Who Holds Up the Bridge?

Reflection

I took this photograph at Ba Na Hills in Vietnam. Massive stone hands emerge from the fog, supporting a golden bridge suspended above the landscape. People walk across it together, unable to see the other side.

The image reminds me of students considering the transition from vocational education and training (VET) to higher education.

Many of the students I work with are capable, motivated and ambitious. Yet taking the next step can feel daunting. University may be unfamiliar territory. Some are the first in their family to consider higher education. Others wonder whether they will belong, whether they have the academic skills to succeed, or whether the pathway is really open to them.

Hope, in this context, is not certainty about the destination. It is having enough confidence to take the next step, even when the future remains partly hidden.

This understanding has shaped my work supporting VET students to explore higher education pathways, recognise the strengths they already possess, and imagine themselves succeeding in environments that may once have felt out of reach. The goal is not to convince students that the journey will be easy. Rather, it is to make the bridge visible and help them see themselves on it.

The photograph also prompts a deeper question: who holds up the bridge?

Students carry themselves forward, but hope is rarely an individual achievement. It is sustained through relationships, guidance, encouragement and educational systems that recognise potential rather than deficit. If we want students to imagine a future in higher education, we must also create environments where they can participate, belong and succeed.

Like the hands in this image, hopeful pedagogy may not determine where students go. But it can help make the crossing possible.

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