Using Applied Theatre to Change School Culture:

An Impact Evaluation of ETFO's Poverty and Education Project 2007-2008

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Research Goals:

- **To understand agency within constraint**

- **To examine the role played by theatre to affect change in relationships, initiate dialogue, and deepen understanding of social issues**
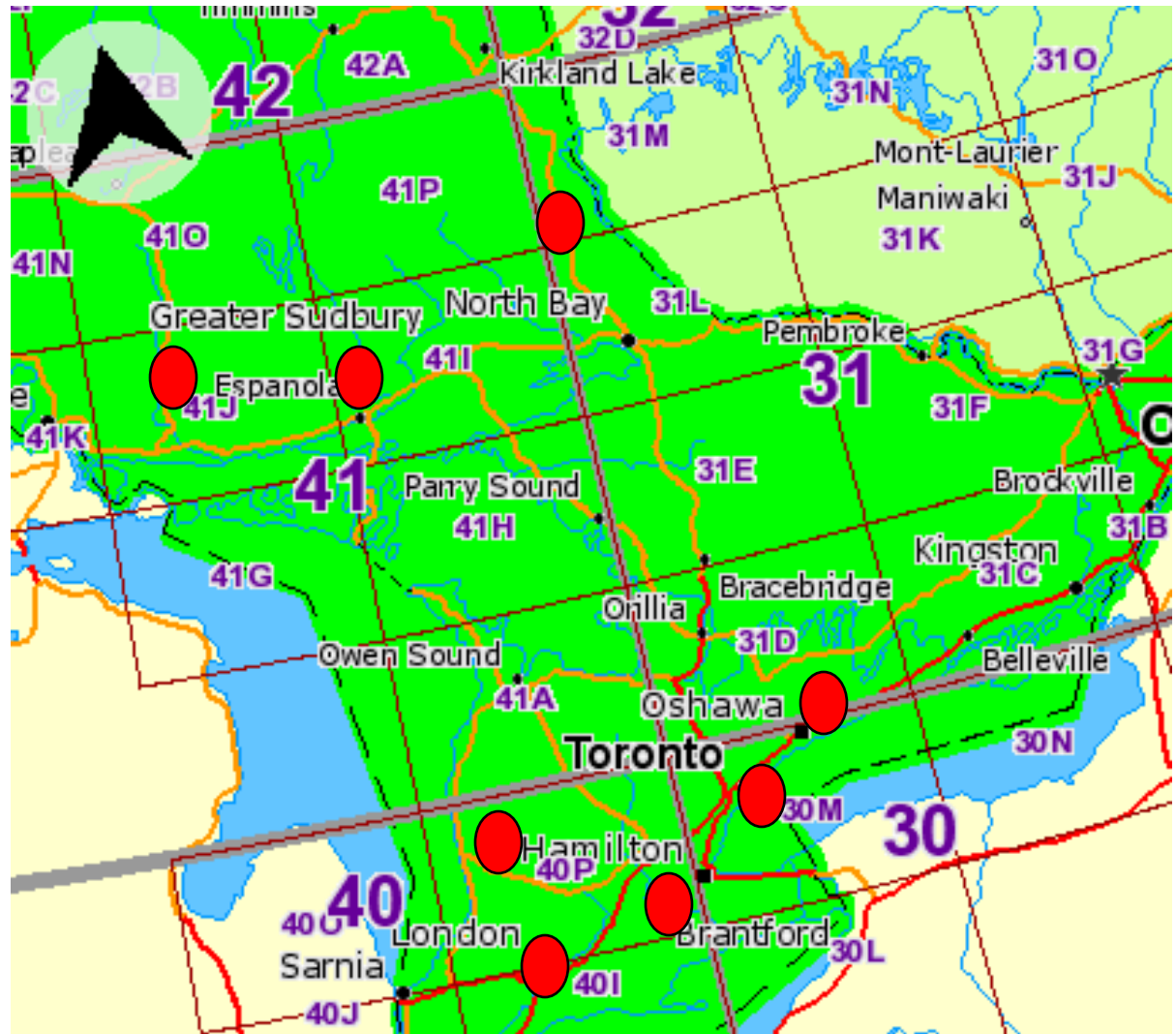
(Research Funded by ETFO)

Actors facilitating a workshop with students, fall 2007

Selected Locations

- **Elliot Lake**
- **Hamilton**
- **Mount Forest**
- **Oshawa**
- **St. Thomas**
- **Sudbury**
- **Temagami**
- **Toronto**

Methods: Pre/during/post intervention approach

- **Phase A:** focus groups
- **Phase B:** Online survey & email interviews
- **Phase C:** School visits; interviews & focus groups; school reports & project documentation

Projects aimed to address:

1. **Physical Needs:** Kitchens, laundry rooms, clothing, nutritional, hygiene programmes.
2. **Intrinsic Needs**: Counselor, character Ed.
3. **Pedagogical:** Literacy resources, media, arts programmes, Danny themes embedded in curriculum, trips.
4. **Social/Cultural:** Parent & community outreach, visits to museums, performances.
5. **Mix of various strategies**

Major research themes

- **Applied Theatre**
- **Leadership**
- **Project Operations**
- **Project Sustainability**

Impact on:
- **Teachers' Awareness**
- **Principals' Awareness**
- **Teachers' Collaboration**
- **Teachers' Engagement**
- **Teachers' Practice**
- **Students**
- **School Environment**
- **School Culture**

Danny's Tree of Hope, Oshawa

Dialogue

- Frequency of conversations or depth of the discussions that followed the drama

- "It knocked down those walls that you didn't realize were there, but it was just something that you never really talked about, but it opened the doorway for communication to start."

- "…before the play came to the school we were asked to discuss poverty…and I found my students didn't really understand the word poverty…but it was after the play came to the school that the conversation became really interesting…I had kids who were twelve years old understanding the parents perspective, understanding the parents motivations, understanding the parents challenges, which I didn't think they were capable of doing."

Pedagogical Tool

- Incorporating themes or ideas found within the drama into the curriculum or teaching practices

- *"And I was impressed with how fast they picked up drama as a means of communication. They respected the form of communication…it moved us ahead in conversation to a deeper depth, discussing everything in language arts…So I felt that it had spin offs that were valuable in the curriculum content as well."*

Survey: Effectiveness of Applied Theatre Methods

Question	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Un-decided	Some what Disagree	Strongly disagree
I believe that theatre is an effective way to raise awareness of our students needs among staff.	65	18	0	0	0
I believe that theatre an effective way to communicate with our students and engage them in discussions about social justice.	73	9	1	0	0
Theatre-based PDs are an engaging and informative way to learn about social issues.	72	10	1	0	0
I would like ETFO to bring us more theatre-based PDs in the future.	73	8	1	0	1

Teachers' Awareness

- Responses describing how the views and practices of teachers have changed as a result of the schools' initiatives

"And now it's a part of our everyday. I mean, we accept these children for who they are and we're there for them...It's brought to life for me as a teacher to keep all those things on the forefront when we deal with each other everyday...I wouldn't think of it as much as I did this year. This year, when a kid comes to me, homework's not done, no lunch, I think, 'Wow, somebody has to deal with issues.' And before I would just be like, 'Ah! Bad parents,' and, you know, 'Do it.' And now I think, 'Wow, what are they dealing with that they couldn't get a lunch in their bag...what's going on at home that, you know, that we can help them with? And how can I help this parent and this child rather than complaining about it?' Doing something about it rather than complain about it and I think that's, for me, that's - this project has brought that to life."

Impact On Students

- Responses that suggested that students changed or benefited from the program in various ways, including physical and intrinsic needs, growth of character, and opening channels for dialogue with educators

"In my classroom, I have a lot of students that act out because they're hungry, and that, they haven't had proper nutrition, and I have this one student in particular that, um, it's really severe. And this year, because of the inclusive environment that we've created, and through talking about poverty, he will no longer shut that off, he will say out loud, put his hand up, and when we're on the carpet and say, "You know Miss Smith I'm really hungry, can I have a banana?" Or, "Miss Smith, can I, is there some food I can have?" And we, we always have some snacks in my classroom, so for him to that, is a huge step, because beforehand, it would've been, he would've had an explosion...'cause I guess he didn't feel that he could express what was kind of bothering him...they don't feel like they have to hide from that. That's something that they feel like they can discuss not only one on one, but they feel like they can discuss it with their peers, so, it's pretty good."

School Culture

- Responses indicated that the general values, beliefs, and perspectives of the entire school had changed as a result of the project.

- *"What I've seen too is through this project is what's given us, is the language. To speak to everyone across the school in, to address the issues, so through talking about poverty and acceptance and character education, um, were not shying away from those issues...But my philosophy is that you start to build from within, and we're kind to each other, we connect with each other, and we build a team within the school, and we care about each other, then the strength within the school grows..."*

Leadership

1. Democratic Participation

2. Charismatic Teacher

3. Top-Down

Some effective practices

- All school involvement
- Danny in the curriculum
- Horizontal partnership teachers-admin
- Structure: preparation & regular meeting times
- Innovating and risking, but considering feasibility
- Projects with cumulative effects
- Projects with potential to carry on
- Seeking new partnerships

In Summary

- Performance is about 'going into another world and coming back with gifts'

Tim Etchells, British theatre director.

Questions?

Danny School, Oshawa