

Motivating Male Language Learners: The Need for “More Than Just Good Teaching”

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Abstract

Four American boys in an advanced high school French class and their teacher were chosen to participate in a research project. An exploratory case study was then conducted to better understand what motivated these boys to pursue their second language (L2) studies and to address the lack of related qualitative research. Through interviews and classroom observations the study shifted attention from what boys dislike or find different about L2 learning to what can possibly be learned from a small number of motivated males who studied an L2 throughout high school. While preliminary in nature, the findings help to confirm the results of previous related research with respect to pedagogical strategies that motivate male language learners. That being said, the findings also suggest that “boy-friendly” teaching strategies may not be sufficient. To motivate their male students, L2 teachers are encouraged to develop a caring relationship with them based on respect in an environment where both students and teacher feel at ease and free to be themselves.

Résumé

On a choisi quatre garçons aux États-Unis dans un cours de français avancé et leur enseignante pour participer dans un projet de recherche. Ensuite, on a mené une étude de cas exploratoire pour mieux comprendre ce qui a motivé ces garçons à poursuivre leurs études d’une langue seconde et, aussi, pour remédier au manque de recherche qualitative sur ce sujet. Basée sur des entrevues et des observations, l’étude a mis l’accent non pas sur les raisons pour lesquelles les garçons ne s’intéressent pas à l’apprentissage des langues, mais, plutôt, sur ce qu’on peut apprendre d’un petit nombre de garçons motivés à apprendre une langue seconde pendant toutes leurs études secondaires. Les résultats de l’étude exploratoire confirment les résultats de la recherche qui existent déjà sur le sujet des stratégies pédagogiques qui favorisent la motivation des garçons à apprendre les langues secondes. Cependant, ils suggèrent aussi que ces stratégies pédagogiques ne suffisent pas toujours. Pour motiver les garçons, il faut encourager les enseignants et les enseignantes des langues secondes à établir une relation personnelle de qualité avec eux qui soit basée sur le respect dans une salle de classe où tout le monde se sent à l’aise.

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Introduction

Since Netten, Riggs, and Hewlett (1999) first reported that boys in Canada were less likely than girls to pursue the study of French as a second language (L2), numerous studies have reiterated the notion that English-dominant, adolescent males lack motivation to learn another language in comparison with their female peers. In a study¹ involving 490 Grade 9 students studying French in Canada, Kissau (2006), for example, reported that of the 122 students who planned to continue studying French the following year, only 35 were male (28.7%). Moving beyond the Canadian context and the study of French, additional research has revealed that adolescent males in the United Kingdom (Jones & Jones, 2001; Williams, Burden, & Lanvers, 2002) and Australia (Carr, 2002; Carr & Pauwels, 2006; Pavy, 2006) have less desire and put forth less effort to learn foreign languages than do their female counterparts. Pavy (2006) reported that in Australia, once language study becomes optional in high school, males represent only 20% to 40% of total enrolment. Angst over the under-representation of males in advanced-level foreign language classes has also spread to the United States (Heining-Boynton & Haitema, 2007). Kissau, Kolano, and Wang (2010) reported that the American boys in their study had less desire to learn Spanish, put forth less effort, and had less interest in getting to know Spanish-speaking people than their female peers. Lack of motivation among English-speaking boys to pursue L2 learning has become a widespread concern.

While the above-mentioned studies have succeeded in drawing attention to the under-representation of males in advanced L2 classes, the research literature, in the process, has constructed a deficit paradigm of the English-speaking, adolescent male language learner. In sharp contrast to the often-pessimistic portrayal, there is a small but important number of reports of successful and motivated male language learners. Kissau, Quach, and Wang (2009), for example, described male students as having very positive attitudes toward the study of Spanish, and in some cases being more motivated than their female peers. Similarly, Carr and Pauwels (2006) reported that in some L2 classrooms boys outnumber girls.

A greater understanding of what motivates male L2 learners may be as informative and as beneficial as understanding what does not. Supporting this claim, in their meta-analysis of research related to boys and language learning published in the *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, Kissau and Turnbull (2008) encouraged further research into which pedagogical strategies are used by L2 teachers who retain high numbers of male students in their advanced L2 classes.

To better understand why many boys do pursue advanced language studies an exploratory case study was conducted involving a high school French teacher and four of her male students studying advanced-level French. Our goal in this investigation was to

¹ Many of the studies mentioned in this article have been previously described in related research by Kissau (see Kissau, 2006, 2007; Kissau, Kolano, & Wang, 2010; Kissau & Quach, 2006; Kissau, Quach, & Wang, 2009; Kissau & Turnbull, 2008).

understand, through the voices of adolescent males, their motivation to persist in their L2 studies throughout high school. We feel that the use of a qualitative approach involving only a small number of boys sets the study apart from others, and thus adds to its value. As part of a project sponsored by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages to target key areas in which greater research in L2 instruction is needed, Wesely (2012) stressed the importance of studies that have investigated gender differences in L2 learning. She lamented, however, that most of these studies have been large-scale and quantitative in nature. Indeed, there is a growing consensus that quantitative studies about gender and language learning are far more abundant than qualitative ones (Norton, 2000; Syed, 2001; Ushioda, 2001).

Literature Review

Prior to delving into an investigation of what motivated a small number of boys to pursue L2 studies throughout high school, it is first necessary to have an understanding of the various factors that may affect male participation in advanced L2 classes. Scholarship has offered multiple explanations of what influences male motivation to pursue language learning.

Pedagogy

Focusing first on pedagogical issues, Jones and Jones (2001) and later Carr and Pauwels (2006) reported that many boys dislike the mimicry and repetition associated with language classrooms. While the repetitive nature of many L2 classes may be equally disliked by both boys and girls (Clark & Trafford, 1995), more recent research has suggested that boys are less willing to tolerate it (Pavy, 2006; Williams et al., 2002).

Control

In teacher-centered classrooms boys often feel as though they have very little control over events in the classroom and over their own success. The notion of control, or lack thereof, has also been mentioned in the literature as a cause of the lack of L2 motivation among many boys (Carr & Pauwels, 2006; Kissau & Quach, 2006; Pavy, 2006). Rotter (1966) reported that people who perceive themselves to have little control in their environments have less motivation to complete tasks than those who do feel a sense of control. Making the link to the L2 classroom, Kissau and Quach (2006) found control to be an important factor in whether or not students chose to continue studying an L2. The authors also reported that the 236 adolescent boys in their study perceived themselves to have less control in their L2 classroom than did their 254 female peers.

Societal Perceptions

Another reason proposed in the literature for the lack of male participation in advanced L2 classes relates to societal perceptions of male-appropriate behaviour (Dörnyei & Clément, 2001). Language learning is frequently viewed as a female pursuit (Gilbert &

Gilbert, 1998), and one that does not align well with traditional views of masculinity (Frank, Kehler, Lovell, & Davison, 2003). For adolescent boys, dropping L2 studies from their schedules may serve as a means of affirming their masculinity (Kissau & Turnbull, 2008). Kissau (2006) reported that even boys who enjoyed studying French often abandoned their study of the language due to fear of being perceived as feminine.

Encouragement

Societal expectations for male behaviour have also been cited when reporting another reason for the under-representation of males in L2 classes. In a study investigating gender differences in encouragement to study French, Kissau (2007) reported “that boys receive less encouragement from parents, teachers and peers to study French because French is a subject traditionally viewed as more appropriate for females” (p. 429). This finding is especially troubling given that McGannon and Medeiros (1995) found boys to be more influenced than girls by the encouragement of teachers, family, and friends to continue or discontinue language study.

Distinctive Nature of L2 Learning

Other reports have focused on how boys perceive L2 learning to be different from other subjects. The British boys in a study by Jones and Jones (2001), for example, emphasized the cumulative nature of L2 instruction and the consequences of falling behind. They reported that L2 instruction places greater emphasis on accuracy than does instruction in other areas, and offers comparatively little opportunity to explore new ideas. According to the researchers, many boys also perceive L2 study as less relevant than other subjects. This finding was supported by Carr and Pauwels (2006). These researchers found that boys from working-class homes did not see themselves travelling abroad where knowledge of another language would be useful, and therefore viewed L2 learning as less relevant to their daily lives. Echoing this sentiment, Jones and Jones (2001) stated that language learning represented an experience that lacked “reality” for many adolescent boys (p. 46).

Motivational Orientation

Research has also shown that adolescent males have different reasons or orientations for studying an L2 than do females (Massey, 1994; Stewart-Strobel & Chen, 2003). A study by Baker and MacIntyre (2000) found that male students had a higher instrumental orientation for studying an L2 than did their female peers. In contrast, the female students in this study showed a higher integrative orientation. In other words, the males were studying the L2 for practical reasons, such as to get a good job, or to fulfill university entrance requirements. The females, on the other hand, were more interested in getting to know and conversing with members of the L2 community. Such gender differences in motivational orientation may be influencing male participation in advanced L2 classes. In a study by Gardner, Smythe, Clément, and Glikzman (1976), the researchers found that the primary reason for students persisting with L2 studies appeared to be having an integrative orientation.

Classroom Characteristics

Research over the past decade has also highlighted characteristics of L2 classrooms that contribute to boys' motivation to learn another language. Drawing from both her research and her own experience as an L2 teacher in Australia, Pavy (2006) emphasized that boys are motivated by language that is of interest to them and that they feel they will actually use in their lives. They want to know the purpose of each lesson, what they are working toward, and if they are making progress. To feel as though they have made progress they must be able to express themselves orally. She stressed, "if [boys] are unable to talk many of them do not see themselves as successful" (p. 7). Pavy also found that boys are motivated by lessons that involve competition and collaboration. She explained that working with others allows boys to discuss their ideas before writing them down, and gives them more confidence. She also emphasized the importance of beginning each lesson with something that will grab the attention of male students and the need to use a variety of instructional strategies to maintain their focus and interest throughout the lesson.

The L2 Teacher

Although all of the above-mentioned classroom characteristics were reported to be important by Pavy (2006), their influence on male motivation was thought to pale in comparison with the influence of the L2 teacher. Pavy stressed that L2 teachers must show their students that they care about them and must be actively involved in their learning. She provided the example of a teacher who moves around the room helping students and reminding them when they may have forgotten something. She added that L2 teachers need to be relaxed, enthusiastic about the language, and able to establish a balance between having fun and maintaining class control.

The work of Clark and Trafford (1995) and Jones and Jones (2001) also emphasized the importance of the teacher in motivating adolescent male language learners. The boys in the study by Clark and Trafford stated that their relationship with their L2 teacher was the most influential factor affecting their attitude toward the subject. They reported to be motivated by L2 teachers who possessed good personalities, who were friendly, who took interest in their students, and who made their lessons lively. Supporting this claim, Jones and Jones added that boys perceive a good L2 teacher to be someone who respects them, who engages them throughout the lesson, who offers them choice, and who maintains a fun, but orderly classroom.

While the work of Clark and Trafford (1995), Jones and Jones (2001), and Pavy (2006) has succeeded in identifying what many boys like or want in an L2 classroom, an overview of the related literature reveals that such research is relatively scarce. The large majority of studies focusing on the under-representation of males in advanced L2 classrooms highlight what boys dislike or find different about L2 instruction. Shedding additional light on what motivates boys to continue studying languages could provide beneficial information to all L2 teachers.

Methodology

As male language learners and experienced L2 teachers at both the elementary and post-secondary levels, we, the researchers, have long been interested in the study of languages among adolescent males. This interest has been reflected in multiple studies we have conducted over the past decade that have investigated the under-representation of males in advanced L2 studies. We recognize, however, that there was a need in the literature for more nuanced, qualitative understandings of what motivates boys beyond the statistically driven discussions that have characterized our own previous studies, and those of many other researchers. It was important, we felt, to document in a more qualitative way what influenced a small group of motivated males to continue learning an L2 beyond required coursework. The exploratory case study that we report here was therefore conducted. As Stake (1995) has explained, qualitative case studies serve the valuable purpose of describing, analyzing, and representing the complexity of a single case. Case studies in language education typically examine individual learners, teachers, or other bounded entities such as a specific language or program (see Johnson, 1992). We framed this participatory inquiry as an *exploratory* qualitative case study for two reasons. First, to our knowledge, no case studies have examined high achieving males' motivation in advanced L2 classrooms. Therefore, our intent was to explore the potential of a more ambitious study. Second, given the limited access to participants that we were accorded in May 2012, we recognized in advance of fieldwork that the degree of contextualization our data would be able to provide would be somewhat limited.

Data Generation and Analytic Method

In the spring semester of 2012, we contacted the World Language Coordinators of three local school districts seeking collaboration in a case study involving boys pursuing advanced L2 studies. The Coordinator for the district where the study eventually took place recommended Mrs. Tracey Coughlin². Of the more than 100 K-12 L2 teachers in the district, Mrs. Coughlin had earned a reputation for recruiting and retaining a high number of males in her Level IV³ French classes. A series of emails followed, with Mrs. Coughlin suggesting that data collection in the form of teacher and student interviews and classroom observations take place in May.

Data generation was driven by 30-minute semi-structured interviews with each of the four boys participating in the study. The questions asked in these interviews were approved by the district's superintendent and were intended to elicit the boys' perspectives on their experiences learning French (see Appendix). A second, very similar interview protocol was also developed for Mrs. Coughlin that sought further insights into what motivated the male students in her advanced-level French class to pursue L2 studies. The

² Pseudonyms were used to protect the anonymity of all participants.

³ A Level I French class is intended for high school students in their first semester of learning the language. Upon successful completion of Level I, students can progress to Levels II, III, IV, and finally Level V, also known as Advanced Placement or AP French.

audiotaped interviews and follow-up questioning with Mrs. Coughlin and her students took place at Abernathy High School (AHS) before, during, and after their second period French IV class.

While one of the researchers conducted an interview, the other remained in the classroom taking observational notes. These fieldnotes were not driven by a particular observational protocol, but rather, were an open-ended attempt to capture the dialogue and interaction among participants as they unraveled. We concluded each session with a debriefing between the researchers on our university campus. These debriefing sessions included a discussion of the interviews we had just conducted and shared oral commentary about what we had seen and/or heard in the classroom that day. These discussions were followed by individual written elaborations of the fieldnote data. We continued to talk together as we transcribed the interviews and began coding the data set that, in its final form, consisted of more than three hours of interview transcripts and 20 pages of typed classroom observations.

As is typical in participatory approaches to qualitative research, data analysis was an inductive, recursive, and ongoing process that accompanied data generation and continued afterward in a transformative interplay of description, analysis, and interpretation of the boys' participation in the advanced L2 coursework (see Wolcott, 2001). Specific procedures or methods for compressing, fashioning, and reading the collected data followed Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw's (1995) practical considerations of the processes of qualitative fieldwork. These included coding as well as in-process analytic writing, initial and integrative memo writing, and content analysis of open-access district archival data. A strict set of priori codes were not assigned. Rather, after multiple readings of the complete data set, the researchers first identified quotations through line-by-line open coding with the comment function in Microsoft Word. These quotations, or bracketed segments of the data, were then organized and reorganized into meaningful categories that ultimately took the form of the themes we present here⁴.

Abernathy High School: "Connecting our students to the world!"

Abernathy High School (AHS) in Monroe County first opened its doors in 2009 and at the time of the interviews was the district's largest high school with an enrolment of 1296 students. An open-access school, AHS served 14 to 18 year-old students in the neighbouring communities. Located on the outskirts of a metropolitan area in the southeastern United States, the county, formerly show horse farmland, had, in the 1990s transitioned into an affluent suburb. In the vicinity of gated communities with names like *Chatelaine* and *Montclair Estates*, horses still grazed behind picketed fencing. In its short history, AHS had developed a reputation for excellence. It proudly displayed for visitors to see both its motto "Connecting our students to the world!" and the fact that it was home to the district's 2010-2011 Principal of the Year. At the time of the study, AHS offered L2 instruction in Spanish, French, German, and Chinese.

⁴ A more detailed explanation of the analytic method used in this study is provided in earlier work by Salas (2008, 2010, 2013).

Mrs. Coughlin

Tracey Coughlin, a white southern woman in her early forties was a native of the county. She explained that she was one of the few “homegrown” AHS teachers. Graduating from a local high school in the late 1980s, she had received a prestigious teacher recruitment scholarship. Marrying after her first year of teaching, Mrs. Coughlin had taken an extended period of time off to raise three children—one of whom was finishing her first year at AHS the spring semester of the interviews. After returning to teaching, Mrs. Coughlin developed the French program at AHS in 2009. She has since been witness to its continuous growth.

In the spring of 2012, Mrs. Coughlin taught two Level II French classes with enrolments of 36 and 38 students. Given that many universities in the United States require applicants have at least two semesters of high school L2 instruction, it is quite common to see such high enrolment in introductory level (Levels I and II) L2 classes, followed by a precipitous drop in Levels III and IV. This, however, did not seem to be the case in Mrs. Coughlin’s classes. That same semester there were 28 students (10 male, 18 female) in her Level III French class and 29 students enrolled in her Level IV class, nine of which were boys (31%). At the time of the study, Level IV French was the most advanced French course offered at the high school. As the only French teacher at AHS, teaching Levels I through IV maximized Mrs. Coughlin’s teaching capacity. To offer Level V or Advanced Placement French would require an additional French teacher.

Besides teaching, Mrs. Coughlin had established a French Club that had an open enrolment. She explained, “They don’t have to be studying French, so I get a few kids who are interested, or maybe their friends are in it, and they’ll join.” The French Club’s monthly meetings offered a French-style breakfast of croissants, baguettes, and *confiture*. In the words of Mrs. Coughlin, the meetings were a time for students to “hang out and have fun” with an occasional slide show of a participant’s recent visit to France. Mrs. Coughlin had also recently begun teaming with her district colleagues to take students on short summer trips to Paris and the Côte d’Azur.

The Boys

As previously mentioned, there were nine boys and 20 girls in Mrs. Coughlin’s Level IV French class at the time of data collection. All nine of these boys were reported by Mrs. Coughlin to be highly motivated students in her class. Supporting this claim, we observed all nine male students actively participating in French lessons and appearing to enjoy their class. Of these nine boys, only four returned the required parental consent forms in the allotted time frame, and were thus selected to participate in the study.

Steve, a tall and lanky 16-year-old junior, had grown up in Monroe County. He was an active member of his family’s church community, and had dreams of one day travelling throughout Europe. Manuel, 17, was a native speaker of Spanish, and had emigrated from Peru as a child. He had recently moved to Monroe County from the larger metropolitan area when his father got a new job. John, of Haitian/Trinidadian origins, had arrived at AHS after being homeschooled from the first through ninth grades. His mother, he explained, was a native speaker of Creole and his sister had learned French as well. The fourth boy,

Craig, had grown up in Maine through eighth grade, and had travelled to Quebec on multiple occasions to visit his Canadian relatives. He was a gymnast and all-star cheerleader, which he expressed, took up most of his free time. Supporting the previously mentioned research by Gardner et al. (1976) that emphasized the importance of an integrative orientation in pursuing advanced L2 studies, three of the four boys demonstrated integrative reasons for studying French. Both John and Craig expressed an interest in enhancing their skills in the language so that they could better communicate with French-speaking relatives in Haiti and Quebec, respectively. Having already learned English as an L2, Manuel was intrinsically interested in learning another language and liked the sound of French. In contrast to his three male peers, Steve decided to pursue learning French for instrumental purposes. He explained that he wanted to study French throughout high school as part of his long-term goal to study international business or finance. He was also keenly interested in spending time travelling in France.

Results

The intent of the interview process was to better understand what motivates adolescent boys to pursue advanced language learning. Supplementing the boys' articulation of what motivated them, conversations with Mrs. Coughlin combined with classroom observations as a means of contextualizing the boys' responses. Analysis of the teacher's and students' interview transcripts and classroom observation records generated six common themes threaded throughout the data set: interaction in the L2, variety of instruction, technology, outline of objectives, encouragement, and the student-teacher relationship.

“You gotta show what you know”: Interaction in the L2

The four boys mentioned when they first started being able to communicate in the L2 as a pivotal moment in their decision to continue the study of French. When asked at what point he knew that he wanted to pursue the language throughout high school Manuel explained, “I would say, right after taking French II...French I was just like a lot of vocabulary. French II involves more conversations. I like really like, you know, talking in French, because it's kind of cool.”

Steve also reported being “hooked” on French after his first conversation in the target language. He enthusiastically described a family dinner at a French restaurant in Florida:

I ordered all of my food in French, and I felt so accomplished, and the lady like spoke French back to me, and she was like, “You were awesome. That was perfect.” That just really made my day... That really motivated me to keep going. I want to be able to have a conversation with someone in another language than English.

The four boys also stressed oral communication in the L2 when describing teaching strategies they found beneficial and motivating. Steve, for instance, liked Mrs. Coughlin's insistence that students speak to her in French as much as possible. Laughing, he recounted

a recent experience when he had to use the bathroom, but was not allowed to leave the classroom until he asked for permission *en français*. Manuel felt that the daily, communicative warm-up activities in his class were particularly helpful. He explained, “The guy who was sitting next to me, when he was doing his warm-up, he didn’t just check it off, you have to ask everybody around you. You have to talk to people. You gotta show what you know.” Receiving multiple opportunities to interact in the L2 and to apply what they had learned in class was appreciated by the boys. Describing what he liked best about Mrs. Coughlin’s teaching, John explained, “She does a lot of speaking exercises in class, instead of just memorizing vocabulary we get to, you know, use the vocabulary in class, until it becomes second nature almost.”

Three sessions of classroom observation confirmed that Mrs. Coughlin did indeed call upon her male and female students to interact in the L2, persistently engaging them in spoken French from the moment they entered the classroom to the time the bell rang 90 minutes later. As an example of one such conversation noted on the first day of observation, a Monday following the Junior Prom, Mrs. Coughlin initiated the following dialogue:

Mrs. Coughlin:	Qui est allé au prom ce weekend?
Sarah:	Marie, et elle a dansé beaucoup.
Marie:	I didn’t even go to prom.
Mrs. Coughlin to Marie:	Mais oui, je t’ai vu.
Mrs. Coughlin:	Est-ce qu’il y’en a d’autres? Mark?
Mark:	Non, j’ai regardé le match de basket.
Mrs. Coughlin:	Qui a joué?
Mark:	The Knicks.
Mrs. Coughlin:	Moi, je préfère les Celtics.

Mrs. Coughlin had attended the prom herself. Indeed, she made it a point to attend as many sporting events and other after-school activities as she could. Showing up, she explained, was her way of demonstrating that she cared about who they were and what they were doing. Her attendance at such events, she explained, also allowed her to initiate meaningful small talk with the class. As she was the sole French teacher at the school, students in French IV had grown to know her over three semesters of instruction. There was an intimacy, therefore, to these conversations. They knew each other both from their classroom interactions and by virtue of living in the same community. On trips to the neighbourhood grocery store, Mrs. Coughlin was frequently greeted with a “bonjour” from one of her current or former students.

“Something different every day to keep you on your toes”: Variety of Instruction

All four boys reported enjoying variety—emphasizing Mrs. Coughlin’s use of puppets, games, movies, scavenger hunts, music, food, and technology. Steve talked about how the variety of instruction she offered helped keep him in French for two and a half years. Talking about his peers who had dropped L2 studies from their schedules, Steve explained:

My friends can't stand their Spanish class because they do the same thing every day. With Mrs. Coughlin we're doing something different every day. Maybe one day we're going on Quizlet⁵ to look at vocabulary. Maybe we are reading a story out of a book and trying to translate it. Maybe we're writing a story based out of something we read in a book. Maybe we're writing an essay based on a movie we watched, or watching a movie and comparing it to what we know it's supposed to be in English. I mean Mrs. Coughlin does something different every day to keep you on your toes, so that you're always wanting to come back for more.

Of the various strategies Mrs. Coughlin employed, watching popular American movies in French stood out as a clear favourite among the boys. They reported that they enjoyed the films and that watching them helped their language learning. When identifying which of Mrs. Coughlin's strategies he found to be most beneficial, Manuel did not hesitate:

I'm gonna say the movies. She'll put on a movie, like the *Lion King*. You know, you can pretty much recite the words from the *Lion King* because you have heard it so many times, so when you hear it in French, it's like, "Oh, so that's how you say that in French." Because you already know what they are saying in English, so it kinda sticks with you when you hear it in French, you know?

Craig and Steve also mentioned watching another Disney movie in French, *Finding Nemo*, as an engaging way of learning the language. Craig thought that the addition of English sub-titles allowed for comparisons between English and French. He added, "She'll have us listen to it in French, and put in sub-titles, and if there is something that we don't completely understand, she'll stop it and say, 'Well this literally translates to blah, blah, blah in French.'"

Mrs. Coughlin explained that having raised a son and two daughters, she had come to believe that boys and girls have unique learning needs. She elaborated:

My boy, it takes more work to get him motivated. If he's got to just sit there and take notes, that's not him. So, I think, for the boys, you have to make it interesting, you have to change it up a little.

Expanding on how she tried to engage adolescent boys, Mrs. Coughlin explained:

I play lots of games and I keep my students active. I don't like to spend too much time on one activity. I jump to new stuff. Probably every 10 minutes we're doing something new. We play a lot of games, a lot of competitions, a lot of active stuff, and the boys get really into that sort of thing. We'll play grammar games and vocabulary games, and I think the boys are very motivated by that, by games, by competition, and just being mobile, getting up and moving around, going up to the Smart Board and things like that. Always something different.

⁵ Quizlet.com is a site for creating flashcards and playing games to review vocabulary.

We also noticed a variety of instructional strategies employed by the teacher. During a Tuesday morning observation, for example, Mrs. Coughlin moved from a think, pair, share oral warm-up, to a PowerPoint presentation, followed by an interactive game on the Smart Board, and finally some independent work.

“I mean they live with Twitter”: Technology

Of all the teaching strategies employed by the teacher, the use of technology was most prevalent. When discussing effective teaching strategies, references to various online games, Web 2.0 resources, and forms of social media permeated both student and teacher responses. Steve, Manuel, and John all made mention of Quizlet.com as an effective tool used by their teacher to review vocabulary and to make studying fun. John commented, “She uses Quizlet to, um, make flashcards for us, and when I’m home I can go on Quizlet and quiz myself and play games to help me remember.” Manuel described how excited he and his classmates were whenever Mrs. Coughlin used her Smart Board to play interactive games in class. He explained, “You gotta drag things, in a team of two, you gotta drag words and help each other out. Sometimes the class gets a little too loud and you start screaming at people, because it’s fun you know.” Craig, in turn, enjoyed his teacher’s use of an online polling site to get the students thinking about and interested in the day’s topic. He also mentioned how his teacher frequently used Twitter⁶ to interact with her students outside of the classroom.

From Mrs. Coughlin’s point of view, the integration of technology into her instruction was a purposeful motivational strategy. As evidence of her attempt to make her instruction as relevant as possible to her students, Mrs. Coughlin made the following statement:

I use cell phones. I know we have a county policy that you’re not supposed to use cell phones, but I’ll get them out and we’ll do Polleverywhere.com⁷ and they think they are really doing something because they’ve got their phones out. Or we’ll use Twitter to communicate in French, especially with my Level IV students. I tweet with my Level IV students in French. We’ll kind of joke around. I don’t know, I kinda like to think outside of the box, you know. Go to where they are I guess. I mean they live with Twitter. That’s a big part of their lives. So I jump in there with them.

⁶ Twitter is a social media site that allows users to send and read posts of up to 140 characters, known as “tweets”.

⁷ Polleverywhere.com allows instructors to ask their students what they feel about certain topics and instantly graphs student responses.

“You are going to learn this”: Outline of Objectives

Related to the notion of making instruction relevant to students, analysis of interview data revealed the motivational benefits of providing students with an overview of not only short-term goals to be addressed in a specific lesson, but also long-term goals to be achieved in a course, or even in an entire sequence of courses. Manuel, for example, liked to know what he was going to learn in a given lesson and then be able to look back to see what he had accomplished. Explaining why he liked the movies that his teacher used at the beginning of every new chapter, Manuel made the following statement:

The movie provides a scenario of everything that we are going to learn in that chapter. I guess that kinda works because it lets you know what you are going to learn, like what kind of conversations you're going to have. That it's going to be about animals, or bragging about something, or that kind of stuff, and it kind of gives you a preview of what you're going to learn. So at the end of the unit you can go back to that movie and understand what is going on and that is kind of like a good feeling.

Steve, on the other hand, was motivated by knowing the long-term goals of his language instruction. He stated, “Madame Coughlin would tell us that, ‘You are going to learn this in French III and this in French IV, and you’re going to learn how to do these kinds of things by the end of French IV.’” Knowing that by the end of high school he would be able to carry on a conversation in French or be able to find his way around Paris motivated Steve to persevere with his study of the L2. Craig was even more vocal in regard to the motivational benefits of being given a holistic overview of course objectives. During a class orientation on his first day of taking Level I, Craig knew he wanted to study French throughout high school. He went on to explain:

Mrs. Coughlin talked to us about what we were going to learn, what we should expect, our homework, and what all of that would entail, all the vocab, and I just knew that this was definitely the language for me.

“She wants to get the word out”: Encouragement

The four boys’ motivation to study French throughout high school was augmented by the encouragement they received. Manuel, Craig, and John were all quick to mention that their families were happy about their decision to study the language. Underscoring the encouragement he received from his family members to study French all the way to Level IV, John remarked: “Uh well, my sister wouldn’t let me stop even if I wanted to, but I want to continue...I love Mrs. Coughlin and I love French class in general, so I didn’t see why I should stop.”

The familial support received by these three boys stemmed from various origins. Craig, for example, spent time growing up near the border of Quebec and had older siblings who studied French in school. John’s family was from French-speaking Haiti and Manuel’s father studied French throughout high school and also made claims of “having European

blood”, despite being born and raised in Peru. While Steve stated that his family encouraged him to study Spanish and not French, his friends compensated for any lack of support he may have received from his family. He stated, “My friends have been very encouraging of me, and they’re always like, ‘Let’s hear something in French.’”

Comments from Mrs. Coughlin further underscored the value of parental encouragement in student choice to pursue advanced L2 studies. She stated that parental support and involvement was apparent among all the students in her Level IV class. This support was reflected in large turnouts at Curriculum Night and in the frequent communication she had with parents via telephone and email.

Encouragement the boys received to pursue their L2 studies extended beyond their families and friends to include their teacher. Craig, for example, mentioned that after not doing too well in French II, Mrs. Coughlin spoke with him “one-on-one” and encouraged him to continue studying the language. In addition, all four of the students made mention of efforts put forth by Mrs. Coughlin to encourage them and other students to study French via the development of a French Club and Language Week. Steve described in detail how during Language Week, while the Spanish teachers just wore their normal clothes, Mrs. Coughlin wore a beret, carried around baguettes, and wore scarves and striped shirts. He went on to say, “She wants people to notice her and ask her questions, because she wants to get the word out that French is an awesome language to learn.” The impact of the festivities was noted by both the teacher and her male students. When asked why she thought her students chose French and not another language like Spanish, Mrs. Coughlin responded, “I think they hear from their friends what we do in French Club. They see how silly I can be during Language Week, and they think it might be fun. So, they sign up, and they get hooked.” This statement was supported by Steve who reported that his teacher’s “quirky” behaviour during Language Week was effective at letting students know how much fun it can be to learn French.

Although not specific to the French language, all students at the participating high school received additional encouragement to pursue language learning from the school administration. The school’s main entrance was draped with flags from around the world, framing the school’s motto in large, proud letters, “Preparing our students for the world.” Mrs. Coughlin explained that AHS was part of a district-wide initiative focusing on globalization and the preparation of students to compete in a global market. As part of this initiative, schools earned points for internationally themed accomplishments, such as studies abroad. This school and district emphasis on globalization and internationalization provided a supportive and encouraging environment for all students to pursue learning an L2.

“She loves all her students”: Student-Teacher Relationship

Whether students were discussing interaction in the L2, the variety of instructional strategies, encouragement to study French, or the outline of instructional goals, the one over-arching and constant motivational factor that infused all student responses was the teacher. To put it simply, all four of the boys loved their French teacher. Steve described Mrs. Coughlin as amazing and that he could not imagine having any other French teacher. John described her as understanding, reasonable, and “a very good teacher”, and both Craig

and Manuel characterized her as the best teacher they ever had. Listening to the boys' responses about what they appreciated most about Mrs. Coughlin, we were struck by the non-pedagogical nature of their answers. While we anticipated talk about her engaging and interactive instructional strategies and her enthusiastic encouragement to study the language, what the boys talked about most emphatically was their relationship with their teacher. They repeatedly mentioned that she was a good friend and respected teacher who truly cared about her students.

Craig defied our expectations of the macho and athletic high school male with this touching endorsement of his teacher: "Like she loves all her students, and she's like a really good friend. More than just a teacher, so I want to pay attention in class instead of just zoning out. I have a lot of respect for her."

Steve, who at six feet five inches tall stood a foot taller than his teacher, seemed to echo his classmate's sentiments when describing why Mrs. Coughlin was his favourite teacher. He commented,

She like takes the time to...like in the warm-up, instead of just asking like one or two people to read our warm-ups, she'll go through and she'll ask everyone. She'll really talk to you. Like she's really into all of the students, like into how their lives are. Like, it's like more than just good teaching. It's like she's our friend.

Analysis of the boys' responses indicated that the strong relationship between Mrs. Coughlin and her students was based on mutual respect and understanding. She took the time to get to know her students and treated them as her equals. During classroom observations, we noted that all examples provided on the board or on the Smart Board were highly personalized involving multiple and specific students in the class. In the course of a 90-minute session, Mrs. Coughlin asked her students about the prom and their family members. She was also observed complimenting them not only on their work, but also on their clothing, their hair, and their athletic prowess. John explained:

Yea, it's like she's on our level. Like, she'll tweet us in French and then if I don't know something then I'll go look it up, so I can tweet her back. And...it's like...her being on like...it's just...when she tweets sometimes, she'll tweet about like something that happened in her day, so not only does she get to know us, but we get to know her too, so it's like a friendship that everyone has with her.

Mrs. Coughlin, on the other hand, did not see herself as her students' friend, but rather as a protective "Mama Bear" in their lives. She had taught most of them since they first started high school. She had also taught many of their siblings, and often took the time to attend their extra-curricular events after school. She tolerated some minor indiscretions among her students, but knew when to draw the line. For example, students did occasionally eat in class, apply makeup, and carry on some off-topic conversations. They did not, however, make fun of each other or get to the point where excessive noise interfered with instruction. She did not allow these things and the students seemed to know it. Exemplifying her perceived role as "Mama Bear" in the classroom, Mrs. Coughlin explained her relaxed classroom management style with the following comment: "I tell my

kids that we are one big happy family in here, and I want them to feel at ease with each other and with me.”

This relaxed classroom atmosphere appeared to contribute to yet another attribute of Mrs. Coughlin that motivated the four male students in her Level IV French class. It allowed her to be herself. When asked why he felt Mrs. Coughlin was “an amazing teacher”, Steve responded, “She’s very lively, and she’s not afraid to be quirky and different.” Voicing a similar opinion, when asked to provide a suggestion for other French teachers to motivate their male students Manuel replied, “They need to be very up-beat and peppy, and basically, they need to come and observe Mrs. Coughlin.” Mrs. Coughlin concurred that the relaxed atmosphere she created in her classroom was important in motivating her students. She explained,

I try to make it fun. I like to play. I like to be goofy. I try to make it an environment where it’s okay to be myself. It’s okay to act silly. I mean we pull out puppets. I act like an idiot sometimes in my classes, I’ll tell you. But I mean it works.

The relaxed, supportive, and “friendly” environment did, in fact, seem to work for Mrs. Coughlin and her students. Bucking national trends for declining French class enrolments, the number of students in AHS French classes had only grown. So much so that there were plans in place at the time of data collection to hire another half-time French teacher at the school for the following year. The number of male students in Mrs. Coughlin’s Level IV French class was also on the rise. In her first year of instruction at AHS, only three years earlier, one male student took Level IV French. At the time of this study, nine males were enrolled in her Level IV French class. Mrs. Coughlin acknowledged that her former students were her greatest recruitment tool. She stated, “When I get them it’s usually a matter of them hearing that the class is fun and that they should take it. So I’ll get a lot of kids who knew so-and-so who took the class before.” As indicated in the following quote, not only was Mrs. Coughlin successful at recruiting new students, but also at retaining those who did not freely choose to study French:

I tell them that it’s okay to say that your mother made you take it. And it’s okay to tell me that you couldn’t get into Spanish class so you are stuck here. I just want to know where we are all starting from. And I get a few of those, but usually by the end they all love it, and I have never had anyone, at least to the best of my knowledge, take Level I with me and not go on to take Level II or switch languages.

Discussion: “More than just good teaching”

Many of this exploratory case study’s findings help to confirm the results of previous research, from a positive perspective. For example, validating the work of Jones and Jones (2001) that suggested boys dislike L2 learning because they are provided with little chance to interact in the L2, the boys in this study emphasized that they love their L2 class because they are given multiple opportunities to converse in French. Reinforcing the findings of Carr and Pauwels (2006) and Kissau et al. (2010) that male students resent rigid, teacher-centered instruction in L2 classrooms, the four boys in this study were motivated by

their relaxed classroom environment and by the variety of engaging, student-centred strategies used by their L2 teacher. Substantiating the earlier work of Kissau (2007), suggesting boys often drop L2 studies because of limited encouragement from teachers, parents, and peers, the four boys in this study all mentioned that they have continued to pursue language learning in part due to the support they have received from their teacher, their friends, and their family.

The study's findings also serve to reinforce the results of the smaller number of related studies that describe what boys enjoy about language learning and what motivates them to pursue L2 studies. For example, in support of Pavy's (2006) claim that male language learners want to know what they are going to learn and why they are going to learn it, the boys in this study were motivated by the short- and long-term goals outlined by their L2 teacher. Corroborating results by both Jones and Jones (2001) and Clark and Trafford (1995) that male language learners enjoy a variety of engaging activities, Steve, Manuel, John, and Craig all mentioned that they were motivated by the variety of instructional strategies used by their teacher.

While the results of the study help to confirm the motivational benefits of various pedagogical factors such as variety of instructional strategies and opportunities to interact in the L2, they also highlight the value of one particular factor in motivating adolescent males to pursue L2 studies. If one factor had to be singled out as the reason why the four boys in the study decided to pursue L2 learning throughout high school, it would have to be the teacher. When discussing teaching strategies they enjoyed, classroom activities they found beneficial, and encouragement they received, the underlying theme was always Mrs. Coughlin. This finding clearly bolsters earlier claims by Clark and Trafford (1995) and Jones and Jones (2001) that the L2 teacher is the most influential factor in motivating adolescent male language learners.

What is perhaps most interesting and possibly the study's most thought provoking contribution to related research is not that the teacher was an important factor in motivating her male students, but rather that the relationship between the teacher and the boys in the Level IV French class seemed to play an even greater role than did effective teaching strategies. While previous related research has focused on addressing the unique needs of adolescent males via the use of "boy-friendly" teaching strategies, this exploratory case study indicated that motivating boys to pursue language learning requires more than just good teaching strategies. As Craig explained when describing what he liked so much about Mrs. Coughlin. "Like other teachers will play games, but their attitude is never like Mrs. Coughlin's. Like she's just always so happy and excited and I don't know. It just makes it more exciting to learn." Further highlighting the perceived value of the student-teacher relationship in motivating male L2 learners, when Steve was pushed to identify what specific teaching strategies he found motivating, he continued to refer to his teacher's personality. He stated, "Yeah, cuz it's like her personality comes into her teaching." The personality of the teacher was clearly manifested in her teaching strategies.

The significance of the student-teacher relationship in motivating male language learners was equally apparent during classroom observations. After interviewing the four boys and hearing over and over about their fantastic French teacher we expected to see many games, technology, interaction, and students moving about the classroom. While we did observe many such activities, what we found most striking about them was the extent to

which they were personalized and highly relevant to the students in the class. While many L2 teachers play games with their students, use technology, and have students participate in dialogues to practice various L2 skills, they do not always tailor these activities to the lives of their students. This was not the case with Mrs. Coughlin. Warm-up questions on the chalkboard had students discussing their experiences that weekend at the prom. Sample dialogues on the Smart Board reviewing the superlative mentioned individual students and their current teachers by name and had all the students laughing and practicing the skill. During informal conversations between Mrs. Coughlin and the class, we listened in on open discussions of family members, horseback riding lessons, gymnastic competitions, and clothing items worn that day. The teacher shared her own weekend experiences, provided advice, praised varied accomplishments, and occasionally provided gentle reprimands for inappropriate behaviour. These were not generic, banal exchanges of information between students and teacher. They were highly specific, personalized, and even intimate. Mrs. Coughlin knew and cared about her students.

Implications and Applications

The study's findings have implications and applications at both the micro- and macro-levels. At the micro-level, clearly fellow L2 teachers at AHS and at other schools in the district could benefit from a greater understanding of how Mrs. Coughlin has been successful at motivating her adolescent male students. The pedagogical practices and caring nature of Mrs. Coughlin should, of course, be shared with the part-time French teacher that was to be hired for the upcoming semester in response to the burgeoning French enrolment at AHS. It would be interesting to see how and if this new teacher could emulate many of the behaviours exhibited by Mrs. Coughlin that her male students found so beneficial.

At the macro-level, the results of the study offer much wider implications. The motivated, adolescent males in this advanced L2 class helped reinforce the findings of numerous related studies involving their unmotivated counterparts. In this respect, the study has contributed to a growing consensus in regard to what constitutes "boy-friendly" L2 teaching practices. To motivate their male students L2 teachers should provide multiple opportunities for them to interact in the L2. Echoing findings previously voiced by Pavy (2006), all four male participants in this study mentioned that they enjoyed and benefited from opportunities to practice their oral communication skills. Further, two of these four males stated that the time they first realized they were able to orally express their ideas in the L2 was an instrumental moment in their decision to pursue L2 studies throughout high school.

Related to the development and attainment of various language skills, L2 teachers are encouraged to provide their students with a clear overview of short- and long-term goals to be attained in lessons and courses. In support of recommendations made by Jones and Jones (2001) to motivate male language learners, the data collected in this study suggest that male language learners want to know upfront what they will learn in their L2 classes and be able to look back to see what they have accomplished. This recommendation, when accompanied with the previous suggestion to focus on the development of oral communication skills, clearly points to the motivational benefits to be had by males whose L2 teachers incorporate *LinguaFolio* into their instruction. *LinguaFolio* is a proficiency-

based assessment tool that allows students to look ahead to what L2 communication skills they should develop at various stages of L2 instruction and allows them to document their progress.

In addition to providing outlines of goals and giving frequent opportunities for students to develop communication skills, L2 teachers should use a variety of teaching strategies so that, in the words of Steve, students “are always wanting to come back for more.” This recommendation is bolstered by earlier calls from Jones and Jones (2001), Pavy (2006), and Clark and Trafford (1995) for L2 teachers to use a variety of instructional approaches to maintain the interest of their male students. Based on this study’s findings, to make L2 instruction relevant to the life of the adolescent, male language learner, these varied strategies should often involve the use of technology. Both the teacher and her male students in this study felt that the use of social media sites like Twitter, cell phones, and Web 2.0 resources was an effective way of reaching adolescent boys in L2 classrooms.

As made evident in this study, encouraging boys is yet another strategy that should not be overlooked in an attempt to motivate them to pursue advanced language studies. This encouragement can and should come from a variety of different sources. Following Mrs. Coughlin’s example, encouragement at the classroom level can range from simple actions such as having one-on-one conversations with male students about their future L2 study plans to larger-scale initiatives like organizing a French Club and study abroad trips. To garner more support from families, L2 teachers should become strong advocates and promoters of their language. When asked what could be done to encourage more boys to study an L2, Manuel replied, “French class is low-key, low profile. People don’t know enough about the language or culture. People don’t really know how important the language is and how easy it is to learn. So I guess just like raise awareness.” By raising parental awareness of the importance of L2 learning via monthly newsletters, classroom websites, and Meet the Teacher or Curriculum Nights, parents may be more inclined to encourage their children to pursue L2 studies. At the school and district levels, L2 studies can also be encouraged by sponsoring events like National Foreign Language Week and by promoting internationalization and globalization initiatives. Given the previous reports that L2 learning is often viewed as inappropriate male behaviour (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1998; Kissau, 2006), it is critical that school administrators create an environment that promotes and celebrates language learning among both sexes.

Although the above-mentioned recommendations are important in honing teaching strategies to meet the needs of male language learners, the results of this study suggest that effective pedagogy must also include a strong student-teacher relationship. More so than by any specific teaching strategy, the four boys in this study were motivated to pursue L2 studies by the relationship they had developed with their L2 teacher. This finding, supported by the work of Pavy (2006), Clark and Trafford, (1995) and Rowe (2003), has implications for teacher education. Teacher training and professional development opportunities frequently focus on pedagogical strategies and overlook the importance of the student-teacher relationship. Foreign language teachers do need to be exposed to a variety of engaging and interactive teaching strategies, but they must also be made aware of the value of developing a positive rapport with their students and of the steps they can take to develop such a positive relationship. Once again, following the model set by Mrs. Coughlin, L2 teachers should take the time to know their students. They should learn about

their families and their interests, and should then make efforts to incorporate this information into the L2 classroom. Doing so helps to make instruction meaningful to students and lets them know that their teacher cares about them.

In addition to getting to know their students, L2 teachers should allow students to know them. Analysis of data indicated that sharing among students and teachers helps to build mutual respect and to create an environment where students feel equal to the teacher. The boys in the study reported that by learning more about Mrs. Coughlin, they were able to see her as more than just their teacher. She was an adult friend they respected and aimed to please.

To facilitate the development of a positive rapport with their male language learners, L2 teachers may also be wise to loosen their student behaviour expectations to allow for a fun and relaxed environment. Building upon the earlier work of Kissau et al. (2010) that reported the motivational benefits of teaching adolescent males in L2 classrooms with relaxed rules, the results of the present study suggest that the L2 teachers may also benefit from such a setting. According to Mrs. Coughlin, her relaxed, easygoing classroom environment allowed her to let down her guard in front of her students. It gave her permission to be silly, quirky, different, and all of the other personality traits that were so appreciated by her male students.

While the many recommendations presented in this article may benefit all students, evidence suggests that they may be more necessary for boys than girls in promoting motivation to pursue advanced L2 studies. As documented in the literature review, males tend to be less willing to tolerate the teacher-centered instruction characteristic of many L2 classes than are their female peers (Pavy, 2006; Williams et al., 2002). They often feel less control than do girls over events in the L2 classroom (Kissau & Quach, 2006), and that L2 study is less applicable to their daily lives (Carr & Pauwels, 2006; Jones & Jones, 2001). Studies have shown that boys may benefit more from encouragement to study an L2 than girls, and yet they receive less of it (Kissau, 2007; McGannon & Medeiros, 1995). Research has also emphasized the degree to which boys are influenced by the quality of their L2 teacher (Clark & Trafford, 1995; Jones & Jones, 2001; Pavy, 2006).

Conclusion

This exploratory study represents one small step forward in better understanding what motivates adolescent males to pursue advanced L2 studies. While acknowledging that the small sample size and qualitative nature prevent generalization of the study's results, we believe that the study is unique and that its findings are interesting and worthy of further investigation. Differentiating itself from many related studies that have focused on identifying motivational differences between large numbers of male and female language learners (Kissau, 2006; Netten et al., 1999), in this study we have focused on what can possibly be learned from a small number of highly motivated, male L2 learners. Drawing further distinctions between this study and many of the others that have stressed all that boys dislike or find different about L2 learning (Carr, 2002; Carr & Pauwels, 2006; Kissau, 2006; Kissau & Turnbull, 2008; Williams et al., 2002), we adopted a positive perspective and have emphasized what boys enjoy about learning languages. In doing so, we have

directly responded to one of the research items identified by Kissau and Turnbull (2008) in their proposed agenda to improve the participation of boys in L2 programs.

The boys in the study were motivated by opportunities to interact in the L2, by the use of a variety of instructional strategies, including technology, by being provided with an overview of the skills they were to develop, and by the encouragement they received to pursue L2 learning. These findings help to confirm the results of previous related research and, thus, contribute to an emerging professional consensus with respect to pedagogical strategies that motivate male language learners.

While acknowledging the need for additional research to validate and build upon the study's results, its findings suggest that the use of such "boy-friendly" teaching strategies, alone, may not be enough. Although the boys in this study appreciated the teaching strategies employed in their classroom, they were most motivated by the strong relationship they had developed with their teacher. In addition to using the "good teaching" strategies discussed in this article, we ask that L2 teachers consider the importance of the student-teacher relationship when attempting to motivate their male students.

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Appendix

1. Why did you decide to pursue language learning throughout high school?
2. Why did you decide to pursue learning French?
3. When many of your male classmates starting dropping foreign language instruction from their schedules, what motivated you to continue on?
4. What teaching strategies and resources have your French teachers used that you have found to be motivating?
5. What language learning experiences in your time in high school did you find the most beneficial?
6. What suggestions or recommendations do you have for other French teachers to motivate their male students?
7. What kind of support or encouragement have you received to pursue learning French?
8. At what point during your study of French did you know that you wanted to pursue learning French throughout high school? Do you recall what happened at that pivotal time?