
**Friedrich-Ebert-Gymnasium
Bonn**

CertiLingua

**My Active Contribution to Breton
Education Centre in 2010:**

**Teaching support, equipment assistance for
school events and travel planning with
students and parents**



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New Waterford, Nova Scotia, Canada 2010 - 2011



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1 Introduction

In the year 2010 I decided to study abroad for ten months. The school I picked was Breton Education Centre in New Waterford, Nova Scotia, Canada. Except from improving my English language skills I had several motivations to dare this trip: I wanted to experience my own personal limits in a new and unknown culture to broaden my horizon as well as I wanted to improve and develop my social competency.

Breton Education Centre (BEC) seemed to offer me the best way to archive these goals. BEC is a Junior and Senior High School which is attended by about 700 students from grade 7 to grade 12 in the area of New Waterford. The school opened in 1970 and belongs to the Cape Breton Victoria Regional School Board (CBVRSB).

New Waterford is an urban community of approximately 10,000 inhabitants and is located in Cape Breton, an island of the province Nova Scotia between the peninsula of Nova Scotia and the Prince Edward Islands (PEI).

Cape Breton is characterized by the coal industry as well as the numerous sights e.g. The Cabot Trail, a scenic road, and The Fortress of Louisbourg, a reconstruction of a French fortress.

Before I had spent my whole life in an urban environment: I was born in Berlin and, at the age of 4, I moved to Bonn. How is life in the countryside? Does living in a small village not get boring? These were some of the questions I had asked myself but I was looking forward to experience the total opposite of my life here in Germany. Except from everyday life experiences I was interested in getting to know the much-lauded Canadian education system and how it is actually put into practice in every single school. How does education work there? Which opportunities does the school offer the students? Studying at a full-time school – how can students engage themselves in school activities outside the regular courses?

From the variety of opportunities the school offers students in Canada, for example sports clubs, voluntary services, theater and school band, I had chosen to become involved in three different projects during my stay which I am going to describe in the following report.

Decisive for my involvement were my wide-ranging computer skills, my motivation to help and support other people and my ability to communicate my knowledge.[^]

2 Description of the projects:

The three projects were realized in the context of Breton Education Centre in New Waterford, Nova Scotia, Canada.

2.1 Breton Education Centre Computer Club

Breton Education Centre is a High School which offers a “step assistant” course. This course is meant for children with learning, mental or physical disabilities. Even though the school takes great care of these students it often seems that they are not fully integrated in the student body. BEC Computer Club was initialized in cooperation with a computer teacher. The aim of the club is to offer all students, but especially the ones mentioned above, a place to spend their break while learning the handling of computers. The focus is on supporting the students with their special needs as well as giving everybody a feeling of solidarity and togetherness.

2.2 New Waterford Coal Bowl Classic

New Waterford Coal Bowl Classic, or briefly just “Coal Bowl“, is a basketball tournament which is the most important sports event of the school and the region. It takes place annually since 1982 and is hosted by Breton Education Centre. Playing basketball in Canada is comparable to playing soccer in Germany – this sport fascinates thousands of youths and is an important part of Canadian culture.

Every year more than 250 active participants, mainly Senior High male basketball players from all across the country, arrive for the competition as well as many visitors and observers. The event which also includes a music and entertainment program lasts for one week but the preparations usually start four weeks earlier.

The preparations for Coal Bowl basically affect the organization: the registration and the care of the participants and their coaches staying at the school building during the event on site and subsequently the documentation of the sports events on the school’s website.

2.3 Breton Education Centre European Travel Group

Another special offer for the students of Breton Education Centre is the opportunity to join the European Travel Group “Travel Club”. This program has a long tradition at the school encountering a lot of approval among students and staff members. The Travel Club is a small group of grade 12 students who are able to afford the costs of a trip. After two years of preparation they travel together with two teachers to different countries in Europe, usually every year in late April or May.

For most of the students this trip is their first time travelling to another continent which means it is a completely new and unknown experience. Therefore, an accurate travel planning is necessary to reduce the concerns and worries of the group. After the trip it

is also part of the school's tradition to create a movie-like slideshow with all the pictures the group has taken to perpetuate their memories and experiences.

3 Connection of the projects to the school curriculum

The three projects I chose correspond to the **CAS** system of the International Baccalaureate (IB): Creativity, Activity and Service.

- **Creativity** for the creative development of teaching units for disabled children (teaching support).
- **Activity** for the equipment assistance for school events.
- **Service** for the travel planning with students and their parents.

This reflects the personal experiences I earned at social level. Besides that, the tasks are characterized by IT (information technology) which fits to the profile of the Friedrich-Ebert-Gymnasium Bonn as a MINT-friendly¹ school.

4 Motivation and expectations

4.1 BEC Computer Club

The BEC Computer Club did not officially exist before. It was my luck to meet the computer teacher Marilyn McGillivray by chance. In my spare time I helped her preparing the computer classes and updating her website with articles, pictures or handouts. She soon noticed my ability to work with computers as well as communicating my existing knowledge on this topic. She offered me the opportunity to teach her grade 7 students. I really enjoyed that but because of my schedule which did not include any free periods I was unable to continue the teaching on a regular basis.

I had noticed that many of the “steps-“students came regularly to the teacher's classroom at lunch time to have a talk or to work on the computers. Many of them were not able to handle computers. I encouraged Mrs. McGillivray to create a “club”: everyone could join and we, I and the teacher, were always present to assist the children with their questions and problems.

From the start I was sure that a lot of children would take this chance because our club was not planned to be like a real course, the atmosphere should be friendly and easygoing. I hoped to get in contact with many Canadian children except the ones I met in my daily courses anyway. I wanted to meet older and younger people from all social groups and I wanted to hear their stories which probably no one was interested in before. My personal challenge and only worry was to see if I had the competency to teach – to teach even people who have difficulties learning something new. This would

¹ MINT: Mathematics, IT, Natural Sciences & Technology

require from my part an abundance of patience, clearness and the ability to adapt to the personal needs of every person who joins the club.

4.2 Coal Bowl Classic

Based on the success and the good experiences I had with the BEC Computer Club, the vice principal of Breton Education Centre, Mr. Kevin Kearney, asked me if I could do the computer work for the annual New Waterford Coal Bowl Classic 2010.

I knew that it was a great opportunity for me because this was one of the essential and most important tasks for this basketball tournament and even more so because it usually was not available for students, especially not for international students who are “new” at school. In the beginning I did not know a lot about the tasks except that my work would be voluntary, I would get my own office, my complete computer skills would be necessary and the work might be very time-consuming.

I personally enjoy volunteering, helping and assisting other people. I expected it to be nice time, an opportunity to experience my limits as well as an opportunity to meet a lot of different people from all across Canada. I considered it as my challenge to show everybody that even a young international student from grade 10 who travels to an unknown country with a new culture, language and school could manage such a responsible and demanding task.

I actually did not worry that I could fail this challenge. The work with the Computer Club gave me a lot of positive feedback from all sides and I knew that I would be supported by the vice principal, other teachers and technicians all the time.

4.3 BEC Travel Club

During my stay I realized that most of the students had never travelled before, a lot of them did not even know anything about Europe. Although German international students are constantly present at school, many students had never heard anything about Germany or countries in Europe in general. Strangely they thought that Germans would only build cars and drink beer all day but many of them were not sure if we had TVs or real roads except the “Autobahn”. In my opinion travelling is a very important part of the education which should be supported as much as possible because it opens oneself to our constantly growing “Global Village” – a world that shrinks and brings people together due to modern technology and means of transportation. I noticed that this was a great chance for me to get involved: I was not only a person who knew Europe well, I was from Europe and I considered it my personal task to represent our continent. Furthermore, my hope was to find out more about how people in Canada

think about Europeans – their culture and traditions, their language, their way of life etc. I wanted to simplify the dialogue between two cultures while taking away their fears, prejudices and worries and show them some of the positive aspects of travelling to Europe.

5 Implementation of the projects:

In the following I will give a description of each of the three projects as well as the experiences I gained.

5.1 BEC Computer Club

I volunteered about ten hours a week for six months. After I brought up the idea to establish a computer club, I and Marilyn McGillivray, the computer teacher, informed all students who spent their lunch time regularly in the computer laboratory. There was not a great difference because our club members were those who had spent their time in the computer lab anyway. But now everybody especially the disabled children were invited to ask me questions or to let me show them a wide range of computer software such as “Photoscape” to edit pictures or “Pivot Stickfigure Animator” to create animated cartoons etc. to try out.

After a few weeks a stable group had formed itself consisting of more or less 6 students from grade 7 to grade 12: our three disabled children Kayla Bussey, Ashley McLeod and Renelda Duco as well as other curious and interested students.

But the computer club was not only about work: sometimes we organized pizza parties. The teacher ordered pizza and soda which was delivered to the school. Everybody used to sit together to talk, chat, eat and drink. A few months later we also arranged a movie night for all club members and friends. The students watched the comedy “The Pacifier” while I organized drinks and snacks for our audience. We created our own logo and took several pictures – either group pictures or pictures of the children working on the computers – to strengthen the group’s cohesiveness and the pride of the Breton Education Centre Computer Club.

Right from the beginning I was very surprised how thankful the students were. They appreciated everything we did, they showed up regularly at lunch time (when we had to cancel it one day they were obviously sad) and they were proud to be an official member of a club. Our three mentally disabled children Kayla, Ashley and Renelda were a stable part of the group: they attended our club every day and, as Ms. McGillivray told me, they also came to the computer lab during free periods or after

field trips. They enjoyed having the opportunity to talk about anything and to share their news, stories etc. with us. There was always somebody who had a sympathetic ear. Furthermore they were very interested in the computer work and I soon noticed a learning process after a few weeks.

First I was a bit disappointed that only a small group of students considered themselves as members of the BEC Computer Club but over time I learned to appreciate working with only 6 students: The atmosphere was friendlier, almost familial, it was usually really quiet and I had more time to dedicate my attention to every single student. Sometimes the club members also brought their friends or other interested students with them so I still had the chance to meet a lot of other Canadian children.

5.2 Coal Bowl Classic:

I was a Coal Bowl volunteer for three weeks for a total of 100 hours. My commitment started two weeks before the actual event began. 13 basketball teams were qualified to participate in the tournament; they would stay and sleep in classrooms of Breton Education Centre.

To handle the mass of visitors, students and players coming to New Waterford and to BEC, special identification cards for each player and volunteer were required as well as hundreds of vouchers for drinks/food etc. Therefore, all the coaches had to send an e-mail with a picture of each player and a list of names. My task was to enter the data to BEC's photo software SIS (school image software), create templates and then print them. I had to edit every single picture which was then copied to SIS with the name of the player and the team they were going to play for. Next I created a template with the logo of Coal Bowl, a picture and the name of the school. In the last step personalized ID cards were printed, cropped, laminated and hole-punched. The whole procedure was rather complicated and consisted of several steps. Renée MacDonald and Alissa Leadbeater, other BEC students who helped out supported me with the laminating and hole-punching of the ID-Cards.

During Coal Bowl week all regular classes were cancelled so the students could watch the games. I usually stayed at school from 9am until 9pm after the last event in the evening which were usually concerts, presentations or other performances. I was equipped with my own ID card that marked me as a volunteer and allowed me to enter the gymnasium without paying and a walkie-talkie to make me available if anyone needed support.

Quite often it happened that players had lost their ID cards or that coaches needed vouchers. They were asked to come to my room so I could make or re-make them as

described above. These were the moments I came in (direct!) contact with Canadians from all across the country: people from the west coast, the French speaking Quebec as well as students from the nearby city of Sydney. I was fortunate to know how to speak French because of my bilingual education in Germany. Every time a game was over, the photographers, usually two or three Senior High students with DSLR cameras, passed in their memory cards with about 100 pictures each. My job was it to minimize the size of each picture with the software “IrfanView”, choosing the 50 best ones and then uploading them to the official Coal Bowl website² by using certain software which was connected to the internal server and the website. During the games I assisted other students or technicians with setting up the required technology, e.g. speakers and lights for the events in the evening or watched some of the games downstairs in the gym. For one week it was a real full-time job.

I was very surprised in a positive way how much responsibility the school delegated to me: they let me use a master key, I had my own office in the school’s library, an own computer and the password to the Coal Bowl website which is usually for the vice principal only. I think after Coal Bowl I knew the school building better than any other student from BEC even though I had just been there for a short time.

The day before the start of Coal Bowl week I was really excited and also a bit nervous because I had never organized an event of this size before.

Having a walkie-talkie and an ID card made me even more aware of the importance of my work. Especially some of my friends were rather jealous because I did not have to pay to watch the games and I could go everywhere in the school building. I had to justify my work several times. What I also noticed a lot of times was that everyone at school treated me just like a fully adequate staff member which made me proud: in the cafeteria I could eat without showing my voucher, while walking down the hallway I was addressed by players, coaches or parents and if someone had a problem with technology I was consulted.

At the end of this stressful week I was more than sad it was over – a feeling that no one could share with me, everybody, especially the vice-principal Mr. Kearney, was glad the trouble was over until next year.

5.3 BEC Travel Club:

My engagement for the Breton Education Centre European Travel Group included about 100 hours of work over three months. The preparations for the journey to Europe started for all members in grade 10. Until their departure the two accompanying

² www.coalbowl.ca

teachers Mrs. Jeanette Kennedy and Marilyn McGillivray organized fundraisers to sponsor the immense costs of the trip of about CAD \$3,000 which is not easy to afford for many students coming from a region characterized by its low-budget working-class society. My motivation to enable education by travelling to as much students as possible made me decide to help the Travel Club members with their last few fundraisers. I also planned to talk to the parents at meetings to give them first-hand information on travelling to Europe. Usually this information is given by the two teachers themselves who both have travelled numerous times to Europe.

My work for BEC Travel Club began a month before the departure of the group. I planned and organized a "pie-fundraiser": The students had to ask relatives and friends if they would like to buy a pie for about \$8. When they were delivered to the school they had to be sorted according to the different tastes and then according to the orders all students had passed in before.

The departure of the trip was planned to be in spring 2010. A few weeks earlier there had been a parents meeting where everybody had the opportunity to ask questions about travelling and talk about other concerns they had.

The meeting took place in the library of Breton Education Centre, about 25 parents participated. Mrs. Kennedy and Ms. McGillivray introduced me to them as the international student from Germany. They said anyone could ask me anything about Europe; also all students were more than welcome to talk to me about their upcoming trip.

The teachers presented the destinations of the two-week round-trip: Venice, Nice, Paris and London. Then it was my turn to inform the parents about cultural distinctions between Canada and Europe in general for example food or safety in Europe's mega cities. I also gave handy tips to prepare a trip to Europe for example about European plugs, if an adapter would be sufficient or if a converter would be necessary and where they could buy them. I introduced the currency Euro and Pounds to the parents and told them the advantage of having money on a credit card as well as having some cash. Furthermore, we talked about travelling by air plane (for some students it was going to be the first time on an aircraft) and about the usage of cell phones to give both, students and parents, the opportunity to communicate with each other.

The actual trip then took place in April 2010. While the students travelled to Europe it was impossible for me to keep in touch with them, however, I was always informed about their whereabouts via status updates by some of the students on Facebook. Exactly two weeks later the return of the Travel Club to Canada was scheduled. Unfortunately, it was the point in time when the volcano "Eyjafjallajökull" on Iceland

erupted and hindered the air traffic on many airports in Europe³. The group was stuck in London with thousands of travellers from all around the world. The travel business responsible for the BEC students, EF tours, arranged a hotel for all students and teachers who were – after the anxiety of being stuck in England for a long time – happy to be able to explore London for another week.

It is a tradition at BEC that all pictures taken during the journey were going to be put together in a slideshow to present it to students and teachers. Because of my computer skills I was asked to do this job for the 2010 group. I spent several afternoons using the Apple software iMovie to choose the best pictures, put them in the right order, title some of the photographs with the location or a quote apposite to the location and then add transitions and music. The result was a movie of over 60 minutes of length which was presented and greatly appreciated by all students and staff members during a “pizza-party” that I had organized as well.

My first impression was actually amazement. I was impressed that so many students and parents were interested in getting to know the European continent. Some people on the one hand did not know anything about Europe at all but some students on the other hand were very interested in European history and culture, especially food and music.

The creation of the slideshow on the computer was also a great experience. I had never handled such a huge mass of pictures before, the students passed in over five memory cards and I am sure that I had more than 1,000 pictures in the end. I was also surprised that a lot of teachers allowed me to leave the classroom during regular classes to finish up the project. Nevertheless, the experience of spending a full day working on it until late at night gave me the feeling of making a great contribution to the travel club and the school.

6 Reflexion and Review

The fact that my voluntary work was greatly appreciated at Breton Education Centre showed me that the need for help and support can be found everywhere.

All three projects were a great experience during my time as an international student and something I will never forget.

In November 2011 I talked to Mrs. McGillivray again since she was my partner at two of the three projects. Retrospectively we still see our projects as being successful which is

³ See article “Volcano extends European vacation for BEC students” on:

<http://www.capebretonpost.com/News/Local/2010-04-19/article-1030272/Volcano-extends-European-vacation-for-BEC-students-/1> (Feb. 4, 2012)

proved by the matter of fact that now it has been over a year since I left Canada but she still opens her classroom for the BEC computer club members every day at lunch time.

It was my first time working with mentally disabled children but I am glad I had the chance to try it out. Nowadays, I see disabled people in a different way: they are not different. They are often able to accomplish difficult tasks – all they need is someone who respects the way they behave and act. I do not want to express that I thought they were “stupid” before I started the project. It is rather the ignorance of those people, the lack of knowledge and interest – and I am sure many people will agree on that. Furthermore, I discovered my attitude to communicate my knowledge at a higher level: it was my first time being a “real” teacher and I did not need much time to get used to it which surprised me.

But in a way I also see the Computer Club critically: our club members were all good friends; many of them were good friends with the teacher too (which is truly possible in Canada!). On the one hand that made the atmosphere so easygoing and familial what I had hoped for and really appreciated but on the other hand I cannot say that it was representative for a real public High School club. I think someone who would have liked to join but did not know anyone of the group members would probably have had some difficulties to get comfortable there.

Every time I talk on Skype with some of the Computer Club members they always tell me how much they miss me being there at lunch time. I think that is the best feedback which makes me say that the project was a success to the full extent!

In retrospect I would rate my work for the Coal Bowl event 2010 as the highlight of my whole time in Canada which I will always remember. The first time in my life I had the chance to connect my interests for computers with real work, a task to fulfill. I consider myself as a very responsible person; therefore it was a great feeling to be responsible for a rather difficult but important work which was essential for the organization and success of the event. Working for Coal Bowl was really stressful but every time I think back the 12h I spent at school every day never seemed to be that long: times flies by if you enjoy something!

To my main partner during this project, Kevin Kearney, it was all a complete success as well: the organization of the event had been done thoroughly – there were not any troubles during the event. While preparing Coal Bowl 2011 and 2012 Mr. Kearney had asked me for my advice again.

However, I was sometimes disappointed because many of my friends could not understand how I could assist a school to succeed with the work instead of “doing

nothing” and just enjoying the basketball games which forced me several times to warrant my joy to volunteer. Some people had literally told me that I must be “crazy” doing that. I had even encouraged my Canadian host sister to sign up for an easy job during Coal Bowl week e.g. taking pictures or answering phone calls but she refused without thinking about it. The students who assisted me with the registration of the players, mainly grade 12 students, were never interested in getting to know how to handle the computer program. Usually the only answer I heard was “I won’t understand it anyway so why don’t you do it?” When I think about it now it gives me on the one hand the feeling that my involvement was even more important than I thought it was before but on the other hand it showed me the laziness of some Canadian students who were only willing to do easy work.

All in all I am sure that this time full of organizing, communicating with people and working made me become more self-conscious and resilient.

My involvement for the BEC Travel Club consisted of two parts. On the one hand there was the travel planning and preparation with the students and their parents. For me this was a really new experience because never before I had talked to people about travelling to Europe. Retrospectively I know that I was unable to take away all their worries and fears before the trip which is obvious since travelling is always an excitement, especially if it is the first time. Nevertheless I heard from almost every student that they did enjoy the trip so I do not think that there are any reasons for me to complain. On the other hand there was the generation of the slideshow. Today I am sure that it was an advantage being more or less on my own while working on it: I taught myself a lot about how to handle a Mac Computer and how to create a slideshow which is not long-winded. Furthermore, it made me realize that it is easier for a student to volunteer at a Canadian school than at a German school. Especially the fact that almost all of my teachers allowed me to leave the classroom during regular courses to work on the slideshow showed me on the one hand how much my involvement was appreciated and on the other hand the “relaxed” learning environment at a Canadian school which allows students to realize projects like that.

In fact there was not any chance for the project to fail: Travel Club has a long tradition at the school and the two teachers are operating well together. Anyhow I think that Travel Club 2010 was planned more thorough and more interesting for all participants compared to previous years due to my active involvement but in the future it is probably only I who still benefits from the experience in terms of improved communication, organization, and especially computer skills. Moreover, it is planned by Ms. McGillivray

and Mrs. Kennedy that I am going to join them on their next trip to see how my contributions in 2010 actually paid off.

My contributions to the school were also a great success at a different level: my personality. During my stay I grew up. I became a more independent person. I experienced my personal limits, found out what I am able to achieve and realize if I have the required scope. Now I am able to communicate my ideas more clearly, state my opinion more precisely, organize and manage things a lot better before I left for my stay in Canada. I learned how to adapt to a new country and how to get an insight into a new culture. Since I returned to Germany I would not consider myself as a child anymore. With my voluntary contributions to Breton Education Centre I bridged between European and North American culture.

7 Outlook

The great experiences in Canada have been influencing my future already. With my activities I exert here in Bonn I tie in with my activities and experiences from Canada and my aim for the future is to keep up my personal link to the culture I got to know in 2010.

Back in Germany I joined the project group “EULE – Schüler unterrichten Senioren” at my school because it reminded me of my work for the BEC Computer Club. In this case I am not working with students anymore but with old people: I teach them how to work with computers or cell phones which leads to an active communication and exchange of experiences between two generations.

Six months after I left the international student program I returned to New Waterford for a visit. While visiting BEC I was not treated as a normal visitor: several teachers asked me to help out in their courses or to support them with the creation of new tasks for the students. Finally I assisted Ms. McGillivray with the preparation for her French course and Mr. Kennedy, the husband of Mrs. Kennedy who is responsible for the Travel Club, with the preparation for his (architectural) design course which I had attended back in the days as well.

In 2011 I assisted Breton Education Centre again with the registration of the Coal Bowl players because they were unable to find a volunteer who could handle the programs which were necessary for the creation of ID cards. On my computer at home as well as on the computer in Canada I had installed a program called “TeamViewer”. It allows the user to control another computer via internet, comparable to a remote. I created the templates and IDs like I did the year before and when they were ready to be printed; someone else took over my work. It was more stressful and complicated to do it that

way but I personally enjoyed it almost as much as I did in 2010 when I was in Canada. Furthermore I gave an interview via Skype about my experiences as a Coal Bowl Volunteer to Crew Productions, a company from New Waterford that supports the school with the technique at the event and video tapes all games.

In summer 2012 after I will be graduated from school I also want to travel abroad for a voluntary social year, preferable to Asia, to broaden my personal experiences with voluntary work. My favourite work then would be to teach either English or something connected with IT.

8 Acknowledgement

I would like to thank the staff of Breton Education Centre, New Waterford, NS, Canada for their great support during my time as an international student which gave me the opportunity to put my projects into practice. Special thanks to Mrs. Marilyn McGillivray, Mrs. Jeanette Kennedy and Mr. Kevin Kearney.

I would also like to thank Mrs. Beate Rosendahl, Friedrich-Ebert-Gymnasium Bonn.

I really appreciate her cooperativeness and helpfulness while writing the present report.

9 References

- www.bretoned.ca (Homepage of Breton Education Centre)
- www.coalbowl.ca (Homepage of New Waterford Coal Bowl Classic)
- www.feg-bonn.de (Homepage of Friedrich-Ebert-Gymnasium Bonn)
- http://www.cbv.ns.ca/bec/xoops_bec/modules/mastop_publish/?tac=BEC_Travel_Group (Website of BEC Travel Club)

Effective as of January 15, 2012

10 Appendix

- Certificate: Contribution to BEC Computer Club
- Certificate: Contribution to New Waterford Coal Bowl Classic
- Certificate: Contribution to BEC Travel Club