"Bring the outside world in": informing children in the educational setting about economic inequality

A qualitative study on how an intervention in schools can help children to develop realistic beliefs about inequality based on economic differences

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Abstract

People are confronted with several obstacles that prevent them from developing accurate views on economic inequality. These misperceptions could lead to more discrimination against the poor and to less demands for redistribution. Children already start developing misperceptions about economic inequality at a young age, but they are also open to new input on which they could change their beliefs. Therefore, the goal of this study is to address how children between 11 and 14 years old could learn about economic inequality in schools so that they arrive at a better understanding of this issue. I conducted eight interviews with teachers to gain insights into their perceptions on how to discuss this topic with students. The findings of these interviews show, in combination with the results from a literature analysis, what elements are fruitful to use in a school intervention. The main criteria are 1) that an intervention should aim to teach children about empathy and critical thinking, 2) that there should be a focus on experience, creativity and an active contribution of the students themselves, and 3) that teachers should understand their crucial role in keeping the students engaged and maintaining a safe atmosphere. Implications for future research and limitations of this study are discussed.

Keywords: children's beliefs, economic inequality, education, school intervention, teachers' opinions

Introduction

While the income of the wealthiest people is increasing, citizens with low incomes do not see a rise in their financial situation. In fact, the gap between rich and poor is only increasing (Piketty & Saez, 2014). This phenomenon is until this day very relevant as this recent study shows: "The social and economic context at present is much more similar to that during the 2008 crisis. . . . If anything, existing inequalities have deepened since 2008" (Van Bavel & Scheffer, 2021, p.8). Even though income inequality is increasing, people do not express more concern about this trend. This puzzle can be unraveled when focusing on how people might develop beliefs about inequality that do not fully match the actual reality (Mijs, 2019).

There are several barriers described in academic literature that give explanations for why people tend to have incomplete beliefs about increasing economic inequality. Briefly described: the first constraint is that people can be misinformed about the actual levels of inequality. Citizens find it hard to correctly estimate the levels of inequality in their country and so they do not fully grasp the scope of the issue of inequality (Gimpelson & Treisman, 2018). Secondly, people tend to adjust their beliefs as a coping mechanism. The mechanism motivates them to see their society as just, and so these citizens adjust their perceptions of what counts as fair levels of inequality (Trump, 2018). A last

barrier is that people understand inequality through the paradigm of meritocracy. In a meritocratic system one's success is determined by one's hard work and effort and so being poor becomes an individual problem. However, this paradigm lacks to focus on structural factors that cause inequality like someone's network or parental background (Mijs, 2016).

These misconceptions are already developed at an early age. Young children are aware of the differences between rich and poor and these concepts become more complex and sophisticated when children grow older. Eventually, children's beliefs are similar to adults' beliefs: structural factors like race and the social system are often left out as potential causes for poverty (Chafel, 1997). However, an important difference between adults and children is that the latter are more open to new information to develop their beliefs about inequality: "Contemporary misconceptions that inaccurately depict the poor and limit policy on their behalf should be challenged when they are most amenable to change: during childhood" (Chafel, 1997, p.462). That makes children an interesting target group to study in relation to changing beliefs about inequality.

Different scholars show that we should care that people develop accurate beliefs about inequality. First of all, the coping mechanism that people use to adjust their perceptions prevents that citizens demand redistribution and prevents that citizens demand help for the disadvantaged by their government (Trump, 2018). Furthermore, inaccurate conceptions of the role of hard work and effort could give people the idea that they should blame the victim. Beliefs based on meritocracy could make that people who are unemployed or did not finish their education are viewed as failures, and that can have serious effects: "Apart from the effect this has on a person's self-esteem, the mark of personal failure removes the right to protest, erodes the grounds for collective action, and thus effectively renders the marked immobile" (Mijs, 2016, p.23). And lastly, offering information on structural factors that cause inequality could reduce the risk of discrimination against the poor and it could make people more likely to support policies to assist the disadvantaged (Mistry, Brown, Chow & Collins, 2012).

From this literature it becomes clear that it is important that people have an accurate understanding of what causes economic inequality, and it becomes clear that children form a target group that can be influenced by interventions. With an intervention, I refer to an activity that is offered to children by their school and that differs from standard teaching methods. Chafel (1997) calls for further research and states that "educational experiences should be created to counter prevailing stereotypes about the poor" (p.461). In this thesis, I respond to this call. I investigate the criteria for a fruitful intervention, and I design an outline of what elements should be integrated in this

intervention. The central question of this thesis is: *How could an intervention designed for schools help children develop a more accurate and realistic view on economic inequality?*

In the next section, I give a more detailed overview of relevant literature by presenting articles that give arguments for the relevance of this research question. After this theoretical justification, the methods of this research are discussed. I aim to find a satisfying answer to the research question by conducting interviews with teachers about their ideas on how to cover the topic of economic inequality in their class. Afterwards, I discuss the most relevant findings from these interviews in the result section. I reflect on both the context in which the statements must be placed, and on the elements that teachers label as fruitful for an intervention. In the final part, I present the outline for an intervention based on insights from literature and from the interviews. I also reflect on the implications of this outcome for practice and future research, and I address some limitations of this study.

Theoretical background

In this section, I offer a variety of literature as a justification for this research. First, I explain why children are an interesting target group for this project. Then, I substantiate why especially schools are relevant settings to implement a new intervention. Afterwards, I reflect on what mechanisms contribute to people developing inaccurate beliefs about economic inequality and thus what mechanisms should be debunked. I end with an overview of already existing literature on interventions to understand what elements are useful and should be incorporated when designing a new intervention.

Developing beliefs during childhood

Young people develop, just like adults, beliefs about economic inequality that do not fully match reality (Arsenio & Willems, 2017). Just like adults, children and adolescents find it difficult to attribute structural factors, like someone's background, to the issue of inequality (Grayman & Godfrey, 2013). These misperceptions start to develop at very young age. When shown pictures of people from different socio-economic backgrounds, children as young as 3 and 4 years old can already identify people as 'rich' and 'poor' (Chafel, 1997). This understanding is further expanded when children grow older. Nenadal and Mistry (2018) show that when children develop more skills, they start to categorize people into different groups "based on these salient attributes and eventually form beliefs about members of specific groups (which may or may not be accurate) based on their own ideas and the implicit and explicit messages they have encountered" (p.45). Apparently, children base their beliefs on their own thoughts but also on information that they receive from their surroundings.

Thus, children develop perceptions of inequality in a similar manner as adults do. But because children are still in the process of learning, they are less likely to stick to already established perceptions but are more open to changing their beliefs (Mistry et al., 2012). This thesis focuses on children at the end of primary school and at the start of secondary school, because they start to deal with meritocratic ideals as one of the barriers to developing realistic beliefs about inequality: "Older participants (11 to 14 years of age) displayed more complex ideas. At the stage of psychological conceptions, they believed that economic inequality emanated from individual merit" (Chafel, 1997, p.449). An intervention could help to nuance how children understand the effect of individual effort and hard work on inequality.

A study by Schäfer, Haun and Tomasello (2015) shows that beliefs about distributive justice are not universal, but rather culturally influenced. Depending on the culture a child grows up in, this child will develop certain beliefs about fairness and the role of merit in distribution. The researchers did an experiment about sharing rewards with children from three different cultural groups. About German children, who reflect the 'Western culture' and are thus similar to Dutch children, the authors say: "They shared most equally when rewards had been obtained through equal merit . . . but as unequally as Samburu children when contributions to the rewards had been unequal" (Schäfer et al., 2015, p.1257). This shows that these German children take into account the notion of merit when sharing rewards. Part of the experiment showed how this group of children agreed that peers who got better results, even though those results were manipulated in the context of this experiment, also received the most rewards. The two other cultural groups in this experiment divided the rewards in different ways and so this study shows that ideas of merit and distributive justice are culturally affected (Schäfer et al., 2015).

Educational system as a setting

People start developing beliefs about economic inequality during their childhood, and thus part of this development takes place during their time at school. I argue that the educational system is a fruitful setting to discuss economic inequality because this might be an effective way to reach a lot of children, instead of that only a few children discuss this topic in their homes, for example. Furthermore, some scholars see an important role for schools and teachers in supporting their student's development to become engaged and critical citizens: "Teachers have the chance to help students understand the meanings, causes, and consequences of wealth and poverty and engage them in lessons about the opportunities and obligations they have as citizens in a democratic society" (Nenadal & Mistry, 2018, p.44). To fulfill this task, teachers could make use of an intervention to discuss the issues of poverty and inequality with their students.

According to Biesta (2009), education has multiple functions and two of them are qualification and socialization. These two functions tie in with the role that teachers have to teach children how to be engaged and mindful citizens. Socialization means that children become engaged members of our society through education. Since incorrect beliefs about inequality can lead to discrimination against the poor (Mistry et al., 2012), education can have a role in preventing this. Furthermore, subjectivation means that children are offered useful tools to become independent human-beings. In relation to the construction of beliefs this means that they are trained to not simply accept information or ideas, but to critically analyze that to form concrete and conscious beliefs (Biesta, 2009).

Furthermore, the educational setting is an interesting area for research because it is a setting where children are confronted with inequality themselves. A report by the Dutch education inspectorate (2016) shows that inequality in schools is increasing. Through time, children from low social-economic backgrounds are less and less often likely to attend higher education. When children make the step to secondary education, they receive advice on the educational level that would fit them. However, research shows that children from lower social-economic backgrounds often receive school advice that is too low, while children from higher social-economic backgrounds are often overestimated regarding their school advice. This difference in school advice is increasing over time (Inspectie van het onderwijs, 2016).

What barriers to overcome

An intervention could contribute to debunk the beliefs that children already have about economic inequality and could help them to develop realistic views on this topic. An effective intervention should address three different forms in which inaccurate views on economic inequality are developed. First of all, it should debunk the notion of meritocracy as discussed by Mijs (2019). He studied how meritocratic beliefs and structuralist beliefs shape people's thinking about inequality. Meritocratic beliefs focus on the idea that working hard and putting effort in something will lead to success. This is seen as fair because societal success would then depend on individual talent and ambition, according to this meritocratic understanding. This meritocratic paradigm forms the first barrier to coming at a better understanding of actual levels of inequality. This paradigm lacks to take into account structural factors. Even though one might work hard, structural factors like family's wealth, discrimination and connections might complicate societal success (Mijs, 2019).

Next to the belief in meritocracy, another hurdle that should be overcome is related to misunderstanding the issue of economic inequality. According to Hauser and Norton (2017), people tend to project their understanding of inequality as it is in their immediate environments onto the

situation on a national scale. This results in a misperception of inequality in the society as a whole. This is in line with how Gimpelson and Treisman (2018) discuss how people have difficulties with correctly estimating the level of inequality in their country. For example, citizens in the higher percentiles of the income distribution often think that they are in a lower percentile and vice versa. Thus, because people are not well enough informed, they might have an inaccurate understanding of the issue of inequality in their society.

Trump (2018) mentions another barrier described in the adjustment theory. This implies that people adjust their expectations in such a way that the inequality in their country seems fair or just. She writes: "We are biased in favor of interpretations that do not cause us psychological distress" (Trump, 2018, p.6). That indicates that people tend to view the system that they are living in as fair because that conception causes the least worries. Creative and interactive interventions might be needed because 'simply' providing information might not be enough, according to Trump (2018): "This [adjustment] theory proposes that human beings are inherently motivated to think of their social systems as fair and legitimate, and to maintain this belief even when faced with information that may indicate the opposite" (p.5). Thus, just offering information or telling people that they live in an unequal system might not have the desired effects. The question remains how an intervention could then help people develop accurate beliefs.

Drawing inspiration from literature

A few scholars have already tested interventions that deal with the barriers that prevent people from developing correct beliefs about inequality. Since there is little literature that precisely focuses on economic inequality as the matter to change children's beliefs about, I included literature that focuses on related, but different topics. The main findings from this literature review are included in a table in Appendix A, and in the next paragraphs I elaborate on that.

Lee, Patall, Cawthon and Steingut (2015) tested whether an intervention based on theatre exercises could be implemented within curriculums at schools. This is called drama-based pedagogy and it is an embodied approach to learning and used to teach regular courses like mathematics and English. The authors of this study reviewed literature on this teaching strategy and found that this kind of intervention contributed to children's creativity, critical thinking, motivation, and attitudes towards others. Especially this last category is linked to interventions on inequality since it can focus on how to treat other people living in different economic situations. Overall, drama-based pedagogy had positive effects on children's attitudes toward others. The effects were especially productive when the intervention was led by a classroom teacher or a researcher in comparison to the lead of

teaching artists or other third-party people. Furthermore, data suggest that such an intervention should be between 5 and 20 lessons to be most effective (Lee et al., 2015).

Fontanella-Nothom (2019) did a study on how racial differences can be discussed via children's books. The researcher points out that reading books in which a diversity of racial identities is included helps to affirm children's own racial identities. It also helps children to understand racial identities of others better and to open up a conversation about race. A conclusion of this study is that learning materials should show the diverse nature of society so that children feel represented. Learning about the perspectives and situations of others in our society helps children to become more empathic. According to Fontanella-Nothom (2019), being empathic is an important skill to develop since it helps to bring people closer to each other.

Mistry et al. (2012) tested if children would change their beliefs after taking a course on inequality. The results showed that students were less likely to attribute individualistic causes to poverty after the new curriculum, but their ideas about the effect of hard work and effort on someone's success remained the same. A related research by Mistry et al. (2016) focused on an inquiry-based curriculum instead of a fixed lesson series. An inquiry-based approach means that a significant topic is thoroughly investigated using input provided by the students themselves. So, this approach is student-centered, and the discussions and actions within the lessons are mainly based on students' interests and knowledge. According to this article, a focus on empathy and perspective taking is necessary to reach positive results (Mistry et al., 2016).

De Mooij, Fekkes, Scholte and Overbeek (2020) researched what components within social skill training for children were effective. They found that the inclusion of sharing knowledge and a focus on the development of children's skills were important. What is striking is that they did not find any support that the use of physical components would be beneficial. This is in contrast with drama-based pedagogy in which physical exercises form the core of the approach (Lee et al., 2015). Furthermore, De Mooij et al. (2020) found that programs are most effective when the duration is between 10 to 16 weeks. Shorter and longer than this showed a decrease in effectivity. Lastly, they found that programs given by professionals or given by school personnel yielded similar effects.

Nenadal and Mistry (2018) interviewed teachers to hear their experiences with an inquiry-based intervention to discuss wealth and poverty with students. Three elements were considered especially successful: first of all, it is important to take students' voices seriously and to listen to the students to hear what they already know or think about these topics. Secondly, the teachers experienced that the incorporation of creative aspects worked well to keep the students motivated and engaged. Lastly, it was important for the teachers that they felt that the children's parents supported and

understood the program. However, the teachers also reflected on what elements were more challenging. They mentioned that it was difficult to bring up sensitive topics and to adequality deal with uncomfortable feelings felt within the class. Another point was that the teachers had difficulties with covering all contents that were part of the intervention because not all students immediately understood the materials. Finally, because the teachers wanted to incorporate creative elements, they spent quite some time on preparing those activities and they felt that there was not enough time to discuss as much about the topic as they hoped (Nenadal & Mistry, 2018).

Another intervention I draw inspiration from is described by Visser (2018). He writes about a game that is designed to teach children about citizenship and ethical issues, called '*Terra Nova Minimaatschappij'.* In this game, children work in groups and together they must determine what the society of a fictional group of islanders should look like (Visser, 2018). Goal of this game is to let children think for themselves and to train them in critically analyzing societal issues, which is in line with the educational function of subjectification as described by Biesta (2009). The advantage of using such a game as an intervention is that a fictional situation is created: this helps to create a safe environment in which everyone can share their opinions since it does not immediately relate to children's personal realities (Visser, 2018).

Finally, it might be interesting to look at the effect of introducing children to people with different economic backgrounds: "New research suggests that what grounds people's beliefs abouts inequality is their exposure to and interactions with other people across economic fault lines" (Mijs, 2019, p.5). Related to this is a focus on experiences and emotions since those play an important role in establishing beliefs: "Seeing and experiencing inequality in the moment may translate into behaviors that influence inequality" (Hauser & Norton, 2017, p.24). This is also in line with the work by Back (2012) on live sociology. This idea starts with the premise that methods should help to enact reality instead of simply reflect it. This can be done when a method focuses more on sensations and experiences.

Methodology

In this part, I shed light on the methodological aspects of this thesis. The methods described here support finding an answer to the research question: *How could an intervention designed for schools help children develop a more accurate and realistic view on economic inequality?* Using the literature as a base and as an inspiration, I interview eight teachers who share their visions on possibly useful interventions in the classroom.

Sampling and finding respondents

As a form of data collection, I conduct one-on-one interviews with eight teachers. The aim of these qualitative interviews is to shed light on how theoretical discussions about pedagogical interventions are viewed by teachers. These teachers are experts in the field, and most likely will have opinions and ideas about this topic or are able to share some practical experiences. This is in line with the idea that interventions do not simply exist out there, but rather are constructed and performed by people (Biesta, 2015). We should understand education and educational interventions "as a (complex) social reality constituted by the conscious acts of reflexive agents" (Biesta, 2015, p.203). Thus, the role of teachers as active agents within interventions should not be overlooked. Furthermore, this method of interviewing offers the possibility to let teachers have a say in the intervention that is being designed. These teachers are part of the population of people to eventually use such an intervention, and so their contribution in the process of creating the intervention is valuable.

A sample is drawn from teachers who teach in the final years of primary education or the first years of secondary education. In this research I focus on children in the age group of 11 to 14 years old since that is an interesting target group for the intervention (Chafel, 1997), and that roughly matches the population of children in group 7 and 8 in primary school and class 1 and 2 in high school. A criterium for this sample is thus that all respondents have, to a greater or lesser extent, experience with these groups or classes. This sample consists of 'just' eight people but that should not be considered a limitation: I am not interested in being able to generalize conclusions that would apply to the population of teachers in the Netherlands. Rather, I am interested to hear in depth from just a very few people within that population what their ideas about and experiences with this topic are. I contacted my respondents using snowball sampling. This means that the researcher first samples a few people, and then asks these people for suggestions for more respondents (Bryman, 2016). I used my personal network to find respondents and these respondents then helped me to find more participants.

Conducting and analyzing the interviews

Before conducting the interviews, I reflected on how to protect the participants' privacy as described in the ethics and privacy checklist (see Appendix B). I also let my respondents read an informed consent form (see Appendix C) containing information on their rights, the aim of the research and the storage of the data. This helped to be transparent towards the participants and helped to prevent miscommunication about the research. At the start of every interview, I ask the respondents if they read and understood the informed consent form, if they had any questions and if they agreed on the interview being recorded. These interviews are held online, due to the COVID-19 crisis and its

restrictions. The interviews are semi-structured and are guided by an interview guide. This is a list of specific questions and topics to cover while maintaining the qualitative nature of the interviews, which gives room to interviewees' own perspectives. I used the literature for inspiration when developing the interview guide and I incorporated some findings from the literature into the interview questions. This way, I proposed suggestions from the literature to the respondents to hear their opinion on it. The interview guide can be found in Appendix D.

During the interviews I wrote down memos and, afterwards, I relistened to every audio recording to collect all the relevant pieces and quotes from the interviews. I took extensive notes while listing to the recordings and transcribed the parts that where especially interesting or important. Then, I combined the parts of different interviews in which similar topics were discussed, to compare the ideas of the eight respondents. This is in line with how Deterding and Waters (2021) argue for a more flexible approach to data analysis in which the overarching concepts are identified instead of immediately applying fine-grained coding. Cross-case memos helped to smoothly analyze the differences and similarities between respondents' opinions. The outcome of the analysis can be read in the results section of this thesis.

Based on literature and the interviews with teachers, I arrive at a good understanding of what should be included in a school intervention to tackle the topic of economic inequality. From this overview, I set up an outline of an intervention on economic inequality to be used in schools. It is important to realize that the outline of that intervention is supported by data, but that does not automatically mean that the intervention also works in practice. Because of the limited scope and limited time set for this thesis project, I focused on creating a preliminary version of the intervention. In the conclusion section, suggestions are made on how this version can be improved and can be tested in practice.

Positionality

When reviewing the literature and the interviews, I have an unmistakable role in how the results are displayed. The process of reviewing literature and gathered data involves an active and creative construction of new knowledge by the researcher, and thus the positionality and own interests of the researcher play a role (Montuori, 2005). This is in line with what Koro-Ljungberg (2016) wrote: "Methodologies are choices, often onto-epistemological and theoretical, and cannot be divorced from the values, beliefs, backgrounds, bodies, and affects of the researcher or the research context" (p.79). Personally, I do not have the feeling that I have been negativity affected by the issue of economic inequality myself. Therefore, I cannot know how people who do have to face the struggles of this issue might respond to or think about an intervention that aims at discussing precisely this.

Furthermore, I believe that it is important to discuss this topic with children because it could contribute to more connectedness within a society when citizens better understand each other. During the interviews, I hear from teachers if they agree with me: they reflect on whether they believe that this issue should be discussed in class, and how they would deal with such a topic that might be sensitive to some of their students.

Results

In this section, I present the results that I extracted from the interviews with the teachers. There are roughly two parts that can be identified in this results section. First, I explain the context in which these teachers work and in which an intervention would thus be implemented. Then, I address the question of what elements should be included or should be avoided in an intervention for it to be fruitful. To answer this question, respondents both shared their own ideas but also reflected on suggestions from literature that I proposed to them during the interviews. To protect my respondents' privacy, I refer to the interviewees in the findings section as Respondent 1 to 8 with the inclusion of at what type of school the teachers work or used to work. Six of the teachers that I interviewed work in primary education, and two interviewees work in secondary education. A more detailed overview of the respondents and their characteristics can be found in Appendix E.

Setting and context

Inequality as a topic and an issue

At the start of every interview, I spoke with the respondents about if and how they discuss the topic of economic inequality with their students, but also if they think that economic inequality is an issue in their class. I learned that almost all interviewed teachers do have some experience with discussing social themes with their class. Most of the times, these topics are discussed when they caught the students' or teachers' attention, for example when it was a news item. Respondent 4 (retired primary school teacher) explains that she finds it very important to talk about these topics with her students and that she experiences that her students also care to have these conversations. However, these discussions were her own initiative, and she says: "I think that in the educational system there should be some sort of method [to discuss economic inequality], because I doubt whether all teachers pay attention to that."

Respondent 8 (teacher in special secondary education) also talks about economic inequality with her students but adds to this that the issue itself is visible in her class. She mentions that especially children at the lower end of the economic divide might struggle at school and that this is visible in her class: "Some students don't have a laptop at home, no pens. They don't have the right facilities

to study. . . . And I find it important that there is attention for that so that these students are not prejudiced." These economic differences do play out to be a problem in her class, because children tend to bully classmates who often wear the same clothes or don't have a lot of possessions. To counter this, Respondent 8 thinks that it is very important to start conversations with her students about this. Respondent 7 (high school teacher) agrees and believes that having conversations about societal issues contribute to the personal development of his students. He thinks that teachers have a "social duty" towards their students: "I try to stimulate that people think for themselves. You cannot force an opinion, of course, but I do think that as a teacher you must make sure that [the students] are offered a different perspective."

Respondent 2 (former teacher in primary education) explains that discussing economic inequality was not part of a standardized and common method, but rather it was integrated in her school's own approach to social issues. She says: "We worked a lot with guest speakers, the aim was really to bring the outside world in." Furthermore, her school often organized excursions to introduce students to new people and practices. Respondent 6 (primary school teacher) discusses economic inequality with her students as part of the school's curriculum and also sees this issue in her class. However, she mentions how it is not merely about economic differences: "What I run into is not so much the economic, but rather the cultural aspect." It could also be a combination of the two: she gave the example of how children sometimes bring toys to school, and she associates those material possessions with the economic situation of the family. But how children deal with that is culturally influenced, since some children are brought up with the manner that everybody can play with everybody's toys, while other children learn that toys are someone's personal belongings.

Other teachers explain how economic differences do not play out to be an issue in their class. For some this means that they spend almost no time on discussing this topic. For example, Respondent 3 (primary school teacher) does not work with a specific method to discuss economic inequality with her class. She explains that she finds it difficult to discuss this topic with her students since they do not seem to relate to it. R3: "It is often still far away from their reality." At her school, most children and parents know each other from the neighborhood and are usually like-minded. Perhaps this contributes to why the topic of inequality does not seem like an urgent matter to discuss at her school.

Respondent 1 (primary school teacher) also does not see a lot of inequality within her class and thus says that it is also not an issue among her students. However, she does think that some other groups of children would benefit from addressing this topic, when it is an issue in their lives: "When I look at my classes, I don't think that [discussing economic inequality] is necessary. . . . I can imagine that in a

different group, in a different region of the Netherlands or in different neighborhoods, that it might be useful there." Other teachers do see economic differences within their class, but do not articulate that as an issue. For example, Respondent 5 (primary school teacher) whose school is located between a very wealthy and a relatively poor neighborhood and therefore the population at this school is mixed: "My class is very sensitive and understanding, and they really look after each other, so they all responded very well. And so maybe that's why this topic is not really covered, because it is not an issue."

The role of a school

All teachers mentioned at some point during the interview that it is not simply a matter of developing and implementing an intervention in schools. Rather, it is crucial to also reflect on the role and the possibilities a school has in discussing the topic of inequality with children. One puzzle is brought up by a majority of the respondents, which is their limited amount of time in a typical school day. Respondent 1 (primary school teacher) is very clear about this: "The regular classes are stuffed, so where do I get the time?" In addition to that, Respondent 7 (high school teacher) mentions how spending more time on discussing economic inequality comes at the expense of other important topics. Respondent 8 (teacher in special secondary education) thinks that economic inequality is such an important topic to discuss with her students, that she would rather spend more time on that even if that means that there is less time for required components of the curriculum. She does note that in special education she is less bound to the strict rules of the curriculum since there is more attention to the needs of students. Thus, she feels that she is more flexible in what to discuss with her students than teachers in regular education might be.

Another puzzle is that of to what extent schools are responsible for discussing the topic of economic inequality with the students. Four respondents explained that it is mainly the school that should take care of discussing this topic. Respondent 1 (primary school teacher) believes that children look up to their teachers and that children trust that the information shared by their teachers is valid and important. Teachers should be conscious of this role and have to put it to good use, for example, by discussing the topic of economic inequality. This responsibility is also felt by Respondent 8 (teacher in special secondary education). She believes that it is very important to train children to be engaged and mindful people. She doubts whether these themes are discussed in every home, and so she thinks that a school should do that and offer information on societal issues to all students.

The other four interviewees were a bit more hesitant in claiming that only schools have this responsibility, because they think that the role and influence of parents should not be forgotten. Respondent 3 (teacher in primary education) explains: "You are in this together. . . . A school must

have an open communication to the parents to inform them about what is going on. So, you can say to parents like 'today we have discussed this during class, so now it is up to you to decide whether or not you want to talk about this with your child at home'." Respondent 2 (former teacher in primary education) takes an even more reserved approach, because she mentions that parents have ideas and opinions on what should be taught to their children, too. She wonders if all parents would agree with an intervention on economic inequality: "With such a project you are kind of shaping these children and steering them towards a certain point of view. For some parents it quickly becomes like 'you interfere with how my child should look at the world', and that can be sensitive at times." She emphasizes that, when developing an intervention, it is crucial to find a balance in which useful information is offered without pushing or steering children already too much in a certain direction.

Developing an intervention

I have now shed light on how teachers view economic inequality in their class, how this could be an issue among students and what considerations should be taken. With this, the interviewees have sketched the context in which an intervention would eventually be implemented. In the next part, I reflect on what elements or criteria were mentioned by the teachers that should be incorporated in the intervention.

Inform and discuss

The first option of how to discuss economic inequality with children is in line with how some teachers already address this topic, namely by offering information and starting conversations. Respondent 1 (teacher in primary education) thinks that giving information on economic inequality would be fruitful, because children often simply do not have certain knowledge yet. She says: "I think that children from richer families often do not realize how life could be differently. So, it is often ignorance too: children live in their own bubble." According to Respondent 4 (retired primary school teacher) these lessons could involve conversations about news items because that helps to get the children's attention. News items might speak to the students and spark their interest which is a premise to keep them engaged and to successfully teach them about economic inequality. However, when developing such an information-based intervention, the approach must not be too similar to how traditional and mandatory subjects are often discussed. Respondent 5 (primary school teacher) would strongly advice against a classic or standard lessons series: ''There is something to be said for all options [for interventions], except for the very static lessons in which you say 'here is a PowerPoint presentation, this is the situation in the Netherlands': even I don't find that interesting.''

Respondent 7 (high school teacher) is a bit more hesitant in the option of directly discussing economic inequality during a lesson series or course. He thinks that it might have negative

consequences for the children themselves who have to deal with poverty. Perhaps some children feel confronted when this topic plays a role in their personal lives, or other children point out which classmates are at the lower end of the economic divide. Respondent 2 (former primary school teacher) agrees with this and says: "If this theme [of economic inequality] is a very big thing in your life, then education on this might be too confronting. What would work to deal with this is to start from a fictional situation. This way it becomes very concrete and accessible, yet not immediately too personal. Later on, the connection to real situations can be made in which students themselves can give examples."

Projects and excursions

Thus, offering information and starting discussions might be an option, but most teachers would also like to see the inclusion of experience in a newly developed intervention. They mention the importance of how children should learn to be empathic and how to take a new perspective. Respondent 2 (former primary school teacher) is very clear about this: "I think it's good to see and experience new things. And to hear from and talk with different people." This could be achieved by inviting guest speakers, thinks Respondent 8 (teacher in special secondary education). According to her, guest speakers could help to make this topic concrete and to bring this topic more to life. Furthermore, it is a starting point to let students think for themselves and to let them share their opinions and ideas after they are offered a new perspective by the guest speakers.

Respondent 5 (primary school teacher) explains how one of the methods that she already uses might be fruitful for the purpose of discussing economic inequality as well: "We work quite often with 'active classes', that means that the students themselves can do a lot. . . . I think that it's important to first identify what the children already know and then what they do not yet know but might be curious to learn something about." Besides letting children discover for themselves what they find interesting, she also suggests that it would be an option to take students on a trip to, for example, the food bank to see and experience a part of the issue. Meeting and talking to new people help them to understand the perspective and situations of others. Respondent 3 (primary school teacher) also emphasizes how children themselves should have an active contribution to the learning process. She suggests developing a project about inequality that should be executed in a creative way since that is something that children respond well to. For a few weeks, children could then spend time on this topic while working towards an event for parents where they would present what they have learned. According to Respondent 3 it is crucial to make sure that children feel connected to the subject so that they stay interested and engaged: "The most important thing is that it should be brought close to a child, so that a child understands what he or she is working on. Then, they start to learn!"

Theatre exercises

Based on literature, I proposed the option of integrating theatre exercises within an intervention to train children how to take a different perspective. When proposing this to the interviewees, I received mixed reactions. Respondent 1 (teacher in primary education) was strong-minded and immediately said: "That won't make a difference. Children are too excited with how they could do it, they are busy with 'how should I talk, how should I stand, how should I do that or this?' and so they probably don't care about the content of the story. And furthermore, it's just one situation and it is not real; it is not real at all because it's theatre." Respondent 2 (former primary school teacher) also mentions the negative sides of this approach, namely that there is a risk that children start to play out the lives of classmates and that can be painful or mocking. However, she also believes that with good training and some guidance of the teacher, it might be possible to let children do such drama exercises in a respectful way. To do this, it is important to emphasize that the situation is fictional so that children do not make or take it too personal, she says.

On the other hand, both Respondent 5 and Respondent 6 have confidence in such a drama-based intervention. Respondent 6 (primary school teacher) has positive experiences herself with theatre exercises. She likes to discuss certain topics with her students with the use of roleplay. She lets her students take the position of someone else so they can imagine how that position is. It is in her opinion a good way to train perspective-taking and that eventually helps students to become more mindful and understanding of the lives and situations of others. Respondent 5 (primary school teacher) agrees with this: "I think a game would definitely work, for example role play: then it comes to life, and [the children] have to empathize. I think this would works, especially in combination with personal stories." She does, however, reflect on how more advanced theater exercises might be too difficult for teachers to guide. In that case, the help of professionals or experts from outside of school would be desired. This would be an interesting option, because children tend to respect and listen to people with authority from outside and so the effectivity of the exercise could increase, she thinks.

When and how often

A few respondents also addressed the more practical requirements that an intervention must meet. Respondent 4 (retired primary school teacher) shares her experiences on how she had time to discuss topics outside of the curriculum at the end of group 8. In this last year of primary education, children take a final test to indicate what track in secondary education would match their level. After this test, there are some weeks left before the summer vacation starts. Respondent 4 used these weeks to organize different kinds of projects in which her students learned about topics that are not thoroughly discussed within the curriculum. These projects are valuable because children do not

have to follow a book but can explore a topic and ask questions or focus on the aspects that they find most interesting. That is a more exploratory and creative way of discussing a topic, she argues.

Respondent 3 (teacher in primary education) thinks that an intervention should be given on a regular basis to make an impact. She experiences that children do show interest in a societal topic like inequality, but that it can also quickly disappear from their minds when there is no more attention for it: "You have to keep it alive if you want to make the information stick." She thus argues that a teacher should regularly spend time on this to keep students engaged. Respondent 4 (retired primary school teacher) also mentions this element of grabbing children's attention and says: "You need to find something that gets their attention and that these children find interesting and that resonates with them."

The role of the teacher

Interestingly, a few participants mention that not only the students should be educated in this program, but that also the teachers themselves could use some extra training. Respondent 2 (former teacher in primary education) explains how the attitude that teachers have towards economic differences can already have an influence: "We should raise awareness among teachers that there are many unconscious things in our actions that perpetuate this difference or that bring a message across to the children that we actually did not intend." It is crucial that a teacher knows how to successfully mediate during conversations about economic inequality to make sure that everybody feels safe and heard. She thinks this is very important because she experiences in her environment that teachers are often hesitant and insecure about teaching things that they do not have a lot of experience with. Teachers are prone to teaching that what is familiar to them and thus discussing economic inequality as a new topic might scare them off. Addressing this during the education that trainee teachers receive might help them when they have to deal with such topics in the classroom.

Another important role of teachers is that they should try to create a safe environment within the class. Respondent 7 (teacher in secondary education) explains how the relationship with the teacher and the students should be good and safe: "Group formation and the atmosphere in a class are very important. At school we have the chance to come together, to hear different opinions, to learn that opinions are welcome." He says that especially children from lower economic backgrounds often need a bit more attention and help from their teachers. When teachers succeed in creating such a safe environment, this could make conversations about sensitive topics more accessible. This opinion is shared by Respondent 8 (teacher in special secondary education) who says that the most fruitful conversations can take place when students have the feeling that they are allowed to show their

vulnerabilities. Therefore, teacher should actively try to create a safe environment in which students feel free to share their personal and honest experiences, she thinks.

Conclusion

The outline

From the findings it becomes clear that teachers have different experiences with and different opinions on how to discuss economic inequality with children. Some did not see inequality as an issue in their class and therefore also rarely spend time on this topic. Others thought that it is one of their main tasks to discuss social themes like economic inequality with their students. The interviewees reflected on the question whether or not economic inequality should be discussed at schools at all. I have the normative belief that this is important, however, some teachers pointed out that discussing this might not be a school's responsibility. Even though these considerations should be taken into account, I offer an outline for a possible intervention to answer the research question of this study: *How could an intervention designed for schools help children develop a more accurate and realistic view on economic inequality?* I combined insights from the literature with insights from the interviews and an overview of that can be found in Appendix F. Below, I elaborate on what can be concluded from that synthesis.

From the literature and interviews, I conclude that there are three different categories to pay attention to: what the goals of the intervention are, how those can be achieved, and what practical considerations must be considered. First of all, besides focusing on teaching children about economic inequality, an intervention should also aim to train children how to be empathic. Students should learn how to take a new perspective and how to empathize with the lives and situations of other people. This contributes to the social and personal development of children and helps them to become engaged citizens. While learning how to be empathic, children should also develop their critical thinking. Within an intervention, there should be a balance between offering information to students while also letting them think for themselves. This is in line with what Biesta (2015) says on how we must ensure that an intervention does not force students to think in a particular way and that his becomes an indoctrination. We should stop with the intervention before "the moment where students can no longer appear as subjects of initiative and responsibility and are turned into objects of educational intervention" (Biesta, 2015, p.205).

Secondly, these goals can be achieved by carefully designing the form and shape of an intervention. What would work well is an intervention in which children can meet others and hear their experiences and stories. This way, the topic of inequality comes to life and is graspable. A traditional

lesson series is not ideal for this, rather a more creative approach that is based on children's prior knowledge and questions would be more effective. Both literature and teachers emphasize the importance of actively involving children in altering and molding the intervention, so it fits the interests of the class. Discussions are useful to let children learn from classmates and to train how to develop arguments, raise questions and be respectful to others. Whether or not incorporating drama exercises is debatable: the article by Lee et al. (2015) shows that this is fruitful, however, some teachers mention that it could either become too personal or too fictional.

Finally, some practical aspects should be considered in this outline. An intervention will only be fruitful when it is introduced in a class with a safe and good atmosphere. Children need to feel comfortable to share opinions and experiences when discussing this sensitive topic. The teacher has a salient role in achieving this, and thus the lead of the teacher is important. However, inviting experts from outside might make students more engaged because they tend to take these experts seriously. At the same time, this could negatively influence the safe environment of the class because students might not feel comfortable around those experts. Repeating information is useful to let students remember the materials, but the teacher then must be able to keep the students engaged. Lastly, considering the role of parents is crucial because the parents might consider discussing economic inequality as a normative approach. A school could work together with parents to achieve a better result, and teachers might feel supported if parents approve of the intervention.

Implications

The elements or criteria that are now established form the beginning of the actual realization of an intervention. This is an important implication that follows from this study: future research should focus on creating an intervention that can be piloted in practice. Now that I have determined the main ingredients for an intervention to discuss economic inequality in schools, the next step is to create such an intervention. When designing an intervention, attention must be paid to how there is not one intervention that will work for all, according to the interviewees. Depending on the group, the teacher, and the situation, it should be determined what is relevant or doable to incorporate in an intervention. So, a clear-cut method might not work for everyone, in every context. Therefore, I would argue that there should be room within the intervention for teachers to make adjustments according to their specific situation, so that the intervention becomes effective for their class. After the first version of an intervention is designed, I would advise to test the intervention in practice to see how different actors involved, namely teachers, children, and their parents, experience the intervention. A pilot study contributes to testing the feasibility and effectivity of the intervention.

Another implication is that the role of parents should be researched. As becomes clear from the interviews, teachers have different views on what the role of school and of parents are: some argue that parents should have a say in what is taught to their children and thus what the intervention should entail. I suggest that in future research parents should be interviewed on this topic to hear their opinion. Perhaps that conducting interviews with parents and combining the outcomes with the outcomes from the interviews with teachers conducted in this study, might lead to new insights.

Lastly, an implication for practice is that teachers should be trained how to deal with sensitive topics. As a few interviewees put forward, some teachers are insecure about discussing sensitive topics because they have the feeling that they do not have sufficient skills for this. Being able to address sensitive topics while maintaining a safe atmosphere within the class, is actually crucial to successfully implement an intervention. I would suggest that there should be more attention for guiding and training teachers in discussing sensitive topics. This is substantiated in literature: Jones (2016) writes about how trainee teachers might need some extra support in learning how to start a dialogue about socio-economic disadvantage. This can be done during the academic program that people follow to receive a degree in education. Also, the schools where teachers afterwards start working could offer extra guidance and support to teachers.

Limitations

In this part, I elaborate on a few limitations of this research to reflect on the process, but also to inform other researchers about what to keep in mind when conducting future studies. A few limitations tie in with the implications of this study because that what is lacking in this study, could be covered in future research. In this study, I did not focus on the role of parents, while parental influence should be taken into account according to some interviewees. Also, I did not directly interview students themselves, so it is possible that their opinions differ from the outcomes of this study. Some interviewees mentioned that an intervention could have different effects in different schools or areas. I did not reflect on this spatial aspect while it is likely that there are differences between schools in, for example, cities and villages.

Furthermore, I mention three mechanism that cause the development of inaccurate beliefs about economic inequality. Those are, the belief in meritocracy (Mijs, 2019), the misperception of inequality due to a lack of information (Hauser & Norton, 2017; Gimpelson & Treisman, 2018), and the adjustment mechanism that lets people change their opinions on what constitutes as fair or acceptable levels of inequality (Trump, 2018). However, I have not tested whether or not the elements that are distilled from literature and interviews and that are considered fruitful for an intervention also effectively contribute to debunking these mechanisms. Mistry et al. (2016) do

mention that empathy and perspective taking might be two mechanisms that contribute to changing children's beliefs about inequality, and those two mechanisms are also mentioned as fruitful elements in this study's interviews. However, whether these and the other criteria do have an effect on changing children's beliefs has yet to be researched once the intervention itself is made.

Finally, conducting interviews was more challenging than I expected. Because of the COVID-19 crisis, I could not personally meet the respondents, but I had to conduct the interviews online. This brought some practical issues with it: some respondents had little experience with digital conferencing tools, sometimes the connection was lagging which interrupted the conversation, and lastly, I missed information from body language and personal interaction. These issues caused that the interviews did not go as smoothly as I hoped, and that might have had a negative effect on the data collection. Another difficulty was the translation from Dutch to English when analyzing these interviews. Many teachers used Dutch expressions or tried to described feelings and emotions, and I struggled to correctly translate that to English without losing nuances.

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Appendix A. Lessons from literature review

Source	Beneficial elements	Implications for intervention
Hauser & Norton, 2017	Focus on experiencing and seeing inequality	Let children meet others to share experiences
Mijs, 2019	Beliefs are based on interactions with others	Let children meet others to share experiences
Lee et al., 2015	Drama-based pedagogy	Theatre exercises can have positive effects on children's attitudes toward others
Lee et al., 2015	Lessons given by classroom teacher or researcher	It is desirable that teachers lead the intervention
De Mooij et al., 2020	Effective when leaded by school personnel or external professionals	Both a teacher or an expert from outside could lead it
Lee et al., 2015	Between 5 to 20 lessons	Repetition
De Mooij et al., 2020	Between 10 to 16 weeks	Repetition
Fontanella-Nothom, 2019	Reading about the diverse nature of society	Children should learn to take a new perspective and be empathic
Mistry et al., 2012	Course on inequality	Offering information
Mistry et al., 2016	Inquiry-based curriculum	Focus on children's ideas and interests
De Mooij et al., 2020	Responding to children's interests and skills	Focus on the questions and concerns that students have
Visser, 2018	Train critical approach	Let children think for themselves
Visser, 2018	Create a fictional situation	Make sure there is a safe environment
Nenadal & Mistry, 2018	Listening to students	Identify what children already know and what interests them
Nenadal & Mistry, 2018	Incorporating creativity	Let students make and create things to engage them
Nenadal & Mistry, 2018	Receive support from parents	Include parents when developing and implementing an intervention

Appendix B. Ethics and privacy checklist

ERASMUS UNIVERSITEIT ROTTERDAM

CHECKLIST ETHICAL AND PRIVACY ASPECTS OF RESEARCH

INSTRUCTION

This checklist should be completed for every research study that is conducted at the Department of Public Administration and Sociology (DPAS). This checklist should be completed *before* commencing with data collection or approaching participants. Students can complete this checklist with help of their supervisor.

This checklist is a mandatory part of the empirical master's thesis and has to be uploaded along with the research proposal.

The guideline for ethical aspects of research of the Dutch Sociological Association (NSV) can be found on their website (http://www.nsv-sociologie.nl/?page_id=17). If you have doubts about ethical or privacy aspects of your research study, discuss and resolve the matter with your EUR supervisor. If needed and if advised to do so by your supervisor, you can also consult Dr. Jennifer A. Holland, coordinator of the Sociology Master's Thesis program.

PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION

Project title: Beliefs about inequality - how to inform children in the educational setting about inequality

Name, email of student: Sofie Schilt ; 580266ss@eur.nl

Name, email of supervisor: Jonathan Mijs ; mijs@essb.eur.nl

Start date and duration: May 3rd 2021 – June 20th 2021

Is the research study conducted within DPAS   YES

If 'NO': at or for what institute or organization will the study be conducted?

(e.g. internship organization)

PART II: HUMAN SUBJECTS

1.   Does your research involve human participants.   YES

        If 'NO': skip to part V.

        If 'YES': does the study involve medical or physical research?   NO

2. Does your research involve field observations without manipulations

    that will not involve identification of participants.   NO

    If 'YES': skip to part IV.

3. Research involving completely anonymous data files (secondary data

    that has been anonymized by someone else).   NO

    If 'YES': skip to part IV.

PART III: PARTICIPANTS

1. Will information about the nature of the study and about what
    participants can expect during the study be withheld from them?   NO

2. Will any of the participants not be asked for verbal or written
    'informed consent,' whereby they agree to participate in the study?   NO

3. Will information about the possibility to discontinue the participation
    at any time be withheld from participants?   NO

4. Will the study involve actively deceiving the participants?   NO
    Note: almost all research studies involve some kind of deception of participants. Try to think about what types of deception are ethical or non-ethical (e.g. purpose of the study is not told, coercion is exerted on participants, giving participants the feeling that they harm other people by making certain decisions, etc.).

5. Does the study involve the risk of causing psychological stress or
    negative emotions beyond those normally encountered by
    participants?   `   NO

6. Will information be collected about special categories of data,
    as defined by the GDPR (e.g. racial or ethnic origin, political opinions,
    religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data,
    biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a person,
    data concerning mental or physical health, data concerning a

person's sex life or sexual orientation)?

NO

7. Will the study involve the participation of minors (<18 years old) or other groups that cannot give consent? NO

8. Is the health and/or safety of participants at risk during the study? NO

9. Can participants be identified by the study results or can the confidentiality of the participants' identity not be ensured? NO

10. Are there any other possible ethical issues with regard to this study? NO

If you have answered 'YES' to any of the previous questions, please indicate below why this issue is unavoidable in this study.

N/A _____
_____
_____

What safeguards are taken to relieve possible adverse consequences of these issues (e.g., informing participants about the study afterwards, extra safety regulations, etc.).

N/A _____
_____
_____

Are there any unintended circumstances in the study that can cause harm or have negative (emotional) consequences to the participants? Indicate what possible circumstances this could be.

In this study, I will interview teachers about what they think could be fruitful interventions to discuss inequality in the schools. Inequality is not a light-hearted subject and so talking about this subject could be sensitive or difficult for some participants. Especially for people who have experienced the negative consequences of inequality themselves; it could evoke negative emotions or memories. I think it is important as a researcher to regularly check if the respondents are still comfortable talking about inequality and to make sure that they know that they do not have to participate if they do not want to. I will emphasize at the beginning of the interview that the respondents can withdraw at any time during the research.

Please attach your informed consent form in Appendix 2, if applicable.

Continue to part IV.

PART IV: SAMPLE

Where will you collect or obtain your data?

I will conduct the interviews online using the software program Zoom.

_____

_____

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

What is the (anticipated) size of your sample?

5 to 6 respondents.

_____

_____

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

What is the size of the population from which you will sample?

I am interviewing teachers who work at Dutch primary schools. Therefore, the population of this sample would be all teachers working in this field. However, I do not wish to claim that my data are representable for all teachers, but rather my data give insights in the experiences of the individuals.

_____

_____

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

Continue to part V.

Part V: Data storage and backup

Where and when will you store your data in the short term, after acquisition?

I will conduct the interviews online, and the program Zoom offers the possibility to record that interview (or meeting) and save it directly to my laptop. I will also store that file on my external hard drive to make sure that I have a back-up of the interviews. Transcripts and quotes from the interviews will be stored on my laptop and external hard drive as well.

_____
Note: indicate for separate data sources, for instance for paper-and pencil test data, and for digital data files.

Who is responsible for the immediate day-to-day management, storage and backup of the data arising from your research?

I, the researcher of this study, am responsible for the storage of the data.

_____

_____

How (frequently) will you back-up your research data for short-term data security?

I will update the files on the external hard drive at the end of every day that I worked on my thesis. This way, I always have the most recent versions of files on my external hard drive.

_____

In case of collecting personal data how will you anonymize the data?

When using information retrieved from the data in my thesis, I will not mention any personal information that could lead to the identification of that respondent. This includes their name, but for example also the name of the school that they are working at.

_____

Note: It is advisable to keep directly identifying personal details separated from the rest of the data. Personal details are then replaced by a key/ code. Only the code is part of the database with data and the list of respondents/research subjects is kept separate.

PART VI: SIGNATURE

Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the ethical guidelines in the conduct of your study. This includes providing information to participants about the study and ensuring confidentiality in storage and use of personal data. Treat participants respectfully, be on time at appointments, call participants when they have signed up for your study and fulfil promises made to participants.

Furthermore, it is your responsibility that data are authentic, of high quality and properly stored. The principle is always that the supervisor (or strictly speaking the Erasmus University Rotterdam) remains owner of the data, and that the student should therefore hand over all data to the supervisor.

Hereby I declare that the study will be conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Department of Public Administration and Sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam. I have answered the questions truthfully.

Name student: Sofie Schilt   Name (EUR) supervisor:

                                                                              Jonathan Mijs

Date: 1st of May 2021   Date: May 1st, 2021

Appendix C. Informed consent form

This sheet of information was sent to all respondents before conducting the interviews. It provided the respondents with information on their rights and on how their data would be treated and stored. This sheet is written in Dutch since all communication with the respondents and the interviews themselves were in Dutch.

Fijn dat je wilt deelnemen aan dit onderzoek. Hierbij ontvang je meer informatie over hoe de data voor dit onderzoek worden verzameld en beheerd, en over jouw rechten als respondent. Je wordt geïnterviewd in mei 2021 voor een onderzoek uitgevoerd door Sofie Schilt in opdracht van de *Erasmus School of Social and Behavioural Sciences* te Rotterdam. De begeleider van dit onderzoeksproject is Jonathan Mijs (mijs@essb.eur.nl). Voor vragen over de bescherming van jouw data kan je terecht bij de functionaris gegevensbescherming van de Erasmus Universiteit, te bereiken op: privacy@eur.nl.

Dit onderzoek wordt uitgevoerd als eindscriptie van de sociologie master *Engaging Public Issues*. Deze scriptie gaat over wat mogelijke manieren of interventies zijn om met schoolgaande kinderen te praten over economische ongelijkheid. Hiervoor worden leerkrachten of andere onderwijskenners geïnterviewd om data te verzamelen over hun ideeën over en ervaringen met dit onderwerp. Doel van dit onderzoek is om (een plan voor) een interventie te ontwikkelen die gebruikt kan worden op scholen om kinderen te leren over de oorzaken en gevolgen van economische ongelijkheid.

Deelnemers van deze interviews doen vrijwillig mee. Direct voordat het interview begint zal de onderzoeker je vragen of je inderdaad toestemming geeft om mee te doen aan dit onderzoek. Als respondent heb je het recht om voorafgaand aan het interview, tijdens het interview of na het interview je deelname en toestemming in te trekken. Je hebt het recht om de audio-opname van het interview te beluisteren en om transcripten van het interview te bekijken. Deze opname en transcripten (of delen ervan) mag je corrigeren of verwijderen. Je hebt het recht om contact op te nemen met de begeleider of de functionaris gegevensbescherming als je klachten hebt over het verzamelen of verwerken van jouw data.

De data zullen direct na afname van het interview als een audiobestand worden opgeslagen op de laptop van de onderzoeker. Transcripten van deze opname zullen ook op die laptop worden bewaard. Deze bestanden zijn beschikbaar voor de onderzoeker en begeleider verbonden aan de Erasmus Universiteit, maar niet voor andere partijen. Het audiobestand en de transcripten zullen na het afronden van het scriptieproject in augustus 2021 worden verwijderd. Quotes of delen van de geschreven transcripten die onderdeel zijn van het geschreven eindverslag zullen wel bewaard worden. Deze informatie zal volledig geanonimiseerd zijn en is dus niet naar de respondenten te

herleiden. Het eindverslag worden beheerd door de Erasmus Universiteit als bewijs dat de student het scriptieproject heeft uitgevoerd.

Appendix D. Interview guide

The interviews are conducted in a way that the respondents are most of the time talking. I am interested in hearing their experiences and ideas and thus I want to give them space to share that. However, to make sure that some important topics are covered during the interviews, I set up this list of interview questions. I used this list as a guide, to check throughout the interview if all topics were discussed. Sometimes I asked a specific question from this list, but most often I used them for inspiration and as a checklist.

Over het lesgeven zelf

1. Hoe lang geef je al les?
2. In welke groep geef je les?
3. Op wat voor soort school geef je les? Bepaald type school? Dalton, Montessori, etc.? Andere opvallende kenmerken of eigenschappen van de school?

Ongelijkheid als onderwerp

1. Hoe worden sociaalmaatschappelijke thema's besproken op school? Is er een vak over burgerschapsvorming?
2. Wordt het onderwerp van economische ongelijkheid nu al besproken bij bepaalde lessen?
3. Denk je dat het bespreken van economische ongelijkheid verder uitgebreid zou moeten worden?
4. Denk je dat leerlingen behoefte hebben aan meer les over dit onderwerp?
5. Denk je dat het een taak van scholen is om hier aandacht aan te besteden?
6. Denk je dat bepaalde scholen of klassen meer baat hebben bij zo'n interventie dan andere?
7. Zie je armoede en economische ongelijkheid in jouw klas?
8. Hoe ga je daarmee om?
9. Hoe gaan de kinderen daarmee om?

Interventie als middel

1. Heb je ervaring met interventies? Misschien niet specifiek over sociaalmaatschappelijke thema's maar misschien wel zoiets als sociale vaardigheidstrainingen?
2. Wat zou een bruikbare interventie, of training of project zijn om ongelijkheid met jouw klas te behandelen? Heb je daar ideeën over?

3. Stel je leidinggevende (de directeur van je school) zou jou vragen om een interventie te bedenken om ongelijkheid met jouw klas te behandelen. Wat zouden dan je eerste ideeën zijn om dit aan te pakken?
4. Wat denk je van een project, bijvoorbeeld waarbij leerlingen ook uitstapjes maken?
5. Wat denk je van een lessenreeks over armoede en ongelijkheid?
6. Wat denk je van discussies of gesprekken over armoede en ongelijkheid?
7. Wat denk je van theateroefeningen? Bijvoorbeeld waarbij leerlingen zich moeten inleven in de situatie van anderen?
8. Zou zo'n interventie geleid moeten worden door de leerkracht? Of zou iemand anders de leerkracht hierin kunnen ondersteunen?

Appendix E. List of respondents

Below is an anonymized list of all respondents that took part in this research. Naturally, their names and other information that could be redirected to them personally, are removed. However, information on their experiences in the educational system is important to put their statements into context. Thus, in this list is included how long they have been working in education, at what kind of school, what groups or classes they teach and other characteristics that are worth mentioning.

	Gender	Years of experience	Type of school	Group or class*	Any characteristics
Respondent 1	Female	Less than five years	Public primary school	Mainly group 5, but also group 6 and 7	The respondent is also a graduated educationalist
Respondent 2	Female	+- 10 years	Primary school	Group 6	Nowadays this respondent no longer works as a teacher but as an educationalist
Respondent 3	Female	Less than five years	Christian primary school	Group 1 and group 8	The respondent is a teacher in training
Respondent 4	Female	+- 35 years	Primary school	Group 7 and 8	The respondent is now retired
Respondent 5	Female	Less than five years	Primary school	Mainly group 7, but also helps in other groups	The respondent is a teacher in training

Respondent 6	Female	+- 35 years	Christian primary school	Mainly group 1 and 2, but also helps in group 6 and 8	N/A
Respondent 7	Male	+- 20 years	Secondary education; biology and mentoring	Past ten years: upper classes of *HAVO* and *VWO*	First ten years he taught *VMBO* and lower classes of *HAVO* and *VWO*
Respondent 8	Female	Less than five years	Special secondary education; civic and social studies	Different classes within VMBO	Teaches children with learning and behavioral problems

*To understand how children are divided into different groups and classes in the Dutch educational system, it is helpful to have some basic knowledge of this system. This system consists of different steps, with the first two being primary education and secondary education. Primary education has 8 groups with group 1 as the entry group for children who are 4 years old. Children are about 11 years old when they are in group 7, and they are 12 years old in group 8. Then, they move on to secondary education, and so most children are 13 in class 1 of high school and are 14 years old in class 2. Secondary education can be divided in roughly three different levels: VMBO is the pre-vocational education track that consists of four classes. HAVO is the senior general education track and has a duration of 5 years. The last level in this brief overview is VWO and that is the pre-university education track which takes 6 years to complete. Special education is for all children who cannot participate in regular education due to, for example, a disability or behavioral problems.

Appendix F. Synthesis of insights from literature and interviews

	According to literature	**According to interviewees**
What is the aim of the intervention?	Children should learn how to take a new perspective and how to be empathic (Fontanella-Nothom, 2019; Mistry et al., 2016)	It is crucial that children see and experiences new viewpoints and ideas
	Children should learn how to be critical and how to think for themselves (Visser, 2018)	Helping students to become engaged citizens who can think critically is important
		The topic should be brought close to the child so that it can be grasped and enters their thoughts
How is this aim achieved?	Offering information through a course or lesson series (Mistry et al., 2012)	A traditional lessons series is not desirable, but a more flexible approach in which discussions are started based on news items is
	Drama-based pedagogy and theatre exercises (Lee et al., 2015)	Mixed opinions: risk of mocking and risk of not being effective, but also creative and fun way to address this serious topic
	Let children meet others to share experiences (Hauser & Norton, 2017)	Invite guest speakers, or take students on excursions to, for example, a food bank
	Flexible approach in which adjustments can be made based on the questions and interests that children have (Mistry et al., 2016; Nenedal & Mistry, 2018; De Mooij et al., 2020)	Active classes in which children have an active role in what is discussed based on their interests and prior knowledge.
	Incorporate creativity (Nenadal & Mistry, 2018)	Creative aspects help to keep students engaged and interested
		A project in which children have the freedom to focus on the aspects of the topic that they find most interesting and in which the end results can be presented to parents during an event
Practical consider-ations?	It is desirable that teachers lead the intervention (Lee et al., 2015)	Teachers now their students and are probably better capable of creating a safe environment in class
	Both a teacher or an expert from outside could lead it (De Mooij et al., 2020)	Sometimes, experts from outside have more experience (for example with drama exercises) and more authority
	Duration should be between 5 to 20 lessons, or 10 to 16 weeks (Lee et al., 2015; De Mooij et al., 2020)	Repetition is important to keep students engaged. The period after the final test in group 8 offers time to implement an intervention that is not part of the curriculum
	A safe environment should be creating, for example through first discussing fictional situations (Visser, 2018)	This is a premise: children should feel comfortable and safe in class before a sensitive topic like economic inequality can be addressed
	Parents should be included for support and collaboration (Nenadal & Mistry, 2018)	Parents should be informed about what their children do and discuss at school. Furthermore, parents and school are both responsible for discussing societal themes like economic inequality