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The bridges that change us: inquiring in the middle of the gorge

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22.1 Introduction

In this chapter we take up the theme of a 'bridge' to explore how students and tutors engaged together in learning about 'Managing Change' in a South West of England business school. Brunel's suspension bridge in Clifton, Bristol, our home town, offers a physical landscape that has provoked and will shape the questions we wish to explore. 'Managing Change' is a final year undergraduate course where we have been evolving a more student and research led pedagogy with four successive cohorts of students (Page & Gaggiotti, 2012). This process has been driven on the one hand by our desire as tutors to 'change' the subject and rules of engagement of teaching in a business school, and on the other by students who have engaged willingly or not with an approach less familiar to them than the didactic approaches that are more commonly practiced.

Student engagement – or lack of it – is a hot topic for UK business schools and universities. Similarly student led learning is seen by some as a smoke screen for badly prepared teaching, by others as a way of building engagement (Garrison, 1997, Many, Fyfe, Lewis & Mitchell, 1996). Business Schools have long been critiqued, for being factories run on Tayloristic principles of standardisation, measurement, and control rather than a seat of learning (Hopfl, 2005, 65). Yet paradoxically, many business schools, in particular that one's not enrolled in the mainstream thinking, were blamed in the past for not being practical and business oriented.

The theme of an organisation studies conference³²⁰ that we regularly attend, 'bridging', offered a means of exploring and articulating tensions between instrumental 'banking' and more inquiry based and student led pedagogic approaches that may be in conflict, but exist alongside each other.

22.2 The first invitation: to meet on the bridge

The metaphor of the bridge offered tutors an opportunity to engage in research with students to explore and to articulate dimensions of their experiences of change that might otherwise remain outside the frame of their learning about organisations. The opportunity became apparent to us as we allowed ourselves to engage in conversation with each other about our own experiences and memories of Clifton suspension bridge. As we visualised the bridge, suspended between two points across a deep and dramatic rocky gorge, and began to describe its qualities, we found ourselves evoking through this visual memory a rich description of the thoughts and feelings provoked by our engagement with students. This is reflected in the language of our conference abstract. It was through this interaction, that the research project was born – to invite the students to join us on the Clifton suspension bridge to explore their experiences of bridging.

As tutors we were surprised at the rich set of associations with the suspension bridge that were provoked in conversation between us. We discovered that 'bridging' suggested to us a journey through space, an idea and experience of learning as travelling between two points, perhaps from 'not knowing' to 'knowing', through acquiring knowledge. The bridge itself also suggested potential for meeting, a process of engagement between tutors and students, who may bring different modalities of knowing, and through encounter develop new knowing, a synthesis of some kind, through which each may be transformed (Heron, 1992; Levy, 2008).

But our idea of the bridge was also one of a crossing - a dangerous and risky place, suspended in the middle of nothing, over a chasm. Stepping onto such a bridge requires confidence in the technology, and willingness to trust something someone else has built. To engage in inquiry based learning, tutors and students must each play a part in building the bridge. Each must take risks, overcome fears and anxieties, and trust that the technology will help them to cross - yet hold in mind the chasm that is the river gorge below. As we step out onto the bridge, we seek to 'hold a gaze' (Winnicott, 1971) in order to affirm a relationship that can allow different thoughts and feelings to emerge as a resource for learning. Every year we build the bridge anew and 'open' the construction of the metaphor, trying not to 'bureaucratize' students and our metaphorical imagination (Burke 1968), a frequent practice in organization theory.

With this in mind we invite our students to meet with us on the bridge to explore their experiences of bridging and to discover what this might tell them about change.

SCOS 27 Conference abstract (Page & Gaggiotti, 2009)

At the end of the first semester we announced that the first tutorials of the spring term would be held on the bridge. We invited students to meet us there in their tutorial groups at the usual times and asked them in preparation to read our conference abstract. We prepared a brief outline of the purpose of our meeting on the bridge and a link to some historical information about the bridge and Brunel. We wanted to avoid limiting the invitation to using the bridge as an abstract metaphor to apply to organisation change, but rather to invite them to engage with their own embodied experiences of being on the bridge, and to link this to their experiences of change. To this end we asked them to take a photograph that in some way captured this experience, to send it to us with brief reflections about how this might link to their experiences of change. In the following tutorial, we said, we would work with them to explore links between this experience and ways of thinking about organisation change. The following is the exercise we designed.

22.3 The bridge as crossing point, student and tutor experiences

The tutorials took place in a week of exceptional cold, rain and eventually snow. Some of them were scheduled at the end of the day, as light was fading. Transport was difficult, and not facilitated by the teaching timetable. While few (a total of 12 or so) students visited the bridge during the allotted times others visited in their own time, and sent us their photographs.





Picture 1: Lecturer 2 (2009)



Picture 2: Student Group 1 (2008)

The conversations that took place with those who did come took us by surprise. Students engaged differently with us on the bridge, sharing stories about their lives, where they lived and what they were planning to do – it was as if they took hold of an opportunity to engage with us in a more intimate and familiar way, and invited us to engage with them in a context much wider than the module, in their life trajectory.



Picture 3: Lecturer 2 (left) and 1 (right) (2009)



Picture 4: Student Group 1 (2008)

As a student pointed out:

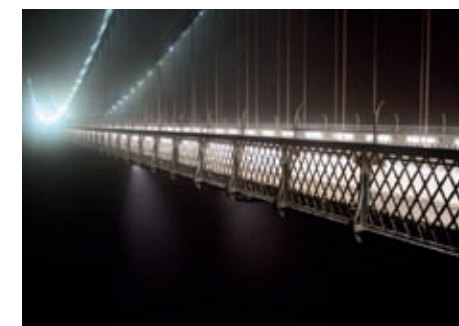
'The bridge influenced my thinking in the way that change inspires change. What I mean by this is when relating to my own university experience is that I chose to come to university and to take a job from school which was a positive experience for me. And then as I am scared of heights this as reflected in the same uncomfortable position I feel I was first in when first arriving at uni and not knowing anyone. The fear of the unknown. However as I got to know my housemates and the university, so in relation to the bridge as I am walking across it I became more comfortable and more confident in the path I had taken. I had personally changed ... the path of change has in fact changed me as a person ...'

This new theme – of uncertainty and vulnerability – was explored more fully in the tutorials that took place later, and in reflections shared by individual students:

'However what did this change in structure of the newly formed organisation mean? Having previously worked for an organisation that had willingly merged with another, I can relate to the feeling of disparity, and questioning the norms of my daily routine. This change made me question, is my job secure? Will the culture change? What is happening? Going back to the metaphor of the 'bridge', I could not see the end road, or the whole picture, I could only entrust then to ensure that when the end had become apparent, I was a destination I want to have reached.'
(Student Group 1, 2008)

For the students and tutors it was as if the experience of being together on the bridge had opened bridges between us of a different order. What was revealed was the fragility of the bridge that students felt they were crossing towards their future, and the many emotions and risks associated with 'not knowing'. For both, students and tutors, the bridge that was now opening up was evoking thoughts and dimensions of experience associated with being suspended between two points that we had not previously considered. The bridge itself seemed to have entered our awareness and to be working some kind of magic. It was as if it had opened up a space within which we were surfacing thoughts that had not previously been articulated or been available for thinking as Christopher Bollas (1987) had put it – 'the unthought known'. This was vividly evoked by our students:

'But now darkness has fallen. We can no longer see our destination. We look to the left, we look to the right, we see nothing. We look down ... we see nothing. All we see is the path that lies ahead of us. Lit by lights of the change. Driven by the faith of our leaders ... or the knowledge that there is no turning back.'
(Student Group 2, 2008)



Picture 5: Student Group 2 (2008)



Picture 6: Student Group 2 (2009)

'I also went back when it had snowed. I attached a photo from this trip. I have not attached a commentary but I really feel the picture speaks a lot about change. The link between two land masses, the sweeping curves, the monuments on either side. the chains that go deep underground on both sides, etc.'

(Student Group 2, 2009)

At the bridge, our students reflected about the reliability of the 'tutor-technology' that will help them to go to the other side. The tutors are a reliable bridge for 'crossing' college, to move to live in London. The 'other side' was a place a physical location but also a state of mind and way of relating to each other and to us, adulthood and independence. In subsequent reflection this 'other' side as explored.

One of our students told us, in the middle of the bridge:

H: 'What do you think about the bridge?'

E: 'I think you are the bridge. You, the tutors, are our bridge. Are those that take us from one side to the other side? We trust that you know how. You know how to make us to finish college ...'

Another student told us:

H: 'Do you know this bridge?'

L: 'Yes, but I'm not from Bristol. Next year I will leave the university ... I will leave Bristol ... I'll going to live in London ...'

With another group of students, bridging between Bristol and London acquired more meanings. In one of our sessions, we crossed the bridge and entered, among other things to protect ourselves from the cold, a small museum/reception that is in one of the sides. There it is explained that the chains of the bridge had been purchased in London and came from the demolition of one of Brunel's bridges there (Hungerford). One of us was invaded by a feeling of sadness for Brunel and for our students. A few days later, looking at the pictures sent by one of our students of the chains of the bridge, we discussed the idea that the students relied on a bridge made from fragments discarded from another bridge, on experience built from failure to build bridges. We began to reflect on how we had built a bridge together in the last two years. A bridge that now is being crossed by our students.

22.4 From crossing point to meeting point: change as quest and transformation

Eleven of the students sent in reflections with the photographs they had taken for the first tutorial. In their reflections students used the physical structure and aesthetic qualities of the bridge quite literally to map and to explore qualities of change in organisations. Their accounts are both reflective and reflexive, making links between their lived experiences of change and the story of setbacks and difficulties of building the bridge. They draw conclusions about the difficulties and

vicariousness of managing change – and express a vulnerability and with for guidance in their own life transitions. The accounts we received fell into three main themes:

Theme 1: the bridge as connection

'Like walking a tight rope only a little safer.'

'My picture shows the cables as part of the structure of the bridge, leading to the stone structure at the far end. This could show there is a small distance to travel until the desired state is reached. However it also shows it is reachable – like walking a tight rope only a little safer.'

(Student Group 2, 2009)



Picture 7: Student Group 2 (2009)



Picture 8: Student Group 2 (2009)

'The joining between two links in a chain.'

'I took many photographs but found none of them to give me any inspiration, it was after all a pretty dull day with poor light ... However, one photo I did take shows the joining between two links of the chain. While staring at this photo I thought it reflected synergy, with many small parts working together to achieve great strength, creating a masterpiece of engineering. In any change situation I imagine attention to detail is important; every individual of an organisation has a role to play, and therefore I should ask myself: does this change account for this individual?'

'The bridge as a symbol in this city'. An international student saw the bridge as a symbol of trust in linking between two social groups who had invested in building the bridge. For him, the bridge represents a shared project in which connection is achieved through active participation. The cables represented knowledge, concepts that were universal. He notes that this symbol has a timeless quality – a value that remains despite social change.

Theme 2: the bridge as an attempt to establish a different order

'I decided to take a picture of the day the snow hit, so the bridge was closed. Symbolising that sometimes even the best laid plans for change can fail.'

Picture 9: Student Group 2 (2009) = picture 6 above

'The bridge as an organisational structure and the toll barrier as a process of operation.'
'The car crossing the bridge is the individual embarking on a journey through the organisation. The structure is present, the processes have to be followed in order to avoid failure and the tool for change could be the shares you buy as a member of the organisation or shareholder.'
'Processes exist in order to keep order and prevent failure.'



Picture 10: Student Group 1 (2008)

Theme 3: The bridge as a quest or journey towards transformation

'Sometimes change is like the bridge in this photograph. We have stepped out, some of us confidently, some of us reluctantly, some of us kicking and screaming. Never-the-less we have stepped out. Led by the evangelistic change agents who painted us a picture of the splendours that await us, we have stepped out onto the bridge of change. In the distance we have a blurry view of green shapes which could very well be the splendours the change agents promise ... or a land of bandits and thieves, like which is rumoured.'



Picture 11: Student Group 2 (2009)



Picture 12: Student Group 2 (2009)

'In the distance we have a blurry view of green shapes which could very well be the splendours the change agents promise ... or a land of bandits and thieves, like which is rumoured. But now darkness has fallen. We can no longer see our destination. We look to the left, we look to the right, we see nothing. We look down ... we see nothing. All we see is the path that lies ahead of us. Lit by lights of the change. Driven by the faith of our leaders ... or the knowledge that there is no turning back.'
 (Student Group 2, 2009)

'In the end, I decided to take two pictures, both from the middle of the bridge, looking along it (from the first person perspective) in both directions. I chose this particular set of images as I feel it demonstrates being in the transition of change, having multiple options available, with obstacles in the way (as I waited to get other people crossing the bridge in the shot to help show obstacles). My feelings on the matter, are that the picture isn't just about where I am, or what change I have experienced in my life, but what everyone has gone through, whereby, they go through the change, and at some point they take a minute to stop, and look back – maybe thinking, have I made the wrong choice, or where do I go from here – but everyone could have had these thoughts during a transition of change.'
 (Student Group 2, 2009)

This theme of the journey or a quest on which students were embarked, and in which in students' minds tutors too played a role, was explored in a further round of inquiry, with students, using the social photo matrix as a method (Sievers, 2009). In the following section we discuss these findings.

22.5 The second invitation – to reflect together on the experience of being on the bridge

Tutorials on the bridge were followed by a second tutorial where students were asked to reflect together on photographs they had taken and to make links between reflections and associations provoked by the pictures and organisational change. Photographs from students and tutors were collated and shown using a PowerPoint slideshow, allowing approximately half a minute for each slide. We invited students first to record individually thoughts or feelings provoked by each photograph, and then to discuss them together, and to make a poster that captured their shared reflections.

Tutorials were attended by about half of those eligible – three groups of approximately eleven out of a possible twenty five in each – a good proportion for this time of the year. We found that many more students than those who had met us on the bridge had visited it in their own time and continued to send us their photographs and reflections. We were surprised in many ways by what happened next.

After a very short time students engaged with the slideshow with concentrated attention – an unusual contrast to the usual chaotic interactions and banter to which we were used. After half an hour or so we asked them in their sub groups to create a poster presenting themes from their reflections. These were then presented to the tutorial group.

Almost all the students drew the bridge in the centre of their posters - inserting more or less words at each end, and around it. The posters were evocative, some an explosion of conflicting emotion and experiences, others more minimalist, evoking a sense of a journey towards an uncertain destination.



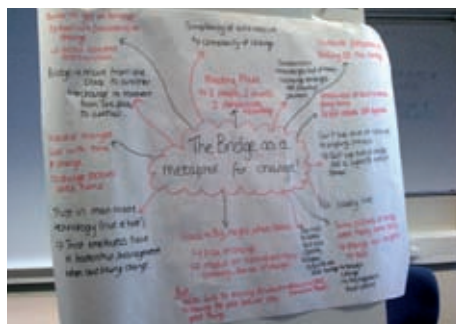
Picture 13: Poster of Tutorial Group 1 (2009)



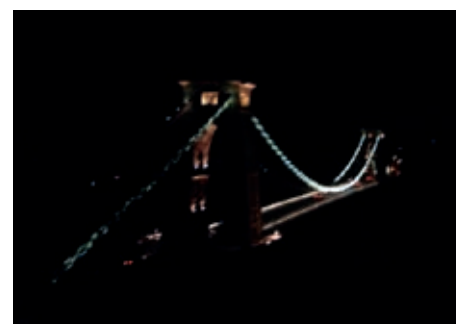
Picture 14: Poster of Tutorial Group 2 (2009)

In these collective discussions, students continued to explore the theme of the bridge as a metaphor for understanding the qualities and processes of organisational change and resistance. However what became apparent was that the bridge evoked for them their own ambivalent feelings about change and their uncertainty about their own futures. This was illustrated in a discussion about one of the posters where the bridge was drawn between a place called 'Bristol' and a place with no name-which when asked students were able only to name 'not Bristol'.

The bridge was constructed in students' discussion both as a change in itself, and providing a means (structure, architectures, support, and process) for change to take place. Tutors were seen by some as being a bridge, or offering a means to cross. The bridge itself evoked strong feelings – nausea, fear of heights, risk, exposed, powerlessness/no control, no safety net; speed, danger, urgency; questions of trust, fear, uncertainty; the unknown destination, impossibility of seeing the whole when you are on the bridge/in the midst of a change; ambiguity, 'safety barriers' there to guide you but also controlling, restriction, confining; power, scale, structure, design, framework, technology; dominance of size, height, scale; the need to plan a change process yet the unpredictability of how people will engage with it or what the outcome will be; time and movement as dimensions of change and timelessness of fixed structure in relation to changing context; complexity of architecture versus complexity of change.



Picture 15: Poster of Tutorial Group 2 (2009)



Picture 16: Tutor 1 (2009)

22.6 Tutor reflections on bridging and parallel process

Being on the bridge provoked tutors to reflect on the bridges we constructed with each other. We had both crossed the bridge several times in the past. This time, we crossed it walking, sometimes alone and sometimes together. The idea of 'crossing' was important in our reflections and feelings.

This idea of crossing associated with purpose and hope of something better was captured by one of our students:

'I could not quite see the link between change and the bridge. One, the bridge, seems to me as a one off activity, whilst the other changes, is constant. On further reflection, I have come to view the two as linked through the emotions that they stir in me - purpose and hope.'

On the other hand, crossing the bridge put some of us in touch with a sense of being free from pre-given purpose or task – an opportunity to savour the experience of being suspended between two points, and from here to enter a state of reverie, a different way of being in the world and different point from which to engage with it.

'I woke this morning full of the image of snow gently drifting – and of the suspension bridge. Last night after my course finished I was drawn to it – it has snowed all day and somehow I felt I had to see it in the snow. I felt anticipation, adventure as I set out driving slowly yet deliberately on ice covered roads after dark, looking forward to being there, the sense of – what? Permission to gaze out from the bridge – to simply be on the bridge, without pressure, somehow suspended between tasks and obligations. To allow myself to follow intuition simply to see what would happen.'

So what was it like?

'Viewing the bridge from above, I climbed up towards the tower. Glimpsing the lights on the suspension chains like a string of pearls fling and caught, suspended, over dark nothingness, anchored at each end by a buttress, a tower. The bridge itself appeared to be floating, lit up, in darkness. A mirage, perfect, and suspended in space.'

'Somehow it felt important to be alone on the bridge this time. In order to fully absorb it, and to reflect on my visits with H. and with the students. I remembered that H. had remarked that students needed time to engage with being there – our role was to simply enable them to be there - while the bridge worked its magic and they could take the time to engage on their own terms. Not to prompt or offer orientations. I noticed that this had somehow enabled me too to simply 'be there' – to suspend thinking and somehow allow my thoughts to drift.'

(Tutor 1, 2009)

The bridge always has taken me from the known (Bristol) to the unknown 'the other side of the bridge'. Suddenly, in the middle of the bridge, I remembered a piece I sang at the choir, 'Toward the unknown region' (V. Williams-W. Whitman):

*Darest thou now O soul,
Walk out with me toward the unknown region,
Where neither ground is for the feet nor any path to follow?*

*No map there, nor guide,
Nor voice sounding, nor touch of human hand,
Nor face with blooming flesh, nor lips, nor eyes, are in that land.*

*I know it not O soul,
Nor dost thou, all is a blank before us,
All waits undream'd of in that region, that inaccessible land.*

*Till when the ties loosen,
All but the ties eternal, Time and Space,
Nor darkness, gravitation, sense, nor any bounds bounding us.*

*Then we burst forth, we float,
In Time and Space O soul, prepared for them,
Equal, equipt at last, (O joy! O fruit of all!) them to fulfil O soul.
(Tutor 2, 2008)*

This sense of being transported from the known to the unknown resonates with the concept of the sacred, an aesthetic category that:

'... emphasises that the reality and fiction of human experience are not rationally distinct. In its various forms, sacredness relates to the unsayable and the unseeable, to the magical and the inviolable, in dreams and premonition to the exceptional and the divine.'
(Strati, 2000, 24)

The shift into pleasure in solitude from which to enjoy a contemplative state of mind seems close to that state of reverie described by Winnicott (1971) as a state entered into by mother and infant of playful creativity, developed in adults as a state of free association and creativity. Benjamin (2004) also in her concept of intersubjectivity speaks to the reciprocal, active sense of presence of another mind and the difficulty of sustaining this in actual psychic experience, where subject to subject relating tends to break down in favour of subject to object, and a loss of connection or reduction of two to one. It seemed that students were taking up from our invitation to inquiry as a new way of relating to theory, mediated by experiencing themselves as independent thinkers and centres of experience.

22.7 Discussion: Dimensions of Change

The process we adopted for discussion in tutorials was inspired by the Social Photo Matrix developed by Sievers (2008). Over a twelve week period, Sievers invited 15 or so students in a department of management and economics in a German new university to take pictures of their university, and at weekly seminars to share their associations to these pictures. The pictures and reflections were understood to belong to the collective, rather than as specific to any individuals. The meanings are explored for their social content, rather than for their meanings brought to them by individuals. The seminar had the working hypothesis that the photos would allow access to 'the unconscious of the university' to the extent that associating to the pictures and amplifying the thoughts would 'foster the thinking of thoughts that had not been thought before' (237). This proved to be the case, as many anxieties and fears were raised though that that had not been spoken about previously. The photos became a means for new ways of thinking about the university (24) – for speaking out about what cannot be expressed officially.

In our seminars something similar, and something different, took place. The invitation to make visual representations – first through photographs and then through posters – seemed to access a dimension of experiences of change that had not previously been available for thinking. This experience was one of students' own vulnerability and ambivalence and their sense of being in transition towards an unknown future. Their ambivalence was accessed through the senses and sensations of being on the bridge, suspended about a gorge. It was a quality of felt experience, vividly captured in the drawings they made when invited to capture the feelings and thoughts evoked by the photographs they had taken. Our role as tutors was to act as their guides, to legitimate the act of dwelling in experience, both in our meetings on the bridge and in subsequent reflections. The social photo matrix offered a methodology that enabled students to focus on the visual representations, suspending judgement and intellect, and focusing on their felt experience. The extended epistemology developed for action inquiry provided a means of legitimating our work in the academy where propositional knowledge is privileged and other modalities not accredited.

Heron (1992), in his extended epistemology, identifies four modalities of knowing: experiential, presentational, propositional and practical. Each of these modalities forms the ground for the next, in a cycle of knowing, in which congruence between modalities is the basis of validity. Seeley and Reason (2008) explore the movement between experiential and presentational knowing. They find that propositional knowing can become empty of meaning, when experience is translated directly into proposition, unmediated by the presentational.

'Poised at the edge of the realm of experiential knowing where our senses and imagination meet, we run the risk of the intellect prematurely rushing in with a show of certainty, planning and a quick answer to dispel the anxiety of dwelling in complexity and unknowing ... Using Heron's theory, we see that such a rushed response represents a jump from experiential knowing to propositional knowing, while bypassing presentational knowing altogether. This over valuing of propositional knowing comes at the expense of potentially subtler, rich and more complex presentational knowing.'
(Ibid., 11)



On reflection, we discovered ambivalence in our invitation to the students. On the one hand, we encouraged them to dwell in their experience of being on the bridge, as a source of knowing, and to present this in the form of a photograph that in some way evoked the qualities of this experience. Our intention was to move to propositional mode in discussion together in the second tutorial, through the medium of the social photo matrix. On the other hand, we invited them to use the bridge as a metaphor for thinking about change in organisations, making a link to their previous research and work based experience. While the first was an invitation to dwell in embodied experience, this was an invitation that might have been interpreted as encouragement to remain in propositional mode, a discouragement to dwell in experience of being in the moment. In this second sense, metaphor is used as a conceptual tool, while in the first, the bridge becomes a means of representing meaning made by and specific to the individual knower, through a shared symbolic form (Morgan, 1986).

Students engaged with both dimensions of our invitation, on the one hand, representing in their pictures the felt qualities of their experiences of being on a bridge, in transition, in their life trajectory, and on the other hand, using the structure and chronicle of the building of the bridge as a metaphor to name and to conceptualise processes of organisational change that they had not previously articulated.

Taylor and Ladkin (2009) distinguish four processes through which arts based methods can contribute to management development, and call for further research to test their typology. One of these processes, 'projective technique', is based on Langer's (1942) conception of using art as a presentational form that expresses tacit, embodied knowing as opposed to a discursive form, which represents intellectual, propositional knowing (ibid., 58). They suggest that the 'great benefit of presentational forms is that they provide relatively direct access to our felt experience and draw on our emotional connection to ourselves, others and our experience.' (Taylor & Ladkin, 2009, 56). In their joint reflections students engaged with bridge as it is now, but it also speak of the work of construction and of what made it possible. They note that how people use it may be different to the uses that were planned – the simple act of crossing from A to B and back again. This work of construction, of making bridges, spoke to students and tutors on many levels. It offered a language for talking about change as an activity, or a construction that enables or guides activity. Significantly, it offered them a means to make a bridge between their own experiences of change, and how they might think about processes of change and of managing in organisations. Change is construed both as a series of acts of bridging, and as a construction that enables a crossing, leading from one place to another, where place is understood both as a physical location, an organisational structure or situation, or an individual state of mind.

Thus the process of engaging collectively with the visual images of the bridge that they themselves had made seemed to enable a quality of reflection and of thinking that had not been accessible before. Viewing the photos together in the context of the tutorial and an invitation to further reflection seemed to provoke a more detailed exploration of the aesthetic and structural qualities of the bridge and to link this to aspects of organisational change process that do not appear in the literature of managing change. It was as if the visual offered a medium for representing and presenting dimensions of experience and of knowing that were not available through propositional academic text. For example students commented in their reflections on the unreality and beauty of the bridge viewed as an image from afar. Tutors and students were then able to think

of change designs that have their own symmetry and beauty - and may be similarly suspended in space, disconnected with context and not grounded in reality. The history and danger of building the suspension bridge speaks to the risks and human casualties of the change process and outcomes that do not figure in the plans - and may not figure in the history that is recorded. Several students who visited spoke of their fear of heights and of crossing – would the bridge collapse? Could it be trusted? And if we the tutors were the bridge – could we be trusted? And is trust sufficient to allow the unknown? Or the inevitable chimeras like qualities of the known?

'How is change perceived from an organisations perspective or an employee's perspective? Using the word 'bridge' as a metaphor, when you stand at one end of the bridge you can only see the other end, when organisations begin to change you can never see it as a whole, you cannot get off half way through as it is 'suspended in the middle of nothing' (Page & Gaggiotti, 2009). you have to carry on until you reach the destination on the other side, when making the transition you have to trust that all the workmanship that went into making that bridge which enables you to get to the other side safely '... and trust that technology will help them to cross ... yet hold in mind the chasm that is the river George below.' (Page & Gaggiotti, 2009), similarly, the managers guide you through change, you have to trust them to guide you safely across. Only once you have made that transition to the other side can you see the whole picture of change.'
(Student Group 2, 2009)

Yet:

'We both tutors have a friend who lives in 'the other side of the bridge' who inspired us to reflect about this point. Whenever we cross the bridge, we cross it from one side to another. We think that because we are leaving one side behind us, that side is now in the 'past', a past we 'know'. We are going to 'the other side of the bridge'. If it is your first time crossing, the 'other side' is the unknown. But what happens if one crosses the bridge several times from different sides? What will be the experience of our friend who lives on the other side and cross the bridge from 'our' other side and not to 'her' other side?'
(Tutor 1 and 2, 2009)

One of us who crossed noticed, from the perspective of the other side, the shadow of the bridge reflected across the landscape and gorge below. The shadow, invisible from the 'home' side, seemed to enhance the sense of height, the sense of being part of a landscape yet suspended above it, and evoked a sense of optimism, of unspoken and undefined possibility. A shadow perhaps of the desire and hope expressed by our students as they contemplate their future.





Picture 17: Tutor 2 (2009)

22.8 Conclusions – Shadow of the bridge

We have discovered in writing this chapter that our inquiry on the bridge changed us and our students in ways that we did not expect. There were many parallels with organisational life in what we experienced – the tensions between the planned and the unplanned outcomes that emerged, the pain and the pleasure of not knowing and arriving at new thoughts, the discovery of the aesthetic dimension of knowing through engaging with the bridge as physical structure in a landscape. Most of all, discovering visual expression as a means of surfacing and articulating ‘the unthought known’ and making it available for thinking in the presence of others.

From our perspective as tutors, our approach to engaging with our students requires many acts of bridging. On a practical level, students and tutors engage in pedagogic processes that are different to the familiar but institutionalised ways of learning within the Business School. Tutors and students must each be willing to create bridges in the mind to engage in and to make meaning of this bridging in their work together. These bridges concern ways of learning, and ways of engaging with each other across student and tutor roles. In the minds of students, tutors become trusted guides rather than sources of knowledge. Tutors and students together set out on a journey, in which both may be transformed. In our minds in our role as tutors, we set out to accompany students in their journey, but also to accompany each other as colleagues. The bridging is one that we embody and do together, as we bring to our teaching different sets of literature, life experiences from our travels in different continents, different mother tongues and genders. Students captured the reciprocal sense of creative play that we sometimes bring to our bridging. Working with aesthetic and emotional modalities of knowing alongside the cognitive, as a basis for developing student led critical inquiry, requires bridging and interpretation. In the academy, these aesthetic and experiential modalities must be translated into – but not reduced to – propositional knowing in order to be validated or recognised. Furthermore, these different and unfamiliar ways of learning must be linked and anchored to the institution through accreditation and assessment.

We set out to offer students an experience through which they could explore and expand how they engaged with change, and from this expand their understanding of the nature of change. We found ourselves transformed in the process – caught up in some kind of magic. The experience seems to have transformed our own ways of engaging with the subject of change, releasing us to find our own way of engaging with the subject.

And for us as tutors and authors, our work is still in process. We might call this – shadow of the bridge.

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