on the aggression scale and on the sensitivity scale, no difference is evident in relation to whether or not pupils are in the Swedish, S2, or NoS2 group. Differences between these latter groups were found only on the scores for sociability and leadership. Table 3 shows that Swedish children have significantly higher scores for sociability-leadership than S2-children. The scores given by the Swedish or the immigrant children (indicated by the suffixes swe and imm) did not differ.

Overall, the conclusion is that children think that there are no differences between Swedish, NoS2-, and S2-children, as far as the occurrence of aggressive/disruptive behavior is concerned and in regards to the degree of sensitivity or isolation. On the other hand, they consider S2-children to be less socially competent than Swedish children. The findings indicate that having S2-lessons is an important factor in peer evaluation of social competence.

Gender influences

In the preceding section, we concluded that the gender of the children, whose social competence is evaluated, has no effect on the scores for social competence. Here we will explore if the gender of the pupils, who evaluate their peers' social competence, has an effect on the scores. A MANOVA was conducted with gender and S2 as the two factors. This time we included 12 dependent variables, the scores for sociability, aggression, and sensitivity given by Swedish girls, Swedish boys, immigrant girls, and immigrant boys (e.g. socswe = sociability score given by Swedish girls). The results paralleled those reported in the preceding section. The MANOVA yielded an effect for the S2 factor, $F(24,676) = 1.87$, $p = 0.008$. No significant effect for gender was found, nor was an interaction effect found.

Table 3. Post hoc Scheffé tests for the average sociability scores given by Swedish peers and those given by immigrant peers to three groups of children (Swedish, NoS2 and S2)

	n	M	Mean difference	SE	p
1) Socswe, Swedish children	208	0.085	1-2: 0.086	0.070	0.48
2) Socswe, NoS2-children	88	-0.001	1-3: 0.267	0.068	0.00
3) Socswe, S2-children	98	-0.183	2-3: 0.183	0.081	0.08
1) Socimm, Swedish children	208	0.069	1-2: 0.070	0.071	0.62
2) Socimm, NoS2-children	88	-0.002	1-3: 0.215	0.069	0.01
3) Socimm, S2-children	98	-0.150	2-3: 0.144	0.082	0.22

Table 4. *Post hoc Scheffé tests for the average sociability scores given by Swedish girls, Swedish boys, and immigrant girls to three groups of children (Swedish, NoS2, and S2)*

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	Mean difference	<i>SE</i>	<i>P</i>
1) Socswegi, Swedish children	201	0.101	1-2: 0.107	0.082	0.43
2) Socswegi, NoS2-children	80	-0.006	1-3: 0.373	0.085	0.00
3) Socswegi, S2-children	73	-0.272	2-3: 0.266	1.00	0.03
1) Socswebo, Swedish children	201	0.066	1-2: 0.029	0.079	0.93
2) Socswebo, NoS2-children	80	0.036	1-3: 0.286	0.082	0.01
3) Socswebo, S2-children	73	-0.221	2-3: 0.257	0.097	0.03
1) Socimmggi, Swedish children	201	0.058	1-2: 0.017	0.081	0.98
2) Socimmggi, NoS2-children	80	0.041	1-3: 0.264	0.083	0.01
3) Socimmggi, S2-children	73	-0.205	2-3: 0.246	0.099	0.05

The univariate analyses showed a significant effect of the S2 factor on the sociability scores given by Swedish girls ($F(2,348) = 9.52, p = 0.00$), Swedish boys ($F(2,348) = 6.42, p = 0.01$), and immigrant girls ($F(2,348) = 5.18, p = 0.01$). No effect was found for immigrant boys ($F(2,348) = 2.63, p = 0.07$). These findings warrant the conclusion that the evaluation of peers' social competence, made by Swedish children, is not affected by gender of the evaluator. This factor, however, seems to have a slight influence in regard to immigrant children.

The results of the post hoc Scheffé tests are presented in Table 4. These findings show more clearly, than do the findings presented in Table 3, that participation in S2-lessons is an important factor in peer evaluation of social competence. The differences between Swedish and S2-children, as well as the differences between NoS2-children and S2-pupils, are significant.

Teachers' ratings

In three classes (with a total of 66 pupils), two teachers, independent of one another, rated their pupils' social competence. The Pearson *p.m.* correlation between the scores given by the teachers to the same children amounted to 0.70 for sociability/leadership, to 0.84 for aggressive/disruptive behavior, and to 0.63 for sensitivity/isolation. It was not surprising that the highest correlation was found for aggressive/disruptive behavior, as it is probably the most obvious and most frustrating behavior from the teachers' point of view (cf. Granström, 1986, 1993). On the other hand, sensitivity/isolation is a type of social behavior, which attracts far less attention, as it is less apparent. This fact might explain the modest between-teacher correlation for this type of social behavior. Whether or not teachers and children experience the same similarities and differences between Swedish, NoS2-, and S2- children, was also explored. A MANOVA was conducted once more. For the scores given by children, a distinction is no longer made between those given by Swedish and those given by immigrant children. Data for 80 Swedish, 62 NoS2-, and 61 S2-children were included. The MANOVA yielded a significant effect for gender ($F(6,192) = 2.62, p = 0.02$) and for the S2 factor

($F(12,386) = 2.90, p = 0.01$). We found, however, no interaction effect. Subsequent univariate analyses resulted in a significant effect for the factor gender on the teacher evaluation of children's aggressive/disruptive behavior ($F(1,197) = 8.17, p = 0.01$). Girls received lower scores for aggressive disruptive behavior ($M = 2.18, SD = 1.25, n = 104$) than boys ($M = 2.71, SD 1.29, n = 99$). Scheffé's post hoc tests showed that this difference is significant ($p < 0.05$). The S2 factor yielded significant effects both on teachers' evaluation of children's sociability/leadership and on children's evaluation of their peers' sociability/leadership ($F_s(2,197) = 5.42$ and $4.71, p_s = 0.01$). The results of the post hoc Scheffé tests are presented in Table 5.

Teachers and children agree in their evaluation that Swedish, NoS2-, and S2-children do not differ in terms of aggressive/disruptive behavior and sensitivity/isolation. Moreover, they agree that S2-children have the lowest average score on sociability, when compared to the Swedish and the NoS2-children. The teachers' scores lead to a significant difference between the NoS2-children and the S2-children, whereas the children's scores yielded a significant difference between the Swedish and the S2-children. To a large extent, the analysis of the teachers' scores confirms the findings resulting from the children's data.

DISCUSSION

Given the focus on Swedish language proficiency in teaching immigrant children in Sweden, it was assumed that this factor would have a strong impact on children's inter-ethnic relationships. The findings are summarized in the following:

1. The educational background of immigrant children's parents was generally lower than that of Swedish children. We found no indication that the educational qualification level of S2-children's parents differed from those of the parents of the other immigrant children's (NoS2).
2. The scale we used, the RCP, was reliable and valid both for Swedish and for immigrant children, for boys and girls, which means that in all subsamples it measures three types of social behavior: sociability/leadership, aggressive/disruptive behavior, and sensitivity/isolation.

3. The ethnicity of the children, who evaluated their peers' social competence did not have an effect on the evaluations, when Swedish children were compared to immigrant children.
4. The gender of the children, who evaluated their peers' social competence, did not influence the evaluations given by Swedish children, and had a small influence on the evaluations given by immigrant children.
5. Neither the evaluation of the Swedish children, nor those of the immigrant children yielded significant differences between Swedish, NoS2, and S2-peers in terms of aggressive/disruptive behavior and sensitivity/isolation. With respect to these two types of social behavior, our assumption was not confirmed.
6. Both Swedish children and immigrant children gave significantly lower scores for sociability/leadership to S2-children than to Swedish children. Differences between either of these groups and the NoS2-children were not significant. This finding shows that children, both Swedish and immigrant children, make a clear distinction between immigrant children who have and those who do not receive S2-lessons. This confirms our assumption.
7. Teachers evaluated girls as less aggressive/disruptive than boys.
8. Teachers, like their pupils, evaluated that Swedish, NoS2- and S2-children do not differ in the amount of aggressive/disruptive behavior and sensitivity/isolation they exhibit. With regard to teachers' evaluation of children's sociability/leadership, the S2-children received the lowest average score. This score was significantly lower than that given to the NoS2-children.

We compared the pupils' evaluation of peers' social competence with teachers' evaluation of the children competence to strengthen the validity of the study and its conclusions. In general, the teachers' evaluation confirmed the findings based on the pupils' scores. This comparison, however, can be seen from another perspective as well. Children's social behavior is a matter of concern for both teachers and peers. It is assumed that the more overlap there is in the criteria teachers and children use for determining whether behavior is socially competent or incompetent, the more consistency there will be between teachers and children in this respect.

Consequently, greater consistency will result in more effective regulation of children's social behavior. A lack of overlap, however, means that teachers and children differ with respect to the types of social behavior, of which they approve or disapprove. Children's and teachers' influence on pupil's social behavior may be dissimilar, becoming a source of conflict in relation to children's social behavior. After having finished the study, the findings about the children were reported to the teachers. One of the teachers saw a high score on sensitivity/isolation for one of his pupils and commented 'I don't think of him in those terms. Sure, he is quiet, but he has a lot of integrity. I don't consider him to be as isolated as his classmates do.' This is an example of how a teacher interpreted the discrepancy between her/his assessment and peer assessment of a pupil's social competence, dismissing it as 'just a matter of interpretation'. The discrepancy in perception between peer and teacher assessments of a particular child's social behavior is linked to the differential expectations peers and teachers have in relation to the child in question. Such a discrepancy makes it more difficult for children to understand and live up to expectations, being as they may in conflict with one another. Pupils are, thus, confronted with different expectations, partly in different situations and settings, but partly also in the same setting. This situation requires children to acquire adaptation capability. Sensitive and isolated children might find this task to be altogether too difficult (cf. Van Lieshout *et al.*, 1990).

In regard to the main finding, it is necessary to deal with the issue of how to explain the evidence that S2-children's social competence is not evaluated as positively as that of their classmates. In the introduction, we referred to the contact hypothesis. If indeed, as we assume, taking S2-lessons is a valid indicator of a limited proficiency in Swedish, then this limited proficiency may have negative consequences for children's possibilities to communicate with other children. This could be a good explanation for their low scores for sociability/leadership. S2-language proficiency, as the mediator between S2-lessons and children's scores for sociability/leadership, need not be the sole possible mediator. Another might be the actual possibilities for contact that exist. Boström (1995) describes language minority educational practice in Swedish schools as a constant flux in the classroom throughout the entire school day. She

Table 5. *Post hoc Scheffé tests for the average sociability scores given by teachers (socteachers) and by peers (socpeers) to three groups of children (Swedish, NoS2, and S2)*

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	Mean difference	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
1) Socteachers, Swedish children	80	2.88	1-2: 0.24	0.200	0.50
2) Socteachers, NoS2-children	62	3.11	1-3: 0.47	0.201	0.08
3) Socteachers, S2-children	61	2.41	2-3: 0.70	0.213	0.01
1) Socpeers, Swedish children	80	0.104	1-2: 0.081	0.088	0.66
2) Socpeers, NoS2-children	62	0.023	1-3: 0.265	0.089	0.02
3) Socpeers, S2-children	61	-0.161	2-3: 0.184	0.094	0.15

portrays a third grade class of nineteen children with twelve immigrant children in the following manner: 'They all met just once a week during one hour of physical education. During the rest of the week, some children were always missing in the classroom, having Swedish-as-a-second language, mother tongue or remedial help'. (Boström, 1995, p. 24). Boström's description is confirmed by the preliminary result of recent report (Skolverket, 1999). The children's S2-language proficiency notwithstanding, these children have few possibilities to interact with other immigrant children and Swedish children.

It was argued in the introduction that academic achievement hardly plays a role in distinguishing Swedish from immigrant children. It was also mentioned that selection for participation in Swedish-as-a-second-language is made by class teachers and principals. A distinction is made between children's need of Swedish language skills per se and children's need of auxiliary instruction to overcome learning problems. Children with learning difficulties receive study supervision, on the recommendation of their teachers. In practice, however, an overlap might be occurring as far as S2 and study supervision is concerned. This would mean, in extension, that instruction that takes place outside of the classroom as S2-lessons is, for all intents and purposes, linked with learning problems, at least for some of the S2-children. In other words, both teachers and children may consider the need to take S2-lessons to be an indicator of insufficient academic competence. From this perspective, the findings are not really different from studies reported earlier that show a relationship between peer status or peer acceptance and school achievements (Byrne & Griffith, 1966; Dors, 1987). Further research is needed to find out which of these explanations is valid.

The study in Sweden shows that children's social position is not dependent on their ethnic background. What does this finding tell us? On the one hand, it may be interpreted as an indication that Sweden has been able to achieve that which has not been possible in the United States or the Netherlands, i.e., to ensure that children from ethnic minorities are judged by peers in school on the basis of other criteria than their ethnic origin. On the other hand, the same finding may indicate that Swedish minority policy is more effective in ensuring the dominance of the majority language than predominance of minority languages.

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APPENDIX 1: Factorstructure of RCP-data of Swedish and immigrant children ($n = 671$), after varimax rotation (only highest factor loadings included)

	Sociability	Aggressive	Sensitive
Has good ideas for things to do	0.714		
Someone you can trust	0.643		
Has many friends	0.838		
Everyone listens to	0.772		
Helps other people when they need it	0.571		
Good leader	0.795		
Makes new friends easily	0.782		
Everyone likes to be with	0.824		
Good sense of humor	0.498		
Can get things going	0.756		
Usually happy	0.586		
Gets into a lot of fights		0.738	
Loses temper easily		0.666	
Shows off a lot		0.617	
Interrupts when other children are speaking		0.601	
Doesn't obey the teacher		0.602	
Too bossy		0.798	
Talks a lot		0.541	
Sticks his/her nose in things that are not his/her concern		0.766	
Teases other children too much		0.827	
Picks on other children		0.850	
Rather plays alone than with others			0.869
Feelings get hurt easily			0.255
Can't get others to listen			0.661
Often left out			0.742
Usually sad			0.319
Very shy			0.892
% explained variance	26.03%	20.94%	9.91%
Cronbach's alpha	0.91	0.91	0.86