Boys and FSL: What, Why, When and How?

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Goals

1. WHAT is the current state of male participation in FSL and foreign languages internationally?

2. WHY are males less interested in language learning?

3. WHEN and HOW should this problem be addressed?

4. Raise awareness of the state of male participation in FSL programs

5. Provide a framework for future research to enhance our understanding
Plan

I. Overview of the state of male participation in FSL and foreign languages internationally

II. Summary of reasons for lack of male interest in second and foreign language learning?

III. Series of questions to guide future research
I. WHAT?
Canadian research indicates approximately 2/3 of students who drop FSL after mandatory years are male (Kissau, 2006; Netten, Riggs & Hewlett, 1999).

- Boys under-represented in French immersion (Allen, 2004) and less motivated in francophone schools (Larocque, 2006).
Proposed Research Questions

1. What are enrolment trends, by gender, in alternative FSL programs?

2. Are male participation rates different when students are within geographical proximity of Quebec or Ottawa where French is frequently needed for employment?

3. What are enrolment trends in areas where French is required past grade 9?

4. When boys do continue to study French in high school, how does their achievement and motivation in French compare to girls’?
International Concern

- Males represent only 23%-35% of students studying foreign languages in upper levels of high school (Carr & Pauwels, 2006).
- In Victoria, Australia fewer than 10% of Catholic high school students studying L2 were male in 2005 (Pavy, 2006).
- Heining-Boynton & Haitema (2007) demonstrated that adolescent males in USA have more negative attitudes toward foreign language learning than do female peers.
However….

• Asian languages more popular amongst boys than European languages like French and Italian (Carr & Pauwels, 2006)

• Boys outnumber girls in Latin classes (Carr & Pauwels, 2006)

• Boys reported more favourable attitudes to German than French (Williams, Burden & Lanvers, 2002)
Proposed Research Questions

1. How does male enrolment in French compare with enrolment in other foreign languages offered in Canada? For example, is the percentage of male enrolment in Spanish or German higher than in FSL?

2. What is it about languages like Latin, Chinese or German that makes them more appealing to certain boys?

3. How could the attributes of popular languages amongst adolescent boys be applied to languages that are less popular?
II. WHY?
Some studies suggest that girls are superior in pronunciation, vocabulary, verbal fluency (McCarthy, 1954)

Different learning styles

Teachers believe that boys need more physical activity and autonomy (Carr, 2002)
BUT

• Biology argument is inconclusive and fails to account for success of many males

• Learners reject the biological differences theory

• More recent research points to societal and environmental explanations for male disinterest (Gipps & Murphy, 1994; Sunderland, 1998)
Proposed Research Questions

1. How pervasive is the commonly held belief of female language learning superiority? How does this belief affect male performance and motivation in the FSL classroom?

2. In what ways do FSL teachers treat boys differently in the classroom? To what extent do FSL teachers attempt to create “male-friendly” classrooms?

3. Does the belief amongst second and foreign language teachers that males are less able language learners result in boys receiving less teacher attention in the classroom?
Pedagogy

- Boys bored by repetition, heavy doses of grammar, irrelevant tasks and lack of L2 use by teacher (Carr & Pauwels, 2006; Court, 2001; Jones & Jones, 2001)

- Boys lament feelings of lack of control (Kissau, 2006; Pavy, 2006)
Proposed Research Questions

1. To what extent is the Communicative Approach to teaching languages being used in FSL classrooms?

2. How would male motivation change in FSL classrooms that were less teacher-centred and offered more student-control?

3. Which pedagogical strategies are effective for reaching males in FSL classes and why?

4. Which pedagogical strategies are used by teachers who manage to retain high numbers of males in their FSL classes?
Socio-economics

• Boys from working-class families appear particularly averse to language studies (Carr & Pauwels, 2006)

• Language learning more real and relevant to lives of affluent boys, many of whom have parents who speak a second language or who have traveled overseas (Carr & Pauwels, 2006)

• Language learning more valued at private schools and those offering international programs

• Career relevance (Carr, 2001)

• Uselessness for a lucrative career (Kissau, 2006)
Proposed Research Questions

1. How do attitudes and motivation toward the study of French in Canada differ amongst socioeconomic groups?

2. How would the prospect of traveling abroad or to Quebec increase male motivation to learn French in Canada?

3. How do public and private schools differ with respect to the promotion of French studies in Canada?

4. What are student beliefs and perceptions about the career-related benefits of learning French in Canada?
Masculinities and homophobia

- Certain subjects viewed as more “male-appropriate”

- Adolescent boys particularly sensitive to gender stereotypes at school (Whitehead, 1999)

- Fear of homophobic backlash and ridicule from other boys (Kissau, 2006)

- “French has the monopoly on femininity” (Carr & Pauwels, 2006)

- “French is a sissy language” (Kissau, 2006)

- French routinely has lowest male participation (Carr & Pauwels, 2006)
Proposed Research Questions

1. Why are boys who pursue academic excellence in French viewed as less than masculine compared to boys who do poorly in French?

2. In what ways do male and female teachers and administrators contribute to and/or reinforce the perception that French is effeminate and a more appropriate field of study for girls than for boys?

3. What can be done to change the perception that French is more appropriate for females? What can parents, teachers and students do to broaden the concept of masculinity to include subjects like French?

4. In what ways do gay males’ participation rates, motivation and achievement in French differ from straight males?
Influence of Peers

- Fearing they will be viewed as feminine, many boys underachieve in L2 classroom to assert masculinity (Kissau, 2006)
- In single-sex classes boys feel less need to differentiate themselves from females (Barton, 1998)
- Results of several British studies suggest academic and motivational benefits of single-sex L2 classes (Cheng, Payne & Witherspoon, 1995; Henry, 2003)
- Not all results are positive (Barton, 1998)
- No Canadian research on topic
Proposed Research Questions

1. What is the impact of single-sex instruction on male and female motivation to learn French?

2. How do the dynamics of single-sex and co-ed second or foreign language settings differ?

3. How do teaching strategies differ in single-sex environments from co-ed classrooms? In what ways are teachers able to better meet the needs of their students in single-sex classes?

4. Are single-sex second or foreign language classes offered in co-ed schools as effective in motivating males as language classes offered in entirely single-sex schools?
Encouragement

- Boys more influenced by encouragement with respect to subject choice than girls (Bartram, 2006; Portelli, 2006)
- Girls receive more encouragement from parents, teachers and peers to study French than do boys (Kissau, 2007; Netten et al, 1999)
- Teachers and parents often adhere to stereotype that males less able and as a result encourage girls more
- Adolescent boys use homophobia as mechanism to police male-appropriate behaviour and thus discourage boys (Martino, 1999)
- Administrative decisions pertaining to guidance counselors and scheduling also discourage boys (Kissau, 2006)
- Depreciated status of FSL instruction (Kissau, 2005)
Proposed Research Questions

1. How does the amount of encouragement students receive to study languages vary according to the language of study? For example, are boys encouraged less to study French in Canada than they are to study other languages like German or Spanish?

2. How do current language policies and school board practices bias against male interest and enrolment in FSL programs?

3. What role do guidance counselors play in the encouragement of boys to study French in high school?

4. How do current curricula and graduation requirements discourage males from studying French?
Male teachers

- Approximately 10% of core French and French immersion teachers in Ontario are male
- 11% of students enrolled in French methods courses are male
- Lack of male teachers reinforces perception that French is for girls.
- Boys think that male language teachers are better (girls divided on this issue)
- Boys feel more comfortable to speak in a class taught by a man
Proposed Research Questions

1. How does the gender of the teacher affect student motivation and achievement in the FSL classroom?

2. What causes males to steer away from a career in teaching second and foreign languages?

3. What percentage of male teachers with FSL qualifications in Canada are not currently teaching French? What can be done to lure these teachers back into the FSL classroom?

4. What can be done to recruit more male FSL teachers?
Questions and comments??