

Project Title: An autoethnographic study of the influences on a student's dispositions to dropout of doctoral study: A Bourdieusian perspective

Outline of the research project

Causes of program dropout among research students are suggested as including various situational, dispositional and institutional factors ([Cantwell, Scevak, Bourke, & Holbrook, 2012](#)). This proposed research will attempt to explore the dispositional aspects of research student's dropout of which student expectations and self-esteem, level of family support and prior educational participation will be explored as possible factors ([Wonacott, 2002](#)).

This project proposes an exploration of the dispositional aspects of professional¹ doctoral research dropout within a theoretical orientation framed by Pierre Bourdieu's (1975) sociological notions of *dispositions, habitus and capital*. An autoethnographic methodology using the researcher's own lived experience, combined with accounts of a group of participants who have, or have considered dropping out of doctoral study will be captured via ethnographic interviews to explore the development or abandonment of dispositions towards doctoral research.

The proposed study seeks to explore how a student's choices to persist or dropout are influenced by dispositions to doctoral study. Sociological philosophies suggest that dispositions to doctoral research are inherited from a doctoral reference group or developed from learned knowledge, experiences and beliefs relative to doctoral research education ([Bourdieu, 1977, 1990](#); [Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2007](#); [Davey, 2009](#)). That is, if a student is involved with a doctoral research group, at either a faculty or social level, the nuances of doctoral research may be assimilated from this group. As such, this project will explore how disposition framed by the student's cultural and social capital influences success in doctoral study.

Abstract

Dropout research has historically been focussed on various 'risk factors' attributed to students and tertiary institutions. These factors focus on the effects of student income, race or ethnicity, academic achievement, and behaviours and attitudes on student progression and success ([Brown & Roderiguez, 2009](#)). This research proposal details a project that seeks to contribute to the understanding of student dropout or *attrition* by drawing on an application of Tinto's ([Tinto, 1975](#)) theories on student dropout, as applied to *disposition* as a possible cause of attrition. This research project will focus on post-graduate level student dispositions, habitus and the cultural and social capital of a group of participants and that of the author/researcher in professional doctoral research programs. An autoethnographic methodology has been selected to collect personal experience data of doctoral program dropout whilst an interpretative analytical method framed ([Chang, 2008](#)) around the concept of dispositions, habitus and capital ([Bourdieu, 1977](#)) will be applied to 'make sense' of the collected data. With *dispositions* understood as inherited and oriented around personal and collective beliefs as borne-out in the cultural capital of the student, this proposed research supposes that student dropout can be ameliorated by influencing students beliefs and understandings - their *disposition* - towards further study.

¹ Professional doctorates are typically combinations of course work and an autonomous research thesis where the coursework is completed prior to commencing the research (Cotterall, 2011).



The University of Southern Queensland
Consent Form

HREC Approval Number: **H13REA163**

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Doctoral Student Withdrawal Disposition Research

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Robert Templeton, who is a doctoral student from the Faculty of Education at the University of Southern Queensland. Mr. Templeton is conducting this study for his doctoral dissertation. Dr. Andrew Hickey is his faculty sponsor for this project.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You should read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate. You are being asked to participate in this study because you have withdrawn for a doctoral research program.

● **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to understand the influences on student dispositions to withdraw from doctoral research including pedagogies and supervisor influences. I hope to use what is learnt from the study to ameliorate student attrition from professional doctorate research programs.

● **PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we will ask you to do the following:

1. You will be requested to complete an online interview of 30 to 45 minutes to provide background data concerning your disposition to doctoral research; your reasons for withdrawing from the course; your experiences with the universities provision of information about the course and the support provided by your research supervisor.
2. The interview will be undertaken using Skype software.
3. This interview will be recorded for transcription and analysis.
4. We will ask your permission to undertake the interview.

● **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

We expect that any risks, discomforts, or inconveniences will be minor and we believe that they are not likely to happen. If discomforts become a problem, you may discontinue your participation. Faculty and administrators from the University of Southern Queensland will neither be present at the interview nor have access to raw notes or transcripts. This precaution will prevent your comments from having any negative repercussions.

● **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

It is not likely that you will benefit directly from participation in this study, but the research should help us learn how to improve the completion rate of professional doctorates.

● **PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

You will not receive any payment or other compensation for participation in this study. There is also no cost to you for participation.

- **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of a code number to let Mr. Templeton know who you are. We will not use your name in any of the information we get from this study or in any of the research reports. Within five years of the completion of the study, I will destroy the list that shows which code number goes with your name. Information that can identify you individually will not be released to anyone outside the study. Mr. Templeton will, however, use the information collected in his dissertation and other publications. We also may use any information that we get from this study in any way we think is best for publication or education. Any information we use for publication will not identify you individually.

The videotapes that we make will not be viewed by anyone outside the study unless we have you sign a separate permission form allowing us to use them. The tapes will be destroyed five years after the end of the study.

- **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You can choose whether or not to be in this study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if your physician tells us that continued participation may injure your health.

- **IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact

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- **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

The Human Research Ethics Committee has reviewed my request to conduct this project. If you have any concerns about your rights in this study, please contact the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Southern Queensland by phone on 07 4631 2690 or email at ethics@usq.edu.au. Further details are provided on the internet at <http://www.usq.edu.au/research/ethics/human>.

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Printed Name of Subject

Signature of Subject

Date

Signature of Witness

Date

Robert Templeton

Date