

# Boys, Books and Homophobia: Exploring the practices and policies of masculinities in school

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## Abstract

Disturbed by a proliferation of quick-fix literacy strategies to “help the boys” increase achievement levels in the midst of a policy shift that acknowledges gay, lesbian, bi and transgender, questioning (GLBTQ) youth, the author examines how masculinities are connected to literacy practices and negotiated through a safe school policy. He argues that specific literacy strategies recommended in recent support documents for teachers are limiting and restrictive because of a narrow view connecting gender and masculinity to literacy practices that reinscribe heteronormative masculinity in schools. He further argues that strategies to increase literacy achievement levels among boys run contrary to a more embracing school board policy aimed at acknowledging diverse multiple youth identities.

## Résumé

Les garçons, les livres et l'homophobie: exploration des pratiques et politiques de la masculinité dans les écoles

Dérangé par la prolifération, au sein de la littérature, de stratégies « remède rapide » visant à « aider les garçons » à améliorer leur niveau de réussite au coeur d'un changement de politique reconnaissant les jeunes lesbiennes, gais, bi et transgenres, et ceux en questionnement (LGBTQ), l'auteur s'interroge sur la façon dont les masculinités sont apparentées aux pratiques de lecture et traitées par une politique scolaire réfléchie. Il suggère que certaines stratégies mises de l'avant et recommandées dans la littérature et documents destinés aux enseignants sont contraignantes et restrictives. En effet, elles offrent une vision restreinte en reliant sexe et masculinité à des pratiques de lecture qui réaffirme la norme de la masculinité hétérosexuelle au sein du milieu scolaire. L'auteur avance même que les stratégies mises de l'avant pour augmenter les niveaux de lecture des jeunes garçons nuisent aux politiques plus ouvertes des commissions scolaires visant la reconnaissance d'une variété d'identités chez les jeunes.

## Biographical note

MICHAEL KEHLER is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Western Ontario. He is conducting a SSHRC funded national study examining adolescent reluctance to participate in grade nine Health and Physical Education classes. He is co-editor (with Michael Atkinson) of *Boys' Bodies; Speaking the Unspoken*, and co-editor of *The Problem with Boys' Education: Beyond the Backlash* with Drs. W. Martino and M. Weaver-Hightower.

## Biographical note

MICHAEL KEHLER est professeur agrégé à la Faculté des sciences de l'éducation de l'Université Western Ontario. Il pilote un projet de recherche national subventionné par le CRSH via lequel il analyse la réticence des adolescents de secondaire 3 à participer aux cours d'éducation physique et à la santé. Il est le coéditeur (avec Michael Atkinson) de *Boys' Bodies; Speaking the Unspoken* ainsi que coéditeur de *The Problem with Boys' Education: Beyond the Backlash* avec les professeurs W. Martino et M. Weaver-Hightower.

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