



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

## **Educational inequality in the Netherlands: Policies targeting school segregation from the perspective of street-level bureaucrats**

Huibers, Dana

### **Citation**

Huibers, D. (2021). *Educational inequality in the Netherlands: Policies targeting school segregation from the perspective of street-level bureaucrats.*

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [License to inclusion and publication of a Bachelor or Master thesis in the Leiden University Student Repository](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3239860>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

---

# EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY IN THE NETHERLANDS

---

*Policies targeting school segregation from  
the perspective of street-level bureaucrats*

**Master thesis**  
Dana Huibers (s2885271)  
MSc Public Administration  
International and European Governance  
Leiden University  
June 11, 2021

# Table of Contents

1. Introduction .....	4
2. Literature review .....	7
2.1 School segregation and educational inequality.....	7
2.2 Policies in the Netherlands .....	8
2.2.1 Dutch Educational system.....	8
2.2.2 Dutch policy agenda.....	9
3. Theoretical framework .....	13
3.1 Street-level bureaucracy .....	13
3.2 Street-level discretion .....	14
3.3 Theoretical relevance.....	15
4. Research Design.....	18
4.1 Data collection.....	18
4.2 Data interpretation .....	18
4.2.1 Participants .....	19
4.3 Data analysis.....	22
4.3.1 Research validity .....	24
5. Results .....	26
5.1 Experience with school segregation and educational inequality .....	26
5.1.1 Almere .....	28
5.1.2 Den Haag .....	29
5.2 Policies in place .....	31
5.2.1 Almere .....	31
5.2.2 Den Haag .....	32
5.3 Use of discretion .....	35
5.3.1 Almere .....	38
5.3.2 Den Haag .....	39

5.4 Importance of discretion .....	41
5.4.1 <i>Almere</i> .....	41
5.4.2 <i>Den Haag</i> .....	42
6. Limitations .....	43
6.1 The interview approach .....	43
6.2 The issue of reliability .....	44
6.3 The issue of validity.....	45
7. Conclusions and Discussion.....	48
List of references .....	52
Appendix I.....	59
Appendix II. ....	67

# 1. Introduction

In the run-up to the Dutch national elections held on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March 2021, the issue of the inequality of educational opportunities within the Netherlands has been an important topic of discussion. Political parties, among which CDA, D66, Groenlinks, PvdA and SP, have all voiced their concerns on the state of the equality of opportunities within the Dutch educational system (Verkiezingsgids, 2021). Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequences of this crisis for the educational sector have revealed many of the vulnerabilities and bottlenecks present within Dutch education, including the inequality of opportunities (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2021; PO-Raad, 2021).

However, the topic of educational inequality has been on the political agenda within recent years already. In 2019, parliamentarians from CDA, PvdA and SP pointed the cabinet towards the growing inequality of educational opportunities within the Netherlands (Kamerdebat, 2019). Their statement was based on reports from both the OECD (2018) and UNICEF (2018) in which the research shows that the inequality of educational opportunities within the Netherlands is growing. Moreover, in 2016, the annual report on the State of the Education in the Netherlands stated this as well (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2016). The inspection found that the difference in educational opportunities between children with lower-educated parents and higher-educated parents has increased over the past five to ten years. Due to this, many children do not get the education they deserve and talent stays untapped (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2016). This increase in educational inequality has been confirmed by the ‘Inspectie van het Onderwijs’ (2021) yet again.

The inequality of educational opportunities is a complex issue that cuts across many aspects of social life and cannot be defined as the consequence of just one cause (Kamerbrief, 2019). In the Netherlands, one of the main causes mentioned is that the broad societal issue of segregation has manifested itself in the educational system (Kamerbrief, 2019), leading to school segregation (Boterman, 2019). Research shows that school segregation is not only a reflection of the existing social inequalities in society, but that it is complicit in maintaining these social differences as well (Boterman et al., 2019). Indeed, studies have found that school segregation contributes to educational inequality (Andersson et al., 2019; Gorard & Smith, 2004; Logan & Burdick-Will, 2017; Wei et al., 2018; Orfield & Lee, 2005) and that reducing the level of school segregation could in turn decrease the inequality of educational opportunities (Alegre & Ferrer, 2010; Benito et al., 2014).

As a response to the issue of school segregation in the Netherlands, the Dutch government and more specifically the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, has put forward a policy agenda on how to tackle the issue in order to also decrease the educational disparity that follows from it (Kamerbrief, 2020). This policy agenda is still at an early stage and stresses the current importance of the issue at hand. A vital part within this policy agenda is the cooperation between national government, municipalities, schools and other education related organisations, such as the ‘Equal Opportunities Alliance’ (Gelijke Kansen Alliantie), with the aim of tackling school segregation.

How are these ‘policies as written’ perceived and acted upon by relevant actors involved? Do they accommodate their needs and how are/should they be executed as ‘policies as performed’? Reasoning from Micheal Lipksy’s (1980) theory of Street-Level Bureaucracy (SLB), this Master thesis aims to investigate the space and link between the ‘policies as written’ and the ‘policies as performed’ in the context of school segregation within the Netherlands. This space and link are filled by the concept of discretion. Discretion is particularly important in the area of education and within the teaching profession as it is an inherent part of a teacher’s job to accommodate and work according to each individual student’s needs. Research shows that a significant amount of discretion can increase teachers’ professionalism in value and make them more prone to use their time and resources for the students they serve (Malandrino & Sager, 2021). Moreover, when teachers feel they have real choices and freedom they tend to be more motivated to implement policies (Thomann et al., 2018) and real student growth seems possible (Knight, 2019). However, no research has yet been conducted on the discretionary alignment of policies within the Dutch educational field.

In that regard, this research fills this gap as it attempts to apply the theory of SLB and aims to test its key concept of discretion in a descriptive way in order to research and potentially improve the alignment between policies decided upon on national level and the discretionary needs of school directors and teachers implementing them on street-level. Information on how Street-Level Bureaucrats (SLBs) experience the issue of school segregation to be present, the way in which they experience the policies decided upon on national level and subsequently how they utilize and/or would like to use their discretion could show whether a misalignment between the ‘policies as written’ and the ‘policies as performed’ is existent. This potential misalignment could then in turn be fixed by enabling a bottom-up flow of information that could influence how situations are seen and decisions are made on national policymaking level (Evans & Hupe, 2020). This could allow for an improved alignment between the ‘policies as

written' on national level and the 'policies as performed' by SLBs, thereby aiding in policy success. To this end, the purpose of this thesis is to answer the following research question:

*To what extent do the policies targeting school segregation within the Netherlands align with the discretionary needs of the street-level bureaucrats executing them?*

By means of qualitative interviews, the research question is examined. SLBs within two different municipalities within the Netherlands, Almere and Den Haag, are the subjects of study. Both municipalities are considered as big within the Netherlands (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, 2019) and each possess a significant level of school segregation (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2020). However, when applying a classification of segregation amongst these two municipalities in question, Almere is said to have a low level and Den Haag a high level of school segregation (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2020). Therefore, by comparing the data obtained during the qualitative interview with SLBs within these two municipalities, this thesis contributes to a deeper understanding of the interpretation, realization and alignment of the policies targeting school segregation within the Netherlands.

In chapter 2 of this thesis, the relationship between the concepts of school segregation and educational inequality will be discussed. Moreover, the existing policies targeting school segregation within the Netherlands as well as an overview of the Dutch educational system will be laid out. This chapter is followed by chapter 3 in which an explanation of the theoretical framework within which the research conducted in this thesis falls and which it aims to test. This chapter on the theoretical framework flows into chapter 4 in which the research design is explained and justified. The results of the conducted interviews are subsequently analysed and discussed in chapter 5. In chapter 6 the limitations of the research conducted will be addressed. Finally, chapter 7 will be dedicated to an overall conclusion and discussion of this thesis and potential recommendations for better policy implementation and alignment will be given.

## 2. Literature review

In this chapter, the relevant literature about the relationship between school segregation and educational inequality is discussed, which forms the starting point of this thesis. Furthermore, an overview of the current policies targeting school segregation within the Netherlands is provided as they form the baseline for the research conducted within this thesis. Moreover, an overview of the Dutch educational system is provided for further reference and clarification.

### 2.1 School segregation and educational inequality

UNICEF (2018) describes the issue of the inequality of educational opportunities as (some) children entering the education system at a disadvantage due to circumstances beyond their control, such as where they were born, the language they speak or their parents' occupations. And if the educational policies and practices rather reinforce than reduce the gap between these children and their peers, they will only drop further behind. These types of inequality are unjust and cause children to not have the equal opportunity to reach their full potential, develop their talents and skills and pursue their interests (UNICEF, 2018). In this light, the concept of school segregation can be defined as the "uneven distribution of pupils in schools, according to their social origin, ethnic group, sex or any other ascriptive characteristic" (Bonal & Bellei, 2019, p. 1). The increase in literature on this topic started in the United States of America (US) after the publication of the Coleman Report (Coleman et al., 1966). This research conducted within the US has shown that school segregation contributes to educational inequality (Logan & Burdick-Will, 2017; Wei et al., 2018; Orfield & Lee, 2005).

Finding its roots within the US, the issue of school segregation has also been one of the key priorities within the European Union (EU) for many years, as part of the broader concept of educational inclusiveness. The EU states that within Europe "socio-economic background continues to be a strong determinant of student attainment: underperformance, leaving education or training early, and social exclusion are still very real dangers for some students" (European Commission, 2020, p. 13). Moreover, within the EU, the inclusiveness of education is currently the first principle of the "European Pillar of Social Rights" (European Commission, 2017) as it sees educational inclusiveness, of which targeting school segregation is a part, as the key to breaking the inter-generational transfer of disadvantage (European Commission, 2013).

This great awareness for and importance of school segregation by the EU has resulted in the overall rise of literature on the topic of school segregation within countries in Europe (Bonal & Bellei, 2019). Moreover, globalization has impacted the increase in the amount of

school segregation studies too. Social and economic inequalities have increased in urban places around the world and have generated growing processes of urban segmentation and fragmentation within neighbourhoods (Bonal & Bellei, 2019). Within this growing body of literature in Europe, research has shown that school segregation contributes to educational inequality (Alegre & Ferrer, 2010; Andersson et al., 2019; Benito et al., 2014; Gorard & Smith, 2004). Benito et al.'s (2014) study, for example, focusses on sixteen developed countries within the EU and shows that a reduction in school segregation decreases the level of educational inequality. In line with this, Alegre & Ferrer (2010) describe that generating the contextual conditions that lead to an increase in social heterogeneity within schools could consequently lead to higher rates of equity in the academic outcomes obtained by students and schools.

As for the Netherlands, forming the décor of this thesis, one of the main causes for the inequality of educational opportunities is also that the broad societal issue of segregation has manifested itself in the educational system (Kamerbrief, 2019), thereby leading to school segregation (Boterman, 2019). Boterman et al. (2019, p. 3071) show that “school segregation is not only a reflection of existing social inequalities in (urban) society, it is also complicit in maintaining social differences”. The embodiment of the relationship between school segregation and educational inequality within this thesis builds upon and takes these research findings as the starting point.

## **2.2 Policies in the Netherlands**

As mentioned in chapter 1, the issue of the inequality of educational opportunities has gained attention and seriousness within the Netherlands in response to international and national reports stating the worsened situation related to educational inequality in the Netherlands. Furthermore, school segregation has been named as one of the main causes for this increased inequality of educational opportunities (Kamerbrief, 2019). In that respect, the Dutch government and more specifically the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, has put forward a policy agenda on how to tackle the issue of school segregation within the Netherlands in order to decrease the educational disparity that follows from it (Kamerbrief, 2020). What this section presents is, firstly, an overview and explanation of the Dutch educational system for further reference and clarification and, secondly, an overview of the policies targeting school segregation in place within the Netherlands.

### *2.2.1 Dutch Educational system*

In Figure 1, a schematic image of the Dutch educational system can be found. The educational system in the Netherlands is set up in a way that at the end of primary school (average age 12)

children enter one of the three different educational streams for their secondary education. This is largely based on the so-called ‘leerlingvolgsysteem’, which is a monitoring system used to register the achievements of pupils throughout their primary school years. Moreover, an aptitude test in the last year of primary school is used to determine which type of school a child should move on to. This can either be a four-year VMBO stream (preparation for vocational training), a five-year HAVO stream (preparation for higher professional education) or a six-year VWO stream (preparation for university). As can be seen from Figure 1, the Dutch educational system is in and of itself quite segregated. Also, the decision on which kind of schooling belongs to which child is made on a relatively young age and relatively early in the educational career. In the process of this level determination, it has been shown that primary school teachers have quite some discretionary room and influence (Abbring & Rabovic, 2019). This theoretical concept will later be explained in more detail and points to the theoretical relevance of this thesis research.

**Figure 1:** Overview Dutch educational system

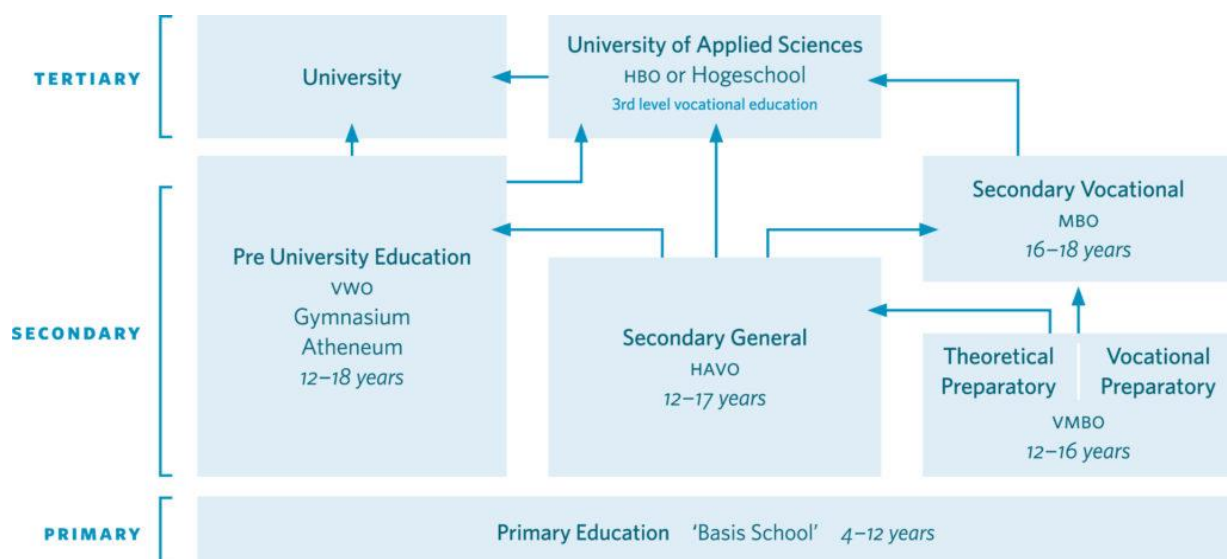


Table by Willemijn van Oppen, Educaide

(Reference: XPAT.nl, n.d.)

### 2.2.2 Dutch policy agenda

The policy agenda from the Dutch government applies to both primary and secondary education. The overview of policies in place that follows next is mainly sourced by the Kamerbrief (2020) written by the minister of Education, Culture and Science. This highly important and information-rich letter lays out the already existing national policies regarding school segregation, a few examples of already existing locally introduced policies/measures set

up through the Gelijke Kansen Alliantie and/or other locally organized initiatives and the newly introduced national policies put forward.

Firstly, the already existing national policies include that rules related to the advisory and testing at the end of primary school have been introduced in order to allow for a better fitting continuation of a child's education. Concrete examples are that a final test at the end of primary school has been made mandatory, the advice of the school on the level of education a child should continue with is leading instead of the result of the final test made at the end of primary school and a market surrounding final tests is being stimulated. In that way, schools can, besides the government appointed final test, also opt for an approved final test from other parties (Kamerstuk, 2019). Secondly, a law for the equal opportunity for students at VMBO-level to transfer to a HAVO- and VWO-level has been established. This law includes a standardization of the requirements that allows for such transferring (Eerste Kamer, 2020-b). Thirdly, secondary schools that offer all levels of education at one location will receive extra funding (Kamerbrief, 2020). And fourthly, an (initiative) law about the voluntary money contribution of parents has been established in order to limit the negative consequences for the children whose parents are not able to pay this voluntary school contribution. Due to this law, this group of children will no longer be excluded from extracurricular activities (Eerste Kamer, 2020-a).

Some relevant examples of already existing locally introduced policies/initiatives targeting school segregation are mentioned next. Firstly, some municipalities have a central school application point and a specific moment at which application is possible. The allocation of students is subsequently done by means of objective criteria which are predetermined by the municipalities and the schools located within them (Kamerbrief, 2020). In this way, school segregation could also potentially be better regulated. Secondly, when proven difficult to get a more social heterogenic student population, some schools have established relationships with other schools (so called 'Vriendschapsscholen') that allows for students with different backgrounds to work together and to jointly undertake school activities (Kamerbrief, 2020). Thirdly, some schools have decided to give specific subjects, such as visual arts, physical education, citizenship and philosophy of life, to classes constituted of students from different educational levels (Kamerbrief, 2020).

The following list of policies consists of the measures recently, in December 2020, introduced by the Dutch government. Arguably, these measures form the most major and currently relevant part of the policy agenda regarding school segregation within the Netherlands.

### 2.2.2.1 Newly introduced national policies

- I. The Gelijke Kansen Alliantie, which forms a network of different municipalities targeting the issue of educational inequality within the Netherlands, will be used to obtain better and more information on the presence and effects of school segregation on local levels. (Kamerbrief, 2020).
- II. Scientifically modelled policy simulations will be executed in order to gain more and better insight into the effectiveness of different policy measures targeting school segregation in the Netherlands. Moreover, promising policy initiatives on local levels will be followed in order to determine their potential effectiveness in targeting the issue of school segregation. (Kamerbrief, 2020).
- III. More intense oversight from the educational inspection on Local Educational Agendas (LEA) will be introduced. LEA's are where municipalities, day-care organisations and school boards come together to make agreements on the goals they want to achieve, including the ones on targeting school segregation. This stronger oversight from the inspection is introduced as the result of a study by the Dutch educational inspection which states that these LEA's do not function properly in all areas of the country. By stimulating the LEA's, by means of intensified inspection, the government hopes that they will set higher ambitions for themselves, including on targeting school segregation. The inspection will put forward yearly reports for the LEA's and will discuss the results of their reports with the municipalities involved. In that way, municipalities can determine on what aspects they should improve and an inventory of the (non-)effective policies can be made. (Kamerbrief, 2020).
- IV. Municipalities connected to the Gelijke Kansen Alliantie network can now also extend their policy agendas targeting the inequality of education opportunities by including policies targeting the issue of school segregation specifically. (Kamerbrief, 2020).
- V. More (transparent) communication on their application, admission, enrolment and rejection policies will be required from schools. Moreover, the pool of possible communication channels will be widened in order to reach the entire target audience. Independent information points for students and parents will be also set up. (Kamerbrief, 2020).

These aforementioned measures form the framework conditions that are currently in place to address the issue of school segregation within the Netherlands. An important notion to add is that these measures are all laid out on a national level, not indicating concrete action plans for

the local policy domain and also not mentioning which actors would be responsible for which contribution. However, to a large extent, the “real hands-on work” will ultimately have to be done on a local level (Kamerbrief, 2020). This can partly be achieved through the Gelijke Kansen Alliantie network, but other local initiatives have been established and will have to be extended towards the future as well. The Dutch ministry of Education, Culture and Science supports the Gelijke Kansen Alliantie and is willing to endorse other potentially promising local initiatives (Kamerbrief, 2020). By sharing knowledge on what measures are effective and forming coalitions with other (non-)governmental parties and organisations dedicated to targeting the issue of school segregation in the Netherlands, the ministry of Education, Culture and Science wants to stimulate and inspire municipalities and schools to target school segregation together and thereby decrease the level of educational inequality. Despite these action impetuses on a local scale, it can be stated that a little number of policies and initiatives related to targeting the issue of school segregation have yet been concretely and officially formulated on a municipal level.

### 3. Theoretical framework

In this chapter, the relevant theories that are applied and tested within this thesis in relation to the Dutch policy agenda regarding school segregation are explained. The theory of street-level bureaucracy (SLB) is elaborated on as this is the theory this thesis research utilizes and aims to test. Additionally, an interpretation of street-level discretion as a central point of street-level bureaucracy is presented, highlighting the role and responsibilities of current policies targeting school segregation within the Netherlands. Furthermore, the theoretical relevance of the research conducted within this thesis is discussed.

#### 3.1 Street-level bureaucracy

SLB is a “sociological theory that seeks to explain the working practices and beliefs of front-line workers in public services and the ways in which they enact public policy in their routine work” (Cooper et al., 2015, p. 376). Its foundations lie in Michael Lipsky’s (1980) still highly valued work named *Street-Level Bureaucracy: The Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Service*.

To put these foundations into perspective: before Lipsky introduced the SLB theory, public administration scholars tended to have a different dominant view on public bureaucracies and the administrative state (Maynard-Moody & Portillo, 2010). Front-line workers were regarded as powerless and the process of policymaking and implementation was mostly viewed from a top-down perspective. By initiating his somewhat provocative reversal of this commonly recognized discourse of the stages picture of the policy process, Lipsky put SLB theory on the scholarly agenda (Hupe & Hill, 2019). He argues that “public policy is not best understood as made in legislatures or top-floor suites of high-ranking administrators, because in important ways it is actually made in the crowded offices and daily encounters of street-level workers” (Lipsky, 1980, p. xii). He places the power, discretion and judgement of what he coins “street-level bureaucrats (SLBs)” at the very centre when looking at public bureaucracies and the administrative states (Maynard-Moody & Portillo, 2010) and argues that the “decisions of street-level bureaucrats, the routines they establish, and the devices they invent to cope with uncertainties and work pressures, effectively become the public policies they carry out” (Lipsky, 1980, p. xii). SLBs are the “necessary link between the government and the needy as they are in the best position to evaluate the needs of each client” (The Michigan Law Review Association, 1981, p. 811). Examples of SLBs are police officers, social workers, general practitioners and teachers.

### 3.2 Street-level discretion

An important concept that plays a key role and stands at the centre of SLB theory research is that of discretion (Maynard-Moody & Portillo, 2010; Portillo & Rudes, 2014; Tummers et al., 2015; Zang, 2016). Evans (2010, p. 2) defines discretion as the “extent of freedom a worker can exercise in a specific context and the factors that give rise to this freedom in that context”. This is also in line with Lipsky’s idea of the notion of discretion (Lipsky, 1980). Discretion could thus be seen as the wiggle room that SLBs possess and are able to use in order to execute policies in such a way that they accommodate clients’ needs and circumstances. This discretion is then what fills the space, of which Lipsky (1980) speaks, between ‘policies as written’ and ‘policies as performed’. This also relates to how SLB theory has brought about a “growing literature on bureaucratic discretion into direct conversation with an emerging literature on policy implementation” (Brodin, 2010, p. 941).

According to Lipsky (1980), there are two conditions restricting the discretion of SLBs. The first one is concerned with a shortage of resources (such as time, access to expertise etc.) which could lead to a rationing in service supply and the second one is concerned with the absence of clear guidelines for this rationing process (Lipsky, 1980). The consequence of these two restricting conditions is a decrease in the ability of SLBs to provide quality and customized services to clients. These theoretical arguments lead to the following *hypotheses* that are tested within this thesis:

*h(1): A shortage of resources will work restrictively when it comes to the discretion of SLBs in the municipalities of Almere and Den Haag in relation to the policies tackling the issue of school segregation.*

*h(2): The absence of clear guidelines for rationing these resources will work restrictively when it comes to the discretion of SLBs in the municipalities of Almere and Den Haag in relation to the policies tackling the issue of school segregation.*

As for the qualification of the concept of discretion, differences in opinion exist. Before 1980, street-level discretion was generally viewed unsympathetically (Zang, 2016). With Lipsky’s (1980) introduction of the SLB theory, he initiated a more favourable view on the notion of street-level discretion. He regards it as an essential way to remedy impractical mandates and to provide public services according to the needs of clients. His view is supported by other scholars as well (Tummers et al., 2015; May & Winter, 2009). Nevertheless, negative sides of discretion have also been emphasized by scholars. For example, Lavee and Strier (2018; 2019) point

towards a coercive element of discretion that proves problematic for both SLBs and clients. Other scholars describe street-level discretion as neither good nor bad (Brodkin, 1997; Maynard & Portillo, 2010; Portillo and Rudes, 2014; Northdurfter & Hermans, 2018). In addition to this, Portillo and Rudes (2014) believe it to be the way in which SLBs exercise their discretion that determines whether it can be seen as good or bad.

This thesis reasons from Portillo and Rudes' (2014) view that a policy's success depends on the embodiment of discretion by SLBs, indicating that the concept of street-level discretion is highly relevant to investigate in relation to policies directed at tackling school segregation in the Netherlands. Research has shown that a significant amount of discretion can increase teachers' professionalism in value and make them more prone to use their time and resources for the students they serve (Malandrino & Sager, 2021). Moreover, when teachers feel they have real choices and freedom, they tend to be more motivated to implement policies (Thomann et al., 2018) and real student growth seems possible (Knight, 2019). It is the school directors and teachers (the SLBs) who directly deal with the issue of school segregation on the ground and the educational inequality that might follow from it. They must respond to every student's individual needs as well. Therefore, considering that the issues of school segregation and the inequality of educational opportunities also have a strong individual component to them, this shows the importance of teachers being able to use their discretion to meet every student's needs. As this is an inherent part of their job, they require a level of discretion that allows them to use their wiggle room when executing policies and respond to each situation as they see fit. In doing so, teachers and school directors can be the ones to help overcome the barrier that a different ethnic or socio-economic background might have proven to form for a single student when it comes to educational opportunities. These theoretical findings flow into the following and final *hypothesis* that is tested within this thesis:

*h(3): SLBs in the municipalities of Den Haag and Almere will experience their use of discretion to be important in relation to the policies tackling the issue of school segregation.*

### **3.3 Theoretical relevance**

The research in this thesis thus interprets the concept of discretion in such a manner that it could be a potential remedy to impractical mandates and a way to provide the quality and customization of public services according to the needs of clients. Moreover, it stresses the importance of street-level discretion and takes it into account when looking at the process of policymaking in its entirety. In that respect, this thesis research builds upon the findings by

Thomann et al. (2018), among Dutch healthcare and education professionals, that discretion positively affects their willingness to implement a policy and by Malandrino & Sager (2021) that discretion positively influences the value teachers deliver to their students. However, no research has yet been conducted on the discretionary alignment of policies within the Dutch educational field. This thesis, therefore, contributes to this gap as it attempts to apply the theory of SLB and accordingly aims to test the concept of discretion in order to research and potentially improve the alignment between policies decided upon on national level and the discretionary needs of school directors and teachers executing them on street-level.

In this context, the main objective of this thesis is to determine to what extent the nationally formed policies targeting school segregation align with the needs of the SLBs executing them. This is also where the notion of discretion comes in. By conducting qualitative interviews with school directors and teachers as directly involved actors, information on their experiences, understandings and opinions regarding the policies targeting school segregation in the Netherlands and their discretion in executing these policies is gathered. Their views on the ‘policies as written’ are asked about, their use of discretion in executing these policies as ‘policies as performed’ is enquired and the importance they ascribe to their discretion is discussed. In that regard, the research in this thesis applies the theory of SLB and aims to test the theoretical concept of discretion by means of the three aforementioned *hypotheses* in order to draw conclusions on teacher discretion and answer the research question of this thesis.

Furthermore, by using the municipalities of Almere and Den Haag in a comparative way, descriptive and potentially hypothesis-generating insights into the relationship between the level of school segregation and the experiences, understandings and opinions of SLBs regarding the policies targeting school segregation in the Netherlands and their discretion in executing said policies can be gained. These insights could in turn aid in a theory building effort that brings SLB discretion in relation to the degree to which societal issue is known to be present in the context of the Netherlands. In this light, five relevant points to investigate are: whether SLBs in the municipality of Den Haag will experience school segregation to be present to a larger extent than SLBs in the municipality of Almere, whether SLBs in the municipality of Den Haag will experience the inequality of educational opportunities to be present to a larger extent than SLBs in the municipality of Almere, whether policies targeting school segregation will be present to a larger extent within schools in the municipality of Den Haag than within the municipality of Almere, whether the use of discretion by SLBs in relation to the policies tackling school segregation is present to a larger extent in the municipality of Den Haag than

Almere and whether SLBs in the municipality of Den Haag experience their use of discretion in relation to these policies to be more important than SLBs in the municipality of Almere.

## 4. Research Design

In this section, the methodological set-up corresponding to the research conducted for this Master thesis is discussed. The methods of data collection and analysis used for this thesis research are explained. Furthermore, the choice of participants and case selection as well as the operationalization of the different topics of inquiry is elaborated on.

### 4.1 Data collection

To answer the research question of this thesis – *to what extent do the policies targeting school segregation within the Netherlands align with the discretionary needs of the street-level bureaucrats executing them?* – data on the experiences, understandings and opinions of teachers and school directors (the SLBs) at secondary schools in two different municipalities, Almere and Den Haag, regarding school segregation in the Netherlands and their discretion in relation to this topic was collected. More specifically, data on the teachers’ experiences with school segregation and educational inequality (topic of inquiry 1), the policies targeting school segregation in place (topic of inquiry 2), the(ir) use of discretion in executing these policies (topic of inquiry 3) and the importance they ascribe to this discretion (topic of inquiry 4) was obtained. This information was gathered by means of qualitative semi-structured interviews. The design for these semi-structured interviews is presented in the *Interview Guide* (Appendix I., p. 63-65).

### 4.2 Data interpretation

In Table 1, an overview of what each topic of inquiry contributes to the research in this thesis is laid out according to the following three categories: theory application, theory testing and descriptive/hypothesis-generating.

**Table 1:** Overview of the contribution of each topic of inquiry to the research.

Topic of inquiry	No. 1	No. 2	No. 3	No. 4
<i>Theory application</i>	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Theory testing</i>	No	No	Yes – $h(1) + h(2)$	Yes – $h(1)$
<i>Descriptive / hypothesis generating</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Topic of inquiry 1 allows for a notion as to what extent the SLBs in the municipalities of Almere and Den Haag believe and experience the issues that lay the ground for the Dutch policy agenda to be present and whether a difference within that can be seen between the two municipalities under study. It, therefore, directly relates to the descriptive and potentially hypothesis-generating aspect of this thesis. Topic of inquiry 2 allows for a notion as to which policies the

SLBs and their schools have in place and whether a difference in the number and essence of the policies in place can be seen between the municipality of Almere and Den Haag. This topic of inquiry, therefore, directly relates to the descriptive and potentially hypothesis-generating aspect of this thesis as well as the theory application part of this thesis as it helps in the determination of whether the policies in place are similar to the ones formulated on national level. Topic of inquiry 3 allows for a notion as to what extent discretion can be used, is used and in what way by the SLBs as well as to what extent a difference within this can be seen between the municipalities of Almere and Den Haag. It, therefore, directly tests *hypothesis h(1)* and *hypothesis h(2)* and thus relates to the theory application and testing part of this thesis. Moreover, it relates to the descriptive and potentially hypothesis-generating aspect of the thesis too. Topic of inquiry 4 allows for a notion on the importance the SLBs ascribe to their discretion and why as well as to what extent a difference within this can be seen between the municipalities of Almere and Den Haag. It, therefore, directly tests *hypothesis h(3)* and thus relates to the theory application and testing part of this thesis. Moreover, it also relates to its descriptive and potentially hypothesis-generating nature.

The data gathered on these four topics of inquiry in turn consist of the experiences, understandings and opinions of the SLBs. Firstly, the SLBs' experiences speak to how they perceive the issues of school segregation and educational inequality to be present within their schools and environments and how they believe these issues have come to be (*descriptive/hypothesis-generating effort*). Secondly, the SLBs' understandings speak to how they express their use of discretion and to what extent they believe this to be possible (*theory application, testing (h(1)+ h(2)) and descriptive/hypothesis-generating effort*). Thirdly, the SLBs' opinions embody how important they feel their discretion to be and why (*theory application, testing (h(3)) and descriptive/hypothesis-generating effort*). In addition to yielding these experiences, understandings and opinions, this thesis can also help in unruffling which policies the SLBs have in place and how they believe the policies regarding school segregation and educational inequality should ideally be formulated (*theory application and descriptive/hypothesis-generating effort*).

#### 4.2.1 Participants

The policy agenda formulated by the Dutch ministry of Education, Culture and Science addresses the issue of school segregation for both primary and secondary schools. Due to the limited time in which this research was conducted, a specified and well-defined choice had to be made in order to still allow for the research to support a generalized conclusion on the

experiences, understandings and opinions of teachers and school directors as to what extent the policies targeting school segregation align with their discretionary needs.

The choice made within this research was to gather information on the experiences, understandings and opinions of secondary school directors and teachers. This is based on the fact that the issue of school segregation often presents itself between the different secondary school levels (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2016). Moreover, it has been shown that the ethnic and/or socio-economic background of children can affect the advice that they are given at the end of primary school, which determines the type of school they move on to, thereby influencing the educational opportunities of children and the division of children over the different levels at secondary school (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2016). This is especially relevant, considering that this advice given at the end of primary school has been brought into relationship with teacher discretion and that this discretion can play a significant role (Abbring & Rabovic, 2019). This again shows the importance of researching the relationship between discretion and the issues of school segregation and educational inequality in the Netherlands.

To reach out to secondary school directors and teachers, different methods were employed. Emails to school directors, through a contact person within a national organisation to which a lot of secondary schools in the Netherlands are associated, were sent out. Emails directly to school directors and messages to teachers, through the platform of LinkedIn, were sent out by the researcher herself. In total, 35 people were contacted of which, even after reminder emails and calls, 5 people responded positively. Through 2 of these respondents, 2 other participants were subsequently found willing to engage, bringing the total of participants within this research to 7 (of which 6 can be considered SLBs). As for the 6 SLBs, interviews with one school director, one coordinator tailored education and one coordinator ISK (international immersion classes) in Den Haag and one school director and two team leaders/teachers in Almere were conducted. An overview of all the interview participants and their position and work location can be found in Table 2. Each interview lasted between 30 minutes to 1 hour. Prior to conducting the interviews, each of the participants signed a consent form (Appendix II, p.68).

**Table 2:** Overview of interview participants.

<i>Position</i>	<i>School #1</i> <i>Almere</i> <i>(VMBO, HAVO and VWO)</i>	<i>School #2</i> <i>Den Haag</i> <i>(VMBO)</i>	<i>School #3</i> <i>Almere</i> <i>(VMBO)</i>	<i>School #4</i> <i>Den Haag</i> <i>(VMBO, HAVO and VWO)</i>	<i>Gelijke Kansen Alliantie</i> <i>(Governmental organisation)</i>
<i>School director</i>	x				
<i>School director</i>		x			
<i>Coordinator tailored education</i>		x			
<i>Team leader / teacher no. 1</i>			x		
<i>Team leader / teacher no. 2</i>			x		
<i>Coordinator international immersion classes</i>				x	
<i>Regional officer</i>					x

Apart from the interviews with these 6 SLBs, an additional interview was conducted with a regional officer from the Gelijke Kansen Alliantie. This interview was also semi-structured, but contained different questions compared to the interviews held with the school directors and teachers (Appendix I, p. 66-67). The conversation with the 7<sup>th</sup> participant of this research yielded insights into the role the Gelijke Kansen Alliantie plays in targeting school segregation in the Netherlands and their experience with translating national policies targeting school segregation towards municipalities and schools. Furthermore, information on what schools within the two municipalities under study and the two municipalities themselves do against school segregation, what feedback these municipalities and schools have given with regard to (the policies) targeting school segregation and whether changes have been witnessed due to the introduced targeting policies was gathered. In that way, extra perspectives from an organisation

located in between de Dutch government and the municipalities/schools could be added to the research in this thesis. The data obtained within this interview could thus be used to check whether the policy translation is done according to plan. Moreover, additional insights as to how municipalities, and more specifically the municipalities of Almere and Den Haag, deal with the issues of school segregation and educational inequality could be obtained and compared to the experiences that the SLBs have when it comes to these two issues. Furthermore, an even better sense could be created as to what extent the policies targeting school segregation and educational inequality that SLBs and their schools have in place correspond to the ones thought of by the Dutch government and the Gelijke Kansen Alliantie. Altogether, these findings thus support in testing the *hypotheses h(1)* and *h(2)* and are relevant for answering the research question of this thesis, thereby also contributing to the descriptive and potential hypothesis-generating effort that is aims to incorporate.

### **4.3 Data analysis**

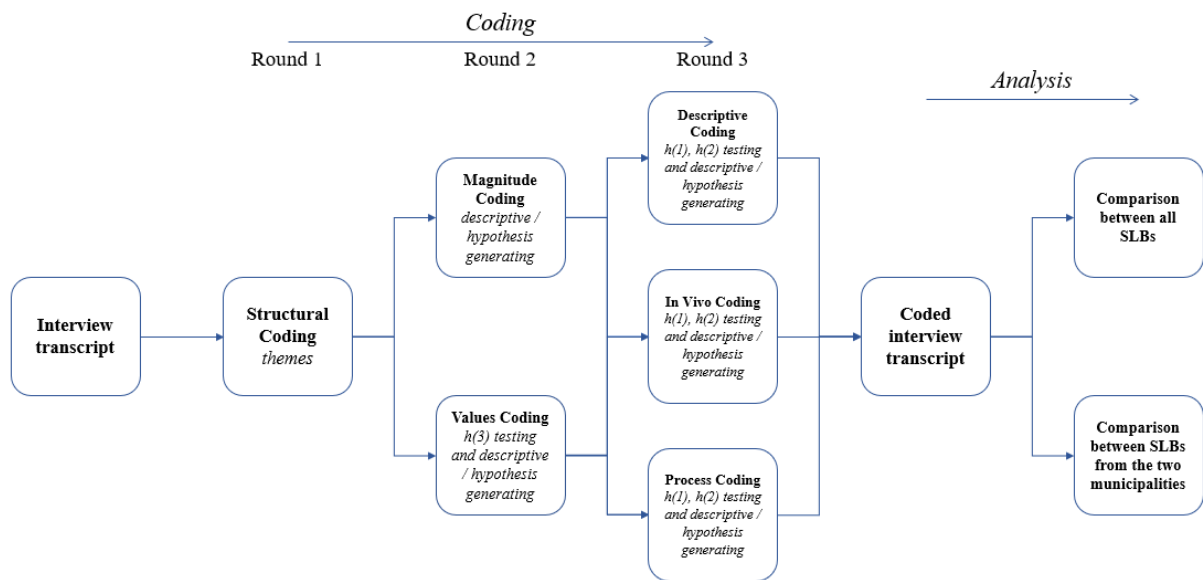
All the semi-structured qualitative interviews were first anonymized (only the position of the participants remained known) and transcribed before submitted to analysis. The transcription of the interviews was done with the use of the automated transcription software Amberscript. The interview transcripts are a combination of unfocused and indexical transcripts, meaning that they recount exactly what was said during the interview, identify both the interviewer and the respondent and organize the interview in a timely manner. The automated transcripts were subsequently checked and manually finalized by means of listening to the original audio recording again. For analysing the transcribed interviews, the Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software was used. Atlas.ti is a software used to assist in the in-depth analysis of textual data. More specifically, it allows for computer-assisted coding of the interview transcripts, thereby providing for transparency in the data analysis process.

As for the coding process, a deductive method of coding has been applied in order to analyse the qualitative interviews. The four topics of inquiry established prior to the interviews have been translated into four corresponding themes: experience with school segregation and educational inequality, policies in place, use of discretion and importance of discretion. The information provided by the interview respondents about these four different themes allows in turn for the testing of the *hypotheses* written down in section 3.2 of this thesis. In this way, the analysis of the qualitative interviews enables the answering of the research question within this thesis.

By means of structural coding, the interview transcripts were separated into data segments representing the identified and asked-about themes. These segments were subsequently subject to a combination of different coding methods. These methods of coding all come from Saldaña's (2013) *Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, which has also been used as the basis of and reference for the coding analysis used within this research. It clearly describes each use of a different coding method and what this specific type of code contributes to the research. Firstly, Magnitude Coding was used to state whether certain experiences, policies or uses of discretion were present or not. This in turn was used to determine the degree to which both school segregation and educational inequality are believed to be present, whether policies are in place and to what extent discretion is used in tackling these issues. Within the same round of coding, Values Coding was used (if applicable) in order to analyse the integrated values, attitudes and beliefs that the participants have towards these abovementioned themes. Secondly, Descriptive and In Vivo Coding were used to express and capture the essence of the different parts said by the interview respondents within the different data segments. This in turn specified the exact experiences that the SLBs have, the policies that are in place (or not) and the ways in which discretion was used (or not). In essence, these two types of coding were used to determine whether the policies formulated by the Dutch government correspond to the schools' and teachers' discretionary needs. Thirdly, Process Coding was used to identify causal relationships that the interview participants believe to occur. These findings assisted in determining whether the policies formulated by the Dutch government correspond to what is needed on the ground and aided in the development of policy recommendations/proposals on how to tackle the issue of school segregation and educational inequality within the Netherlands from the perspective of SLBs.

After having applied these coding methods to each interview transcript separately, the different transcript documents were compared to each other and patterns were recognized as well as differences in experiences, uses and opinions were established. This analysing process was done both between all the different SLBs as well as between the SLBs of the two different municipalities. Diagram 1 shows an overview of the coding analysis used for this thesis research. The insights gained from the analysed Gelijke Kansen Alliantie interview were used to check, complement and support the findings obtained from the analysed SLB interviews. In chapter 5, the findings that were generated according to the four identified themes are presented.

**Diagram 1: Overview of the coding analysis**



By Dana Huibers

#### 4.3.1 Research validity

To increase the internal validity of the research conducted, a semi-pilot interview was conducted to determine whether the predetermined interview structure and questions would provide the data that is needed in order to test the *hypotheses* made and to answer the research question. This was done by means of attentively listening to the first interview once more after it was conducted before proceeding with the rest of the qualitative interviews. The interview structure proved to be sufficient for the needed data collection and no real changes were made before conducting the other interviews. Due to the semi-pilot's success and the fact that there was no need for changes in the interview structure and questions, the semi-pilot interview has not been discarded, but has been included within the data analysis of this thesis research as well. Moreover, the limited number of respondents and time constraints to this thesis encouraged this decision as well.

Apart from the descriptive and potential hypothesis-generating effort as explained in section 3.3, the comparison of the experiences, understandings and opinions of SLBs in the municipalities of Almere and Den Haag, the former containing a low degree and the later a high degree of school segregation, also increase the external validity of the obtained research findings. It allows for a more generalized answer as to what extent the policies targeting school segregation within the Netherlands align with the discretionary needs of the school directors and teachers executing them. Both municipalities are medium to big in size within the Netherlands. Almere has a population number of 211.840 and Den Haag of 545.163. Additionally, each of these municipalities is part of the Gelijke Kansen Alliantie (not all

municipalities within the Netherlands are) and therefore both give attention to the issue of educational inequality. Furthermore, the GDP per capita for both cities is similar, being €25.200 in Almere and €26.000 in Den Haag. In that respect, the municipalities cover the range of medium to big municipalities within the Netherlands and comparing these can thus give a good sense as to what extent the policies targeting school segregation align with the discretionary needs of SLBs within the Netherlands as a whole.

## 5. Results

In this section, the results of the qualitative interviews are presented, subdivided per theme. These themes, experience with school segregation and educational inequality, policies in place, use of discretion and importance of discretion, correspond to the four topics of inquiry established prior to the interviews and allows for the testing of the *hypotheses* and answering of the research question. Quotations are used to strengthen the claims that fall under each theme and with each quotation, the function of the person is mentioned to provide a level of context. As for the interview with de Gelijke Kansen Alliantie, this information obtained is, as explained in section 4.2.1, used with the aim of underpinning, checking and/or justifying the findings made within the interviews with school directors and teachers.

### 5.1 Experience with school segregation and educational inequality

This theme is about the way in which the participants experience school segregation to be present within their school and their direct environment. The overall results are summarized first, before a distinction is made between the municipalities of Almere and Den Haag. These findings are complemented by insights gained from the Gelijke Kansen Alliantie interview.

All in all, 100% (6/6) of the interviewed SLBs believe school segregation to be present. 50% (3/6) expressed to experience school segregation to be present to a low degree within their school. 17% (1/6) of the SLBs expressed to experience school segregation to be present to a medium degree within their school and the remaining 33% (2/6) expressed to experience school segregation to be present to a high degree within their school. When going beyond their own school, 33% (2/6) of the interviewed SLBs did not give any voice as to what degree school segregation was present in their direct environment, 17% (1/6) expressed school segregation to be present to a medium degree in their direct environment and 50% (3/6) mentioned school segregation to be present to a high degree in their direct environment. Yet, it is important to note that 100% (6/6) of the SLBs expressed the degree to which school segregation is present to be situation specific. When looking at the two municipalities specifically and the expressed degree of present school segregation by SLBs within their school and direct environment together, 67% (2/3) of the SLBs in Almere said to be medium and 33% (1/3) high. In Den Haag 33% (1/3) of the SLBs pointed it out to be low and 67% (2/3) expressed it to be high.

Moreover, all SLBs (100% - 6/6) mentioned the inequality of educational opportunities to be present. Apart from it being ingrained to a certain extent within society and the human mentality, the biggest cause for this, in their eyes, is the language gap that children with different

ethnic backgrounds, lower income backgrounds and parents with lower education levels struggle with. In addition to this language gap, it is also thought that if parents experience a language barrier this might influence the educational opportunities of children as well. In addition, the difference in (possible) parent involvement and support for children from different ethnic backgrounds, lower income backgrounds and parents with lower education backgrounds is considered to be a cause too. Apart from these causes, certain policies, such as the freedom of school choice for parents, the brother and sister policy (meaning that if your brother or sister went to a specific school you will automatically be admitted there as well) and the zip code policy (meaning that only children living in a certain zip code area can enter a specific school), are believed to play a role when it comes to educational inequality. Furthermore, as mentioned by the regional officer of the Gelijke Kansen Alliantie, the issue of the inequality of educational opportunities consists of a list of about thirty to thirty-five topics, of which school segregation is one.

*“Equality of educational opportunities is about so many issues, I think we have about 30 to 35 factors that have an influence, that you all have to take into account.”*

*(Gelijke Kansen Alliantie)*

*“Because these are children who, for example, have a good intelligence, but know too little school language, because who knows that if their parents have a slightly different background, and they turn out to be able to do for example HAVO while they are at Kader [educational stream within VMBO].”*

*(Coordinator tailored education, school #2)*

*“Language! Language, but also of course background of those things themselves. I have done some careful research into this in the past, but what you notice is that children, you see a very clear difference between the school language and the home language and then in between they have slang.” ... “Also in the Netherlands, in certain regions, language is a barrier to upliftment.”*

*(Team leader/teacher no. 1, school #3)*

*“I think that a very good impulse would be what we can do with the corona funds, that is, for example, strengthening your language. In a city like Almere where there are a lot of language arrears, also among the white originally Dutch population, that would be a very good investment to combat disadvantages and to bring about less school segregation.”*

*(School director, school #1)*

*“It's just the case that people who might speak the language less well are less able to stand up for their children, because I'm going back to primary schools now, where of course you notice that sometimes pupils are offered or advised a low level because of their background or the fact that they come from a certain family.”*

*(Team leader/teacher no. 2, school #3)*

### 5.1.1 Almere

The interview participants located within the municipality of Almere experience their schools to be culturally diverse and a good representation of the overall population of Almere.

*“We have a high cultural diversity at our school, and I am proud of that. We provide education at the VMBO kb, VMBO tl, HAVO and VWO level and our cultural profile is very broad and accessible, in which students can make use of their own backgrounds.”*

*(School director, school #1)*

*“All the colours as we know them here in the Netherlands are represented in our school. So in that respect, we really are a multicultural school. The nice thing about a totally multicultural school is that there are no real groups, which I really like.”*

*(Team leader/teacher no. 1, school #3)*

However, they believe that the presence of school segregation cannot be denied and it is their knowledge that a difference in diversity can be seen between the different levels at secondary school. In that regard, the participants (100% - 3/3) agree to the fact that the background of students matters. Especially the level of education of parents is considered to be a strong factor in the determination of the advice as to which kind of educational level a child should move on to after primary school.

*The more theoretical the education, because I try to avoid the word 'high' in education every time, but the more theoretical the education, the greater the segregation.”*

*(Team leader/teacher no. 1, school #3)*

*“In the country, and also in Almere, you see that, roughly speaking, white children are often at the higher levels and the children of colour are often at the lower levels. This means that our VMBO is more coloured than our HAVO VWO. But fortunately, there are also many children of colour there, because in the Netherlands they sometimes say: congratulations on your parents' diploma. In the Netherlands you generally get a higher school level advice if your parents also had a higher school level advice. And the integration, at least that's my opinion, the integration of the other cultures is not so far*

*advanced in the Netherlands that it also means that people of colour and with a different cultural background than a Dutch one have the same chance to get a high diploma.”*

*(School director, school #1)*

*“Yes, it [school segregation] is there of course, especially in big cities, in Almere I recognise the same problem. It's just there and I think we cannot go around that.”*

*(Team leader/teacher no. 2, school #3)*

These quotes form a bridge to the more general issue of educational inequality in the Netherlands that was most often (100% - 3/3) addressed simultaneously with the problem of school segregation. It became clear that schools do not specifically look at the issue of school segregation, mostly due to the fact that they have no say in the pupils that apply to their school and feel that background should not be looked at initially. Rather, they prefer to have their focus on providing equal opportunities to all their students. This is also in line with the information obtained from the Gelijke Kansen Alliantie on how municipalities deal with the topic of educational inequality.

*“Segregation is still a complicated term for many municipalities, because it is also a negative one. With equality of opportunity, you just get everyone and everybody feels that. Equal opportunities or inequality of opportunity, that is also what the programme is working on and segregation is part of that in some places. But many municipalities say: yes, we are working on equal opportunities and segregation is not the theme we look at.”*

*(Gelijke Kansen Alliantie)*

### *5.1.2 Den Haag*

In Den Haag, the same trends can be identified when addressing the issue of school segregation. The conversations (100% - 3/3) quickly turned into a talk about educational inequality in general of which school segregation is a relevant part. Nevertheless, when talking about the participants' experiences with school segregation, it became clear that they feel this to be very much present in Den Haag.

*“At X [school in the region of Den Haag], 96% of the children have parents with a different ethnic background [than Dutch].”*

*(Coordinator tailored education, school #2)*

*“But yes, of course it cannot be denied that if you look at our population, it is mainly a reflection of the socio-economically lower, yes, lesser neighbourhoods in Den Haag. So when we have an open day here at the school, yes, we rarely see white people, so to speak.” ... “Yes, apparently, we have the name of a school where, well, I find black school an annoying expression. But from a school where there are few children, even though they are from the third generation, who are now considered Dutch, because they are.”*

*(Coordinator ISK, school #4)*

However, it also became clear that the issue of school segregation is mainly present in mainstream education (67% - 2/3). As soon as there is a specific component, such as tailored education (which is special schooling meant for pupils who have an average IQ, but who leave primary school with a learning disadvantage and/or have slight learning problems), the population of that school becomes very diverse with children from different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds.

*“So we called ourselves, as a location, ‘learning support with a focus on language disadvantage’. At that time, we did get more children with a different ethnic background, so to speak. But that has now been equalised, so the rules for two [tailored education] have been made clearer by the government, and now we just about get all the children who need extra guidance, and you see that it is indeed a reasonable reflection of the Den Haag population.”*

*(Coordinator tailored education, school #2)*

## 5.2 Policies in place

This theme is about the policies that schools and teachers have in place in order to combat the issue of school segregation as well as the potential ways in which they believe this should be done. Firstly, the overall results are summarized and secondly, a distinction is made between the municipalities of Almere and Den Haag. These findings are again complemented by insights gained from the Gelijke Kansen Alliantie interview.

All in all, 100% (6/6) of the interviewed SLBs expressed there to be no specific policies targeting school segregation within their schools. Nonetheless, 100% (6/6) of the SLBs communicated there to be specific policies and measures in place to ensure and promote chance-rich education in order to provide each child with the educational opportunities they deserve. Furthermore, 17% (1/6) of the SLBs conveyed the policies in place to come from the municipality and more specifically the municipality's 'Gelijke Kansen Agenda' that is set-up in collaboration with the Gelijke Kansen Alliantie. A few of these policies (indicated with CGP in de lists of policies per school per municipality laid out below, which stands for Corresponding Governmental Policy) also correspond well with the national policies agenda in place as mentioned within section 2.2. The other 83% (5/6) of SLBs (and on certain policies the 17% (1/6) as well, the ones not indicated with CGP in the list of policies at school #3) mentioned the policies in place to be thought of and implemented by the schools themselves. This also forms a link with the theme of which the findings will be presented in section 5.3.

### 5.2.1 Almere

The interview participants (100% - 3.3) located within the municipality of Almere expressed there to be no policies specifically related to tackling the issue of school segregation within their schools.

*“Not really policies, at least, yes, of course we do strive, as I just said, to treat everyone equally, but we don't really have policies based on it.”*

*(Team leader/teacher no. 2, school #3)*

*“Well, look, for me, yes, there is actually no policy on educational segregation. There has been a call from the Minister to give children, well, to get rid of the inequality of opportunities, so to provide equal opportunities.”*

*(School director, school #1)*

Notwithstanding, as can be distilled from the abovementioned quotes already and which is again in line with the information obtained from the Gelijke Kansen Alliantie on how municipalities deal with the topic of educational inequality, the inequality of educational opportunities is given attention to in the view of the interviewed participants (100% - 3.3). The schools in Almere have different policies in place in order to provide equal circumstances to their students according to the best of their abilities. The policies that school #1 has in place according to its school director include:

- I. Giving the benefit of the doubt when a child has gotten an in-between level advice, such as Kader/Tl or Tl/Havo;
- II. Carefully looking at the advice given by the primary school for each child that enters the school.

The policies that school #3 has in place according to two of its team leaders/teachers include:

- III. Creating a direct link between language education and practical education;
- IV. A project for poverty alleviation, where children can get a free breakfast three days a week;
- V. Extracurricular models, such as music projects, IT projects or sports;
- VI. Giving every child the opportunity to express him or herself in class;
- VII. Equal procedure, for example for class removal, for every child in order to guarantee equal treatment;
- VIII. Providing the opportunity to do different subjects at different levels;
- IX. Providing a test period for children to see if they could potentially change education levels;
- X. Focus on triangle: parents, home and school (*CGP*);
- XI. Inform parents on financial support possibilities (duty to inform parents in general) (*CGP*).

### *5.2.2 Den Haag*

The aforementioned findings regarding the presence of policies specifically tackling the issue of school segregation within the municipality of Almere can be recognized within the interviews with the SLB participants located within the municipality of Den Haag as well. No policies specifically related to tackling the issue of school segregation are present within their schools (100% - 6/6).

*“No, not consciously with that word [school segregation] in our minds, no”*

*(Coordinator tailored education, school #2)*

*“Yes, but for us this is already a non-issue. We just focus on children with talent and that is how we present ourselves. We present ourselves on the website as a school for children who may have a different background than Jan, Piet or Kees, and we say: yes, we are the school that offers you opportunities and it is up to you to seize those opportunities or not. So we skip the whole dilemma, or the whole issue of black or white schools.”*

*(Coordinator ISK, school #4)*

*“We have no influence on who eventually attends school. The only thing that is certain is that a pupil must comply with the educational levels that we offer. So, in the end, a pupil comes in, not from a certain neighbourhood or district, or in the end, background is no longer relevant. In the end, it's all about having the right advice from your primary school, that's what we place and we have no influence at all on that.”*

*(School director, school #2)*

Just as within the findings for the municipality of Almere, the interview participants (100% - 3/3) in the municipality of Den Haag also express there to be specific attention for the equality of educational opportunities within their schools. Policies are established in order to increase the equality of educational chances for all children at their schools. The policies that school #2 has in place according to its school director and coordinator tailored education include:

- I. A heterogenous first year class, meaning that all the different education levels are present within the same class;
- II. Extra teaching assistants in order to provide teachers with an extra pair of eyes and ears;
- III. Monitor from the start what a child's educational level is and provide the opportunity to easily change levels if possible;
- IV. Friendshipschools (school director, school #2 knew this to be present at another school in Den Haag) (*CGP*);
- V. Lending out of laptops during Corona period;
- VI. Support in school language (coordinator tailored education knew this to be present at another school in the region of Den Haag).

The policies that school #4 has in place according to its coordinator ISK include:

- VII. Roof tile classes for the first two years in order to fully determine a child's education level;

- VIII. Actively work on the language side of all the different subjects;
- IX. Participation in the programme called Giving Back, which is an initiative to bring children from the second and third generation in contact with certain fields of work (ICC, Shell, Heineken, Second Chamber etc.).

### 5.3 Use of discretion

This theme is about the use of discretion by school directors and teachers and their possibility to do so when it comes to the policies tackling school segregation and educational inequality. A summarized overview of the overall results for this section is provided first, before a distinction is made between the municipalities of Almere and Den Haag. These findings are also complemented by insights gained from the Gelijke Kansen Alliantie interview.

All in all, 100% (6/6) of the SLBs expressed there to be room for discretion in implementing policies regarding school segregation and educational inequalities. Even within the policies that originate from the municipality in collaboration with the Gelijke Kansen Alliantie, the school/SLB in question experienced there to be discretion possible in order to make the policies fit for the needs of their specific student population. This is exactly what the Gelijke Kansen Alliantie aims to do. Their ambition is to provide a network and knowledge for assisting municipalities and schools in what they need in order to tackle educational inequality.

*“What is unique about the Equal Opportunities Alliance, also in comparison with the rest of OCW [ministry of Education, Culture and Science], is that we very much opt for what we call a responsive approach. So, we do not make policies from Den Haag where we ask the municipality to participate, but we enter into a dialogue with the municipalities. What are the local issues, where lie the biggest challenges and what could we do about it? This also shows in the fact that we have 50 agendas in the Netherlands with 50 municipalities, and that the interventions differ greatly. After all, equality of opportunity in the Bijlmer looks very different from equality of opportunity in North-East Groningen, for example. Both: children do not get the opportunities they deserve, but the cause and the approach are very different. So, make it fit well with what you are doing with your interventions and get that from the municipalities.”*

*(Gelijke Kansen Alliantie)*

Moreover, 100% (6/6) of the SLBs also expressed to use that available wiggle room, as can be seen from the wide variety of policies that are in place as presented in sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2. 33% (2/6) even stated that there is more room for discretion than often used.

*“I think that there is more possible than we realise.”*

*(Team leader/teacher no. 1, school #3)*

*“If you ask a teacher: hey, do you have time? No, I don't have time, because I have to do this and that. A lot of things are planned and that's something that has grown over the past few years, at least during the time that I've been working at school, that it's all fixed and when you start looking at it all, you think, okay, but actually this is something that you want to do extra. It's nice, it's good that you want to give the pupil more, but do you want to give him theoretical knowledge, or do you ultimately also want skills and competences, and what does he need?”*

*(School director, school #2)*

This last quote points towards another topic that was mentioned by the interviewed SLBs (50% - 3/6) when it comes to the use of discretion in order to meet every student's individual needs and provide equality of educational opportunities. This concerns the point of schooling teachers specifically about the topics of school segregation and educational inequality so that they can be aware of these issues and consciously deal with them. Especially since all teachers are humans, it is important to train them in how to take a certain distance from situations with the aim of keeping a professional look at students, judging their potential and determining what their needs are.

*“I don't like over-regulating either, but yes, when it comes to ethnic background or disadvantaged backgrounds? Then I don't think there should be many more rules for schools: you have to comply with so much colour, or something like that, no idea what you call it. I do think that we need to look very closely at what it takes to get those children a higher school level advice. So, the primary school teacher has to be trained.”*

*(Coordinator tailored education, school #2)*

*“So, you have a bit of information duty, a bit of objectivity, a bit of training, I think, of our staff as well: how do you look at pupils? What I'm saying, we're human beings, we're all human beings, and in all the hecticness of the day, you're sometimes inclined to think: ah, but this is such a pupil, so it's bound to be that, let's take a step back, let's look through those professional glasses. What do you see? And let's just look very factually: what is going on? And what are we going to use? And not because we see a, it must be b.”*

*(Team leader/teacher no. 2, school #3)*

A proposed way to do so by one of the SLBs is to, in a positively critical way, make schools aware of the issues and consciously think about them. This could be done by means of the yearly inspection that schools in the Netherlands go through and the report they get with their inspection results.

*“That attitude of real interest, so attitude if we, if we could find a guiding element for that, in the inspection report, that the inspection report would ask: yes, how...the questions you ask. What is the situation with school segregation in your school and do you have a picture of it? And are you actively working on it? And if you are actively working on it, what are you doing about it? And ask more positive critical questions than normative ones.”*

*(Team leader/teacher no. 1, school #3)*

This mentioning of the inspection bridges towards another topic that came up during one of the interviews, which points at a restrictive element in being able to provide equality of educational opportunities. This element is the paradoxical relationship between the call from the ministry of Education, Culture and Science to provide change-rich education and the inspection norms, as the following quote indicates. The inspection report requires schools to comply with certain norms (when it comes to, for example, the average final exam marks of students in their last year of secondary school and the number of students repeating a school year) and according to the SLB in question, providing more room and options for educational changes to children causes difficulties with adhering to these rules.

*"We do everything we can to give everyone the best opportunities, but it is hard work. When we started, we always gave every child the benefit of the doubt. So, let's say, a child who is just on the edge of TI HAVO, we let him go to HAVO, HAVO VWO we let him go to VWO, repeating, not repeating, we always let him pass. Well, we always gave children the benefit of the doubt and that has cost us dearly, because ultimately that did have an effect on the number of repeaters in the later years of secondary schools, and on the number of students that did not graduate and the average exam mark, and the inspection reprimanded us for that." ... "And then we were urgently advised to, let's say, be more careful about giving opportunities. We did that. As a result, those results have improved. But now, again of course, the tendency nationally is, yes, the tendency to give a lot of students a lot of opportunities."*

*(School director, school #1)*

Furthermore, another restrictive element that was mentioned in relation to being able to meet every individual student's need is that of time.

*"It is a question of time. In primary school, of course, a teacher has much more time, much better relationship with parents and with pupils. Is the contact also, is the line a bit shorter. And yes, a primary school teacher sees a pupil from nine till three, five days a week, so knows a lot more about the pupils."*

*(Team leader/teacher no. 2, school #3)*

*“Yes, far too busy with, far too little time to really look at children's needs.” ... “Yes, I think a teacher should have fewer classes. Less class time so that he or she has more time to make lesson plans, or to have conversations with the children.”*

*(Coordinator tailored education, school #2)*

*Yes, you know, what I just pointed out, we only have the students for 32 hours a week. All the time outside that they deal with the street and home. In those 32 hours, and we do realise that, we can set an example and we try to do that as well as we can. But we cannot solve the problem of society during those 32 hours. Yes, what do I mean by that? So, we are aware of our possibilities, but also our limitations.*

*(Team leader/teacher no. 1, school #3)*

Taking all the findings within this thematic section of the results into account, it can be said that evidence has been found in support of the *hypotheses*  $h(1) + h(2)$  about the shortage of resources and an absence of clear guidelines on how to ration these resources. A shortage of time as well as a paradoxical relationship with the inspection norms cause for a restriction in the use of discretion according to the interviewed SLBs. Moreover, a lack of better guidance in how to manage this time and efforts to make SLBs more aware of the issues of school segregation and educational inequality restrict the most effective use of SLB discretion. Nevertheless, the interviewed SLBs stress that there is a lot of room for discretion and that they actively make use of that discretion.

### *5.3.1 Almere*

When it comes to their use of discretion and their ability to do so in tackling the issue of school segregation and educational inequality, the interview participants (100% - 3/3) located within the municipality of Almere expressed there to be ample room for this and to also use that room. One of the SLBs even expressed to use discretion although resistance was felt from colleagues within a managerial position. This again could point towards a restrictive element experienced by SLBs. Notwithstanding, this SLB felt that the way in which he/she wanted to use his/her discretion is important and the only way to meet a specific students' individual needs. Therefore, he/she pushed for it to happen as shown within the following quote (team leader/teacher no. 1, school #3).

*“Yes, really from the school, we appointed a project leader two years ago who took a close look at our pedagogical policies and that's just a teacher or one of our own colleagues. She set this up in collaboration with the team. We also have a real 'soldiers' handbook', we call it, a handbook in which we have all our agreements: how we deal with certain situations, the positive situations, but also the less positive situations, precisely in order to act as equally as possible.” ... “Perhaps I may indeed say that this is school-specific.”*

*(Team leader/teacher no. 2, school #3)*

*“And it's also good that schools like, us too, but also primary schools, have some space.”*

*(School director, school #1)*

*“At the moment, I have a boy in the third year. X and X, he really does have HAVO, sure, HAVO capacities, but can't sit still, so to speak, so he dropped out of HAVO and went to MAVO and then from MAVO ended up at our school. Of course, he's bored stiff with Dutch, English, maths, physics, because yes, the teacher explains everything two or three times, otherwise most of the other children will not understand. Well, because he's bored stiff, he starts behaving badly, he gets a lot of negative attention from teachers, he gets sent out of class, you get the idea. What I've come up with is: hey, X, and together with his parents, I say to X: what if you, because he really wants to become a mechanic, just wants to become a plumber. What if we... what do you think about it if you do your Kader diploma on the regular subjects in three days instead of five? That means that you would have to do a lot of homework and that you do a two-day internship at an installation company. My exam secretary immediately turned grey, saying that this is not possible at all and that it is not allowed at all and that it shouldn't be done. I said: and still we are going to do it this way. So, X is now very happy, he goes to an installation company on Thursday and Friday. Is a real guy among the guys there and during those three days that he's at our school, he has to work extra hard to, well, master the subject materials that are normally done in five days.”*

*(Team leader/teacher no. 1, school #3)*

### **5.3.2 Den Haag**

In Den Haag the same opinions and experiences as in the municipality of Almere were expressed by the interviewed SLBs. They mentioned that they believe discretionary room to be present and make use of this room as well.

*“I think that the regulation of such things is not there at all yet... a lot of it is done by the school itself.”*

*(Coordinator tailored education, school #2)*

*“But I would say that the sky is the limit. If you think, as a teacher, that this works for these children. Go and try it out and if you notice that it works, report back, because then we can implement it. So there is a lot of discussion about that. About language policy, about what we can do to improve it. Because yes, that is what these children benefit from.”*

*(Coordinator ISK, school #4)*

*“The X [school community, school #2] is very busy with that now. We focus on the life skills. We started writing a new school plan at the beginning of this year. Yes, really on life skills, ICT, twenty-first century skills. There's just music in that, I think it's very important. It doesn't all have to be fixed. You can also develop things, it's allowed to go wrong, it's allowed to go wrong once in a while. And indeed, discover together what works for this target group, what works for this location.”*

*(School director, school #2)*

## 5.4 Importance of discretion

This theme is about the importance that the SLBs ascribe to their discretion when it comes to the policies tackling the school segregation and educational inequality. The overall results are summarized first, before a distinction is made between the municipalities of Almere and Den Haag. These findings are again complemented by insights gained from the Gelijke Kansen Alliantie interview.

All in all, 83% (5/6) of the SLBs expressed to find their discretion in tackling school segregation and education inequality to be of importance. 17% (1/6) of the SLBs did not give any qualification as to the importance of their discretion. The question was asked within the interview with a distinctive SLB too, but no answer to the question was provided. To not push the interview participant for an answer, the topic was not inquired about again. Evidence has thus been found in support of the *hypothesis h(3)* that SLBs in the municipalities of Den Haag and Almere would experience their use of discretion to be important.

A reason for the ascribed importance to their discretion, as can be distilled from some of the below mentioned quotes within sections 5.4.1 and 5.4.2, is the fact that the SLBs (33% - 2/6) believe to have the best knowledge on what is going on at their school and therefore on what their student population needs. Nonetheless, as also came apparent within section 5.3, potential guidelines on how to manage teachers' discretion when it comes to school segregation and education inequality are believed to be useful. This opinion given (33% - 2/6) reads that their discretion is not always used well.

### 5.4.1 Almere

The interview participant (67% - 2/3) located in the municipality of Almere voices their discretion to be of importance to them.

*“Yes, well, I think that space is important, because behind all those numbers there's a story. So, the space is important, but it is not always used well. The research also shows that, very bluntly, this space is used to give white children from richer backgrounds positive advice than the results would actually indicate, and that pupils from other backgrounds tend to get a lower advice. So, the fact that there is such space is a good thing, but the way in which this space is used is not fair and, in my opinion, there are no, there is no teacher, every teacher wants the best for his pupil, so it is not a teacher who deliberately abuses this. I really don't believe that, but we should all be much more alert as to what our motives actually were in giving someone a chance or not.”*

*(School director, school #1)*

*“Very important. Very important, because of that difference [the difference in the student population of its school and therefore its needs] I just pointed out. I had a meeting with middle management last week. My colleague from the other school did indeed indicate that. He said: yes, but that's not not important for us, but a bit less than for you.”*

*(Team leader/teacher no.2, school #3)*

#### **5.4.2 Den Haag**

In Den Haag, the interview participants (100% - 3/3) expressed the same opinions as the participants in the municipality of Almere when it comes to the importance that they ascribe to their discretion.

*“That's good, because as I said before, X is a really big school, and if you indeed start pulling one string, that doesn't only mean something for the Dutch lessons here, but that also means something for all those subjects, of course, for all those layers of learning that give the same type of lesson. But it's great that you get the space, that I also get space as a location director, to see what we can do better, what we can change from what is the standard?”*

*(School director, school #2)*

*[Do you believe this discretionary room to be important when it comes to equality of educational opportunities?] “Yes, absolutely yes. Look, it's not wrong, especially on this important subject, that you get guidelines from the government.”*

*(Coordinator ISK, school #4)*

*“Yes, really! That cannot be determined nationally. Yes, I know from these colleagues what knowledge, what expertise they have.”*

*(Coordinator tailored education, school #2)*

## **6. Limitations**

In this section, a critical assessment on the research process is made and limitations related to the research done within this thesis are discussed. More specifically, general disadvantages to the interview approach as well as specific limitations to the process of interviewing are elaborated on. Furthermore, the issues of reliability and validity in relation to the research conducted are addressed.

### **6.1 The interview approach**

Semi-structured interviews as a means to collect data is recognized to be a method that allows a researcher to uncover information that is probably not accessible when using other methods such as observations or questionnaires (Alshenqeeti, 2014). This applies to the research within this Master thesis as well, considering that information about the experiences, understandings and opinions of SLBs in relation to their own discretion is needed to answer the research question of this thesis. These data can only be expressed and conveyed by the SLBs themselves, which asks for in-depth interviews. No amount or form of observation could indicate whether the SLBs feel that the policies in place targeting school segregation meet their discretionary needs. Moreover, semi-structured interviews are believed to be a flexible method of data collection due to the fact that an interviewer is present to adjust, rephrase and simplify questions for the interview participants if needed (Alshenqeeti, 2014). This in turn allows for more accurate, detailed and insightful information on the given subject(s) of inquiry (Almeida et al., 2017). Furthermore, recording the interviews, as was done within the research conducted in this thesis as well, makes that an accurate representation of the interviews conducted and thereby its corresponding findings can be produced and subsequently analysed.

Nevertheless, despite these advantages to using the interview approach, limitations are known to be attached to it too. Firstly, interview research is perceived to be time consuming in both data collection and data analysis (Alshenqeeti, 2014). Therefore, it can also be relatively high costly (Almeida et al., 2017). Secondly, interview research often consists of small sample sizes which affects the ability to generalize the findings obtained (Rahman, 2017), an issue present within the research conducted within this thesis as well. Thirdly, the interviewer-interviewee relationship could also potentially limit the effectiveness of the interview method (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). An interviewer's personal characteristics (gender, age, ethnicity etc.), beliefs and/or other factors may influence interviewee's responses and affect the accuracy of the gathered data (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). What interviewees say could be shaped by the questions asked by the interviewer, possibly resulting in conventions on what can be spoken

about and/or the interviewee answering in the way that he or she believes the interviewer wants (Alshenqeeti, 2014). It is therefore often recommended to use more than one instrument of data collection to validate research findings, something for which there has not been an opportunity within this research. Lastly, participants in interview studies should be chosen carefully in order to avoid bias (Almeida et al., 2017). In the case of the interviews conducted within this thesis, the issue of potential sample selection bias needs to be taken into account as well. As mentioned in section 4.2.1, the response rate of participants within this thesis has been 19% (7 out of 37). No random assignment has been utilized when it comes to the sample selection and it will most likely have been a certain type of school director and teacher that was willing to be interviewed, as it is often certain characteristics that make people respond to an interview invite out of their own.

As for the specific interview conducted within this thesis, some specific within interview strengths and limitations can be identified as well. It appears that the right questions were asked during the interview since the needed information to test the *hypotheses* made and to answer the research question have been obtained. In addition, the interview participants seemed open and engaged during the interview conversations and are believed to have answered the questions in a well thought of and honest way. However, within one of the interviews (coordinator ISK, school #4) time has been a constraining factor. Within this interview all questions have still been asked, but more detailed information regarding the use and importance of discretion topics could have been collected if more time would have been available. Furthermore, as mentioned in section 5.4, one interview participant (team leader/teacher no.1, school #3) did not answer the question about the importance he or she ascribes to his or her discretion.

## **6.2 The issue of reliability**

Next to the strengths and weaknesses related to the used interview approach, the issue of reliability needs to be taken into account when critically reflecting on the research conducted within this thesis. Reliability “pertains to the consistency and trustworthiness of research findings; it is often treated in relation to the issue of whether a finding is reproducible at other times and by other researchers” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018, p. 141).

Within this context, the notion of stability relates to the “extent to which the results of coding vary across different time periods” (Sheppard, 2021, p. 334). If coding stability applies, this means that a coder has coded the same content at different times and has obtained the same result each time (Sheppard, 2021), which increases the reliability of the research significantly.

No coding stability test has been done for this thesis due to the limited time provided within which the research could be conducted and the fact that finding the first interviewee occurred already relatively late within the entire research timespan. Therefore, coding stability cannot be guaranteed. Another concept crucial for research reliability has to do with reproducibility and is often referred to as intercoder stability. Intercoder stability is defined as the “extent to which one’s coding procedures will result in the same results when the same text is coded by different people” (Sheppard, 2021, p. 334). Again, due to time constraints and the Master thesis being an individual endeavour, also no intercoder stability test has been carried out. Nevertheless, the different methods of coding used, the order in which they are used and the reason why they are used have been made as explicit as possible (see section 4.3 and Diagram 1) in order to ensure intercoder stability to the best extent possible. Moreover, this same coding approach has been applied to analyse every single interview to create a level of transparency and structure to the coding process. In this way, coding stability as much as possible.

Furthermore, coding accuracy could increase the reliability of research findings as this refers to the “extent to which one’s coding procedures correspond to some pre-existing standard” (Sheppard, 2021, p. 334). Considering that the coding methods used within the data analysis part of this thesis (see section 4.3) are all based on Saldaña’s (2013) *Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, this increases the coding accuracy and thereby the reliability of the research findings. However, it is important to note that due to the inherent nature of semi-structured interviews and qualitative data analysis being mainly based on the researcher’s own interpretation, that replicability and reliability can never be fully ensured.

### **6.3 The issue of validity**

Besides the issue of reliability, the issue of validity will also have to be discussed. Validity “pertains to the issue of whether a method investigates what it purports to investigate” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018, p. 142). Within this concept of validity two separate types of validity can be distinguished, being internal and external validity.

Internal validity is concerned with the fact that a research tests the very thing it also aims to test (Sheppard, 2021). As mentioned before in section 4.3.1, a semi-pilot has been used in order to increase the internal validity of the research conducted as it allowed for a check that the interview structure and questions did indeed gather the information they were intended to. Nevertheless, considering the number of participants, other alternative explanations are possible. In that respect, data saturation has not been met within this research. Data saturation is “reached when there is enough information to replicate the study, when the ability to obtain

additional new information has been attained, and when further coding is no longer feasible” (Fush & Nesh, 2015, p. 1408). The lack of data saturation within this research thesis negatively impacts the content validity of the findings obtained (Fush & Nesh, 2015). Content validity is a concept that falls under the notion of internal validity and refers to the “extent to which the items on a test are fairly representative of the entire domain the test seeks to measure” (Markus & Smith, 2012, p. 239). When the number of participants would have been higher and data saturation would have been met, the recognized patterns could have been identified with more confidence and the to be drawn conclusions could have been made with more certainty.

Besides the internal validity of the research findings, the limited number of participants affects the external validity of the results too. External validity is concerned with the fact that the research findings are generic to other situations and contexts (Sheppard, 2021). An increased number of participants would have allowed for a greater insight into the experiences, understanding and opinions of SLBs in the Netherlands in general. Nonetheless, as mentioned in section 4.3.1, the comparative use of the municipalities of Almere and Den Haag has increased the external validity. The reason for this is that they each have a different level of school segregation, but are similar on many other relevant aspects, such as being part of the *Gelijke Kansen Alliantie*, having a similar GDP per capita and both fall in the category of big municipalities within the Netherlands. They, therefore, represent the municipality cases with low school segregation and high segregation. In that respect, the research is roughly identical in case selection to a most similar systems design (MSSD). However, this comparative use of municipalities does not allow for a claim at causality between the level of school segregation present (independent variable  $x$ ) and the experiences, understandings and opinions of the interviewed SLBs when it comes to the policies targeting school segregation and their discretion in executing these policies (dependent variable  $y$ ). Therefore, within this thesis, only statements of descriptive/potentially hypothesis-generating nature can be made. To be able to make such as causal claim more cases in the form of more different municipalities would have to be included within the study. This was part of the initial research design of this thesis, but due to a lack of responses from school directors and teachers within the municipality of Groningen (considered to have a medium level of school segregation), this covariational analysis design had to be dropped. Table 3 shows how the covariational table would have otherwise looked when including the municipality of Groningen as well.

**Table 3:** Covariational table initial research design

<i>Municipality</i>	<i>School segregation level (x)</i>	<i>Population size (2020)</i>	<i>Population density per km<sup>2</sup> (2020)</i>	<i>GDP per capita</i>	<i>Exposure to national policies</i>	<i>Part of Gelijke Kansen Alliantie</i>	<i>Experiences, understandings opinions of SLBs (y)</i>
<i>Almere</i>	Low	211.840	1.640	€25.200	Equal	Yes	Topic of inquiry 2, 3 and 4
<i>Den Haag</i>	High	545.163	6.620	€26.000	Equal	Yes	Topic of inquiry 2, 3 and 4
<i>Groningen</i>	Medium	232.922	1.255	€22.900	Equal	Yes	Topic of inquiry 2, 3 and 4

## 7. Conclusions and Discussion

In the Netherlands, the issue of educational inequality is high on the political agenda as both international and national reports have shown that the inequality of educational opportunities in the Netherlands has increased in recent years. One of the main causes for this is the issue of school segregation. To tackle this issue, the ministry of Education, Culture and Science has put forward a policy agenda. In that respect, this thesis has attempted to answer the following research question: to what extent do the policies targeting school segregation within the Netherlands align with the discretionary needs of the street-level bureaucrats executing them?

To do so, qualitative semi-structured interviews with secondary school directors and teachers within the municipalities of Almere and Den Haag, each containing a different level of school segregation, have been conducted. Within this context, three *hypotheses* based on the theory of SLB and its key concept of discretion have been tested. Hereto, descriptive findings into the relationship between the level of school segregation and the experiences, understandings and opinions of SLBs regarding the policies targeting school segregation and their discretion in executing said policies have been gathered. Keeping in mind the limitations discussed in chapter 6, the analysis of the obtained data has led to the following answer to the research question within this thesis.

The policies targeting school segregation within the Netherlands align with the discretionary needs of the SLBs executing them to the extent that these policies are part of the bigger policy agenda of the Dutch government to tackle the issue of the inequality of educational opportunities within the Netherlands. None of the interviewed SLBs conveyed to have policies in place that specifically target school segregation. This was supported by the findings from the Gelijke Kansen Alliantie on how the municipalities of Almere and Den Haag deal with the issue educational inequality as well. Additionally, they mentioned to not have been faced with the newly introduced policy agenda in December 2020 targeting school segregation specifically. Their foremost concern has been with the general state of policies regarding educational inequality within the Netherlands. This also shows from the fact that all the SLBs communicated to have policies regarding the inequality of educational opportunities in place.

Evidence was found in support of all the *hypotheses* ( $h(1) + h(2) + h(3)$ ) to test the theoretical concept of street-level discretion and aid in answering the research question. Restrictive elements, such as not having enough time and inspection norms, are felt by the SLBs to decrease the possibility for employing their discretion ( $h(1)$ ). Moreover, a bit more guidance, not in a normative but stimulating way, on how to tackle school segregation and educational

inequality as well as training in and creating better awareness for these issues are considered to be of potential value to their discretion ( $h(2)$ ). This shortage of resources and the absence of guidance on how to ration these resources in relation to school segregation and educational inequality would suggest that the discretionary needs of school directors and teachers are not met. Nevertheless, the interviewed participants clearly expressed that they experience discretionary room in tackling the issue of educational inequality and in meeting every individual student's needs to be present and sufficient. Furthermore, all SLBs voiced their discretion to be important as they believe that they are the right people to determine what measures should be implemented as they have the best knowledge on what is going on at their school and therefore on what their student population needs ( $h(3)$ ). This is also in line with the governmental and Gelijke Kansen Alliantie's approach as they want to have the possibility to determine together with municipalities and schools what is needed in each situation specifically.

The evidence in support of *hypotheses*  $h(1) + h(2)$  shows that the Dutch government would act wisely to create even greater awareness for the issues of school segregation and educational inequality in the Netherlands. The ways in which the Gelijke Kansen Alliantie aims to tackle the issues seems to be perceived well and to work on a situational level. Nonetheless, a large proportion of the SLBs (83% - 5/6) indicated not to know about the Gelijke Kansen Alliantie and the ways in which it could assist. It can be stated that the willingness and drive to combat school segregation and educational inequality is present and could be felt among the SLBs. Schooling and guidance of teachers and other school personnel could aid in this, while at the same time the discretionary room for SLBs to respond to every student's individual needs stays intact. Moreover, looking into the inspection norms in relation to the issues of school segregation and educational inequality could be of interest.

As for the comparative aspect between the municipalities of Almere and Den Haag and hence the descriptive part of this research, no significant differences were noticed between the experiences, understandings and opinions of the interviewed SLBs when it comes to the policies targeting school segregation and educational inequality in place and their discretion in executing these policies. This is found to be the case even though a slight difference in school segregation was experienced between the SLBs from Almere and Den Haag. Thus, the obtained findings might suggest that they can be generalized towards SLBs within the whole of the Netherlands. A potential claim can be made that the level of school segregation present within a municipality does not affect the experiences, understandings and opinions of SLBs regarding the policies targeting school segregation and educational inequality in place and their discretion in executing said policies.

In future research, this generated hypothesis could be fully tested by including more participants and municipal cases (for example, see Table 3). Within this research design, the combination of both qualitative interviews and covariational analysis would increase the internal validity of the research conducted. As it is difficult to infer a causal relationship by conducting a covariational analysis alone, the information obtained within the qualitative interviews could strengthen the conclusion about this causal relationship even more. Blatter and Haverland (2012, p. 41) claim that the covariational approach “assumes that ‘independent variables’ have autonomous causal power”, while it is often believed that causal effects are a result of a combination or interaction of different causes. This would mean that the assumption of the level of school segregation (x) solely affecting the experiences, understanding and opinions of school directors and teachers regarding the policies targeting school segregation in the Netherlands and their discretion in relation to said policies (y) is presumably weak. Furthermore, within a covariational approach, a researcher is not able to determine “empirically whether the assumptions formulated about the causal pathways and causal mechanisms that presumably lead from independent variable to the dependent variable actually hold” (Blatter & Haverland, 2012, p. 54). This means that the assumed causal relationship between the independent variable (x) and dependent variable (y) is never fully proven. However, by actively asking how school directors and teachers experience school segregation to be present within their school/region and by gaining the specific insights into the experiences, understandings and opinions of these SLBs, the causal relationship between the level of school segregation (x) and the experiences, understandings and opinions of school directors and teachers (y) can to a certain extent be tested empirically too. Both the link itself would be understood better as well as what the interview participants think this causal link embodies. This in turn increases the internal validity of the causal relationship established by the covariational analysis.

Another relevant future avenue of research that flows from this thesis is to expand the research to the entire school trajectory within the Netherlands. If a larger scale research could be conducted, also including qualitative interviews with primary school directors and teachers as well as on different levels within the Dutch educational system, this could definitely add a valuable perspective. This is especially the case considering that it is often at the transition between primary school and secondary school that the inequality of educational opportunities manifests itself. It could also account for the fact that the job of teachers at primary school and secondary school are significantly different. Moreover, similar research into other established causes of the inequality of educational opportunities in the Netherlands could be beneficial to get a fuller picture of the experiences, understandings and opinions of SLBs regarding the issue

of educational inequality more general. Also, elevating the research up to the level of European governance could also pave the way for relevant and insightful findings on how the issue of educational inequality is dealt with within different European countries and/or at EU-level. This especially holds when considering that the EU has made educational inclusiveness one of its key social pillars. Within this research design, a European wide survey among school directors and teachers could be conducted in order to try to get a notion on how the issue is possibly dealt with in a variable manner at the European street-level.

All in all, the findings within this research thesis give an indicative and primary depiction of the experiences, understanding and opinions of school directors and teachers when it comes to the policies targeting the issue of school segregation and, more generally, educational inequality within the Dutch educational system. This thesis has pointed out that school directors and teachers value and use their discretion within the execution of policies regarding school segregation and educational inequality. These SLBs are the ones able to speak to students' individual needs and are therefore relevant actors within the policy arena of educational inequality, as shown by the findings within this thesis research. Future research into this topic could potentially map out the specific needs of the educational field even further, which in turn could allow for a more cooperative and comprehensive plan on how to proceed and tackle the issues of school segregation and educational inequality altogether.

## List of references

Abbring, J. H. & Rabovic, R. (2019). Teacher Discretion in Educational Tracking. *Early view*, p. 1-34.

Alegre, M. A. & Ferrer, G. (2010). School regimes and education equity: some insights based on PISA 2006. *British Educational Research Journal*, 36(3), p. 433-461.

Almeida, F., Faria, D. & Queirós, A. (2017). Strengths and Limitations of Qualitative and Quantitative Research Methods. *European Journal of Education Studies*, 3(9), p. 369-387.

Alshengeeti, H. (2014). Interviewing as a Data Collection Method: A Critical Review. *English Linguistic Research*, 3(1), p. 39-45.

Andersson, E. K., Hennerdal, P. & Malmberg, B. (2019). The re-emergence of educational inequality during a period of reforms: A study of Swedish school leavers 1991–2012. *Environment and Planning B: Urban Analytics and City Science*, 48(4), p. 685-705.

Akosa, F. & Asare, B.E. (2017). Street-Level Bureaucrats and the Exercise of Discretion. In *Global Encyclopedia of Public Administration, Public Policy, and Governance*, ed. Farazmand, A. Springer, Cham.

Benito, R., Alegre, M., & González-Ballebò, I. (2014). School Segregation and Its Effects on Educational Equality and Efficiency in 16 OECD Comprehensive School Systems. *Comparative Education Review*, 58(1), p. 104-134.

Blatter, J., & Haverland, M. (2012). Co-Variational Analysis. In *Designing case studies: Explanatory approaches in small-n research*, p. 33-78. Palgrave Macmillan, London.

Bonal, X. & Bellei, C. (2019). The renaissance of school segregation in a context of globalization In *Understanding school segregation. Patterns, causes and consequences of spatial inequalities in education*, ed. Bonal, X. and Bellei, C., p. 1-25. Bloomsbury, London

Boterman, W.R. (2019). The role of geography in school segregation in the free parental choice context of Dutch cities. *Urban Studies (Edinburgh, Scotland)*, 56(15), p. 3074-3094.

Boterman, W., Musterd, S., Pacchi, C. & Ranci, C. (2019). School segregation in contemporary cities: Socio-spatial dynamics, institutional context and urban outcomes. *Urban Studies (Edinburgh, Scotland)*, 56(15), p. 3055-3073.

Brinkmann, S. & Kvale, S. (2018). Validation and generalization of interview knowledge. In *Doing interviews*, p. 139-148. SAGE Publications Ltd, Newbury Park.

Brodkin, E. (1997). Inside the welfare contract: discretion and accountability in state welfare administration. *Social Service Review*, 71(1), p. 1-33.

Brodkin, E. Z. (2010). Reflections on Street-Level Bureaucracy: Past, Present, and Future. *Public Administration Review*, (72)6, p. 940-949.

Cooper, M. J., Sornalingam, S. & O'Donnell, C. (2015). Street-level bureaucracy: an underused theoretical model for general practice?. *The British journal of general practice: the journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners*, 65(636), p. 376-377.

Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2020-a). Initiatiefvoorstel-Kwint en Westerveld Verbod dat leerlingen van ouders die geen vrijwillige geldelijke bijdrage hebben voldaan worden buitengesloten van activiteiten. *Wetsvoorstel*. Retrieved on April 13, 2021 from:  
[https://www.eerstekamer.nl/wetsvoorstel/35063\\_initiatiefvoorstel\\_kwint\\_en](https://www.eerstekamer.nl/wetsvoorstel/35063_initiatiefvoorstel_kwint_en)

Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2020-b). Wet gelijke kans op doorstroom naar havo en vwo. *Wetsvoorstel*. Retrieved on April 13, 2021 from:  
[https://www.eerstekamer.nl/wetsvoorstel/35195\\_wet\\_gelijke\\_kans\\_op#:~:text=Wet%20gelijke%20kans%20op%20doorstroom%20naar%20havo%20en%20vwo,-Inhoud&text=Dit%20wetsvoorstel%20heeft%20als%20doel,vmbo%20naar%20havo%20en%20vwo](https://www.eerstekamer.nl/wetsvoorstel/35195_wet_gelijke_kans_op#:~:text=Wet%20gelijke%20kans%20op%20doorstroom%20naar%20havo%20en%20vwo,-Inhoud&text=Dit%20wetsvoorstel%20heeft%20als%20doel,vmbo%20naar%20havo%20en%20vwo)

European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice. (2020). Equity in school education in Europe: Structures, policies and student performance. *Eurydice report*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

European Commission. (2013). Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage. Retrieved on April 28, 2021 from:  
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A32013H0112>

European Commission. (2017). The European Pillar of Social Rights in 20 principles. Retrieved on April 28, 2021 from:

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en)

Evans, T & Hupe, V. (2020). Conceptualizing discretion. In *Discretion and the Quest for Controlled Freedom*, ed. Evans, T and Hupe, P., p. 1-13. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

Evans, T. (2010). Introduction. In *Professional discretion in welfare services: Beyond street-level bureaucracy*, ed. Lovelock, R., p. 1-10. Routledge, London.

Fush, P. & Ness, L. (2015). Are We There Yet? Data Saturation in Qualitative Research. *Qualitative Report*, 20(9), p. 1408-1416.

Gorard, S. & Smith, E. (2004). An international comparison of equity in education systems. *Comparative Education*, 40(1), p. 15-28.

Hupe, P. & Hill, M. (2019). Positioning street-level bureaucracy research. In *Research Handbook on Street-Level Bureaucracy*, ed. Hupe, P., p. 15-30. Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham.

Inspectie van het Onderwijs (2021). De Staat van het Onderwijs. Retrieved on April 28, 2021 from:

<https://www.onderwijsinspectie.nl/documenten/rapporten/2021/04/14/de-staat-van-het-onderwijs-2021>

Inspectie van het Onderwijs. (2016). Onderwijsinspectie: kansenongelijkheid groeit. Retrieved on March 1, 2021 from:

<https://www.onderwijsinspectie.nl/actueel/nieuws/2016/04/13/onderwijsinspectiekansenongelijkheid-groeit>

Inspectie van het Onderwijs. (2020). Technisch rapport - Segregatie. Retrieved on April 13, 2021 from:

<https://www.onderwijsinspectie.nl/documenten/rapporten/2020/04/22/technisch-rapport-svho-2020-segregatie>

Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. (2019). Debat over kansenongelijkheid in het onderwijs. *Kamerdebat*. Retrieved on March 17, 2021 from:

[https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/plenaire\\_verslagen/kamer\\_in\\_het\\_kort/debat-over-kansenongelijkheid-het-onderwijs](https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/plenaire_verslagen/kamer_in_het_kort/debat-over-kansenongelijkheid-het-onderwijs)

Knight, J. (2019). Why Teacher Autonomy Is Central to Coaching Success. *A Culture of Coaching*, 77(3), p. 14-20.

Lavee, E., & Strier, R. (2019). Transferring emotional capital as coerced discretion: Street-level bureaucrats reconciling structural deficiencies. *Public Administration*, 97(4), p. 910- 925.

Lavee, E., & Strier, R. (2018). Social workers' emotional labour with families in poverty: Neoliberal fatigue?. *Child & Family Social Work*, 23(3), p. 504-512.

Lipsky, M. (1980). *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*. Russell Sage Foundation, New York.

Logan, J. R. & Burdick-Will, J. (2017). School Segregation and Disparities in Urban, Suburban, and Rural Areas. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 674(1), p. 199-216.

Malandrino, A. & Sager, F. (2021). Can Teachers' Discretion Enhance the Role of Professionalism in Times of Crisis? A Comparative Policy Analysis of Distance Teaching in Italy and Switzerland during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, (23)(1), p. 74-84.

Markus, K. A. & Smith, K. M. (2012). Content Validity. In *Encyclopedia of Research Design*, ed. Salkind, N. J., p. 239-243. SAGE Publications Ltd, Newbury Park.

May, P. & Winter, S. (2009). Politicians, Managers, and Street-Level Bureaucrats: Influences on Policy Implementation. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory: J-PART*, 19(3), p. 453-476.

Maynard-Moody, S. & Portillo, S. (2010). Street-Level Bureaucracy Theory. In *The Oxford Handbook of American Bureaucracy*, ed. Durant, R. F., p. 255-277. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur & Wetenschap. (2020). Beleidsagenda tegen segregatie in het funderend onderwijs. *Kamerbrief*. Retrieved on March 1, 2021 from:

[https://www.tweedekamer.nl/nkamerstukken/brieven\\_regering/detail?id=2020Z25514&did=2020D53577](https://www.tweedekamer.nl/nkamerstukken/brieven_regering/detail?id=2020Z25514&did=2020D53577)

Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur & Wetenschap. (2019). Bevordering kansengelijkheid in het onderwijs. *Kamerbrief*. Retrieved on March 17, 2021 from:

<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2019/03/13/kamerbrief-over-kansengelijkheid-in-het-onderwijs>

Minister voor Basis- en Voortgezet Onderwijs en Media. (2019). Brief van de minister voor basis- en voortgezet onderwijs en media. *Kamerstuk, 31293 nr. 471*. Retrieved on April 13, 2021 from:

<https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/kst-31293-471.html>

Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid. (2019). Tabel aantal inwoners gemeenten per 1 januari 2019 op alfabetische volgorde. *Uitvoering van Beleid*. Retrieved on April 13, 2021 from:

<https://www.uitvoeringvanbeleidszw.nl/documenten/publicaties/subsidies/veranderopgave-inburgering-pilots/tabel-aantal-inwoners-gemeenten-per-1-januari-2019/tabel-aantal-inwoners-gemeenten-per-1-januari-2019-op-alfabetische-volgorde>

Moors, H. & Bervoets, E. (2013). *Frontlijnwerkers in de veiligheidszorg. Gevalstudies, patronen, analyse*. Boom Lemma uitgevers, Den Haag.

Nothdurfter, U. & Hermans, K. (2018), Meeting (or not) at the street level? A literature review on street-level research in public management, social policy and social work. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 27(3), p. 294-304.

OECD. (2018). Education at a Glance 2018. Retrieved on March 17, 2021 from:

[https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/education-at-a-glance-2018\\_eag-2018-en#page1](https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/education-at-a-glance-2018_eag-2018-en#page1)

Orfield, G. & Lee, C. (2005). Why Segregation Matters: Poverty and Educational Inequality. *The Civil Rights Projects*, p. 1-47. Harvard University, Cambridge.

PO-Raad. (2021). Tweede Kamer in debat over Nationaal Programma onderwijs na corona. Retrieved on March 17, 2021 from: <https://www.poraad.nl/nieuws-en-achtergronden/tweede-kamer-in-debat-over-nationaal-programma-onderwijs-na-corona>

Portillo, S. & Rudes, D. (2014). Construction of justice at the street level. *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 10(1), p. 321-334.

Rahman, M. S. (2017). The Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches and Methods in Language “Testing and Assessment” Research: A Literature Review. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 6(1), p. 102-112.

Roller, M. R. & Lavrakas, P. J. (2015). *Applied qualitative research design: A total quality framework approach*. The Guilford Press, New York.

Saldaña, J. (2013). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. SAGE Publications Ltd, Newbury Park.

Sheppard, V. (2021). *Research Methods for the Social Sciences: An introduction*. BCCampus.ca.

The Michigan Law Review Association. (1981). Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services by Michael Lipsky. *Michigan Law Review*, (79)4, p. 811-814.

Thomann, E., Van Engen, N. & Tummers, L. (2018). The Necessity of Discretion: A Behavioral Evaluation of Bottom-Up Implementation Theory. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 28(4), p. 583-601.

Tummers, L. G., Bekkers, V. J. J. M., Vink, E. & Musheno, M. (2015). Coping During Public Service Delivery: A Conceptualization and Systematic Review of the Literature, *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 25(4), p. 1099-1126.

UNICEF. (2018). An Unfair Start. Retrieved on March 17, 2021 from: <https://www.unicef.org/reports/unfair-start>

Verkiezingsgids. (2021). Gelijke kansen in het onderwijs. Retrieved on March 17, 2021 from: <https://verkiezingsgids.nl/gelijke-kansen-in-het-onderwijs/>

Wei, Y. D., Xiao, W., Simon, C. A., Liu, B. & Ni, Y. (2018). Neighborhood, race and educational inequality. *Cities*, 73, p. 1-13.

XPAT.nl. (n.d.). The Dutch Education System. Retrieved on June 8, 2021 from:  
<https://www.xpat.nl/moving-to-netherlands/netherlands-facts/national-education-system/>

Zang, X. (2016). Research on Street-Level Discretion in the West: Past, Present, and the Future. *Chinese Political Science Review*, 1(4), p. 610-622.

## Appendix I.

### **Interview Guide\***

Research Master Thesis: Educational inequality in the Netherlands  
*Masterscriptie: Onderwijsongelijkheid in Nederland*

Policies targeting school segregation from the perspective of street-level bureaucrats  
*Beleid aangaande onderwijssegregatie vanuit het perspectief van frontlijnwerkers*

\*for researcher only, no parts were shared with any of the research participants before the interview itself

### Interview goals / *Interview doelen*

- **Sketching** the context of the research and introducing myself to the interviewees (street-level bureaucrats in the field of education)
  - **Discussing** the current situation regarding educational inequalities as a result of school segregation and the policies targeting school segregation in the Netherlands.
  - **Inquiring** about the views of street-level bureaucrats regarding the policies targeting school segregation and how they deal with executing said policies
  - **Exploring** possibilities for improving the alignment of policies targeting school segregation in the Netherlands with street-level bureaucrat's discretionary needs
- 
- *Schetsen van de context van mijn master scriptie onderzoek en mijzelf introduceren*
  - *Bespreken van de huidige situatie rondom de onderwijsongelijkheid als gevolg van school segregatie en het beleid aangaande school segregatie in Nederland*
  - *Vragen naar de kijk van frontlijnwerkers op het beleid aangaande onderwijssegregatie in Nederland en hoe zij met dit beleid omgaan*
  - *Verkennen van mogelijkheden om het beleid tegen onderwijssegregatie beter aan te laten sluiten op de discretionaire behoeften van de frontlijnwerkers*

### Interview introduction / *Interview introductie*

My name is Dana Huibers and I am a master student at the University of Leiden. I am following the research Master in Public Administration for which I am currently in the process of writing my thesis. The overarching theme of my Master thesis is the educational inequality as a result of school segregation in the Netherlands. The intention of my research is to investigate, from the perspective of school directors and teachers, the views on the policies regarding school segregation in the Netherlands and how these street-level bureaucrats (public service workers who interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs, and who have substantial discretion in the execution of their work)<sup>1</sup> and their managers deal with executing said policies.

The research consists of qualitative interviews with school directors and teachers in two different municipalities within the Netherlands. The two municipalities of focus are Almere and Den Haag. These two municipalities are considered to be big within the Netherlands, but each have a different level of school segregation.<sup>2</sup> By comparing these two municipalities on the information gathered from the different qualitative interviews, the aim is to answer the following, overarching research question: “To what extent do the policies targeting school segregation (already existing and new)<sup>3</sup> within the Netherlands align with the discretionary needs of the street-level bureaucrats executing them on the ground?”

---

<sup>1</sup> Akosa, F. & Asare, B.E. (2017). Street-Level Bureaucrats and the Exercise of Discretion. In: *Global Encyclopedia of Public Administration, Public Policy, and Governance*, ed. Farazmand, A. Springer, Cham.

<sup>2</sup> [Inspectie van het Onderwijs. \(2020\). Technisch rapport - Segregatie. Retrieved on April 13, 2021 from: <https://www.onderwijsinspectie.nl/documenten/rapporten/2020/04/22/technisch-rapport-svho-2020-segregatie>](https://www.onderwijsinspectie.nl/documenten/rapporten/2020/04/22/technisch-rapport-svho-2020-segregatie)

<sup>3</sup> Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur & Wetenschap. (2020). Beleidsagenda tegen segregatie in het funderend onderwijs. *Kamerbrief*. Retrieved on March 1, 2021 from: [https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/brieven\\_regering/detail?id=2020Z25514&did=2020D53577](https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/brieven_regering/detail?id=2020Z25514&did=2020D53577)

*Mijn naam is Dana Huibers en ik ben een masterstudent aan de Universiteit Leiden. Ik volg de masteropleiding Public Administration en schrijf momenteel mijn masterscriptie. Het overkoepelende thema van mijn masterscriptie is de onderwijsongelijkheid als gevolg van onderwijssegregatie in Nederland. Binnen mijn onderzoek wil ik graag vanuit het perspectief van frontlijnwerkers (uitvoerende functionarissen waarvan het alledaagse werk zich kenmerkt door veelvuldig contact met burgers en een aanzienlijke mate van beleidsvrijheid)<sup>4</sup> te weten komen hoe zij kijken naar het huidige beleid aangaande onderwijssegregatie in Nederland en hoe zij met dit beleid omgaan.*

*Het onderzoek bestaat uit kwalitatieve interviews met schoolleiders en docenten binnen twee gemeenten in Nederland. De twee gemeenten in kwestie zijn Almere en Den Haag. Deze gemeenten worden alle gezien als grote gemeenten in Nederland, maar hebben alle twee een verschillende mate van onderwijssegregatie.<sup>5</sup> Door deze gemeenten te vergelijken op basis van de inzichten uit de verschillende kwalitatieve interviews hoop ik antwoord te kunnen geven op de hoofdvraag van mijn onderzoek: "In hoeverre komt het beleid tegen onderwijssegregatie (bestaand en nieuw)<sup>6</sup> overeen met de discretionaire behoeften van scholen en docenten in Nederland?"*

---

<sup>4</sup> Moors, H. & Bervoets, E. (2013). Frontlijnwerkers in de veiligheidszorg. Gevalstudies, patronen, analyse. Boom Lemma uitgevers, Den Haag.

<sup>5</sup> Inspectie van het Onderwijs. (2020). Technisch rapport - Segregatie. Retrieved on April 13, 2021 from: <https://www.onderwijsinspectie.nl/documenten/rapporten/2020/04/22/technisch-rapport-svho-2020-segregatie>

<sup>6</sup> Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur & Wetenschap. (2020). Beleidsagenda tegen segregatie in het funderend onderwijs. Kamerbrief. Retrieved on March 1, 2021 from: [https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/brieven\\_regering/detail?id=2020Z25514&did=2020D53577](https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/brieven_regering/detail?id=2020Z25514&did=2020D53577)

## Interview structure / *Interview structuur*

Policies/measures that form the framework conditions to address the issue of school segregation, the “uneven distribution of pupils in schools, according to their social origin, ethnic group, sex or any other ascriptive characteristic” (Bonal & Bellei, 2019, p. 1), in the Netherlands are currently in place. An overview of these policies is written down in chapter 2 of this thesis. This overview will also be present during the interview and could be shown to the interviewees if needed. The interview itself will consist of the following structure/questions:

*Richtlijnen om onderwijssegregatie, de ongelijke verdeling van leerlingen met verschillende etnische en/of sociaaleconomische achtergronden, in Nederland tegen te gaan zijn opgesteld door de Nederlandse overheid. Een overzicht van deze maatregelen is opgenomen in hoofdstuk 2 van deze masterscriptie. Dit overzicht zal ook aanwezig zijn tijdens het interview zodat de participanten deze kunnen inzien indien nodig. De volgorde van vragen/structuur voor het interview luidt als volgt:*

### **Policies in place (topic of inquiry 1 + 2)**

I. How do you experience school segregation to be present in your region/school/class?  
*Hoe ervaart u de aanwezigheid van onderwijssegregatie binnen uw regio/school/klas?*

II. What does your school do against school segregation? Does the school have any policies targeting the issue?

If yes, where do these policies come from? If no, why not?

*Wat doet uw school tegen onderwijssegregatie? Heeft de school beleid dat is gericht op dit probleem?*

*Zo ja, hoe horen jullie over dit beleid? Zo nee, waarom niet?*

Potential follow-up question

a. Are you aware if/whether there are policies targeting school segregation in place in your municipality/on national level? If yes, what do they entail?

*Bent u op de hoogte of/dat er beleid tegen onderwijssegregatie is binnen uw gemeente/op nationaal niveau? Zo ja, wat houdt dit beleid naar uw idee in?*

III. In your opinion, how effective are these policies or would/could these policies be (national, municipal and school level)?

*In uw opinie, hoe effectief is dit beleid/zijn deze maatregelen of zou dit beleid kunnen zijn (nationaal-, gemeente- en schoolniveau)?*

**Use of discretion (topic of inquiry 2)**

- IV. To what extent do you shape the policies targeting school segregation yourself?

*In hoeverre geeft u zelf invulling aan dit beleid/het tegengaan van onderwijssegregatie?*

Potential follow-up question

- a. How are you trying to do so?

*Hoe proberen jullie eigen invulling te geven?*

- V. How do you perceive the already existing policies and the new agenda to influence your ability to shape the policies targeting school segregation yourself, and why?

Does it have a restrictive or a conducive effect? Is there a difference between the two?

*Op welke manier beïnvloeden de al bestaande maatregelen en de nieuwe richtlijnen de mate waarin jullie eigen invulling geven aan het beleid gericht op onderwijssegregatie, en waarom?*

*Hebben deze een beperkend of bevorderend effect? Is er een verschil tussen deze twee?*

Potential follow-up question

- a. To what extent would you like to, or do you feel like you could shape these policies yourself?

*In hoeverre zouden jullie willen, of hebben jullie de ruimte om eigen invulling te geven aan dit beleid/het tegengaan van onderwijssegregatie?*

**Importance of discretion (topic of inquiry 3)**

- VI. How important is the possibility of shaping the policies against school segregation yourself for you, and why?

*Hoe belangrijk vindt u het kunnen geven van een eigen invulling aan het beleid tegen onderwijssegregatie, en waarom?*

- VII. Do you feel you are still able to meet every student's individual needs with these policies in place?

*Heeft u het idee dat u nog steeds kan voldoen aan een ieders leerling individuele behoeftes in de klas?*

- VIII. How would you like to exercise your discretionary power in shaping policies targeting school segregation?

*Hoe zou u het liefst invulling willen geven aan het beleid tegen onderwijssegregatie?*

**(Potential) final questions**

IX. Have changes become visible within (any of) these two municipalities regarding school segregation? Which policies/measures/initiatives were especially helpful?

*Zijn er al veranderingen merkbaar in (een van) van deze twee gemeenten wat betreft onderwijssegregatie? Welke maatregelen/initiatieven waren hier vooral succesvol voor?*

X. Are you aware of the Gelijke Kansen Alliantie and what they can do for you?

*Zijn jullie op de hoogte van de Gelijke Kansen Alliantie en wat zij wellicht voor jullie kunnen betekenen?*

Potential follow-up question

a. Would you like to get help/assistance in targeting school segregation?

*Zou u hulp wensen met het probleem van onderwijssegregatie?*

## Interview Gelijke Kansen Alliantie / *Interview Gelijke Kansen Alliantie*

### **In general**

- I. What is the role of the Gelijke Kansen Alliantie in targeting school segregation in the Netherlands?

*Wat is de rol van de Gelijke Kansen Alliantie in het tegengaan van onderwijssegregatie in Nederland?*

- II. What is the experience of the Gelijke Kansen Alliantie with translating national policies targeting school segregation towards municipalities and/or schools in the Netherlands? What difficulties do you run into? Do you have concrete examples?

*Wat is de ervaring van de Gelijke Kansen Alliantie met het vertalen van het beleid naar gemeenten en/of scholen in Nederland? Waar lopen jullie tegenaan? Heeft u hier concrete voorbeelden van?*

- III. How is the feedback from municipalities and schools on the policies targeting school segregation in the Netherlands?

*Hoe is de feedback van gemeenten en scholen aangaande het beleid tegen onderwijssegregatie in Nederland?*

### **Municipality specific (Almere and Den Haag)**

- IV. What do the municipalities of Almere and Den Haag do against school segregation?

*Wat doen de gemeenten Almere en Den Haag tegen onderwijssegregatie?*

- V. What do schools within the municipalities of Almere and Den Haag do against school segregation?

*Wat doen scholen zoal binnen de gemeenten Almere en Den Haag tegen onderwijssegregatie?*

- VI. What are the experiences of/how is the feedback from the municipalities of Almere and Den Haag and/or schools within these two municipalities regarding the policies targeting school segregation?

*Welke ervaringen zijn er/feedback is er vanuit de gemeenten Almere en Den Haag en/of de scholen binnen deze twee gemeenten aangaande het beleid tegen onderwijssegregatie?*

VII. Have changes become visible within (any of) these two municipalities regarding school segregation? Which policies/measures/initiatives were especially helpful?

*Zijn er al veranderingen merkbaar in (een van) van deze twee gemeenten wat betreft onderwijssegregatie? Welke maatregelen/initiatieven waren hier vooral succesvol voor?*

## Appendix II.

### **Consent Form\* / Toestemmingsformulier\***

Research Master Thesis: Educational inequality in the Netherlands  
*Masterscriptie: Onderwijsongelijkheid in Nederland*

Policies targeting school segregation from the perspective of street-level bureaucrats  
*Beleid aangaande onderwijssegregatie vanuit het perspectief van frontlijnwerkers*

\*shared in its entirety with the research participants

## Introduction / *Introductie*

My name is Dana Huibers and I am a master student at the University of Leiden. I am following the research Master in Public Administration for which I am currently in the process of writing my thesis. The overarching theme of my Master thesis is the educational inequality as a result of school segregation in the Netherlands. The intention of my research is to investigate, from the perspective of school directors and teachers, the views on the policies regarding school segregation in the Netherlands and how these street-level bureaucrats (public service workers who interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs, and who have substantial discretion in the execution of their work)<sup>7</sup> and their managers deal with executing said policies.

The research consists of qualitative interviews with school directors and teachers in two different municipalities within the Netherlands. The two municipalities of focus are Almere and Den Haag. These two municipalities are considered to be big within the Netherlands, but each have a different level of school segregation.<sup>8</sup> By comparing these two municipalities on the information gathered from the different qualitative interviews, the aim is to answer the following, overarching research question: “To what extent do the policies targeting school segregation (already existing and new)<sup>9</sup> within the Netherlands align with the discretionary needs of the street-level bureaucrats executing them?”

For my research I would like to interview you, the one reading and filling in this consent form. In case you have any further question, feel free to contact me (details can be found below). Furthermore, you can of course ask them during the interview itself.

Thank you very much for participating!

---

<sup>7</sup> Akosa, F. & Asare, B.E. (2017). Street-Level Bureaucrats and the Exercise of Discretion. In: *Global Encyclopedia of Public Administration, Public Policy, and Governance*, ed. Farazmand, A. Springer, Cham.

<sup>8</sup> [Inspectie van het Onderwijs. \(2020\). Technisch rapport - Segregatie. Retrieved on April 13, 2021 from: <https://www.onderwijsinspectie.nl/documenten/rapporten/2020/04/22/technisch-rapport-svho-2020-segregatie>](https://www.onderwijsinspectie.nl/documenten/rapporten/2020/04/22/technisch-rapport-svho-2020-segregatie)

<sup>9</sup> Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur & Wetenschap. (2020). Beleidsagenda tegen segregatie in het funderend onderwijs. *Kamerbrief*. Retrieved on March 1, 2021 from: [https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/brieven\\_regering/detail?id=2020Z25514&did=2020D53577](https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/brieven_regering/detail?id=2020Z25514&did=2020D53577)

*Mijn naam is Dana Huibers en ik ben een masterstudent aan de Universiteit Leiden. Ik volg de masteropleiding Public Administration en schrijf momenteel mijn masterscriptie. Het overkoepelende thema van mijn masterscriptie is de onderwijsongelijkheid als gevolg van onderwijssegregatie in Nederland. Binnen mijn onderzoek wil ik graag vanuit het perspectief van frontlijnwerkers (uitvoerende functionarissen waarvan het alledaagse werk zich kenmerkt door veelvuldig contact met burgers en een aanzienlijke mate van beleidsvrijheid)<sup>10</sup> te weten komen hoe zij kijken naar het huidige beleid aangaande onderwijssegregatie in Nederland en hoe zij met dit beleid omgaan.*

*Het onderzoek bestaat uit kwalitatieve interviews met schoolleiders en docenten binnen twee gemeenten in Nederland. De twee gemeenten in kwestie zijn Almere en Den Haag. Deze gemeenten worden gezien als grote gemeenten in Nederland, maar hebben alle twee een verschillende mate van onderwijssegregatie.<sup>11</sup> Door deze gemeenten te vergelijken op basis van de inzichten uit de verschillende kwalitatieve interviews hoop ik antwoord te kunnen geven op de hoofdvraag van mijn onderzoek: "In hoeverre komt het beleid tegen onderwijssegregatie (bestaand en nieuw)<sup>12</sup> overeen met de discretionaire behoeften van scholen en docenten in Nederland?"*

*Voor mijn onderzoek zou ik u, degene die dit toestemmingsformulier invult en leest, graag willen interviewen. Voor het geval u verdere vragen heeft, neem dan gerust contact met mij op (mijn contactgegevens kunt u onderaan dit document vinden). Ook kunt u deze uiteraard tijdens het interview aan mij stellen.*

*Heel erg bedankt dat u wilt deelnemen!*

---

<sup>10</sup> Moors, H. & Bervoets, E. (2013). Frontlijnwerkers in de veiligheidszorg. Gevalstudies, patronen, analyse. Boom Lemma uitgevers, Den Haag.

<sup>11</sup> [Inspectie van het Onderwijs. \(2020\). Technisch rapport - Segregatie. Retrieved on April 13, 2021 from: <https://www.onderwijsinspectie.nl/documenten/rapporten/2020/04/22/technisch-rapport-svho-2020-segregatie>](https://www.onderwijsinspectie.nl/documenten/rapporten/2020/04/22/technisch-rapport-svho-2020-segregatie)

<sup>12</sup> Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur & Wetenschap. (2020). Beleidsagenda tegen segregatie in het funderend onderwijs. Kamerbrief. Retrieved on March 1, 2021 from: [https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/brieven\\_regering/detail?id=2020Z25514&did=2020D53577](https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/brieven_regering/detail?id=2020Z25514&did=2020D53577)

## Consent to take part in research / Toestemming voor deelname onderzoek

- I ..... voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
- *Ik ..... stem er vrijwillig mee in deel te nemen aan dit onderzoek.*
  
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- *Ik begrijp dat wanneer ik toestem deel te nemen aan het onderzoek, ik mij op elk moment kan terugtrekken of kan weigeren elk van de vragen te beantwoorden zonder dat daar consequenties aan vast zitten.*
  
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview at any time after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
- *Ik begrijp dat ik op elk moment na mijn interview de toestemming om de data van mijn interview te gebruiken kan terugtrekken. In dat geval wordt het interview materiaal vernietigd.*
  
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- *Het doel en de aard van het onderzoek zijn mij schriftelijk uitgelegd en ik heb de gelegenheid gehad vragen te stellen aangaande het onderzoek.*
  
- I understand that participation involves participating in a semi-structured qualitative interview on the topic of school segregation in the Netherlands and the policies targeting this issue in relation to my own discretion when implementing these policies.
- *Ik begrijp dat het meedoen aan dit onderzoek inhoudt dat ik deelneem aan een semigestructureerd kwalitatief interview dat gaat over het beleid tegen onderwijssegregatie in Nederland en mijn eigen discretie in relatie tot het implementeren van dit beleid.*
  
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- *Ik begrijp dat ik niet direct zal profiteren van het deelnemen aan dit onderzoek.*
  
- I agree to my interview being audio recorded.
- *Ik ga er mee akkoord dat mijn interview audio wordt opgenomen.*

- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- *Ik begrijp dat alle informatie die ik verstrek binnen dit onderzoek vertrouwelijk wordt behandeld.*
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name, disguising the name of the school/organisation I work for with a number, and disguising any other details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about. The only information that will be retained is my working position.
- *Ik begrijp dat binnen het rapporteren van de resultaten van dit onderzoek mijn identiteit anoniem zal blijven. Dit wordt gedaan door middel van het veranderen van mijn naam, het nummeren van de naam van de school/organisatie waar ik werk en het verbergen van elk ander detail binnen mijn interview dat mijn identiteit zou kunnen onthullen of de identiteit van de mensen waarover ik spreek. Het enige stukje informatie dat zal worden behouden is mijn werkpositie.*
- I understand that disguised/anonymized extracts from my interview may be quoted in the researchers written dissertation and during the researcher's dissertation defence.
- *Ik begrijp dat geanonimiseerde fragmenten uit mijn interview mogen worden geciteerd in de onderzoekers scriptie en tijdens de onderzoekers scriptie verdediging.*
- I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm, they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.
- *Ik begrijp dat als ik de onderzoeker informeer dat ikzelf of iemand anders risico loopt op schade/gevaar, dit wellicht aan de relevante autoriteiten zal moeten worden gemeld – dit zal eerst met mij worden besproken, maar moet wellicht gemeld worden met of zonder mijn toestemming.*
- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be captured via phone (in person) or laptop (online) and will be encrypted and stored on the researcher's laptop only to be accessed by the researcher in order to transcribe and anonymize them.

- *Ik begrijp dat getekende toestemmingsformulieren en originele audio opnames zullen worden opgenomen via mobiele telefoon (persoonlijk) of laptop (online) en zullen worden versleuteld en bewaard op de onderzoekers laptop waartoe alleen de onderzoeker toegang heeft om deze te transcriberen en te anonimiseren.*
- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for two years from the date at which the exam board has confirmed the results of the researcher's dissertation.
- *Ik begrijp dat een afschrift van mijn interview waarin alle identificerende informatie is verwijderd zal worden bewaard voor een periode van twee jaar vanaf de datum dat de examencommissie het resultaat van de onderzoekers scriptie heeft bevestigd.*
- I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
- *Ik begrijp dat onder de wetgeving inzake vrijheid van informatie, ik het recht heb om de informatie die ik heb gegeven elk moment binnen de bovengenoemde periode kan inzien.*
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.
- *Ik begrijp dat het mij vrij staat elk van de onderzoekers betrokken bij dit onderzoek te contacteren voor verdere verduidelijking en informatie.*

Contact details researcher / *contactgegevens onderzoeker*  
 Dana Huibers, MSc student Leiden University  
[s2885271@vuw.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:s2885271@vuw.leidenuniv.nl)

Signature of research participant / *Handtekening van onderzoek deelnemer*

-----

Signature of participant  
*Handtekening deelnemer*

-----

Date  
*Datum*

Signature of researcher / *Handtekening onderzoeker*

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study  
*Ik ben ervan overtuigd dat de deelnemer geïnformeerde toestemming geeft om deel te nemen aan dit onderzoek*

-----  
Signature of researcher  
*Handtekening onderzoeker*

-----  
Date  
*Datum*