

Keynote3: How Economic Inequality in Society Shapes Student Outcomes in Secondary Schools

Wednesday 3 September 2025 12:00 (1 hour)

Abstract:

How does living in a society with greater economic inequality affect students in school? Research on the psychological consequences of economic inequality has primarily focused on adults in their everyday lives, showing that residing in a more unequal society or region leads individuals to become more focused on status, more concerned with relative achievement, and more competitive. In this presentation, we will show that societal economic inequality also affects students in school settings: Students living in more unequal countries tend to perceive their schoolmates as more competitive and, in turn, become more competitive themselves. Because competitiveness can have opposing effects—threatening for some individuals and challenging for others—we will examine how the fact that societal inequality fosters an ethos of competitiveness in schools may help explain the complex, multifaceted, and sometimes opposing effects of exposure to economic inequality on a range of student outcomes, including achievement emotions, cheating behaviors, cooperative attitudes, and the achievement gap between students from higher- and lower-income backgrounds. We will conclude by reflecting on the implications for teaching, with a particular focus on psychology.

Biographical information:

Dr. Nicolas Sommet is a social psychologist and Head of Research at the LIVES Centre at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland. His research interests include examining the psychological consequences of economic inequality, understanding achievement motivation, and making statistics more accessible. Nicolas Sommet has been awarded an SNSF Ambizione grant (2020–2024) to study how residing in places with high income inequality predicts well-being. He is also the co-recipient of an SNSF Spark grant (2019–present) to conduct large-scale cross-national replication of the psychological effects of social class. He is an associate editor at the European Journal of Social Psychology and member of the executive committee of Association pour la Diffusion de la Recherche Internationale en Psychologie Sociale (ADRIPS).

Is the first author also the speaker?

Yes

If first author is not the speaker, please indicate speaker's name here:

Please indicate up to five keywords regarding the content of your contribution

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