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Holding the Door Open: A Realist Perspective on Intercultural Education and Change

All of us want to make a difference. We want to have our actions matter, and to have an impact on the world around us. But it is not easy to promote change. Not in ourselves, and not in the complex systems and structures of which we are a part. Over the years, I have often thought about how these basic ideas, our drive for change, and the difficulty of it, manifest in relation to the theme of interculturality. This is evident not only in pedagogy, but also in many of the theories and models that are widely used in the field, whether they speak of contact, accommodation, competency development, or agency.

In this talk, I explore the idea of intercultural education and scholarship as agents of change, and the challenges of dealing with systems that are slow to change or resist change altogether. Drawing on both theoretical perspectives and practical experience, I propose a type of realist yet hopeful approach to the pedagogical practices we may employ when embedded in resistant systems. In doing so, I hope to show that it is possible to let go of unfeasible idealism, while not falling back on cynicism.