



Prof. Jetske Strijbos
EAPRIL 2025 keynote speaker

Jetske Strijbos is an assistant professor in the Master of Primary Education program at the School of Educational Studies at UHasselt (Belgium). After more than 15 years of professional experience in education - as a teacher, teacher trainer, policy advisor, and education manager - she began her academic career at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), where she obtained her PhD on student participation in urban education. She is currently affiliated with the U-RISE research group at UHasselt, where she furthers her research on citizenship education, with a particular focus on student participation, school connectedness, and dialogical learning environments, especially within metropolitan and highly diverse school contexts. Methodologically, she favors participatory research approaches that actively engage participants. Her research focus is reflected in her active engagement with initiatives that empower children and youth. For instance, she is a member of the learning community on urban education, an international network of scholars committed to the identifying, multiperspectival understanding, and responding sensitively to urban influences on school life. She also contributes to Talentenacademie Limburg (TALim), a local extracurricular, preventive program that supports young adolescents in exploring career paths and building resilience, with the aim of reducing the risk of early school leaving.

“The Power of Disagreement”

This lecture addresses the pressing challenge of social fragmentation and polarization in contemporary technologized democratic societies, and explores the role education can play as a counterforce. Central to the discussion is the question of how children and young people, especially when they hold divergent perspectives, can better understand one another, and what role teachers can play in facilitating this process.

The issue is approached from three interrelated angles. The first part focuses on the power of disagreement within dialogue. Drawing on empirical research, it is demonstrated how disagreement can not only illuminate differing viewpoints among students but also deepen classroom discussions and strengthen interpersonal relationships. Rather than threatening social cohesion, friction can elicit authenticity in communication and emerge as a condition for learning democracy. The second part explores the implications for educational practice. Creating a learning environment where disagreement is not avoided or neutralized but welcomed as a meaningful part of learning requires both teacher professionalism and a school culture that supports open dialogue. This also involves recognising the diverse influences that shape students’ perspectives, ranging from family and peer groups to the digital environments they inhabit. Supporting dialogues in the classroom therefore calls for pedagogical sensitivity to these intersecting contexts, as well as a sustained commitment to building trust, encouraging critical thinking, and fostering genuine human connection. These dynamics are examined and illustrated through concrete examples from both empirical research and everyday classroom practice. The third and final part addresses key methodological questions. How can we study dialogue and disagreement in education in a rigorous and sound way? This section presents insights from participatory research that fosters rich, authentic dialogue, alongside emerging opportunities to analyze interaction patterns using AI-supported methods. These methodological approaches invite renewed reflection on the role of the researcher, power dynamics, positionality, and the need for appropriate research ethics.