Vision as a catalyst for educational change

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Author's Declaration - Certificate of Original Authorship

I, Stephen Harris, declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Education Faculty at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise reference or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

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“Vision without action is merely a dream.
Action without vision just passes the time.
Vision with action can change the world.”

Joel A. Baker

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Abstract

Vision – or more specifically, a shared visioning process, is recognised by many organisational change theorists, to be the key to igniting and sustaining deep change. Educational change has been written about for decades, however is still regarded as an elusive goal. Vision as it directly connects with education as a catalyst for change, has received very little attention. This research looks into that gap.

The research draws from the example of three internationally diverse schools (one each from Australia, New Zealand and Spain), where a shared, co-created vision for collaborative learning environments has been the catalyst for deep pedagogic, cultural and professional change within each community, all the while working from within the legislated curriculum frameworks.

The research involves an examination of the schools' journeys of change through close observation of the communities over a few years and drawing from a range of empirical data. This includes an analysis of multiple semi-structured interviews with the teachers and leaders who were closely involved in the process of visioning and change in each school. These are then drawn together in a cross-case analysis and the research synthesises the findings from these three case studies, drawing a range of implications for future practice. If the vision has sufficient strength, clarity and ownership among the community, then it will provide the momentum to see sustained and embedded change.