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Learner identity development in school and beyond

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CHAPTER 3

UNDERSTANDING SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT. THE ROLE OF CONTEXTUAL CONTINUITIES AND DISCONTINUITIES IN ADOLESCENTS' LEARNER IDENTITIES*

Adolescents' school engagement is related to continuities and discontinuities in learning notions between various contexts (e.g., school, home, peer groups). However, it has remained unclear what role adolescents' learner identities play in how continuities and discontinuities inform adolescents' school engagement. To gain a better understanding of adolescents' school engagement, we therefore examined what relations could be found between various contextual continuities and discontinuities in learning notions adolescents with diverse levels of school engagement encounter and their learner identities. Our ethnographic study suggests that especially continuities and discontinuities regarding notions of a good learner between the school context on the one hand, and the contexts of home and peer groups on the other inform students' learner identities. More specifically, we found that the absence and presence of feasible expectations and the (non-)recognition of effort put into schoolwork in the contexts of home and school, as well as pro- and/or anti-school peer norms, were related to students' learner identities. The present study implies that adolescents' school engagement can be fostered by building continuities between school and home in the appreciation of students' efforts and by making them resilient to unconstructive learning notions that may prevail at home and among peers.

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INTRODUCTION

It has been widely acknowledged that learning and learner identity development are intrinsically related (e.g., Coll & Falsafi, 2010; Holland, Lachichotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Silseth & Arnseth, 2011): by engaging in learning experiences, adolescents are found to develop new knowledge and skills and to come to understand themselves as learners in relation to the knowledge and skills that they try to master (Calabrese Barton, Kang, Tan, O'Neill, Bautista-Guerra, & Brecklin, 2013; Pollard & Filer, 2007). The rather stable and coherent self-understandings as learners that adolescents thus develop, and that, moreover, inform their current and future learning engagements, are referred to as their learner identities (Coll & Falsafi, 2010; Rubin, 2007). It has been theorized that adolescents develop their learner identities not only over time, but also across contexts, such as the contexts of home, school and sports clubs (Coll & Falsafi, 2010; Holland et al., 1998). However, limited empirical insights have been provided into the latter process (Fields & Enyedy, 2013; Vetter, Fairbanks, & Ariail, 2011), leaving it rather unclear what contextual factors motivate students to engage in school and how disengaged students' school engagement can be fostered.

From a sociocultural perspective, what processes of learning and learner identity development adolescents engage in is dependent on the affordances and constraints that are available in the various contexts they participate in (Holland et al., 1998; Wortham, 2006). Context-specific affordances and constraints (e.g., offering opportunities for textbook-learning but not for inquiry-based learning) convey ideas about learning goals and legitimate ways to achieve those goals; they disclose the learning notions that are prevalent in that context (Coll & Falsafi, 2010; Holland et al., 1998). Examples of learning notions are responses to questions such as what knowledge and skills are worth pursuing and why, how one is thought to learn best and what characterizes a good learner. As different contexts are characterized by possibly overlapping yet unique sets of affordances and constraints, the learning notions that adolescents encounter in school may be rather different from those they encounter in other contexts (Coll & Falsafi, 2010; Polman, 2010; Silseth & Arnseth, 2011; Vetter et al., 2011). This is important to consider because continuities in learning notions between school and out-of-school contexts have been found to foster adolescents' school engagement, whereas the opposite applies to discontinuities (Bronkhorst & Akkerman, 2016; Fordham & Ogbu,

1986; Nasir, McLaughlin, & Jones, 2009; Noyes, 2006; Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1991; Pollard & Filer, 2007; Valenzuela, 1999; Vetter et al., 2011). Moreover, discontinuities are disproportionately often found among adolescents with backgrounds that are generally underrepresented in higher education (Bronkhorst & Akkerman, 2016). Extant research suggests that this can be explained by their limited experience of acknowledgement in formal educational contexts of who they are, what they know and what they are capable of (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; Gresalfi, 2004; Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejeda, 1999; Hogg & Volman, 2020; Horn, 2008; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992; Rubin, 2007; Seaton, 2007).

Various studies have been conducted on the role of (dis-)continuities in learning notions between school and out-of-school contexts. These studies tend to especially focus on the contexts of home and peer groups in explaining adolescents' school engagement. Such studies for example document how the rejection of schools' learning goals (e.g., become college-ready, preparing for participation on the labor market) and the legitimate ways of achieving these (e.g., scoring high on standardized tests, not challenging the authority of the teacher, doing voluntary work) by parents or peers may impede adolescents' school engagement (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Mortimer, Wortham, & Allard, 2010; Noyes, 2006; Phelan et al., 1991; Valenzuela, 1999; Vetter et al., 2011; Willis, 1977). The findings presented in most of these studies suggest that such discontinuities in learning notions may cause adolescents a fear to lose their social status at home, in their community, or among peers that prevents them from fully engaging in school (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Noyes, 2006; Phelan et al., 1991; Valenzuela, 1999; Vetter et al., 2011).

While providing important insights, the studies discussed above have not included two other contexts in which many adolescents participate and learn, namely the context of work and the context of leisure institutes. As continuities and discontinuities in learning notions with school may arise from these contexts as well, we contend that it is worthwhile to take them into account too in studying adolescents' school engagement. To our knowledge, only Nasir and Hand (2008) demonstrated how learning notions in a high school basketball team and in a high school mathematics classroom inherently differed from each other and how this impacted the learning engagement of students in these two contexts respectively. Whereas in basketball practice adolescents received immediate feedback, were coached on specific skills that clearly benefited the higher-level game and could express themselves and feel valued for their unique role in the game, this applied to a lesser extent to the mathematics

classroom. Yet, Nasir and Hand did not provide insights into whether and how the prevalent learning notions of the basketball team informed adolescents' ability and willingness to conform to the learning notions in school. Consequently, it remains unclear whether and how leisure-related learning notions may inform adolescents' self-understandings as learners in school. Additionally, many studies identify a relation between (dis-)continuities in learning notions and adolescents' school engagement, but without explaining exactly how continuities and discontinuities inform adolescents' school engagement (Gutiérrez et al., 1999b; Moll et al., 1992). A learner identity approach may help to understand this relation, as it connects adolescents' learning experiences to their learning engagements by means of their self-understandings as learners.

Learner identity research demonstrates that when adolescents experience a discrepancy between their own ideas of how and what they can and want to learn on the one hand, and their school's ideas about learning on the other, this may cause them to disengage from their education (e.g., Calabrese Barton et al., 2013; Rubin, 2007; Mortimer et al., 2010). Yet, this research field is almost exclusively concerned with how learning notions are conveyed in schools. Only a few studies demonstrate that students develop and maintain their learner identities in relation to the contextual discontinuities they encounter between school on the one hand and peer groups or extracurricular programs on the other (Fields & Enyedy, 2013; Vetter et al., 2011). However, these regard small-scale studies that merely concern one or two students that provide important but limited insights into how various types of continuities and discontinuities in learning notions inform the levels of school engagement of different adolescents through their learner identities.

In the present paper, we take a somewhat different approach to move the research field forward: rather than focusing on how individual students navigate across different contexts with different learning notions, we aim to explore patterns in the relations between students' learner identities and the types of continuities and discontinuities in learning notions they encounter to better understand their school engagement. We therefore focus on students with diverse levels of school engagement. Moreover, we not only examine learning notions that adolescents encounter in the often focused upon contexts of school, home and peer groups, but also the ones that they encounter in the less often studied contexts of work, sports clubs and music classes. The following two research questions are addressed in the present paper: 'What continuities and discontinuities in learning notions are encountered by

adolescents with diverse levels of school engagement?’ and ‘What relations can be found between the continuities and discontinuities in learning notions these adolescents encounter and their learner identities?’. In studying these questions, we mainly explore how adolescents’ self-understandings as learners in school are informed by these continuities and discontinuities. By means of this study we hope to provide schools and teachers with further insights into how adolescents’ school engagement can be fostered.

METHOD

Research Context

The study was situated in the Netherlands. In Dutch education, students are allocated to separate tracks in either the first or second year of high school (grade seven or eight, respectively), by the age of twelve to thirteen. This allocation is based on teacher recommendations, students’ standardized test scores at the end of primary school, and/or on the students’ test results and work attitude during the first year of high school. Whereas three sub-tracks of a four year long prevocational track (also known as the “preparatory secondary vocational education track”, ranging from more hands-on to more theoretically oriented education) prepare students for subsequent vocational programs, the five year long intermediate track (also known as the “senior general secondary education track”) provides students with access to higher professional education. Additionally, there are two six year long pre-university tracks, of which one (the Gymnasium) includes Latin and ancient Greek. Completing one of the six-year tracks is the most common way to enroll in university. Exit qualifications for each of these tracks are formally established on a national level.

Research Design

For this study that is explorative in nature, classroom observations and informal teacher interview were performed to assess students’ levels of demonstrated school engagement. Primary data in the form of student interviews was collected as we understand people to tell others and themselves who they are as learners through narratives (Holland et al., 1998; Sfard & Prusak, 2005). Moreover, because we consider people to develop and maintain their learner identities in relation to their experiences of these notions, we were interested

in adolescents' own perception of context-specific learning notions (e.g., Coll & Falsafi, 2010).

Respondent Selection, Data and Procedure

After we were granted permission from our Institutional Ethics Review Board, respondents were recruited from six classes of three Dutch schools (two classes per school) that we already had access to (also see the section Case Selection on pp. 131-139 of Chapter 5). Two of these schools (referred to as School A and B) were located in the same average-sized city in the Netherlands with approximately 500.000 residents, and one school (referred to as School C) in a smaller city with approximately 170.000 residents. Whereas the first two schools' student populations reflected the ethnic and socioeconomic diversity in the Netherlands reasonably well, native Dutch students from middle- to upper-class families were overrepresented in the other school's student population.

In the Netherlands, students in the prevocational track are generally perceived, by themselves and others, as 'less successful' in school (Van den Bulk, 2011). Van den Bulk (2011) demonstrated that such collective ideas are often integrated in adolescents' status positioning and future prospects of both themselves and others. From this it follows that the track students are in may inform their learner identity and hence their school engagement. To take this factor into consideration we recruited, per school, one class on the most theoretically-oriented pre-vocational level (often the only prevocational level offered by schools also providing pre-university education) and one class on the pre-university level. Exclusively classes from the ninth grade were recruited, consisting of students of fourteen to fifteen years old.

To select students for the study, data in the form of classroom observations (in different domains and during at least three classes per classroom in the first six weeks of the schoolyear) and informal teacher interviews with the students' mentors was collected. By means of this data, we established the students' behavioral engagement based on their observed and teacher-reported focus and work attitude in class (e.g., did they bring their schoolbooks to class?; did they do their schoolwork in class or were they talking to friends about other things than school?), and their preparation for school at home as indicated by how often they, according to their teachers, did their homework. In Table 3.1, an overview grounded in extant research on behavioral engagement can be found of the levels of behavioral engagement (highly, moderately

and hardly engaged) that we distinguished and the behavior that characterizes each of these engagement levels (Finn & Rock, 1997).

Table 3.1. Distinguished levels of demonstrated school engagement and their characteristics.

Hardly engaged	Moderately engaged	Highly engaged
<i>Hardly ever:</i>	<i>Quite often:</i>	<i>Almost always:</i>
having done homework	having done homework	having done homework
bringing schoolbooks to class	bringing schoolbooks to class	bringing schoolbooks to class
following teacher's instructions, such as:	following teacher's instructions, such as:	following teacher's instructions, such as:
- being quiet	- being quiet	- being quiet
- doing schoolwork	- doing schoolwork	- doing schoolwork
- taking notes	- taking notes	- taking notes
- complying with a request to take off coats/remove backpacks from tables when requested to		
<i>But instead:</i>	<i>Instead, they are sometimes:</i>	
talking to each other about other things than school	talking to each other about other things than school	
throwing things around the classroom	daydreaming	
listening to music	secretly writing notes to each other	
overtly being on phones	covertly being on phones	

In agreement with the mentors, we found that about ten to twenty percent of the students per class could be identified as highly engaged students. The majority of the students in each class demonstrated to be moderately engaged. Another ten to twenty percent of the students was considered to demonstrate hardly engaged behavior. Whereas many students whom we identified as highly engaged were glad to participate in our research, most moderately engaged and especially hardly engaged students declined our request to participate in our research project. Consequently, ten highly engaged, four moderately engaged and one hardly engaged student could be interviewed. All

these students' levels of demonstrated school engagement were assessed as such by both the first author who performed the classroom observations and the students' mentors. An overview of the interviewed students, and of the schools and educational tracks they were in, their ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds as reported by them in the interviews (provided that they were comfortable with sharing this information) and of the out-of-school contexts they participated in can be found in Table 3.2.

To study adolescents' learner identities and the continuities and discontinuities in learning notions they encountered between school on the one hand and various out-of-school contexts on the other, semi-structured in-depth interviews were performed. Such interviews allow space for adolescents' authentic narratives and experiences, while warranting the discussion of key themes in each interview (Rapley, 2007). The recruited respondents were interviewed in two sessions over the course of the schoolyear 2016-2017. The first session concerned the respondents' educational trajectory thus far, their experiences thereof, their current experiences of going to school, and their self-understandings as learners within the context of school. The full topic list is presented in Appendix C.

The second session addressed the respondents' perceived learning notions in the various contexts they moved across. Also, the respondents were asked to compare the out-of-school learning notions they encountered to the learning notions in school. While discussing these issues, the respondents' self-understandings as learners within the context of school were also touched upon again. The topic list for the second interview session can be found in Appendix D.

Depending on the respondents' preferences, the interviews were held in an empty classroom or in a lunch café nearby the respondents' schools. All interviews were performed in Dutch. After we received the respondents' permission, the interviews were audiotaped. On average, the interviews in the first round lasted forty minutes. The interviews in the second round approximately lasted fifty minutes. The audiotapes were transcribed verbatim, and pseudonyms were assigned to the respondents to protect their privacy.

Analysis

We systematically coded and classified fragments of the interview transcripts for theory-driven themes by means of content analysis (see, e.g., Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Weber, 1990). To start, the first author coded the interview

Table 3.2. Information on the interviewed students.

Students	School	School track	Level of behavioral engagement	Ethnic background ¹	Socioeconomic background ²	Sports	Music	Work
Richie	Traditional	Prevocational	Moderately engaged	Native Dutch	Medium	Soccer	None	Runner
Amanda	Traditional	Prevocational	Moderately engaged	Native Dutch	High	Soccer	None	Supermarket
Tammy	Traditional	Pre-university	Highly engaged	Native Dutch	Unreported	Volleyball	None	Babysitter
Fay	Traditional	Pre-university	Highly engaged	Native Dutch	High	Hockey/horsebackriding/krav maga	None	Babysitter
Jade	Traditional	Pre-university	Highly engaged	Native Dutch	Low	Table tennis	None	None
Kay	Montessori	Prevocational	Less engaged	Native Dutch	Medium	None	None	None

¹ Students' ethnic background was assessed by the country or countries their parents were born in.

² Students' socioeconomic background was assessed by means of the highest attained education level of either parent: students of whom the parents' highest education level was high school or lower were considered to have a low socioeconomic background; students of whom the parents' highest education level was a vocational degree were considered to have a medium socioeconomic background; students of whom the parents' highest education level was a higher professional education or university degree were considered to have a high socioeconomic background. In case students were doubting what the highest attained education level of their parents was, the two levels they were in doubt of were reported in the table.

Students	School	School track	Level of behavioral engagement	Ethnic background	Socioeconomic background	Sports	Music	Work
Miriam	Montessori	Prevocational	Highly engaged	Egyptian	High	Korfbal	None	None
Ludwig	Montessori	Pre-university	Moderately engaged	Native Dutch	High	None	None	None
Andrew	Waldorf	Prevocational	Highly engaged	Native Dutch	High	None	Percussion	None
Ayden	Waldorf	Prevocational	Highly engaged	Azerbaijani	High	Judo	Guitar	None
Nessa	Waldorf	Prevocational	Highly engaged	Native Dutch	Medium	None	Piano	None
Caleb	Waldorf	Pre-university	Moderately engaged	Native Dutch	High	Volleyball	None	None
Rebecca	Waldorf	Pre-university	Highly engaged	German/Native Dutch	High	Judo	Bass guitar	None
Lilly	Waldorf	Pre-university	Highly engaged	Native Dutch	Low	None	Piano	None
Ethan	Waldorf	Pre-university	Highly engaged	Native Dutch	Low	Krav maga	Drums	None

transcripts for *adolescents' perceived learning notions in school / in sport clubs / in music classes / at work / at home / in peer groups*. Representative fragments of each of these codes can be found in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3. Exemplary fragments per code.

Code	Exemplary fragment:
Perceived learning notion in/at:	
School	"[A teacher] recently said 'school is very important, but there are other important things next to school too, of course'" (Tammy, interview #1)
Sports clubs	"[At the soccer club] it is about having fun, and if you lose, ah well, it is really about having fun and being part of a team" (Amanda, interview #2)
Music classes	"In piano class, a good learner is someone who is just doing his best" (Lilly, interview #2)
Work	"[In the supermarket] it is about speed, about working fast and tidy" (Richie, interview #2)
Home	"My mom finds school very important, but she also thinks it is important that I get some work experience" (Amanda, interview #2)
Peer groups	"We [my friends and I] thought 'fuck the system', we are not going to do anything in class, throwing stuff around, literal chaos, like you see in cartoons" (Kay, interview #1)
Perceived continuity	Interviewer: when do your parents entail someone to be a good learner? Jade: Same as my teachers in school. When someone really makes an effort and gets high grades (interview #2)
Perceived discontinuity	"At school, you just get a list of something you have to learn by heart, whereas at volleyball you have to repeat exercises over and over and over again to improve your game" (Caleb, interview #2)
Learner identity	"I like [learning things in school I mean, the more things you learn, the more experience you gain with all sorts of things and, yes, I kind of really like learning" (Miriam, interview #1)

Next, the data was coded for continuities and discontinuities in learning notions between school and each of the other contexts adolescents participated in. Continuities and discontinuities in learning notions were coded for when the learning notions that were discussed by the student in talking about one context were, respectively, explicitly similar to or different from those discussed in talking about another context. The other authors critically observed this coding process.

To answer our first research question, 'What continuities and discontinuities in learning notions are encountered by adolescents with diverse levels of demonstrated school engagement?', various tables were created. In Table 3.4 we included student-specific information on how many continuities and discontinuities in learning notions we identified between school on the one hand and each of the out-of-school contexts they participated in on the other. In Tables 3.5 through 3.8, we included information on the nature of the experienced continuities and discontinuities in learning notions between school and out-of-school contexts. Examples concern a continuity between home and school with respect to the notion that a good learner in school is characterized by putting an effort into his or her education, or a discontinuity between work and school when it comes to the skills that are taught and valued in these contexts.

As a first step to answer our second research question, 'What relations can be found between the continuities and discontinuities in learning notions that adolescents with diverse levels of demonstrated school engagement encounter and their learner identities?', the first author coded interview fragments for 'learner identities' when these reflected how respondents recognized themselves as learners (see Table 3.3). Again, the other authors critically observed the coding process. Subsequently, learner identity portraits were created for each of the research participants. Next, we examined the relations between the encountered contextual continuities and discontinuities in learning notions and the respondents' learner identities, while taking into account their demonstrated level of school engagement.

RESULTS

Encountered Continuities and Discontinuities

We first made a general overview of continuities and discontinuities we identified for each of the students between the school context on the one hand and each of the out-of-school contexts they participated in on the other. This over-

Table 3.4. Amount of identified continuities and discontinuities between the school context and out-of-school contexts.

Students	Continuities				Discontinuities			
	School & Home	School & Peers	School & Leisure	School & Work	School & Home	School & Peers	School & Leisure	School & Work
<i>Hardly engaged</i>								
Kay	0	0			0	1		
<i>Moderately Engaged</i>								
Ludwig	1	1			1	1		
Richie	0	2	2	0	2	2	0	2
Caleb	2	1	0		0	1	2	
Amanda	1	1	2	1	1	1	3	0

Students	Continuities			Discontinuities				
	School & Home	School & Peers	School & Leisure	School & Work	School & Home	School & Peers	School & Leisure	School & Work
<i>Highly engaged</i>								
Miriam	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	1
Jade	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	1
Tammy	1	3	1	0	0	0	3	1
Andrew	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	0
Ethan	1	2	0	1	1	1	3	3
Rebecca	2	2	3	1	1	0	4	4
Fay	2	2	1	0	0	0	2	1
Ayden	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1
Nessa	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
Lilly	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	2

view can be found in Table 3.4. This table shows that no continuities and only one discontinuity could be identified for Kay, the hardly engaged student. Among the students whom we identified as moderately engaged, discontinuities in learning notions between the contexts of school and home, and especially between the contexts of school and peer groups were relatively common. In contrast, most of the highly engaged students in our sample did not experience discontinuities between these contexts. Furthermore, the moderately and highly engaged students experienced at least one contextual continuity in learning notions between school on the one hand and the contexts of home and/or peer groups on the other. Additionally, Table 3.4 shows that for three of the four students who had an after-school job (also see Table 3.2) we exclusively found discontinuities in learning notions between the contexts of school and work.

Below, we explore and zoom in on the nature of the experienced continuities and discontinuities in learning notions between school and out-of-school contexts. Yet, as we were looking for patterns, only continuities and discontinuities are discussed that were identified for various students, or that appeared to be characteristic for students with similar demonstrated engagement levels. An overview of all the continuities and discontinuities that were identified can be found in Tables 3.5 through 3.8.

School and home. For Kay, a hardly engaged student, no continuities or discontinuities between learning notions at home and in school could be identified (also see Table 3.5). Even when Kay was explicitly asked about his perception of the learning notions in the contexts of home and school, he stated that he did not know how his parents or teachers thought about various learning-related themes. For example, when Kay was asked what he thought his parents understood a good learner to be, he replied, "I have no clue what their image of a good student is" (interview #2). It should be noted that, as Kay was rather talkative during the interview, we have no reason to believe he merely responded this way to be able to leave the interview as soon as possible. Moreover, Kay also shared that he and his parents hardly ever talked about school.

For three other students, a discontinuity was found between the contexts of school and home when it comes to what it entails to be a good learner in school. Amanda, whom we identified as a moderately engaged student, thought that both her teachers and parents were concerned with the grades she obtained in school. Yet, she felt that her parents, unlike her teachers, were

Learning no-tions	Hardly engaged	Moderately engaged	Highly engaged
	Kay	Ludwig Richie Caleb Amanda	Miriam Jade Tammy Andrew Ethan Rebecca
			Fay Ayden Nessa Lilly
<i>Disontinuities</i>			
School only: a good learner in school is characterized by obtaining high grades			x
Home only: a good learner in school is characterized by putting an effort into their education		x	

Learning no- tions	Hardly engaged	Moderately engaged	Highly engaged
	Kay	Ludwig Richie Caleb Amanda	Miriam Jade Tammy Andrew Ethan Rebecca Fay Ayden Nessa Lilly
<i>Disontinuties</i>			
Home only: a good learner in school is characterized by obtaining high grades		x	
School only: making an ef- fort is more important than obtaining high grades		x	

Learning no- tions	Hardly engaged	Moderately engaged	Highly engaged
	Kay	Ludwig Richie Caleb Amanda Miriam Jade Tammy Andrew	Ethan Rebecca Fay Ayden Nessa Lilly
<i>Disontinuities</i>			
Some teachers: it is not im- portant for students to be- have like a good learner, as long as they get promoted		x	
Home only: learning things does not have to be fun			x

Learning no- tions	Hardly engaged	Moderately engaged	Highly engaged
	Kay	Ludwig Richie Caleb Amanda	Miriam Jade Tammy Andrew Ethan Rebecca Fay Ayden Nessa Lilly
<i>Disoninutities</i>			
Home only: school is re- sponsible for the flourish- ment of stu- dents with learning disor- ders too			x

proud of her as a learner just for working hard for school. In contrast, Richie, a moderately engaged student as well, perceived his teachers but not his parents to be proud of students who put an effort into school, irrespective of the track they were in. Richie continued to explain this and reported that, in his view, his parents failed to recognize his revived school engagement or the high grades he obtained after he had moved from the intermediate track in the eighth grade to the prevocational track in the ninth grade.

Ludwig, another moderately engaged student thought that even though his parents and most of his teachers considered it important to be a good learner who works hard for and performs well in school, some of his teachers were merely concerned with whether the students eventually got promoted to the next grade, irrespective of their school attitude and achievements.

For most other students, among whom one was identified as a moderately engaged student and the rest as highly engaged students, a consistent pattern of continuity was found between the contexts of school and home when it comes to the notion of what characterizes a good learner in school: these students perceived both their parents and their teachers to think that investing time and energy in school was a characteristic of a good learner. Three of these students (Miriam, Jade and Caleb) had the idea that their teachers as well as their parents thought that obtaining high grades were characteristics of a good learner in school too. Only some students whom we identified as highly engaged (Andrew, Ayden, Nessa and Lilly) thought that neither their teachers nor parents considered school achievements a characteristic of a good learner. These students thought that their teachers and parents were exclusively concerned with the effort that students made. Finally, various students with diverse levels of demonstrated school engagement reported that their parents and teachers considered behaving politely in class as another aspect of being a good learner in school.

School and peer groups. Almost all students reported that their peers deemed a good learner to be someone who both makes an effort for and performs well in school (see Table 3.6). Table 3.6 also shows, though, that this did not necessarily imply that their peers also found it important to behave in accordance with their own learning notions of a good learner. To illustrate, two students (Kay and Ludwig, whom we identified as a hardly engaged student and a moderately engaged student, respectively), only had friends in class who did not put an effort into their schoolwork and who did not seem to care about test results. They did not find it important to be a good learner. Kay and Lud-

Table 3.6. Continuities and discontinuities in learning notions between the contexts of school and peer groups.

Learning notions	Hardly engaged			Moderately engaged						Highly engaged					
	Kay	Ludwig	Richie	Caleb	Amanda	Miriam	Jade	Tammy	Andrew	Ethan	Rebecca	Fay	Ayden	Nessa	Lilly
Continuities															
Most friends and classmates: a good learner in school is characterized by both putting an effort into their education and obtaining high grades						x			x		x				

Learning no-tions	Hardly engaged	Moderately engaged	Highly engaged												
	Kay	Ludwig	Richie	Caleb	Amanda	Miriam	Jade	Tammy	Andrew	Ethan	Rebecca	Fay	Ayden	Nessa	Lilly
<i>Discontinuities</i>															
Befriended classmates: it is not important to put an effort into school and to obtain high grades	x	x	x ¹	x	x										
Friends from out-of-school: it is not important to put an effort into school and to obtain high grades															

¹ In Table 3 we count this as one discontinuity together with "Most classmates: It is not important to put an effort into school and to obtain high grades" as these two groups overlap

Learning no- tions	Hardly engaged	Moderately engaged	Highly engaged
	Kay	Ludwig Richie Caleb Amanda Miriam Jade Tammy	Andrew Ethan Rebecca Fay Ayden Nessa Lilly
<i>Disontinuties</i>			
School only; values "suck- ups"			x

wig mentioned that they and their friends usually did little and mainly chatted with each other in class. Three other students, whom were all identified as moderately engaged students, had rather equal amounts of friends who were dedicated to school and friends who were not.

The remaining students, who all demonstrated high levels of school engagement, had exclusively befriended classmates who found it important to invest time and energy in their education and to perform well in school. Some of these students (Miriam, Andrew and Rebecca) even mentioned that most of their other classmates, next to their befriended ones, as well as their out-of-school friends found it important to work hard for and obtain high grades in school too. Additionally, exclusively some students who exclusively befriended classmates with high levels of school engagement mentioned that they and their classmates as well as their teachers, thought that learning could be fun.

School and leisure institutes. The contextual continuities and discontinuities in learning notions that were identified between sports clubs and music classes on the one hand, and school on the other, were very similar. Therefore, these contexts are jointly referred to as 'leisure institutes' from this point onwards. As can be derived from Table 3.7, we did not find clear differences between students when it comes to the continuities and discontinuities they encountered in learning notions between the contexts of leisure institutes and school. Yet, we did find four general patterns of continuities and discontinuities in learning notions between these contexts.

First, a continuity was found for various students regarding what they thought their teachers at school and at their leisure institutes understood a good learner to be: someone who puts in an effort, irrespective of their achievements (Andrew, Nessa, Lilly, Richie), and someone who is polite (Tammy, Rebecca, Amanda).

Second, we identified an experienced discontinuity concerning learning-related goals for Tammy, Ethan, Rebecca, Fay and Amanda: whereas they reported to attend school in preparation of their further participation in society, they engaged in leisure activities for fun and relaxation.

Third, a discontinuity was identified for most students in the skills that were taught and valued between leisure institutes and the school context. The students did not feel that the skills that were taught in their leisure institutes were useful in school, except perhaps in physical education and music classes.

Learning no-tions	Hardly engaged	Moderately engaged	Highly engaged
	Kay	Ludwig Richie Caleb Amanda	Miriam Jade Tammy Andrew Ethan Rebecca
<i>Continuities</i>			Fay Ayden Nessa Lilly
Learning can-not always be enjoyable (sometimes you have to learn some-thing that is boring first)			x
Getting an ed-ucation is very important, but other things (e.g., friends, family) are im-portant too		x	

Learning no-tions	Hardly engaged	Moderately engaged	Highly engaged
	Kay	Ludwig Richie Caleb Amanda	Miriam Jade Tammy Andrew Ethan Rebecca Fay Ayden Nessa Lilly
<i>Discontinuities</i>			
School only: achievements are more important than the effort that is made		x	
Leisure institutes only: variation in employed learning activities			x

Learning no-tions	Hardly engaged	Moderately engaged	Highly engaged
	Kay	Ludwig Richie Caleb Amanda	Miriam Jade Tammy Andrew Ethan Rebecca Fay Ayden Nessa Lilly
<i>Discontinuities</i>			
School only: learning can not always be enjoyable (sometimes you have to learn something that is boring first)			x
School only: it is important to do your homework			x

Often, the skills that were mentioned to clarify this statement were quite technical in nature, such as learning how to defend yourself in krav maga (Ethan), learning how to play piano chords and read notes (Lilly), or learning how to smash a ball in volleyball (Tammy).

Finally and relatedly, for two students (Lilly and Caleb) a discontinuity was found when it comes to ideas on how things are learned: where they considered learning in school to be more about learning with your brain and by sitting behind a desk, they understood making music and doing sports as something you learn by means of one's hands or entire body.

School and work. Table 3.8 shows that no patterns of continuity could be identified between the contexts of work and school. Additionally, we found a discontinuity for three of the four employed students that concerned the skills that were taught and valued in each of these contexts. For example, Tammy, who was a babysitter, felt that she learned and had to learn as a babysitter how to set and stick to boundaries for the kids, which were not skills she considered to be useful in school. It should be noted, though, that Amanda (whom we identified as a moderately engaged student) did feel able to transfer some of the skills that she had developed at work to the context of school and vice versa, namely participating in a debate and standing her ground while doing so.

In sum, we found only two learning notions with respect to which various students experienced a contextual continuity whereas others experienced a discontinuity: these concern the learning notions of what it entails to be a good learner, and the importance of being one. As the students experiencing continuities in these learning notions, like we expected, differed in their levels of demonstrated school engagement from the ones who experienced discontinuities, we will next zoom in on what relations can be found between their experience of contextual continuities and discontinuities in these learning notions on the one hand, and their learner identities on the other. In doing so, we exclusively focus on comparing the school context to the contexts of home and peer groups, as we did not find differences between students in the continuities and discontinuities they experienced between school on the one hand, and their work and leisure contexts on the other; the presence of continuities and discontinuities between the latter contexts did not appear to be related to students' demonstrated school engagement.

Continuities and Discontinuities in Learning Notions and Adolescents' Learner Identities

In this section, the second research question 'What relations can be found between the continuities and discontinuities in learning notions that adolescents with diverse levels of demonstrated school engagement encounter and their learner identities?' is answered. We found that especially the *absence or presence of feasible expectations*, the *(non-)recognition of effort put into school*, and *pro- and/or anti-school peer norms*, were related to students' learner identities.

The absence or presence of feasible expectations. As can be derived from the previous section, one student in our sample, Kay, mentioned that it was unclear to him what his teachers, parents and peers considered a good learner to be. Our analysis of his learner identity indicated that Kay's seeming lack of interest with respect to the learning notions his teachers and parents communicated may be related to his learner identity. Kay reported to not find it important to work hard for or perform well in school. He mentioned to think "Whatever" (interview #1) when it came to school and explained that this had two reasons. First, he felt that, because of his diagnosed ADHD and dyslexia, doing schoolwork costed him a disproportionate amount of time. Second and relatedly, school mainly required him to sit still, read and write: activities in which he felt particularly hindered by his learning disorders. According to Kay, this is why he stopped putting an effort into his education. We contend that Kay's perceived relative inability to conform to his school's learning notions regarding legitimate ways to achieve learning goals appears to be an important factor in his learner identity and his indifference to his parents' and teachers' learning notions. This claim is supported by the fact that none of the other students (who all were found to more strongly identify with learning in school) mentioned the complete absence of feasible expectations regarding skills that should be mastered.

The (non-)recognition of effort put into school. Three students, who were all identified as moderately engaged students, experienced that either their parents (Richie) or – some of – their teachers (Amanda; Ludwig) were not concerned with how much time and energy they invested in their education. Rather, these teachers, unlike their parents or vice versa, were exclusively focused on these students' school achievement, causing a discontinuity between home and school when it comes to what characterizes a good learner (see Table 3.5).

None of these students aimed or wanted to define themselves as learners who put in a lot of effort into school. Additionally, they all reported to especially care about engaging in classes that they enjoyed. It was for these classes that they wanted to get high grades as rewards for their invested effort (Amanda), wanted to make sure they mastered the curriculum (Ludwig), or wanted to make their teachers proud (Ludwig; Richie). However, they put less effort into classes that they did not enjoy.

The reasons for disliking certain subjects differed per person. However, all three reported to disengage from class when they did not see the purpose of familiarizing themselves with the subject matter. The fact that Amanda, Richie and Ludwig did not feel the need to understand themselves as hard-working learners for all classes in school appeared to be related to the discontinuity they encountered between home and school when it came to what characterizes a good learner. In the interviews with Richie and Ludwig, this came to the fore explicitly. For example, Richie's disengagement when he found his classes too easy was reinforced by his parents' conviction that he did not deserve any compliments for his renewed devotion to and consequently improved performance in school at the beginning of the schoolyear as he had moved from the intermediate to the prevocational track:

Researcher: How did your parents feel about you moving from the intermediate to prevocational track?

Richie: When I tell them I got an 8/10 they think, ok. They say 'yes, but that is at the prevocational level, Richie. This is beneath your abilities'. They really do not like it.

Researcher: Do you agree with them?

Richie: Yes. Right now I am not doing my best and I still exclusively get sufficient grades. If I would work harder I could get all 8/10s.

Researcher: Why do you not work harder?

Richie: I don't know, I'm not motivated to do so. (Interview #1)

In the second interview, this topic was touched upon again and, when asked how important he found it to go to school, Richie replied, "I've started to find that less important, because it is too easy". Furthermore, over the course of the schoolyear, we observed (and were told by Richie himself) that Richie's

level of school engagement had further decreased: he had stopped to work hard for most of his classes, while starting to occasionally skip ones. Our analysis suggests that the impossibility to make his parents proud did not foster Richie's desire to understand himself as a hardworking learner, thereby impeding his school engagement.

Ludwig, in turn, seemed to legitimize his moderate level of school engagement by seizing the opportunity he was offered by his mentor and several of his other teachers to understand himself as a good enough learner without having to put a lot of effort into his education. As Ludwig stated in the first interview:

Well, in general I am quite sloppy. I postpone things until they cannot be postponed anymore [...] and then, the day before the deadline, I do my homework, hand it in and all is well. Except that I do it quick and sloppy. And some teachers do not mind it as long as they can tell that you understand the assignment and that you are able to make the assignment, but others [...] do. But finally I have a mentor who understands how I study [...] And who understands that if this is how I want to do it, he can't do anything to change it [...] I explained to him how I do it and he was like 'well, if you think you can pass your exams this way, I'm fine with you trying it this way'.

Hence, by strongly holding onto his mentor's and some other teachers' learning notions, Ludwig seemed to negotiate space to defend his current learner identity and level of school engagement, thereby enabling himself to neglect the learning notions of his parents and his other teachers.

It seems that the nonrecognition of effort of some authoritative adults in Amanda's, Richie's and Ludwig's surroundings either prevented them from trying to engage more in school due to the impossibility of making these adults proud, or allowed them to "be lazy" (Ludwig, interview #1). This finding is further underscored by the fact that all the students who were identified as highly engaged and wanted to understand themselves as learners who put a lot of effort into school, did exclusively encounter continuities between home and school in terms of the recognition and appreciation of working hard for school. Hence, the messages the highly engaged students received from their parents and teachers concerning what it entails to be a good learner were rather univocal *and* seemed to stimulate them to define themselves as learners who engage in school.

Pro- and anti-school peer norms. For all students in our sample we found that they were often surrounded by peers whose learning notions appeared to reinforce their learner identities. When it comes to Kay's friends, he could tell from their behavior in class that they did not find it important to work hard for or perform well in school, which was part of his own learner identity too. Also, Kay reported that both he and his friends would mock people who, for example, would cancel a movie night because of a test that still needed to be studied for. Even though this was not identified as such by Kay, this suggests the presence of a discontinuity in learning notions between the context of school and his peer group, involving his peers' anti-school norms, that probably further reinforced his then already present learner identity. A similar finding emerged from the analysis of Ludwig's case, as Ludwig's friends would, whenever they felt treated unfairly or approached rudely by a teacher, make a statement by provoking the teacher and disengaging from class even though this meant putting their opportunities to learn in jeopardy.

Amanda, Caleb and Richie, whom (next to Ludwig) were all identified as moderately engaged students, had both friends and classmates who were dedicated to school and friends and classmates who were not. Consequently, various notions on the importance of being a good learner were available among their peers, of which some formed a continuity and others a discontinuity with the context of school. As these continuities and discontinuities had to be negotiated and related to in understanding themselves as learners, this may explain why these students neither fully engaged with nor disengaged from their education so as to maintain their popularity among both the peers who did and who did not fully engage in school.

Among the students whom we identified as highly engaged, we found an interesting pattern. Some of these students thought that only their befriended classmates, but not their other classmates, were concerned with working hard for and performing well in school. These students understood themselves as hard-working learners who were driven by curiosity in some classes, but merely by the desire to obtain high grades (Fay; Ayden; Lilly) or a degree that allowed them to enroll in a particular education program after high school (Nessa) in other classes. What additionally characterized these students was that they all enjoyed learning less in the latter classes as soon as they did not understand the subject matter or an assignment. They explained that this was the case because this put them at risk of obtaining relatively low test scores, which could interfere with the goals they pursued.

However, the other students who demonstrated high levels of school engagement reported that their befriended classmates *and* most of their other classmates and friends in and out of school found it important to invest time and energy in their education and to perform well in school. These students mentioned to be driven by curiosity for all of their subjects. They hoped that school would help them to increase their knowledge and improve their skills, no matter in what classes. They made remarks such as, "I always want to know everything. I want to know how everything works [...] I have a broad interest" (Andrew, interview #1). Moreover, these students explained that they found most of their classes meaningful, irrespective of the learning activities they were introduced to (Jade; Tammy; Andrew; Ethan; Rebecca) their test results (Miriam; Jade; Andrew; Ethan; Rebecca), or their relation with the teachers (Miriam; Jade; Tammy).

Hence, it seems that also among students demonstrating high levels of school engagement, the presence or absence of diverse peer notions on the importance of being a good learner is related to their learner identities. The presence of diverse peer notions, of which some form a continuity and others a discontinuity with the contexts of school and home, appear to be negotiated by these students to, perhaps, safeguard their social status among all peers by positioning themselves as certain types of learners with certain learning goals. The absence of diverse peer notions, in contrast, seemed to allow the highly engaged students in our sample to fully engage in school on both a behavioral and affective level.

DISCUSSION

The present paper aimed to gain a better understanding of how various types of continuities and discontinuities in learning notions inform adolescents' school engagement through their learner identities. First, we examined what contextual continuities and discontinuities in learning notions adolescents with diverse levels of demonstrated school engagement encountered. In doing so, we contributed to the research field by studying the thus far underexposed role of contextual continuities and discontinuities between school and the contexts of leisure institutes and jobs in adolescents' school engagement (see Nasir & Hand, 2008 for an exception). Continuities and discontinuities in learning notions between the contexts of school on the one hand, and worksites and leisure institutes on the other, did not appear to be related to adolescents' school engagement, though. Our analysis suggests that this can

first be explained by the intrinsically different learning goals that adolescents appear to associate with these contexts (preparing for further participation in society at school versus having fun at leisure institutes). Second, this can be explained by the inherent differences in appreciated skills between school (thinking skills) and the contexts of worksites and leisure institutes (practical skills) that adolescents appear to perceive. Third, probably present continuities in learning notions between these contexts regarding, for example, the importance of taking responsibility or the need for discipline are either not recognized by students or deemed irrelevant.

Additionally and in line with earlier studies (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Noyes, 2006; Phelan et al., 1991; Pollard & Filer, 2007; Valenzuela, 1999; Vetter et al., 2011), we did find that particularly continuities and discontinuities in notions about *what it entails to be a good learner in school* and *the importance of being one* between the school context on the one hand, and the contexts of home and peer groups on the other, were related to the interviewed students' levels of demonstrated school engagement. We found that one student, whom we identified as hardly engaged, could not tell when his parents and teachers would consider someone to be a good learner. Students whom we identified as moderately engaged generally thought that either their parents or (some of their) teachers considered school performances to be more relevant, whereas students whom we identified as highly engaged thought that both their teachers and parents deemed investing a lot of time and energy into school a key characteristic of a good learner. Additionally, all the interviewed students thought that their peers considered both putting in an effort for and performing well in school were characteristics of a good learner. However, only the students demonstrating high levels of school engagement and one moderately engaged student reported to have friends who, like their teachers and parents, found it important to be a good learner in school.

Next, we studied the question 'What relations can be found between the contextual continuities and discontinuities in learning notions that are encountered by adolescents with diverse levels of demonstrated school engagement and their learner identities?'. In further exploring the continuities and discontinuities regarding notions of a good learner between the school context on the one hand, and the contexts of home and peer groups on the other, we found that especially the *absence or presence of feasible expectations*, the *(non-)recognition of effort put into school*, and *pro- and/or anti-school peer norms*, were related to students' self-understandings as learners in school.

With respect to the *absence or presence of feasible expectations*, our analysis indicated that the absence of such expectations in school and at home may prevent adolescents from trying to understand themselves as good learners. This is in line with extant research on adolescents' learner identity development within the context of school, documenting that when adolescents experience a discrepancy between their own ideas of how and what they can learn on the one hand, and their school's ideas about learning on the other, this may cause them to disengage from their education (Calabrese Barton et al., 2013; Rubin, 2007; Mortimer et al., 2010). When students feel unable to meet, and perhaps change, the expectations that are imposed on them, they may come to define themselves as people who do not care about school, which impedes their school engagement.

Second, our analysis showed that parents' and teachers' (*non-*)*recognition of effort* that students put into school may inform adolescents' learner identities. We found that parents' and/or teachers' mere focus on school achievement rather than on effort could prevent students from wanting to understand themselves as learners who invest a lot of time and energy into school. Unlike findings reported by extant research (Phelan et al., 1991; Valenzuela, 1999), not wanting to understand themselves as hard-working students did not seem to be driven by adolescents' fear of losing their community's appreciation, but rather by the fact that this discontinuity either robbed students of a chance to make certain authoritative adults in their surroundings proud or allowed them to be lazy. In addition, when adolescents' parents *and* all of their teachers were concerned with the effort students put into school, this appeared to stimulate these students to understand themselves as people who find learning in school important and who are willing to work hard for school.

Third, we found relations between the interviewed students' learner identities and the *pro- and/or anti-school peer norms* their friends and classmates conveyed towards school. For some students, we exclusively identified a discontinuity between their teachers and their befriended classmates when it comes to how important it was considered to be a good learner. These students were characterized by learner identities that, at least at times, motivated them to put their opportunities to learn in school into jeopardy. Other students had friends and classmates who conveyed pro-school peer norms regarding the importance of being a good learner *and* friends and classmates who did not. These students all understood themselves as students who engaged in school as long as they enjoyed the classes they were in. Students who perceived to have friends that had adopted pro-school peer norms, but a fair share of

classmates who had not, reported to be driven by curiosity in some classes, and merely by the desire to obtain high grades or a certain degree in other classes. Only students with exclusively friends and classmates who had adopted pro-school peer norms when it comes to the importance of being a good learner, understood themselves as learners who were driven by curiosity in all their classes. Here, in agreement with previous studies (Noyes, 2006; Phelan et al., 1991; Valenzuela, 1999; Vetter et al., 2011), indications were found that a fear of losing their reputation played a role in adolescents' school engagement and, moreover, in the way in which they understood themselves as learners in school.

More in general, the explorative study presented in this paper provides insights into what role adolescents' learner identities play in how contextual continuities and discontinuities in learning notions inform adolescents' school engagement. Our study indicates that continuities in learning notions regarding the characteristics of a good learner and the importance of being one between the contexts of school on the one hand, and home and peer groups on the other *reinforce* adolescents' identification with these learning notions as well as their demonstrated levels of school engagement. However, contextual discontinuities in these learning notions appear to require *negotiation* that may cause adolescents to adopt suboptimal learner identities, at least from the schools' perspectives, and impede their school engagement. Hence, our research underscores the importance of studying learner identity development to better understand adolescents' school engagement. It also stresses the need to study learner identity development as a process that occurs in several sociocultural contexts at the same time.

Moreover, it can be derived from the present study that teachers may help to foster adolescents' school engagement by trying to build constructive continuities for them between their homes and school in terms of the appreciation of their demonstrated efforts rather than their achievement. This could for example be done by discussing the importance of this learning notion for adolescents' development with their parents. Building constructive continuities between the contexts of school and peer groups may be especially difficult. Our research suggests, though, that supporting adolescents in relating to contextual discontinuities in learning notions regarding the characteristics and importance of being a good learner may benefit the development of learner identities that stimulate school engagement: it is important to try to make students resilient to peer pressure or unconstructive learning notions at home in negotiating these discontinuities in the process of their learner identity

development. Thus far, previous research has identified and suggested the provision of meaningful learning experiences in supportive classroom climates to be an important precondition to achieve this goal (Verhoeven et al., 2019).

Future research could further contribute to the research field in at least three ways. First, in addition to the contexts of school, home, peer groups, worksites and more formal leisure institutes, many adolescents participate in, for example, online communities (e.g., Esteban-Guitart et al., 2017) and religious institutes (e.g., Altinyelken & Sözeri, 2018) too. In examining the learning notions that are conveyed in these contexts as well, an even more complete picture could be provided of what continuities and discontinuities between different types of contexts do and do not play a role in the school-related learner identities that adolescents develop and maintain.

Second, what struck us is that, unlike in previous research findings on funds of knowledge, funds of identity and third space (e.g., Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Hogg & Volman, 2020; Mortimer et al., 2010; Noyes, 2006; Phelan et al., 1991; Valenzuela, 1999; Vetter et al., 2011), continuities and discontinuities in learning notions between the school context on the one hand, and the contexts of home and peer groups on the other regarding, for example, learning-related goals or how things should be learned were not found. Despite the fact that we asked students what a good learner is capable of according to their teachers, parents and peers, the types of knowledge and skills that were valued by the people in their surroundings often remained implicit in the interviews. Students generally mentioned that school requires thinking skills and they addressed what type of behavior teachers expected from their students in terms of, for example, doing homework and not disturbing classes. However, the students did not elaborate on the extent to which all subjects were deemed equally important by their schools, parents, or peers, or on the type of thinking skills that were appreciated most. Hence, future studies could further explore how certain continuities and discontinuities in learning notions between school and out-of-school contexts we may have overlooked can be identified and how these may be related to adolescents' learner identities too.

Third, the present study is explorative and qualitative in nature, and due to recruitment issues, more highly engaged than moderately engaged and especially hardly engaged students participated in our research. We acknowledge that no empirical generalizations can be made based on the sample of the present study. Nevertheless, our research does contribute to conceptualizations of how various types of continuities and discontinuities in

learning notions inform adolescents' school engagement through their learner identities. Future research would benefit, though, from recruiting a larger and more diverse research group to explore the empirical generalizability of our findings to, where necessary, expand or adjust these conceptualizations so as to even better understand adolescents' school engagement.