

THE BUILD



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This case study presents a project being implemented in the Baie-des-Chaleurs, Quebec, by which a group of elementary and high school students are building a sailboat with a teacher. They have the support of a broad range of community, institutional and non-for-profit partners who believe, like them, that a challenging project can have positive outcomes both inside and outside the classroom.

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The Build

NEW CARLISLE, GASPÉ COAST

INTRODUCTION

This case study is intended to document a project in the making, and is therefore done in an exploratory spirit. We will describe the development and initial stages of the project and provide some elements that can be used to design an evaluation, which can be continued as the project progresses. The information comes from interviews with several key informants, as well as documents produced by project partners and journalists.

SITUATION AND CONTEXT

New Carlisle High School was the first high school on the Gaspé coast and celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2013-14. Students come to the school from Bonaventure to Port Daniel, a radius of approximately 50 kilometers. New Carlisle High School is one of the Eastern Shores School Board's largest schools with 168 registered students, from pre-school through Secondary 5.

New Carlisle is located in the Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine administrative region and is part of the Bonaventure regional county municipality. It is on the most southerly point of the Gaspé Coast in the Baie-des-Chaleurs. About two-thirds of the population of New Carlisle speaks English as their mother tongue.



For several years, the Census of Canada has pointed out that English speakers in the Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine region are not as well-educated as the regional French-speaking majority, which itself falls below provincial and national averages. Compared to the English-speaking population across Quebec, English speakers in the region show a higher tendency to have low educational attainment and are much less likely to show high educational attainment. In addition, rates of unemployment are significantly higher among English speakers than among Francophones, and incomes are lower on average as well.¹

Given this socio-economic situation, students at New Carlisle High School benefit from the MELS (Quebec Ministry of Education) designation as a "New Approaches New Solutions" school. On a scale of 10, with 1 being most advantaged and 10 being most disadvantaged, New Carlisle High School ranks as 9. A total of 77 of students are on an Individual Education Plan (IEP): 22 modified in

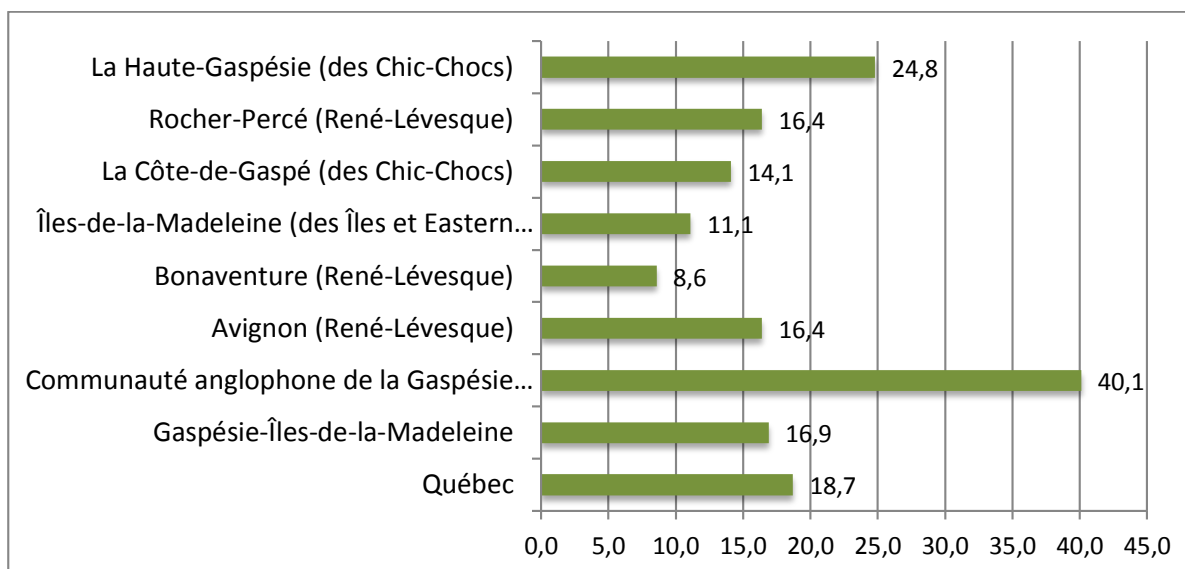
¹ CHSSN 2010. *Socio-Economic Profiles of Quebec's English-Speaking Communities*.

all subjects, 27 modified in 1-2 subjects and 22 adapted. This number has increased from 42 IEP students in 2011 and 58 in 2012. Of the IEP student population, 36% do not write formal year-end evaluations as they are on modified IEPs while 35% take part in some, but not all formal evaluations.²

Student engagement is also an ongoing challenge in the classroom, and a variety of classroom projects and extracurricular clubs are ongoing. Student engagement, self-esteem, behavior and wider societal issues such as involvement in vandalism and illegal activity remain challenges within a certain percentage of the population. This is reflected in the 14% of students in breach of the Code of Conduct. A very high percentage of students require intensive emotional support and when these needs are not met, behavioral issues arise quickly.³

These challenges are reflected in the drop-out rates for the school board for the period from 2007-2010, which are significantly higher for the ESSB (English) than for the other territories. The numbers below will have changed, but they provide the context for a project of this type:

Annual official rate of high school leaving without a diploma or qualification (drop-out) by territory of residence and school board (2007-2008, 2008-2009, 2009-2010)



Source: Charlemagne qualification quotidienne

This situation provides the context for the project that has taken shape in New Carlisle High School.

² Excerpted from *The Build* presentation document.

³ Excerpted from *The Build* presentation document.

THE SEED FOR *THE BUILD*

As a relatively new teacher at New Carlisle High School, Anthony Beer soon realized that the students have little knowledge or experience of the marine environment, although they live literally steps away from the sea—on the shores of the Baie-des-Chaleurs, the large bay located between Quebec and New Brunswick, and which is an extension of the gulf of Saint-Lawrence and ultimately, the Atlantic Ocean. Very few had ever been in a boat and no one had been sailing.

So in June 2014, Anthony took the fifth grade students on an end-of-year outing to sail with a cooperative dedicated to sailing and marine education, called Ecovoile. Despite their usual reticence to try new experiences, resistance to activities organized for them, and downright fear among some of them, the students all loved the sailing experience. Anthony observed them being curious, asking questions and feeling a boost in self-confidence as they took turns steering the boat.

After a summer of sailing, on the first day back at school in the fall, Anthony was greeted by one of the more reluctant students with “when are we going sailing again?” Convinced that the opportunity would be lost if he waited until an end-of-the-year outing, he began to hatch a plan that would continue to motivate and interest the students throughout the year and contribute to their learning and personal development.

Developing the idea

The idea of building a boat emerged out of conversations between Anthony and some key people, including Ecovoile members and Damian Foxall of Canadian Wildlife Federation, a professional sailor who has participated in 18 trans-Atlantic and nine round-the-world events. As Anthony became more involved in sailing himself, the potential of using sailing as way to reach several objectives with students became apparent.

The objectives he identified were:

1. To create stronger connections between elementary and high school students, as well as between students and teachers.
2. To show by example that learning continues after school and throughout one’s lifetime and that literacy and numeracy are useful for real-life projects, such as this, as are geography, art, and all school subjects. In short, he wanted to foster curiosity and a value for learning, to show students that “Learning can make life exciting.”

3. To offer students a hands-on project that they can do outside of school. By using the Anchor building, which offers adult education and vocational programs, students can become acquainted with the place and see the opportunities offered there to learn a trade.
4. To make a connection to the sea, thus instilling a desire to protect the marine environment (water, beach, etc.) and use it wisely.
5. To encourage persistence and pride in accomplishment: "It's going to take 3-4-5 months to complete, and there are going to be very difficult steps and you have to be really precise."

The vision

As expressed in the project document: "With momentum on the rise for student success, partnership building, and collective impact – an opportunity has presented itself to lead an exploratory voyage that will bring children, citizens, non-profits and businesses together to develop a project called: The Build". The educational potential was woven into the project from the outset: "To enhance positive learning environments through a cross-curriculum pilot project under the scope of sailor-leadership development." The long-term intended outcomes were:

- Increased student participation and involvement, higher attendance rate (less absenteeism for students in difficulty)
- Less behavioural issues in-class, increased focus to complete their work and a decrease in negative and unhealthy behaviours (bullying, smoking, drug and alcohol use, vandalism)
- A significant decrease in vandalism in the town, since students are now working to conserve and take care of their environment
- Stronger parent-school relations and sense of belonging
- Increased awareness and care for marine/sailing environments

But first, the project needed support to make it a reality.

GROWING THE PROJECT

The first step was to share the idea with the school principal, Kristy Larose. Anthony approached her and, despite the cost and effort, she believed it was worth trying to get up and running. She suggested contacting the Committee for Anglophone Social Action (CASA, a community organization serving English speakers on the Gaspé Coast) and within a matter of hours, they were able to meet with Cathy Brown, the executive director, and Roberta Billingsley, the youth and

community development manager. Ecovoile was also a partner from the beginning, a natural fit given their mission of promoting and teaching sailing in the Baie-des-Chaleurs area.

Garnering support

Realizing that a project of this type would cost more than the classroom budget for the year, these initial players decided to create a «*Reseau Express*» of potential funders. This was organized in collaboration with the coordinator for the integrated territorial approach (ATI) for the MRC of Bonaventure. This network was very engaged through the whole process, according to our interviewees: “They were extremely supportive. They even said they would pay for the kit if we didn’t have the money (and we would pay them back later).”

An action plan needed to be developed, which could then be shown to other potential partners and funders. These stages of researching, planning, and meetings were done in the fall of 2014, resulting in an action plan for The Build with a set of concrete activities, targeting different age groups and levels of ability. A broad range of partners committed to supporting The Build in a variety of ways. For example, The Municipality of New Carlisle has allowed project participants to use Black Lake (inland from the town centre) as a learning environment and has approved the modifications for the existing dock to support the needs of the sailing component. This partnership adopts the philosophy that the “youth involved will take pride in the environment that surrounds their interests and achievement, and will result in respectful citizenship.”

Ecovoile has supported the project by helping to identify the best boat to build and finding a kit. One of their members, master builder Georges Lemay, has also been helping with construction once a week since the building began. In the summer of 2015, Ecovoile will also be providing sailing lessons and integrating youth into a day camp program. The Anchor (the local adult education and vocational centre) is providing the workshop space for the actual boat building. In addition, various partners have provided funding, including the National Bank of Canada, CASA, the Community Health and Social Services Network (CHSSN), Quebec Sailing Federation (QSF) and the Canadian Wildlife Federation (CWF).

The network of partners are located at community, regional, provincial and national levels. These partnerships between the school, families, community, municipality, not-for-profit organizations and more is considered to facilitate interventions to address barriers to learning, enhance healthy development, and strengthen families.

Finding the right boat

Once the support was in place, a boat-building kit needed to be found. The choice suggested by Damian Foxall was a sailboat called The Mirror, with a capacity of three people. An article in Wikipedia explains:

The Mirror was named after the *Daily Mirror*, a UK newspaper with a largely working class distribution. The Mirror was from the start promoted as an affordable boat, and as a design it has done a great deal to make dinghy sailing accessible to a wide audience. (...) It was originally designed to be built with simple tools and little experience, and this meant that the design was quite simple. For example, the characteristic 'pram' front reduces the need for the more complicated curved wooden panels and joinery needed for a pointed bow, and a daggerboard is used instead of a hinged centreboard. The result is a robust, versatile and fairly light boat that can be easily maintained and repaired, and can also be got into the water very quickly from storage or transport. Although most experienced sailors would carry a paddle rather than oars, if necessary it rows well.



A kit for the Mirror was available in Ontario, and it arrived just before Christmas 2014. Then, curriculum had to be identified. The Canadian Wildlife Federation provided a curriculum called "Wild about sports" which includes age-relevant material to be used in a variety of subjects such as math (measurements, critical thinking), science (ecosystems, shorelines), English Language Arts (creative writing, individual journaling) and more. Two webinars have been held with CWF and skipper Damian Foxall to spur interest and discuss the project.

Starting the work

Work was planned to begin in January 2015, but the lead teacher, Anthony, had an injury and was unable to work until late March. This delay seems to have caused a decline in the enthusiasm of the students, particularly among secondary students, who have exams to prepare and school work to finish. As a result, the building team is composed of two secondary students and six elementary (grades 5 and 6), a "solid crew" in Anthony's view.

At the end of March the crew undid the kit, took inventory, and prepared the initial steps, then building began in April. During April and May, they worked on the boat two days a week after school and on weekends. "We have what is beginning to look like a boat now."

The students have started a website and a small group (4 or 5 students) has been taking pictures with regular "old-fashioned" cameras and will be developing the films in a new darkroom created for the purpose. This dimension corresponds to the original vision by which students can be involved in a variety of ways. Those who are not interested in building can write for the blog, take photographs, make drawings, or find other ways to contribute.

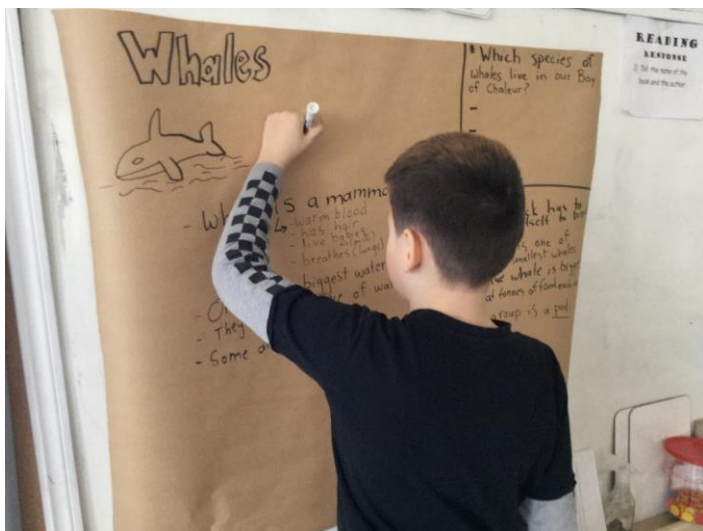
OBSERVATIONS ON THE FIRST YEAR

In this section, we will make some observations on the successes, challenges, lessons learned and preliminary impacts of this project.

Successes: The benefits of partnership

Clearly, the rapidity with which a small group of people was able to secure support from a broad range of partners is a huge success. This project went from a vague idea to a funded project with a sailboat kit and related curriculum in a matter of just months. This speaks to the strength and effectiveness of partnerships that have been developed over the years through other projects, as well as the level of trust among partner organizations. It also speaks to the enthusiasm of organizations on the territory, which are dedicated to youth and their development as healthy, happy people with huge potential. The level of capacity in the partner organizations also made it possible to quickly structure a project, with objectives, activities, outcomes and funding. Finally, many would say that Anthony's enthusiasm is infectious and has helped to convince people to provide support.

Another factor in success is that this project helps partners to achieve their own objectives and fulfill their mission. For example, Ecovoile has an interest in reaching the clientele of English-speaking youth on their territory, which until now they had not succeeded in doing. They were also interested in integrating sailing-related knowledge into the school curriculum, so The Build provides an opportunity to test different content and approaches. In addition, this project contributes to the mission of developing sailing on the Gaspé Coast and in Quebec.



Since The Build focuses on hands-on learning, it can also contribute towards the objectives of The Anchor by exposing youth at the secondary III level to the centre. It is hoped that this will open a conversation amongst the youth about their future, during which they recognize that there are post-secondary opportunities that match their learning styles, contributing to their sense of attachment to school.

The potential of partnerships such as these, as a means to create synergies between sectors (health, education, business, not-for-profit, and more) as well as between organizations has been demonstrated time and again by initiatives such as Community Learning Centres and the CHSSN Networking and Partnership Initiatives. Through such programs, schools, communities and institutions have collaborated to improve the lives of English-speaking youth.

In the implementation phase, the main success is simply in having pulled together a strong crew of students, teacher-s and technical support committed to building a boat for the first time in their lives (aside from Georges Lemay from Ecovoile). The project is off the ground and the different facets that were envisaged are progressing well. Also, the students are integrating the idea that measurement is important and that it is essential to do things right and be sure about what you are doing, because some mistakes can be very difficult to fix.

Challenges faced

The challenges faced in developing the idea and making it a reality included project design, finding a good kit, and getting the young people interested in participating. However, all of these steps went well with the support of the multiple partners.

During the implementation phase, there have been many challenges. As Anthony Beer says:

The biggest challenge, for this year, is just never building a boat before and having to learn with the students. They are children and they need organization and leadership. So it was interesting to juggle that with being in control of them, but at the same time I am trying to figure it out too.

One of the partners also noted that at this stage everything is a challenge because everything is new.

Another challenge is the low level of involvement among secondary students and among girls. It was hoped that the core crew would include more high school students and that girls would be as involved as boys. This could change next year, but is certainly below the original level planned. One issue to address is the stigma among girls of being involved in a construction project, perceived to be a male activity.

Setting up a darkroom has taken some time because of the difficulty finding the right materials, particularly the fabric for the curtains.

Lessons learned... so far



- * Do your homework. Make a strong, well-designed plan and do not hesitate to reach out to people who can help.
- * In communicating the project to students at the outset, make it exciting, but also realistic. Many students expected it to be easier than it is, which can lead to frustration.
- * The original goal of having 30 students involved in the process was not realistic. A crew of ten students, with 4 to 5 working at a time is best because of the nature of the work and the amount of supervision needed.
- * Even the students who are not involved may be affected in some way, simply by knowing this is going on and becoming more aware of possibilities around them.

IMPACTS

To query the initial impacts of The Build, we will refer to the framework titled *Partnering for the well-being of Minority English-Language Youth, Schools & Communities*⁴. This framework will help examine some of the areas in which The Build seems to be aligned with the proposed outcomes, building blocks, approaches and strategies of this framework.



Promoting healthy lifestyles

The design of this project integrates a broad range of opportunities for **activities that achieve health and education outcomes**. Students are able to use their skills and knowledge—some of which is learned in school—to complete a hands-on project. They are also able to experience the physical challenge of sailing as well as building the sailboat. They learn about a vast array of topics,

⁴ <http://www.chssn.org/En/CHSSN-LEARN-Booklet-2014-EN.pdf>

from carpentry to photography, marine environments, wind patterns, writing and communication, and much more.

In doing so, it is hoped that the children will see the relevance of school-based learning and become more motivated to finish high school and pursue learning opportunities in whatever fields they are interested in. In this, The Build also **supports the school in achieving its school success plan**.

Another aspect of healthy lifestyles is **education and experiences to enhance youth's emotional well-being and resiliency**. By offering out-of-school activities where their contribution is valued and space is made for sharing their frustrations, pride, difficulties and joys, it can be expected that well-being and resiliency is being fostered. The opportunity to attend a week-long camp where they will learn sailing and water safety, as well as spend time as a group, can also contribute to this goal. In a review of factors that encourage school perseverance and well-being among youth,⁵ R2 also recognizes the positive effects of role models in preventing alcohol and drug use.

Offering whole school & community initiatives



The Build is clearly a **comprehensive activity that extends beyond the classroom** (an approach targeted in the youth framework). The project takes the school as the starting point and uses the classroom as a place to integrate course material related to sailing, but the main activities take place outside school hours and on a different site. Using The Anchor also connects students to an adult education and vocational centre where they may later wish to continue their education and training. In addition, by using Black Lake, another community asset is put to use and the municipal council is showing the value it places on the well-being of the youth.

The Build also **supports teacher involvement in extracurricular activities**, and has the potential to **enhance relationships between students, teachers**

⁵ Réunir Réussir. 2013. *Pour agir efficacement sur les déterminants de la persévérance scolaire et de la réussite éducative*.

and families by providing a space for working and having fun together in a non-school environment. One can imagine that the interpersonal dynamics and the atmosphere may be quite different than activities that take place in the school environment.

Indeed, this type of action is recognized as an effective way to develop peer relations and ultimately school perseverance, as mentioned by R2: by offering interesting activities for youth and by encouraging activities that help youth develop social capacities outside school and the family, while ensuring connections with these environments. R2 also points out the positive impact of meaningful relationships with adults and peers in the community, as well as challenging activities; The Build certainly provides both such opportunities.

Encouraging English-speaking youth to persevere

This “building block” in the youth framework is more long-term, but The Build certainly seems to have the potential to **motivate youth to become bilingual and develop a sense of belonging**, and possibly even to **help youth in realizing a future in Quebec**. Through experiences like the week of sailing camp in Carleton, they will be exposed to their French-speaking peers as well as other communities on the Gaspé Coast and, perhaps, develop a greater sense of belonging to the region. By exploring trades, careers and educational opportunities they may begin to see more possibilities for a future in Quebec.

WHAT DO THE CREW MEMBERS HAVE TO SAY?

The Build is a new experience for all youth involved. None of them had ever been involved in a teamwork-based project like this before. In addition, only one mentioned having been in a boat before and they were motor boats. Experience with the sea was also limited to cleaning up the beach with the school, some water sports, fishing, and going to the beach for science class. The students’ experience with building was almost non-existent, with the exception of one student who had built a picnic table with his father.

Their motivation is mostly curiosity: about navigation, about the construction of a sailboat, and about how to build and use the boat.

Learning

The students name some things they have learned and suggest the pride they have in it. As one student said:

“now I know what copper wire is. I like telling my dad about it because he understands what I am talking about like measuring and the materials we are using.”

Another mentions:

“I know how to use a drill and what epoxy is. Especially how strong it is and how you need to work fast with it because it dries too quickly.”

One kid wrote on the blog:

“my thoughts of the build is that it's frustrating because of the glue blocks were hard to place in the location where they were meant to be.”

Anthony Beer confirms:

“He is not exaggerating. We had to remeasure about 12 times. You can't be off a millimeter. I was really impressed by that (...) And one of the kids, who was the most patient about the glue blocks, I had him last year and he would give up on anything that was tough. And now he's the most “zen” kid. He is getting a new way of learning.”

Environmental awareness

The goal of fostering environmental awareness seems to be progressing:

“Each year we have a big beach clean-up and last year it was like “aw, really we have to clean that up?” but this year I noticed that the kids who are involved in this just said “OK!” There is more awareness of their local environment. They point out trash now when they see it and want to pick it up. It's not punishment anymore, or “do I get a slurpy because we did this?” Now it's inside them.”

Mutual support

The Build seems to be creating an environment where students can work together and support each other. Being outside of school, in a different environment, where they need to work well together, has created opportunities for sharing and talking about topics they might not have discussed at school. The blend of elementary and high school students also allows for learning and support across age groups. One kid said on the blog “My thoughts about the build are mixed because I really want to finish the mirror dingy sailboat to get it in the water to sail but at the same time I want to keep building just for the fun of it.”

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT ...

The Build will continue beyond the school year. This summer (2015) the students will be spending a week in Carleton where they will receive training in water safety and sailing techniques. They will also be integrated into day camp activities with French-speaking youth and will have time as a group to play and socialize together.

The vision for the future development of the project is that one boat will be built each year at the school and that after two years an entrepreneurial program will be developed with the Anchor, by which the boats will be sold to help fund the next year. The first two boats will be kept for young people in New Carlisle to learn to sail. In this way, the project can continue and a new group of youth can participate in the experience each year, with the older ones guiding the younger ones.

Another part of the vision for the future is that youth will start racing sailboats and participate in regattas. This kind of experience can be very formative, as it calls on skills and personal qualities (leadership, group cooperation, sportsmanship) that are lifelong assets.



⁶ From www.yachtsandyachting.com