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**The Role of a Dominant Masculinity Discourse in the Decisions of
Early School Leaving Boys in Queensland.**

**Thesis submitted by
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in September 2006

**for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the School of Education
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Ingrid Harrington

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Ingrid Harrington

Date

DEDICATION

To

Nina Kurelauk

15 August 1915 – 27 August 2001

Armas Mumi!

**Mumi, Sa julgustasid mind alati ja uskusid minusse!
Ma tänan Sind minu ergutamise eest koguda julgust minna vastu väljakutsetele!
See väitekirj vajab mul neli ja pool aastat tööd, mille
ma pühendan Sinu mälestuseks!
Ma kannan Sind alati oma südames! Ma tunnen puudust Sinu järel!
Mumi, ma loodan, et Sa oled minu peale uhke!**

Sinu Ingi

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Abstract

The research was motivated by concerns about the consistent pattern of poor retention of some boys to Year 12, and overall poor performance of some boys in Australian schools.

The study broadly drew on critical discourse theory to examine the circumstances surrounding the decision to leave school by 22 boys from three different social locations i.e. provincial, rural and metropolitan, in Queensland, Australia. Adopting Fairclough's (2002) model of discourse as a conceptual framework for this research allowed the exploration of the different socio-cultural practices as perceived by the boys in their broader social context.

For the purpose of the research, a dominant masculinity discourse was understood by using concepts commonly associated with masculinity, namely an individual sense of power and control, independence, and a sense of 'self'. The boys constructed narratives to explain their personal circumstances and what influenced their school leaving decision. Their explanations were identified as seven generative themes (Freire, 1972), and the themes could be analysed through the lens of the three concepts of a dominant masculinity discourse. Analysis of the boys' narratives through these concepts created the opportunity to link a dominant masculinity discourse with their attempts to justify their school experiences and early school leaving decision.

Despite the similarity of the boys' school experiences, there were differences in the range of storylines (Bruner, 1990) identified in their narratives to illustrate their experiences in their broader social context differed. Similarities in the boys' narratives included their belief in the value of learning, and that the *context of school* was unable to provide them with learning that was both meaningful and relevant to their post school pathways.

The study concluded that consideration be given by education researchers to the construction of a dominant masculinity discourse in broader social contexts, when understanding boys' overall performance, engagement and retention at school.

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