



## **Keynote speaker Dr. Reinhilde Pulinx**

### **Short Bio**

Dr. Pulinx has a PhD in Linguistics and Gender & Diversity Studies (Ghent University, Belgium). Her research interest includes discrimination, diversity, multilingualism and social participation. Reinhilde Pulinx is affiliated as a senior researcher and content expert on discrimination and equality with the Centre of Expertise Inclusive Society, University College Leuven – Limburg.

### **Keynote Abstract**

Conversations on difference, diversity, and discrimination

In this lecture, we reflect on the need for a renewed and sustained conversation about difference, diversity, and discrimination in education and society at large. In recent years, our society has been challenged to transform. We were faced with a global pandemic and, almost at the same time, with anti-racist, anti-inequality, emancipation, and decolonialization movements.

To understand social reality, for us and in interaction with others, we try to name that reality. We construct concepts, we define categories for objects, people, or experiences, and we assign labels. These are linguistic processes; through language, we want to try to understand reality while at the same time shaping it. Language, and consequently the concepts, categories, and labels we use, are not static but extremely dynamic. Language is constantly evolving, among other things, based on historical, social, or political developments. It is not just the distance caused by the COVID-19 pandemic that has made dialogue about history, inequality, racism, and decolonization difficult and complex. A new language and vocabulary emerged to address these topics, containing words such as "white privilege," "structural racism," "decolonialization," "woke, and "representation."

In this context, avoiding increasing polarization and re-engaging in dialogue and conversation is needed to move forward towards a more equitable and inclusive society. It is through exchange and dialogue that we can break down the barriers that divide us and build new bridges of understanding and empathy. Additionally, we will translate these more conceptual frameworks into everyday educational practices. This will involve creating "third spaces" where authentic encounters are possible. These spaces are essential for fostering open and honest conversations about difference, diversity, and discrimination and for challenging preconceived notions and biases.

By leaving the zone of comfort and engaging in dialogue, a more responsive and inclusive educational environment can be created that recognizes and respects the diversity of all individuals.