



College Documentation Bulletin

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The College Document Centre is proud to present the **first of a two-part series on school success for boys**, and more specifically for boys in the college network. A number of studies on the topic are commented by teacher and researcher Jacques Boisvert.

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Selection of resources and writing:

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SCHOOL SUCCESS FOR BOYS

Part 1: Global problems and factors in play

Presentation

Every ounce of success boys have in school as compared to girls constitutes an important characteristic of today's education system. While we applaud how well a great proportion of girls do in school, the difficulties that plague boys somewhere along the way in their educational pathway is a **persistent problem** of special concern. This is not just a Quebec phenomenon but occurs in most industrialized countries. The negative impact on individual and social plans has led us to take a closer look at these problems in the hope of better understanding them and of finding appropriate measures.

The objective of this *College Documentation Bulletin* is to offer you an overview of the theme that will prove useful when analyzing the phenomenon and identifying appropriate

actions. Focusing mainly on the situation as it exists at the college level, this text is mainly intended as a guide for those who are interested in this issue.

Part 1 of this *Bulletin* deals briefly with the more general question of **motivation and school success** and focuses more closely on **factors that come in play** when examining **problems of success for boys**. The second bulletin will delve more specifically in **interventions** that can promote success for boys.

We hope you enjoy!

1. Boys: What is their problem in school?

A number of studies confirm that **there are significant differences in success rates between boys and girls**. Various indicators show that boys don't succeed as well as girls and that this occurs at all levels of education. If there are several possible ways of interpreting this phenomenon, for many researchers, the question of gender remains an undeniable factor.

A wide vision of success

CONSEIL SUPÉRIEUR DE L'ÉDUCATION. « [Les conditions de réussite au collégial](#) », excerpts from a notice to the Minister of Education, *Pédagogie collégiale*, Vol. 9, No 2, 1995, p. 16-18.

These excerpts set the tone for the notice based on points of view expressed by college students. In order to succeed, the students notably want real support in choosing their career, a culture of mutual peer support as well as an integrated approach to training. They have a **wide vision of success** that is **not just limited to education**.

One third of male children in Quebec do not finish high school

[Égide Royer : les garçons en difficulté](#), interview broadcasted on Radio-Canada, Première chaîne, on *Christiane Charrette – en direct*, September 6, 2010. Time: 20 min 22 seconds.

What if you could compare a young boy's education to that of an elephant? Psychologist Égide Royer uses this comparison to illustrate the alarming situation affecting many young boys who have trouble in school. He says that one third of male children in Quebec do not finish high school. He also believes it is a deplorable fact that a great many aren't actually able to read when they get to second year high school. Égide Royer has published an essay ***Leçons d'éléphant: pour la réussite des garçons à l'école***.

He teaches school adjustment at the Education Faculty at Laval University. (Book available at the CDC. Ask for it! [#787473](#))

Indicators showing boys perform less well in college

GINGRAS, Michèle and Ronald TERRILL. *Passage secondaire-collégial : caractéristiques étudiantes et rendement scolaire. Dix ans plus tard*, Montreal, Service régional d'admission du Montréal métropolitain (SRAM), 2006, 133 p. (Book available at the CDC. Ask for it! [#786462](#))

This study deals with the influence of certain student characteristics on success and graduation. The study shows notably that **fewer boys who had a low average in high school passed** all their courses during the first session at the college level than girls with the same grades. **Fewer of them graduated from college.**

BERNARD, Jean-Pierre in conjunction with Diane Charest. « [Quelques chiffres pour éclairer une réalité qui nous interpelle](#) », *Vie pédagogique*, No 127, 2003, p. 17-21.

Using college-related statistics, the author highlights the fact that a greater number of **girls** go to college, that they succeed at a higher rate than boys during the first term and that they graduate in greater numbers within the time set out for these studies.

The phenomenon of under-performance in school by boys in Europe

[Gender differences in educational outcomes : Study on the measures taken and the current situation in Europe](#) / This document is published by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA P9 Eurydice, 2010, 139 p.).

This study commissioned by the European Union Council shows that **gender differences continue to show up** in school results and in the selection of study streams in all European countries. A change in perspective in questions regarding gender and education was evoked: these are now **more focused on “under-performance” in school by boys** while previously, questions were more intended to correct discrimination against girls and women. Notably among possible means of responding are strategies aimed at improving balance between the genders among teachers and school administrators as well as including gender-related aspects in the initial training for teachers.

ROSENWALD, Fabienne. « [La réussite scolaire des femmes et des hommes en Europe](#) », *Information note 08-11*, February 2008, p. 1-6.

Right from the outset, the text clearly states, “**In Europe, women have a better educational pathway than men,**” according to several indicators. This situation has developed over several generations and has varied from country to country; for instance, countries in southern Europe that were behind the North regarding graduation rates are now showing the widest gaps in favour of women. If fewer women graduate in mathematics, science and technology, they drop out a lot less than boys do and graduate more often from high school and post-secondary institutions, participate more often in “life-long learning” and have less difficulty reading.

2. Why do boys have a lower success rate in school than girls?

It is not just a question of acknowledging that there is a problem regarding the lower success rate for boys, you must try to **understand the phenomenon**, finding possible causes and identifying the factors that come into play. In education-related literature, several angles are examined more closely: the multi-factor approach, socialization among boys, the way they see college and success, their motivation and factors that lead to dropping out from college.

Several factors interact in a complex manner

« **La réussite scolaire au collégial. Une réalité complexe** », Dossier, *Pédagogie collégiale*, Vol. 14, No 4, 2001, p. 11-38.

The texts in this dossier on the issue of academic success at the college level offer a variety of avenues for understanding the related problematics. Contrary to the prevalent current of economic and social pressures to ensure that our schools “perform” better and become more “profitable” including the issue of having to obtain better results, this dossier invites us to **reflect on the complex reality that represents “success” within the educational context**. For example, [Marc Simard](#) openly challenges success assistance plans in cegeps while [André Simard](#) spells out the conditions needed to succeed in meeting the need to increase the graduation rate. Meanwhile, [Robert Campeau](#) highlights the decisive influence the social context has on success in school. [Isabelle Laplante](#) closes the file by presenting a selection of articles from *Pédagogie collégiale* on Success in school, motivation and teaching strategies.

CLOUTIER, Richard. « [La réussite scolaire des garçons : un défi à multiples facettes](#) », *Vie pédagogique*, 127, April-May 2003, p. 9-12.

After having demonstrated that a higher success rate for girls is not a recent phenomenon, nor is it specifically associated to Quebec, the author adopts the following logic: seeing as how the problems boys have in school generate social maladjustment within the affected group, it is therefore necessary to deal with the social loss that failure in school represents. How? Several possibilities exist. First, help the boys without adversely affecting the girls and get into action-oriented research by accepting our limited understanding of this phenomenon. **Five additional measures** are suggested: accept the fact that boys and girls are biologically different; stop trying to fight masculinity from school; promote a proper gender mix; improve boys' commitment towards education and create a positive social pressure in the boys' group. The author insists on the need to **rally around a coherent message**.

CLOUTIER, Richard and Sylvie DRAPEAU. *Psychologie de l'adolescence*, 3rd Edition, Montreal, Gaëtan Morin éditeur, Chenelière éducation, 2008, 313 p. (Available at the CDC. CDC Ask for it! # [787693](#))

In this manual, the authors set adolescence between 12 and 18 years of age, therefore touching on the youngest cegep students. Chapter 10 deals with several aspects of school life, in particular the classroom as a close-knit social setting but also the climate within school and the **differences between boys and girls in school**. Chapter 1 includes a section on new teens, Chapter 6 deals notably with socialization during teen years and Chapter 7 focuses on searching for one's identity during adolescence and briefly presents the **identity differences between boys and girls**.

Low male presence among grade school teachers

[Pourquoi les hommes ne sont-ils pas attirés par l'enseignement primaire?](#), March 2010. Time: 3 min., 16 s. Website of the Education Faculty, University of Montreal.

Should there be more men teaching in grade school? Faced with few men in the grade-school-level teaching program during the 2000s at the University of Montreal, Simon Lamarre decided to undertake doctoral research on male representation among grade school teachers. [Could there be a better school success rate for boys if they were taught by men?](#) Though many would be inclined to believe so, this has yet to be scientifically proven.

DION-VIENS, Daphnée, « [En manque de profs masculins](#) », *Le Soleil*, August 29, 2010.

This article deals with the fact that men are under-represented in the teaching profession both at the grade school and high school levels.

Family, social and school influences

« [Décrochage scolaire et pauvreté : la nécessité d'aller plus loin](#) », *Le Soleil*, « Point of view » published on September 9, 2010

The authors of this opinion piece teach at the University of Montreal, the University of Quebec in Montreal and Concordia University (Research group into school environments, [Centre d'études sur l'apprentissage et la performance](#)).

BOUCHARD, Pierrette and Jean-Claude ST-AMANT. *Garçons et filles. Stéréotypes et réussite scolaire*, Montreal, Les Éditions du remue-ménage, Collection « Itinéraires féministes », 1996, 300 p. (Available at the CDC. Ask for it! # [722236](#))

As is indicated on the back cover of this book, a number of studies on high school have shown there has been a prevalence of male dropouts for a number of years. How can you explain that girls succeed better in school and that they have a lower dropout rate than boys? What influence do sexual identity, the family circle and social class have on their relationship with school? The authors show that based on a vast survey covering 2,249 grade nine students from 24 schools throughout Quebec that both girls and boys **perform better in school once they have overcome sexual models**. In their conclusion, the authors state that, "It is step by step, slowly but surely that boys distance themselves from school. They are relatively less interested, they don't have the same willingness to learn, invest less and they feel their future is less associated to their schooling." (p. 247).

CONSEIL SUPÉRIEUR DE L'ÉDUCATION. [Pour une meilleure réussite scolaire des garçons et des filles : Notice to the minister of Education](#), Sainte-Foy QC, 1999, 116 p. (Book available at the CDC. Ask for it! # [723758](#))

This notice issued by the *Conseil supérieur de l'éducation* was aimed more specifically at **identifying factors related to gaps in school success by gender** and proposing possible means of responding to reduce these differences. Chapter 1 draws up a picture of what is happening in Quebec and elsewhere. Chapter 2 attempts to identify causal factors, especially regarding the gender-to-school-success variable and identifies three

main factors: a general factor that is to say the general societal direction based on gender roles within society, and two specific factors, socialization and school as an institution organization.

In Chapter 3, the Council proposes **five orientations** to support boys and girls in their educational advancement: acknowledge the effects of the social sexual role and socialization; take difficulties regarding the language of instruction into account; take the rate at which students develop into account when assessing their progress; take cognitive styles into account; take into account the need of male and female adolescents to make sense of their place in school. The fourth and final chapter makes recommendations regarding each of these orientations by proposing short, medium and long term measures.

You may also examine the section of this notice of the *Conseil supérieur de l'éducation* titled [Tiré à part](#), published in *Pédagogie collégiale*, Vol. 13, No 2, 1999, p. 41-44.

LESTER, Jaime (Ed.) *Gendered Perspectives on Community College*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, New Directions for Community Colleges, Number 142, Summer 2008, 122 p. (Available at the CDC. Ask for it! # [723679](#))

Chapter 3 titled “Masculinities Go to Community College: Understanding Male Identity Socialization and Gender Role Conflict”, proposes **a reflection on the influence played by family, peers and school on gendered-related socialization**, before entering college as well as the **resulting conflicts arising from masculinity during college-level studies**. Chapter 1, “Community Colleges as Gender-Equitable Institutions”, compares the **concept of equity** between sexes at two different periods, the 1990s and the 2000s. Chapter 10, “Strategizing for the Future”, finishes off the document by presenting **a few strategies** for factoring in gender-related problems and by a discussion on the need to pursue **research** aimed at examining certain specific questions.

MARTINO, Wayne. [Boys' Underachievement: Which Boys Are We Talking About?](#), Ontario, The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, The Ontario Association of Deans of Education, Monograph No 12, april 2008, 4 p.

Not all boys don't perform as well or are at risk. The author feels it is necessary to play down the issue and **determine which boys are having problems** notably regarding their language skills, by resorting to research-based knowledge. Taking all boys as a whole can also add to the problem regarding reinforcement of the male stereotype. In order to adequately identify which boys (and girls) are not succeeding, a more productive approach would be to determine **how other factors such as origin, social**

class and ethnicity are interrelated with gender to influence to which extent students participate in school.

ROY, Jacques. *Entre la classe et les mcjobs. Portrait d'une génération de cégépiens*, Quebec, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, « Analyses et essais » Series, 2008, 140 p. (Available at the CDC. Ask for it! # [787399](#))

This cegep teacher and researcher has been studying cegep students for the past ten years or so. In this book, he notably deals with the values and aspirations of cegep students, the work-studies balance as well as the relationship with cegep and learning. Chapter 5 specifically deals with **success by gender**. Right from the outset, the author states there is no need to panic as there has been some progress made both with boys and girls as determined by all available indicators regarding education over the last 20 years. However the gap between boys and girls tends to grow with time, especially regarding the rate of graduation.

He also delves into **three dimensions by which the two genders are different**. First, questions of identity and social representation concerning schooling. Secondly, commitment, motivation and behaviour of students in school. Thirdly, issues concerning relationships and social networking among girls and boys. In closing this chapter, he identifies two types of interventions: "That said, regarding interventions to be made, I believe we must distinguish between those intended for all cegep students and those specifically aiming students at risk." (p. 85)

How boys see college and success

BOISVERT, Jacques in conjunction with Carole Martin. [Les représentations sociales du collègue et de la réussite chez les garçons en Sciences humaines au collégial](#), PAREA research report, Fonds de rayonnement pédagogique, Cégep Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, 2006, 145 p. [See also the [Article](#)]

How do cegep students entered in Human Sciences programs see college and success? This study differentiates strong and weak male students and tries to understand changes in their respective perceptions over three sessions. **Weak male students** who are more at risk of failing and dropping out are notably characterized by the importance they give to the relationship with the teachers, by the more overall influence exercised by friends and a more instrumental vision of success in school. Several excerpts drawn from thirty focus group interviews illustrate the results of the study.

BOISVERT, Jacques, « [Social Models for College and Success Among Male Students Enrolled in Social Sciences](#) », *Pédagogie collégiale*, Vol. 20, No 3, Spring 2007, p. 15-22.

This article highlights the social representations of teaching in the third session of cegep. While presenting similarities with strong students, **weak boys** stand apart as they prefer games, examples, anecdotes as well as PowerPoint type presentations. They more direct their attention towards the teacher-student relations, for instance hoping that the teacher will express himself clearly when giving explanations and are attentive as long as the topic can draw their interest. The picture drawn between strong and weak male students invites teachers to think about how they can **adapt their teaching methods** to each of the two groups.

RIVIÈRE, Bernard in conjunction with Josée Jacques. *Les jeunes et les représentations sociales de la réussite*, Outremont QC, Les Éditions Logiques, 2002, 111 p. (Book available at the CDC. Ask for it! #[728729](#))

The author believes that a better understanding of the social representation of success in adolescents makes it easier to account for their behaviour in school. He highlights **three types of success: academic, professional and personal**. According to him, under-performing students probably refuse to conform to a performance-based ideology prevalent in the school and cegep culture. In addition to the role sexual stereotypes play in success, he notes that one **must not underestimate the role of institutional factors** as the dropout rate can reflect the trouble institutions have in adapting to students. Among the conclusions drawn in studies that were consulted on the differences between how boys and girls act in school, the author notably highlights the fact that **boys feel** that studies have a lesser role to play in their social insertion and that they will be able to muddle through later “by learning as they go along”.

You may also want to read: **RIVIÈRE, Bernard and Josée JACQUES**, « [Les conceptions de la réussite chez les cégépiens](#) », *Pédagogie collégiale*, Vol. 12, No 3, March 1999, p. 4-7.

Understanding what drives academic motivation to better promote it

BOISVERT, Jacques in conjunction with Josée Paradis. [La motivation chez les garçons et les filles en Sciences humaines au collégial](#), PAREA research report, Fonds de rayonnement pédagogique, Cégep Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, 2008, 286 p. [See also the [Article](#)]

This study compares motivation in boys and girls entered in Human Sciences programs by dividing them into two categories based on the grades, that is to say strong or weak. Each of the four subgroups presents similarities and differences with the three others. As far as the **weak boys** are concerned regarding the theme under study, they **feel they are ill-prepared to start college** and they feel that study habits developed in high school are limited. As they have trouble managing their time and because they deplore the problems they have with the French language, confidence in succeeding remains just average during the first three sessions. All during these sessions, their lack of direction and the class schedule undermine their motivation and all that seems to give them satisfaction is the fact they are getting by and not failing.

You should note that this longitudinal study focuses on the three first sessions of cegep, thereby allowing the author to draw up a progressive picture of student motivation. **More than 800 excerpts** mainly drawn from about 50 focus group interviews illustrate and support study results.

BOISVERT, Jacques, « [Motivation: a matter of gender and also of calibre](#)», *Pédagogie collégiale*, Vol. 23, No 1, Fall 2010, p. 33-40.]

This article is drawn from [the PAREA study](#) and highlights the answer to a number of questions touching on the **sources and manifestations of motivation**. *Context*: Why did you choose the Human Sciences program and what career are you considering? *Perception of competence to execute an activity*: Do you have what it takes to succeed in college? *Perception of own motivation*: What most influences your motivation either positively or negatively? *Choosing to undertake an activity*: What is your level of participation in-class and out-of-class in activities in order to execute school work? *Intellectual engagement in executing an activity*: What are the most efficient strategies you personally use to learn and understand what is taught?

An **active and varied teaching method** and **systematic pairing of strong and weak students** are two possible strategies under consideration. But you must also **act upstream at the secondary level** by teaching students good study habits, by giving a better support to study and career plans and by giving a more accurate picture of what

cegep is really like, all actions that require **a concerted effort by players in high school and in college**. [English version of the [PAREA Report Summary](#)]

KARSENTI, Thierry, « [Favoriser la motivation et la réussite en contexte scolaire : les TIC feront-elles mouche?](#) », *Vie pédagogique*, 127, April-May 2003, p. 27-31.

In order to offset the lack of interest in school, **especially for boys**, information and communications technologies (ICTs) offer **a potential solution**. However, when ICTs are used in teaching rather than for enjoyment, enthusiasm in boys declines. The link between ICTs and the motivation to learn is complex. On the one hand, the benefits drawn from integrating ICTs into the learning process are many, especially with increased possibilities for communication and interaction. On the other hand, other studies show no significant difference in the learning plans using ICTs.

For Karsenti, **the way in which you integrate ICTs must be in accordance with the main determining factors for academic motivation**. Do students feel that they have increased choices and control in activities? Do they see themselves as having better skills? Has their sense of belonging to the class and the school increased? There are also a number of other motivational factors that should serve as guidelines for teachers. Notably, you must avoid integrating ICTs into traditional teaching methods – just think of the overuse of PowerPoint presentations in certain cegep courses – and ensure that students participate actively in their own learning process.

To obtain further information, you may want to read the following article published in *Le Devoir* on May 12, 2010 titled [Les écoles ayant intégré les ordinateurs en classe voient leurs élèves plus concentrés et davantage motivés](#).

The article deals notably with **the positive experience surrounding introduction of laptops in class** at the Eastern Townships School Board into primary grade and high school classes, an experiment which Mr. Karsenti's research team examined. There would seem to be benefits regarding participation, motivation, open-mindedness on the world and perseverance.

LANGLOIS, Simon and Guy CORRIVEAU, «[Étude de l'engagement selon le genre dans les laboratoires de physique](#)», PAREA Report, Collège de Shawinigan, 2009, 156 p. [[Report's Article](#) or [the Pédagogie collégiale's Article](#) (Spring 2011, Vol 24 No 3)]

Do boys and girls have a different way of carrying out a physics lab experiment? Researchers have established that **boys** want to start using the equipment rapidly and get down to work and that they proceed by trial and error. They **tend to think things out based on their experiment**. Their intellectual engagement is **focused on the task at hand** and **their participation is more autonomous than cooperative**. The manner of participating in the task for a boy identified as strong ensures he will understand clearly and be able to develop problem recognition. On the other hand, with such a degree of autonomous participation, a **weak boy** will ask fewer questions that could help him progress, possibly out of fear of being judged, and his limited capabilities stop him from freeing himself from any impasse while trying to solve the problem at hand. As the authors mention, it is not a question of stereotyping genders but of showing that each student has his or her way of developing solutions.

Understanding the dropout process to reduce its frequency

RIVIÈRE, Bernard, « [Comprendre les décrocheurs afin de mieux les aider](#) », *Pédagogie collégiale*, Vol. 9, No 2, 1995, p. 11-15.

This article results from a qualitative study conducted with about 20 students – boys and girls - who have dropped out from the Cégep de Rosemont. The author describes the dropout process in **10 steps spanning three time frames**. First, the **pre-dropout** period covering three actual steps, including first of all a *need for updating* (1) via college-level studies that is accompanied by a *distorted perception of cegep* (2) and a *problem-plagued academic orientation* (3). The next five steps make up the actual **dropout** period. The student is in a *state of shock* (4) because of the course requirements and he feels a *sense of alienation* (5) and is already on the fringe of the system. Then comes a *defensive stance* (6) when the student develops avoidance strategies (absenteeism, passive state in class, etc.), a state of *action inhibition* (7) where he comes self-deprecatory and sees himself as incompetent, finally leading to becoming *resigned to dropping out* (8) when he ultimately decides to throw in the towel.

The two final steps are **post-dropout**. This is the *academic moratorium* (9) whereupon he attempts to join the labour market and may become disillusioned. Lastly, there is the period of *self-reassertion* (10) when the dropout regains his self-confidence, tries new personal projects especially going back to school. **Measures that are proposed** for preventing dropouts are mainly aimed at the initial stages to have more effect. Making high school graduate students aware of real life in college and adapting the teaching

style to the personal characteristics of the students are part of the solutions that are proposed.

RIVIÈRE, Bernard, *Le décrochage au collégial. Le comprendre et le prévenir*, Laval QC, Éditions Beauchemin Ltée, Agora Collection, 1996, 221 p. (Book available at the CDC. Ask for it! # [720406](#))

The following excerpt taken from the foreword sets the tone of this work. Bernard Rivière notes that, “the overall problem with dropouts must be reset in the environment and the context where it comes from: **the institution itself**,” referring to the climate of competition, the type of authority exercised by the teachers, the absence of coaching, the structures and teaching methods that are often rigid and poorly adapted, the piecemeal knowledge, in short, all factors that may inspire a loss of motivation in the students, a reduction of self-esteem and a loss of critical capability all of which may result in increased dropouts if no appropriate help is available.

ST-AMANT, Jean-Claude. [Comment limiter le décrochage scolaire des garçons et des filles? D’abord déconstruire les stéréotypes sexuels](#), sisyph.org, 2003, 3 p.

The theory proposed by the author to explain the overall problem of dropouts affecting part of the boys and girls who have academic trouble revolves around **two simultaneous dynamics**: *the relationship boys and girls have with school* (on an academic proximity/distance continuum) and *the process of building up gender identities* (liberation from or compliance with traditional gender representations). According to the author, **the same mechanisms come into play in boys as in girls**. For instance, **the more liberated someone has become from sexual stereotypes, the better results in school will be**, this liberation becoming more evident in more favoured circles. He suggests three avenues for change: systematic measures to wipe out sexual stereotypes, the development of reading practices and taking over one’s own schooling.

To go even further

We recommend the following bibliography, available directly from the CDC's catalogue, on the topic of «**SCHOOL SUCCESS FOR BOYS**»: Access the CDC's online catalogue: <http://catalogue.cdc.qc.ca> , Click on "**Start search**", then click on "**Suggestions**":



This bibliography is updated on an ongoing basis!

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" SCHOOL SUCCESS FOR BOYS ",
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About the author:

Jacques Boisvert began teaching psychology at the Cégep Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu in 1974. He received his Master's degree in Psychology from the University of Montreal and his Ph.D. in Education from the University of Quebec in Montreal (UQAM). The research he carried out at the cegep level since the early 1990s includes three studies on the development of critical thinking, a study focusing on how boys entered in Human Sciences programs see college and scholar success, as well as a study comparing academic motivation in boys and girls in the Social Sciences program. In 2008, he received the Teaching Excellence Award from the Association of Community Colleges of Canada. Now retired from the Cegep since 2008, Jacques Boisvert is a consultant in his field of expertise and has given classes on academic success in boys in the PERFORMA network's graduate-level certificate in college teaching (CPEC).