

# An Impact and Sustainability Assessment of the ETFO Poverty and Education Project: Follow-Up Case Studies 2008-2009

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the 2008-2009 academic year, three case studies were conducted to address the question of sustainability for the school-based initiatives created for the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario's (ETFO) *Poverty and Education Project*. We sought to illuminate what the schools learned, what the limiting factors were, and how schools address questions of sustainability differently, based on their own contextual features. The cases 'stand alone' in their distinctive experiences and relationships to ETFO, but cross-case comparisons have also uncovered important commonalities and marked differences that provide ETFO with significant strategies for future interventions and support of their membership.

Through the use of field observations, focus groups with teachers and administrators, the collection of school documents, and electronic correspondence, the case studies have analysed:

1. the impact of, and sustainability for, a second year of ETFO funding for one "Danny" school in the Durham Region District School Board;
2. the feasibility of sustainability for one "Danny" school in the Toronto District School Board that did not receive a second year of ETFO funding.
3. the impact on a new "Danny" school in Avon-Maitland District School Board, beginning its support from the ETFO project in 2008-2009.

Deductive and inductive forms of reasoning have helped us to see quite clearly that the sustainability of such large-scale interventions hinge upon:

- i. *The consciousness of the staff/school:* When staff had the opportunity to learn about poverty in their community, reflect on its impact on student learning, and think about the students' and communities' needs, it led teachers to rethink the culture of the school and their pedagogical practices.
- ii. *The ability of teachers to embed the initiative in the curriculum:* Connecting insights, ideas, and resources from the Danny project with classroom lessons and activities increased the longevity of the initiatives in a way that was cost-efficient and manageable for the schools.
- iii. *The capacity of the school to build and sustain partnerships with communities/worlds outside the school:* Partnerships with organizations from the surrounding community

provided the opportunity for schools to offer programs and activities to the students at reduced cost and with additional human resource support. Additionally, many schools identified parents and community members as valuable partners for improving the learning environment of their students.

For future ETFO projects that are similar in focus and scope, there are several recommendations that the Federation members, administrators, and researchers have compiled that would greatly enhance the program:

1. Provide more opportunities for professional networking between schools and educators who are also involved with the same project so that they may share the ideas, strengths, challenges, and successes of their various initiatives.
2. Further professional development with the intent of raising consciousness or awareness of the needs and challenges that economically disadvantaged families face within their respective communities.
3. Encourage schools to see families and community organizations as potential partners that can assist them in meeting the goals and objectives laid out in their school-based initiatives.
4. Extend involvement in the Danny project from one year to three so that educators have the opportunity to properly implement their initiatives, allow those initiatives to evolve and become more context-specific, gain insights about the impact of the project on the students and community, and to balance the initiatives with others that are also being implemented.
5. Incorporate distributed leadership strategies within each school to encourage the sense of ownership that the staff, as a whole, has over the initiatives and their success in meeting the various goals and objectives of the project.

Overall, the three major conclusions outlined above are important to sustainability because they lead teachers to rethink their world and question understandings of poverty, education, and community. Learning to see the lives of one's students, their families, and surrounding communities in a more positive and holistic way has a lasting impact because it changes teachers' pedagogical practices and curriculum choices so that they can better respond to the needs of their students.

Additional funding and resources, especially release time, are also very important for sustainability as many of these initiatives do require some degree of financial investment, as well as time and energy for the important processes of implementation. Furthermore, personal investment on the part of teachers, and a sense of ownership and responsibility, were also important factors in the continued commitment of teachers to the school-based initiatives and the overall project.