Empathy Matters: Building Relationships One Story at a Time

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We all have a story; doesn’t it make a difference when we know them? As I get older and as I see my own children grow, I’ve noticed the fast pace we are living. Society has a self-destructive addiction to faster living and the world will tell you to always move forward and there are no limits to how far you can get. Don’t pause, don’t reflect. Over-scheduling and double booking as you juggle ten plates in your busy week. We are seeing an alarming increase in stress-related disorders at all ages, beginning with elementary school-aged children who are struggling with obesity, depression, anxiety, attention disorders, and all kinds of learning disabilities, and a list of problems for all ages (Brown, 2015). The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has caused an increase in the number of socially isolated people and an increase in loneliness, fear, and other mental health factors (Murayama et al., 2021). World pandemics, the pace of society, and increased academic expectations have had an impact on our schools, and on the relationships students create when they have the opportunity to get to know one another. Our stories, when shared, make a difference to everyone who listens to them. These stories provide a space for us to build a relationship. In our fast-paced, performance-driven, ever-changing schools, we lose the time and importance of sharing our stories. The loss of time we spend with each other face to face has impacted our empathy with each other (Konrath et al., 2011). Is it possible to implement narrative storytelling that provides a place where students can share their stories to ensure that more relationships and empathy among a class would grow as a result? When we create an intentional space in our schools, will barriers be broken between
students and teachers? In this study, relational data from teachers and an administrator who implemented a narrative storytelling curriculum, the Front Porch Initiative, in their school building were gathered using a survey design and analyzed. The findings from the study suggest students need a gathering place to reconnect with those around us and to re-establish a space for conversation, commonality, and community.

KEYWORDS: storytelling; empathy; relationships; conversations; commonality; community; Front Porch Initiative
EMPATHY MATTERS: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS ONE STORY AT A TIME

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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Educational Administration and Foundations

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

2023
EMPATHY MATTERS: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS ONE STORY AT A TIME

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to acknowledge every student, teacher, and administrator that I have worked with along this journey. Those who listened and believed in the idea of the Front Porch Initiative participated in the implementation of this curriculum. The stories you wrote and heard have made a difference. Keep sharing this experience. Every story I have heard personally or through others has inspired me to continue to share the importance of reflecting on, sharing, and listening to your stories.

I want to thank Spread Truth Ministries, our donors, and the creative teams who believed and collaborated to create the Front Porch Initiative. The endless hours and dollars put in and spent to allow an idea to come to life and support God’s commandment to Love others. To my colleagues and cohort friends, thank you for your unwavering support throughout the years. For the encouragement to persevere when we wanted to stop. Thank you for the professional and personal conversations through which we challenged each other and affirmed our daily decisions.

Thank you to my committee team that inspired and supported me through the years. You helped me to see and believe the impact the Front Porch Initiative would have from a personal level to an academic and research-based program that would allow the program to have a bigger influence. Thank you to my thought partner, who helped me to the finish line and provided encouragement and wisdom. Thank you to my chair and his leadership, dedication, and willingness to pivot and come alongside me when these changes happened.

To my children who patiently waited for me as I squeezed time in between the naps, homework, and games, I pray these moments away from your presence help to see a future that
you can do anything if you have the first trust in God and His plan and that You can do all things through Him.

To my wife Jennifer, who provided support and love throughout. The times she had to do it all while I was away. The love and encouragement you gave me to keep going when the world told me to stop. Your inspiration encourages me and everyone who knows you.

Praise be to God, who always has bigger and better plans than I will ever have. He is always there every step of the way. I pray that every part of the Front Porch Initiative is used to be a platform not only for each person to build and deepen relationships, but also a bullseye to God’s love and desire for an eternal relationship with Him.

D.L.L.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

God's windshield for our future is always more significant than the rearview mirror of our past. We can often dwell on our history and replay our previous mistakes. Other times we worry about what our future holds. We are going through our days, missing out on those around us in the present. Left to myself and without my faith, I would not be sharing the importance of getting to know each other's stories. Stories are what connect us to others in our neighborhoods and community. From a single story, a relationship can be born. Knowing the importance of these relationships is why the Front Porch Initiative was created for our classrooms.

The importance of storytelling in the classroom is essential in drawing us all back together. Shawn Wilson (2008), author of Research is a Ceremony, shares how stories go in circles. They don’t go in straight lines. It will help if you read and listen to the stories in between stories (Wilson, 2008). I intend to build a relationship with you as I share parts of my story throughout this research. You will get to experience the process of storytelling by reading about my beginning, challenges, hope, and goals for the future.

The following experiences catapulted me to embark on a journey to help create the Front Porch Initiative curriculum, which is based on the motto I developed when given my first principal role, Building Relationships Making a Difference. The curriculum is grounded in the belief that our relationships with students and staff are essential for any meaningful learning to take place. Dr. James Comer (2005) once said, “No significant learning can occur without a significant relationship” (p. 757).

I will share three significant stories to help highlight the value of stories and storytelling; these stories are related to a courtroom, a classroom, and a weekly bible study. These stories spark a fire and provide a space where students and teachers can share their stories with others
intentionally. Growing up, I always tried to hide my story and never share my life events. Once I did share this story, I allowed others to witness my vulnerability, and it helped me to build relationships with others.

The first story I share is the courtroom story that involves my experience on a jury. The jury duty involved working on a case related to a horrific event that happened to a young girl. Multiple voices that shared testimonies that week included many people that I had known personally. In the courtroom, the young girl said that none of her teachers had ever taken time to ask or know about her struggles in her schooling experiences. The second story, the classroom story, involves me as a principal working with a student whose mom was under the influence and had gotten arrested in my presence. The following day, the same student was sent to my office for not completing her schoolwork. The last story I share is about my bible study group and involves walking through a guided journey of my stories and the group. It was an experience where we thought we knew each other, but I share an understanding of what can happen when you go deeper into the lives of others.

A Courtroom

As an educator, and especially someone in my role, you try to avoid seeing that letter for jury duty arrive in the mail. You can only prolong jury duty for so much time. The only other time I had ever served on a jury previously was in college, and I did not think much of it as I remember only parts like it had involved a vehicle accident. On this particular jury duty that involved the student, however, things were different; they called a row of fellow jurors fresh into the summer. We all lined up and walked into the courtroom. In the first case, we heard an opening statement that involved a superintendent from the local area who had allegedly run a cyclist off the country road in a ditch, causing an accident. There was some preliminary
information about the superintendent's displeased concerns about cyclists taking up the country roads he had traveled. I recognized that I had been in some previous educational pieces of training with the defendant.

I headed back to our staging area, and the last row of people was selected to another courtroom where they needed to choose one more juror. As I entered the crowded courtroom, I sat in a back row next to the eleven jurors selected already. The attorney leads with his opening statement, which brings flashbacks of the movie, *A Time to Kill*. The difference between the film and here was it was real and involved a local high-school aged female student who had brought sexual and physical abuse allegations against her father from when she was a child. I was already uncomfortable hearing this scenario based on my personal experiences from my childhood. This surreal space became even smaller and more personal as I started to recognize multiple people explicitly involved in the case and many who have come to listen.

The plaintiff's attorney happened to be a friend I was with just the weekend before for a birthday party, to top it off. I had also been on a mission trip with his wife. In my mind, I figured there would be no way I would be able to be a juror now. Still, all the jurors in the room had to stay and listen to opening statements. I listened, and as I sat, sick to my stomach, about what I had just heard, I could relate to some of the allegations, and I was also praying that my children would never experience this pain. The juror selection process started. As the twelfth juror was selected, I felt safe in my chair until I was chosen as an alternate.

These four full days of testimonies from everyone involved attested to the importance of educators getting to know their students' stories. The young lady who struggled throughout her time at school and kept herself at a distance from everyone else was someone who had walked the same halls I walked. I thought to myself, how many other students had stories like this? How
many teachers or principals like me never create an intentional space to get to know our students' personal stories? How would I go back to school and make sure that we took the time to get to know our students' accounts through authentic listening full of love and care?

I share this story because it reminds everyone about the difference you can make in another person’s life through listening authentically. Once you take time to hear another person’s story you have a chance to have an impact on their life. Everyone has a story.

A Classroom

There are many stories you hear in the office. Once a trusting relationship is established, it can often be a green light for conversation. Just giving someone your time leads to a connecting discussion. Just like in the office, this happens in the classroom daily. Students walk into our schools with so many experiences from home. Scientist Bill Nye (2014) said to the University of Massachusetts class of 2014, “Everyone you will ever meet knows something that you don’t” (p. 3). Reflecting that every single person you encounter knows something you do not is powerful. So, what do we do with this knowledge shared with us? How does it change our views? How do we grow in empathy? American educator and educator theorist Nel Noddings (2012) says that care is fundamental in human life and that all people want to be cared for by someone else. Our stories make a difference.

One morning at a school where I was principal, a young girl, Bre, who was five years old, was sent to my office door first thing in the morning because she had not completed her morning assignment. And to add to this problem, she had an attitude and did not want to comply with her teacher. I was sitting in my office reflecting on the previous twenty-four hours, and now this young lady was sitting outside my office. I was just about to head down to the classroom to share
with Bre's teacher what had happened the night before, but it was already too late with her having been sent to the office.

The previous night, I was at school preparing for the evening PTO meeting. I noticed Bre's mom drive up to the school and leave twice. Upon the third return, Bre's mom was waiting at the after-school program's door, looking in and knocking. Not anything new for most days, but on this day, it was already an hour after the YWCA program had left. As soon as I approached Bre's mom, I could tell she was not sober and was there to pick up her daughter. I stalled, trying to think of my next steps. On the one hand, I knew that she was a single parent trying to do her best for her daughter, but I had even questioned some of her previous pick-ups and her sobriety. Today, I decided she was putting the lives of too many people in danger. I decided to call the police but had to get her into my office and make the call discreetly without her taking off. As I stalled in conversation until the police arrived, Bre's mom and I kept making calls to figure out where Bre was. Lots of what Bre's mom was saying didn't make sense. I started to watch the video of Bre being picked up earlier by her mother, who was now standing in front of me, and called the YWCA director, who heard that her mom had already picked her up. The fear of her being lost now turned into fear of what her mom had just done with her. Was she still alive? After pleading with Bre's mom to allow the police to search her place, a neighbor friend had called the grandparents, who were now at the school, saying that she had come over to their house. Bre was safe. Mom was arrested that night, and temporary custody was given to the grandparents. Still, Bre sat outside my door. If asked, Bre would tell you the part of the story she knows and what was shared with her from her grandparents, but on this day, she wasn't asked.

My feelings and thoughts about this event in this child's life affirmed the need to focus on getting to know our students' stories and ensuring that teachers and students are connected and
building relationships. This relationship would possibly open an opportunity to notice, listen, and empathize with a student based on recognizing behaviors that could indicate a traumatic event rather than punish. Alfie Kohn has researched human behavior, education, and parenting. In his 2005 article, *Unconditional Acceptance*, he focuses on making sure educators focus on the whole child or beyond their behavior or academic performance. Kohn maintains that children can better accept themselves as valuable and capable to the extent to which they have been accepted unconditionally by others. Kohn reminds educators about the importance of meeting students' emotional needs and balancing academics with getting to know each student and allowing them to know each other. Why? Because in this instance, had the teachers known her story, perhaps, she would not have been sent to the principal’s office for incomplete assignments or talking back. For myself, her story that is still being written reminded me that every student has a story going on. Directly or indirectly, we make a difference in others’ lives. Bre’s story represented the unfolding of a detailed story that we all have the opportunity to be part of in a classroom daily.

**Faith**

My wife Jennifer and I had just moved into a new house, had our first child, and both just started new teaching positions. We were used to putting ourselves first, and being first-time parents, we had a lot to learn. Our marriage was struggling. We decided that trying to do things alone was not successful, and something had to change. I remember physically crying out for God's help.

We met a couple across the street that was part of a small group through a local church. We decided that our faith was struggling, and if things were going to work, we would need it back in our lives. Our small group discussed topics that we are experiencing as couples, parents, professionals, and our brokenness amid it all. We do life together to focus on God being at the
center of our marriages and our children. Reflecting, after enjoying a few years together, living life, and sharing experiences, we have grown as couples, parents, and believers. There is a local Christian group called Spread Truth Ministries that does Kingdom work around the world. Spread Truth offers a variety of resources to connect our stories with God's story. While going through this program with the couples from our small group we had known for a few years now, I was able to find out about stories we had never shared. Sharing these experiences has played a role in our relationship with each couple. We took our relationships deeper by being intentional with our sharing.

As I listened to their stories and shared my own, it affirmed how profound yet straightforward the act of sharing our stories is. The experience of reflecting on our own stories impacted childhood memories I suppressed while helping me realize how these memories can help me shape the future. As I listened to more stories I connected with others and grew in empathy for others. The experience I had in our small group, I believed we could have in the classroom. This experience allowed me to reflect on my own story. Our stories allow us to be vulnerable. As I listened to the stories from my friends who I had known for years I grew in deeper empathy as I got to hear their challenges. These stories would never have been presented at this time without an intentional storytelling tool. Storytelling is essential for our students. It is essential for us as adults as well.

Historically, the front porch has been a place where people gathered and shared life and built relationships. I believe that with each of our passing generations, we are losing the necessary skills to form a community. Using storytelling to build relationships stimulates empathy and connectedness as students and staff learn how to craft their life stories and then share them (Green, 2004) I believe that our focus on storytelling, caring, and affinities in our
schools will, in turn, allow us to listen to one another's stories, and indeed raise the levels of empathy, decrease narcissism, and the growing desire for isolation will fade. This is what prompted my desire to create a curriculum that utilizes storytelling as its central purpose. The curriculum is called the Front Porch Initiative. With this research, I would like to explore how this curriculum has had an influence on students and teachers in the classroom.

**My Story**

These experiences I shared led to the start of the courtroom, classrooms, and faith, connecting with similar stories of my upbringing. I was the student that had perfect attendance when teachers wished I had not. It was better to be at school than at home. My family would rather have me at school than interrupt their day. My faith story says that even though I was not searching for Him, He always kept me close, allowing me to learn from my mistakes but still giving me signs that He had bigger plans than I had for myself. Even today, I am reminded of this in every aspect of my life. Personal stories can be beautiful, heartbreaking, and breathtaking. Sadly, we have replaced the physical space of sharing our stories with various substitutes like technology, busyness, and for some who choose isolation.

The following story provides steps onto my front porch. Through my story I share unique experiences about myself. The same experience I reflected on writing this is the same experience I hope to bring to both students and teachers in schools through the Front Porch Initiative program or curriculum.

**Beginning**

Can you see it? The cloud of smoke slowly rising from the fire pit. I momentarily stand, taking it all in, temporarily mesmerized by the white fog that covers like a blanket dissipating among the leaves that softly flutter from the hot air ascending into the sky. I eagerly grab my
shoes from the porch and head out to the woods, just steps from me. The only sounds I can hear
are the snap of sticks under my foot as I run like a loud deer jumping over branches and twigs. I
listen to birds chirping and flying from tree to tree as well as the deep breaths I take having been
on a dead sprint since the start. I'm off to this place not touched by civilization. I am balancing
on thick branches, breaking small limbs, and rolling logs in search of salamanders.

No trying to keep up with the world, no signs of severe fighting that would have to
involve the police, abuse, or overindulgence in alcohol and drugs. This place is Allegany State
Park, on the border of Jamestown, PA. The place where we stayed many nights.

I was born in Buffalo, New York, on October 27, 1975. My parents were married twice
before they met each other, and I have three older siblings, Candy, Russ, Marc, and three
younger siblings Dawn, Beth, Dakota. My oldest sibling, I just found out about a few years ago.
Here is part of my beginning.

**Challenges**

"I love you; you are my favorite son," I remember this moment. It was right before the
police had arrived, put him in handcuffs, and took him away. I'm not sure for how long this time.
Events measured time. Usually, I never had the chance to see this part. Often, I had run to the
Anderson's before we got to this point. My parents soon got officially divorced, we moved. I
remember the first day of 5th grade at a new school: camouflage pants and a red button-up shirt.
My mom and dad had previous marriages, and my older brothers, who lived with us sometimes,
were under placement in foster care.

Memories, now, I can write down to reflect on this upbringing include alcohol, drugs,
addictions, verbal abuse, physical abuse, self-centeredness, and relationships outside of marriage.
Do not ask about my ACE score. As a child, it is what you know. You imagine that is the way it
goes unless you can see something different. We moved out of our house in the country to a trailer park, 16 Prestige Crossing. I did what I saw. I did what I knew. I never really wanted to see my dad, and I was ungrateful to my other siblings and family. I tried to mask where I came from, where I lived, and what my upbringing was like and still is. I kept people at a distance while still longing for closeness. I lived with 11 families throughout High School. On the outside, I was trying to appear as if I had things together, when truly, on the inside, I was failing, in pain, alone, and lacking any real sense of purpose. Losing any closeness, I had with others with a selfish, self-serving attitude, I was missing family, friends, and myself as I continued down the same path I was running from as a child.

Hope

Hope is what gets us out of bed in the morning; it promises our challenges will not have the final say. The joy in others. Family, friends, kids, people, and you. My journey in faith helped me open my eyes and ears to His love. It helped provide comfort, direction, healing, and fulfillment of lost love. I was able to remove the feelings of insecurity and feeling like I always had to prove myself. The Joy acronym for me stands for Jesus, others, and you. I started to put myself last instead of first. People are in your life with a divine purpose. There were times when I was on my deathbed or one wrong choice from the time I would never get back. To intervene in a marriage gasping for air. These people are around you if you look and if you listen. They come in neighbors, coaches, teachers, friends, parents of others, spouses, children, colleagues, and through a small group of believers. These people took my darkest moments and made them better. They provided the just-right need in the just-right moment. You encourage, inspire, and love others for today and tomorrow.
Future

The decisions we make today will influence our tomorrow. Each day presents an opportunity to change for the better and impact the better as we continue to grow. God's windshield for your future is way more significant and brighter than your past rearview mirror. Look Ahead. Everyone talks about legacy. What do you want yours to be? We talk about relationships. How are we deepening them? How do I act? What do my actions look like? What words do I say? Who do I live for? For me, my faith walk has been a journey that has taken me many places. We all take a different path in our stories. This path has eventually led me here today. All things happen for a reason and are part of a bigger plan. I look forward to the plans He has for me because I trust they are to prosper. Amid my trials and adverse circumstances, I will believe and pray for guidance. I need to remember what order I put out myself. Legacy starts today and at every moment. We affect our stories and others’ every moment. When we hear an account, it is not about me, it is about others. Build relationships, listen to others, and share your story.

Research Purpose

As a teacher, specialist, or principal, you hear many stories from students, families, staff, and community members. Some of these stories can be true, some not so real, yet even in these untruths, you can get to know a person's life. Based on these stories shared, listeners have the opportunity to connect with another person's heart. As you listen to a story, you set the stage for an intentional space that opens doors for conversations and relationships. When taking in or listening to the events of another person's story, our brains scroll through thousands of pictures and images, all related to the story being heard. When a story is told, our brains make connections, and what we have personally seen, heard, or imagined is called upon to bring the
story to life in our mind's eyes. We mentally unfold the story, reflect on our own stories, and make connections.

In education, we get to know our colleagues and students through their stories. Schools are places where genuine care has the potential to be modeled and expressed by teachers and administrators. Noddings (2012) sees education as being central to the cultivation of caring in society. She says schools are where students encounter both planned and unplanned events that promote growth through the acquisition of knowledge of each other, skills, and appreciation (Noddings, 2012). In this way, it can be an extension of family life for students and staff beyond just their families. As we share stories through conversations, we build relationships and grow in empathy for one another. I would not be here right now if it were not for caring people.

Research shows a decrease in empathy among students (Konrath et al., 2011). In our schools, we have added many standards and requirements that take away from the time students get to connect with each other. There has been a breakdown in our conversations and a breakdown in our communities (Twenge, 2006).

The current research will look at how implementing a storytelling curriculum known as the Front Porch Initiative can enhance our relationships and empathy in the classroom. Our storytelling can make a positive impact on building relationships with others (LaFrance, 2018).

The focus on storytelling, caring, and affinities in our schools will, in turn, allow us to listen to one another's stories, and indeed raise the levels of empathy, decrease narcissism, and the growing desire for isolation will fade (LaFrance, 2018). Social entrepreneur and empathy expert in families and organizations, Mary Gordon (2009) focuses on fostering empathy in students, providing a platform to allow students to take the perspective of another person, and to identify commonalities through our shared feelings. I have been blessed to be part of creating
and implementing a curriculum based on storytelling for schools called the Front Porch Initiative. The Front Porch Initiative uses a personal narrative storytelling platform that allows students and teachers to share their personal story with each other. These stories are recorded in writing and picture form into a My Storybook and shared in a storytelling setting (see Appendix B). Teachers and students are then able to keep their books. This research describes the experiences of mainly an administrator and teachers that have used this platform to communicate with students in their classrooms and school. This study will provide schools with research regarding the use of the Front Porch Initiative and whether the use of narrative storytelling through this curriculum in classrooms has had an impact on empathy.

The Importance of Relationships and Caring in Schools

Being disconnected from each other can be seen in different spaces, including schools, stores, restaurants, and homes (Valenzuela, 1999). Valenzuela goes on to show too many schools are focusing only on academic learning instead of incorporating authentic caring. According to the Valenzuela, students that have positive relationships at schools will show better attendance and be willing to take more risks. This research is supported by John Hattie’s (2012) in Visible Learning. Relationships among students and staff lead to increased success (Jacobsen, 2003). Valenzuela (1999) defines authentic caring as a place in schools where trusting relationships constitute the cornerstone for all learning. Nel Noddings (2012) sees education as being central to the cultivation of a caring society, and caring teachers strive to establish and maintain caring relations rooted in integrity. When students and teachers take the perspective of others by listening to their stories, they foster empathy in each other (Gordon, 2009). According to Gordon, empathy is seen as the ultimate human trait.
Furthermore, in the article, *Remembering Larry*, Carol Gilligan (1998) says that care is ethically grounded in voice and relationships and emphasizes the importance of everyone having a voice, being listened to carefully, and being heard with respect in their own right and on their own terms. Stories are powerful means for people to establish bridges across other factors that separate them, such as race, culture, gender, and social class, and telling stories penetrate barriers to understanding and create feelings of kindness (Gay, 2000). Gilligan (1998) says that in this high-tech age, it is easy to overlook the transformative nature of the relationship and the power of listening as a route to knowledge. In storytelling, effective listening can be transformative in authentic relationships (Gilligan, 1998).

Disconnections occur in other ways besides too little focus on caring in schools. Frequently, one will see children and adults connected to their devices rather than each other. Philosopher and author Albert Borgmann (1987) wrote in *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life* about the device paradigm, which focuses on how technology has taken over our culture. In our “device paradigm,” friendships as the focus or the center of our lives is missing. Technology is taking away an essential part of our lives. Our dependence on new inventions and devices is resulting in the loss of the social context which people need, such as conversation and personal connection instead of isolating ourselves from older traditions and customs (Borgmann, 1987).

The extensive use of new technology has raised concerns about how children's face-to-face communication skills may be negatively affected (Uhls et al., 2014). The global-business magazine, *Nielsen*, shares that a staggering 97% of Millennials or Generation Z people own a smartphone (Nielsen Company, 2016). I share this information not to say technology is bad or wrong to use but to understand the effect of increased use of this tool. This statistic shows the
impact of inauthentic student human interactions with each other. This connects with the harmful
effects that screen time increase has had on people. In this same report, our most recent
generation, labeled the IGen, has the highest rate of mental illness traced back to smartphones
(Nielsen Company, 2016). The dramatic increase in technology this half-century by children can
dramatically modify human behavior (Bavelier et al., 2010). While there are many technical
benefits, research suggests that those benefits have come at a cost. Our social and emotional
intelligence can suffer if we are not engaged in meaningful face-to-face conversations (Turkle,
2016). Our social media portrayed life on screens rather than real-world life affects the empathy
between children. Digital technology can provide the illusion of companionship without the
demands of friendship, without demands of intimacy (Turkle, 2016). Turkle believes that many
of our conversations today involve distracted people looking at their phones and not at the person
speaking. We need meaningful conversations in our families, classrooms, and workplaces to help
us develop self-knowledge, empathy, and intellectual skills. Previous research by Turkle found
that people would rather text than talk with a person. That conversation is essential to our
humanity, creativity, work, and ability to be part of a family. Technology overuse is our next
most significant health issue, on par with substance abuse and obesity (Holt-Lunstad et al.,
2010). Their review shows an increase in Americans who say they have no close confidants and
people are becoming more socially isolated. As I talk with families in my school setting, I have
heard an increase in this isolation from the pandemic. The research done in 2010 connected
social isolation with human health and longevity (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010). In a 2018 BBC poll,
based on 55,000 people, 40 percent of adults between 16-24 reported feeling lonely and
disconnected often or very often.
When we engage with our students in face-to-face conversations, we involve more social-emotional skills (Ransom et al., 2022). The development of these skills connects back to an increase in our empathy towards others. Technology available 24/7 can lessen our in-person interactions. Healthy family interactions are essential for nurturing a child's healthy sense of self and belonging, connection, and well-being. Children are more disconnected than ever from each other (Uhls et al., 2014).

Our face-to-face conversations are being lost among our younger generations due to increased dispositions related to technology and our emphasis on academics in schools and a de-emphasis on caring in schools. We have increased our instant gratification with various types of technology (Jacobsen, 2003). Technology has led to isolation and a lack of meaningful connections with others (LaFrance, 2018). The goal of the Front Porch Initiative is to re-establish a space for conversation, commonality, and community.

Theoretical Framing of Storytelling

Storytelling has typically functioned as a vehicle to disseminate knowledge. Many stories told have served traditionally as a means of teaching values of their heritage. This would include teaching values from their parents and grandparents. In its earliest forms, narration was a preferred method of transferring society's beliefs (Hoogland, 1998). Jo-Ann Archibald, also known as Q’’um Q’’um Xiiem, is from the Stó:lô First Nation in British Columbia. Drawing upon her personal and professional learning journey with Stó:lô elders, she focuses on the importance of oral traditions of the Stó:lô people (Archibald, 2008). Her innovative work illuminate practices for the ethical use of oral storytelling as an educational tool. She explains how within indigenous communities, storytelling plays a central role in profound personal and social change. Stories can be very holistic. They can help us learn; they help us identify
emotions; they are spiritual, touching our inner being of who we are as individuals and helps us reflect on our actions (Archibald, 2008). Archibald believes that in schools, when we utilize storytelling, it is a way to think about how we learn to get along or how we can relate to one another, thinking about others' feelings. When I listen to another person's story, the story is about them and not me. It teaches me to be a listener and a learner as I connect with someone else and allows me to talk about similarities and differences. Humans respond to stories because they allow us to explore the benefits and consequences of different outcomes through the choices of others. In turn, it enhances our ability to plan and succeed in our own lives (Firth, 2015). Dr. Archibald (2008) believes that as students listen to stories, patience and trust are learned. Listening to stories includes visualizing the characters and their actions. Emotions come to the surface, allowing us to listen with “three ears; two on the sides of our head and the one that is in our heart” (p. 77). Oral storytelling has the power to take a classroom of students and make our hearts, minds, bodies, and spirits work together. Narrative Psychologist, Dan McAdams (2015), says that sharing stories creates a shared history, linking people together in time and events. Stories produce meaning about the past. American Psychologist, Jerome Bruner (1985), said that how people understand their world through the narrative mode of storytelling. When we write about our lives, the complex work of constructing the story is intertwined with all that constitutes the process of identity formation (Eakin, 1999). Coulter et al. (2007) examined storytelling as pedagogy and said that it helps us understand who we are and shows us what legacies to transmit to future generations. Storytelling is a significant part of the educational process. It is through stories that customs and values are taught and shared (Coulter et al., 2007). Storytelling can have so many impacts on both the storyteller and the listeners. Storytelling can enhance literacy learning in the areas of reading and writing. It improves our overall oral language and reading
comprehension, positively increasing students’ competencies in these areas (Miller & Pennycuff, 2008). The relationship between storytelling and successful literacy development enhances students’ development of language and logistic skills (Cliatt & Shaw, 1988). Storytelling is crucial to child development and helps to strengthen neural pathways that make learning of all kinds possible (Fredricks, 1997). In addition to the academic impact, storytelling can be helpful to the healing process for those who have experienced trauma and provide hope for their future by chronicling, sharing, and making meaning of the experience (Kiser et al., 2010).

Researcher Dr. Jean Watson (2000) conducted research on care in the health field. Watson is best known for her theory of human care. She also conducted research on human care and its importance in a school setting. Dr. Watson made connections to educators and the importance of care in their profession. She contends that caring regenerates life energies and potentiates our capabilities. The benefits are immeasurable and promote self-actualization on both a personal and professional level. Caring is a mutually beneficial experience for both individuals who show and receive care (Watson, 2000). Based on Carol Gilligan’s (1998) care theory there is an interconnecting of humans based on the relationships we develop through getting to know each other. Capturing the heart of storytelling and its impact on conversations, commonality, and community leads to increased empathy and enhanced relationships. In the process of listening to another person’s story, we may learn to care about people whom we might not otherwise care about, including people who are quite different from ourselves (Gray, 2014). Stories facilitate the development of the “theory of mind” and empathy. Our “theory of mind” gives us the ability to walk in another’s shoes and informs the thoughts and choices we make in ours (Firth, 2015).
Figure 1 shows a model that connects storytelling to empathy. It shows the impact of storytelling on conversations, commonality, and community. These connections created through storytelling lead to face-to-face interactions, barriers between students being broken, and students building relationships through connections. This all leads to the goal of developing more empathy between others.

**Figure 1**

*Storytelling Effects on Empathy*

![Diagram of Storytelling Effects on Empathy](image)

*Note.* This figure was created by David LaFrance in connection with The Front Porch Initiative, 2018.

The significance of a caring relationship is a fundamental goal of education; it is the foundation of schooling (Noddings, 2012). These conversations are being made face-to-face instead of through a technology platform. As we see each other's faces and hear our voices, empathy towards one another occurs. The second path again starts with storytelling, then leads to the commonality found in our stories told. The connection located in the things we have in common with others and understanding and celebrating the things that make us different. When we know others' stories, we have the opportunity to put ourselves in others' shoes. This commonality allows us to break many barriers or assumptions that are placed on others based on appearance. Stories are not just a means by which human beings make sense of the world around
them. They are also how social change is enacted (Coulter et al., 2007). The last part of the figure once again starts with storytelling and then focuses on building community. When connected to those around us, like in a classroom or school, we were more willing to take risks and put others first. It means people are more likely to succeed personally, professionally, and socially. I believe storytelling will grow our empathy with others.

**Research Questions**

The following questions guided this research:

1. What is the nature of the implementation of the storytelling curriculum, The Front Porch Initiative, in K-12 classrooms?
   a. What are the variety of ways teachers incorporate the curricula into their classrooms?
   b. According to teachers, what are the perceived benefits of the program?
   c. According to teachers, what are the perceived challenges and suggestions for improvement regarding the curriculum?

2. Based on teacher responses, how has storytelling functioned in their classrooms through the curricula?

**Type of Study**

In this study, I will utilize a survey design approach to look at the implementation of the narrative platform curriculum called the Front Porch Initiative. Qualitative research is a philosophy and methodology of research generally applied in the social sciences. It is generally characterized by a search for understanding and meaning of a phenomenon. According to Merriam & Tisdell, (2015) all qualitative research is characterized by the search for meaning and understanding.
The participants in this study consisted of an administrator and kindergarten through 12th grade teachers who used the Front Porch curriculum in their schools. The Front Porch Initiative has been provided to various schools and districts. It has been provided for small groups to whole group settings. It is hoped that the Front Porch Initiative curriculum will connect relationships and student success. Data for the study was gathered using a survey. This research aims to understand better the implementation of the Front Porch Initiative curricula and the functions that storytelling can serve in classrooms.

**Summary**

We all have a story. Storytelling allows barriers to be broken through intentional conversations that lead to commonality and community. When schools spend intentional time on students reflecting, writing, and sharing their stories, a positive change could happen. This could lead to greater empathy being formed among students.

The Front Porch Initiative is a curriculum, which I participated in creating. The curriculum allows students and teachers to share their stories using the My Story books. The goal is for students and teachers to reflect and write on their beginnings, and challenges while collectively collaborating on possible hopes, and future. The goal of this study is to provide meaningful data about students growing in empathy towards each other as they experience the Front Porch Initiative Storytelling platform. This research hopefully provides information on the significant impact storytelling in the school setting creates deeper relationships between students and teachers.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The first American schools in the 13 original colonies opened in the 17th century. Boston Latin School was founded in 1635 and is both the first public school and oldest existing school in the United States. The history of the academic school is fascinating. Frederick Winslow Taylor, born in 1856, was the son of a wealthy Pennsylvania family. Taylor's goal was to eliminate inefficiency by ignoring the individual and putting the system first. Schools have always had a place for academic standards that are required of students year to year. You may think back to the three R’s—reading, writing, and arithmetic. As states add additional requirements and mandates for students, space for making connections with students has diminished. According to John Hattie, one of the most effective indicators to focus on for predicting student achievement is Teacher-student Relationships, which ranked $d = 0.72$. The relationship teachers have with their students dictates their impact on achievement (Hattie, 2012). Often in schools, stories are shared and heard, but these are often shared in an everyday moment out loud where memories are lost. In addition, story sharing can be in a setting where others are not available, and these interactions are between two people. In my years of being a teacher, there has not been a curriculum that focuses on students sharing their personal narratives with others and having their storybooks (Gatto, 2000). By 1920, most American schools were organized according to the Taylorist vision of education, treating each student as an average student and aiming to provide each one with the same standardized education, regardless of their background, abilities, or interests. These lost stories will impact how we empathize with each other and have authentic conversations and relationships. Story sharing can be a useful pedagogical strategy in teacher education (Coulter et al., 2007).
History of Storytelling

Storytelling describes sharing stories' social and cultural activity, sometimes with improvisation, theatrics, or embellishment. Every culture has its own stories or narratives, shared as entertainment, education, cultural preservation, or instilling moral values. For indigenous cultures, storytelling is an oral form of language associated with practices and values essential to developing one's identity (Archibald, 2008). Everyone in the community can add their touch and perspective to the narrative collaboratively – both individual and culturally shared views have a place in the story's co-creation. This type of account differs from other forms of stories because they are told not only for entertainment but for teaching values (Archibald, 2008). Chief khot-La-Cha used storytelling as a curriculum to teach responsibility. They said that life-experience stories could teach about culture, nature, history, politics, leadership, family relationships, and elders' importance (Archibald, 2008). This variation of storytelling was used inside the tribe and specific to oral storytelling only. Students didn’t write their stories in any type of booklets. This curriculum never made it out into public schools. This instructional strategy implemented on a classroom only size scale provided meaningful experience to the chief and children in her class.

People make meaning through our stories. The act of storytelling and writing it out can have a significant impact on the implications for students. Writing allows one to enter another's world, to stand in another's shoes, and the potential for self-transcend empathy (Eakin, 1999). Stories are legacies we will share with future generations. Stories are very holistic. They can help us learn to use our intellect. Stories help us identify emotions. Stories are spiritual, touching our inner being, who we are as individuals, and they help us reflect on our actions. Once a person tells their story, you can feel pride in their identity and achievements. Using storytelling allows us to share our story with others and make connections (Mirra, 2018).
Storytelling has an impact on many aspects of our schools. Storytelling provides introspect, and it gives the storyteller the ability to meet the challenge, take in the audience, be in their presence, and commune with them (Thau, 2014). We will focus on looking at the importance of stories from early anthropologists. In addition to the value shared through history, we will identify the importance of the storyteller. Storytelling then impacts the teachers in the classroom that utilize stories in their teaching and learning. Storytelling can make many connections to our social-emotional standards and restorative practices. These stories will often break many barriers between students and increase empathy among students, an essential human expression element. The fundamental aspect of life is narrative connections; it commands our face-to-face relationship (Altman, 2008).

**Value of Storytelling**

Anthropologists tell us that storytelling is central to human existence (Denning, 2006). Storytelling is common to every known culture. It involves a symbiotic exchange between the teller and listener (Rose, 2011). How many children learn from the perspective of their classmates every day? We need to foster empathy with children and adults. Students need to take another person's perspective to identify the commonalities through our shared commonalities (Gordon, 2009). Stories allow us to explore our lives, try out alternative or possible ways of acting and being in the world. Storytelling is considered a life review (Kazemek, 1985). It helps us to understand our roots and better understand ourselves which students can connect to the outside world of family, heritage, culture, and community. Teachers can demonstrate interest and enthusiasm by actively engaging in their oral history process. A story can capture the heart and emotionally transport you anywhere (Guber, 2011). Storytelling influences our emotions. How is connecting emotion and learning important? There is research that demonstrates it helps in terms
of student retention of material. Stories enhanced recall, retention, application of concepts into new situations, understanding, and learner enthusiasm for the subject matter (Haven, 2007). The art of storytelling promotes discussion, positively impacts behavior, and generates interest in academics. Storytelling is now being recognized as a powerful tool that can help build literacy and critical thinking skills. Storytelling is crucial to child development and helps to strengthen neural pathways that make learning of all kinds possible (Fredricks, 1997).

**Storytelling Standards**

Schools have many Common Core Standards that need to be addressed in order to show learning in the classroom. The Front Porch Initiative addresses various standards that are already imbedded into schools. These major standards include Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Social Studies. It will also allow schools to focus on aspects of Culturally Responsive pedagogy depending on your school make up.

**English Language Arts–Speaking and Listening Standards**

These standards include Speaking and Listening, Writing, and Literature. The Front Porch allows students to develop the skills necessary to have conversations needed for comprehension and collaboration. It allows the listeners to evaluate a speaker’s point of view. To build a foundation for college and career readiness, students must have ample opportunities to take part in a variety of rich, structured conversations—as part of a whole class, in small groups, and with a partner. Being productive members of these conversations requires that students contribute accurate, relevant information; respond to and develop what others have said; make comparisons and contrasts; and analyze and synthesize a multitude of ideas in various domains.
Writing Standards

Students are losing the art of writing. With all our technology we have lost the physical part of a pen to paper. Handwriting plays a role in learning and retaining knowledge. Writing narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective techniques, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.

Social and Emotional Standards

In Illinois and across the world, we have become more aware of the importance of social and emotional learning. Students are needing more attention to their Social Emotional Learning (SEL) needs. Sharing our stories connects with schools that use the Collaborative, Academic, Social and Emotional (CASEL) standards that are used to equip educators. These social-emotional standards include but are not limited to self-awareness, self-management, relationship skills, social awareness, and responsible decision-making. Sharing our stories develops speaking and listening skills, providing us with essential social skills to react when hearing and responding to these stories. Through our own stories and others, we will look at the importance of caring for others. Our students, our children, are longing for a connection. Our relationships with our parents, children, spouses, siblings, friends, and teachers provide us with meaning and genuine learning (Witmer, 2005).

When creating the Front Porch Initiative, we understood that each state has curriculum and concept maps for what every student should know and be able to do. The Front Porch Initiative meets many of these requirements that focus specifically on the impact of students using storytelling in the school setting.
What Impact can Storytelling have on a Classroom?

In *Stories of Our Lives*, Kazemek (1985) discusses how all our lives are made up of many stories. As we reflect on these stories and tell them from the past, we do a "life review" which can help us shape our futures. This life review can begin at a young age. The life review is an essential component for indigenous tribes in passing along values. Telling our stories and getting people to tell their hope captures the dreams of achieving a positive vision for people. It can help you understand your roots and better understand yourself in interviewing yourself (Turkle, 2012). Chimamanda Adiche says our stories matter; stories can be used to empower and humanize. Stories can break and repair our dignity (Adichie, 2009). We need to have the courage to tell our story with a whole heart. When we put this practice into schools, we can connect. It allows us to join the families outside world in our communities (Brown, 2015). The most crucial factor in the classroom is the teacher's commitment to the process. People will want to share their stories if they believe the listener is interested in them. Kazemek (1985) says that the best way for a teacher to demonstrate interest and enthusiasm is by actively engaging in the same process and sharing their story. In 2016-2017, Tall Oaks went through writing, sharing, and listening to each other's stories. Students, teachers, staff, and families shared their stories. In the classrooms with a teacher committed to the My Story project, we saw deeper relationships created and more barriers broken between students who came from different backgrounds and hadn’t known each other. This evidence is demonstrated in more relationships formed between peers. More students were modeling empathy towards each other in their listening. Staff having genuine conversations and connecting with their principal at a more caring level. Families followed up with the teachers about the joy they felt in the discussions throughout this process while re-writing some students'
futures by having commonality in a story and sharing how they overcame challenges (LaFrance, 2018). Storytelling is empowering to individuals sharing their story.

Our stories reveal what is unique about us. As we share our stories with others, we learn that what’s unique has the power to bind us together, so we don’t feel so isolated and alone. Classrooms are greatly enhanced, and each student feels validated and understood. A connected classroom promotes success and empathy.

**Storytelling for Teachers**

Teachers everywhere could bring their disciplines alive by telling stories to illustrate, clarify, and exemplify their lives (Green, 2004). In sharing stories that include how and why narratives are a vibrant learning medium for adolescents, and like all human beings, need stories to make sense of experience. Teachers sharing their own stories help build relationships with students. Caring leadership builds a learning community that includes everyone involved with a school. The presence of caring for each other through knowing each other’s stories determines the degree of learning in schools (Barth, 1990). Emotion connected to knowing other teachers’ stories creates a caring environment that can reduce teacher stress. Reforming educators are advocating a renewed emphasis on care in education. As educators take time to share and know each other’s stories, they discover it is about caring for more than the jobs we do. Caring is foundational, the source of community and the ground of common humanity whatever gender, race, or identity (Noddings, 2012). A teaching staff that has a supportive environment enhances the learning environment (Caine & Caine, 1991). The more opportunities for interactions between staff enhance relationships and cohesion (Donaldson, 2001). As educators share our stories, we start to build a level of trust among each other. Research done by social neuroscientist, Matthew Lieberman (2013), talks about the importance of community building
and our need to connect is more important than food. Teachers that have relationships in a school don’t tend to leave. In order to thrive you need to have healthy relationships (Aguilar, 2018). Brene Brown (2015) encourages adults to build trust with one another by giving each other their time and heart. To share our stories as a staff involves vulnerability. Brown says, in order to be vulnerable, it's not about winning or losing, it’s about the courage to show up with each other. Conversations become more relaxed and cohesive among teachers (Turkle, 2016). The care we show towards staff, students, and families is needed to sustain a positive school environment. The work educators do in schools primarily happens through relationships, so investing time and resources and getting to know others will nurture these relationships (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2014). As teachers’ storytelling brings the essence of things into being. Stories connect us with our past, present, and future; they hold our memories and pass on wisdom. Stories tell us who we are and what is possible for us. You can take the raw elements of your day and craft them into a variety of stories. The stories we tell ourselves become narratives we share with the world- the stories we tell others (Aguilar, 2018). Storytellers have always held key positions in society; the stories we craft predict our future, encapsulate our legacies, and impact our resilience. As educators we get a chance to hear stories every day. Teachers that take time to listen to students’ stories help them to understand the person and not just a label. They will learn how their life experiences impact them not only in a school sense, but also, life in general. Students and teachers who share their stories can begin to understand who they are and what is in their hearts and minds (Knowles, 2006). In reading and listening to their stories you will begin not only to understand them and build a relationship.
Relational Benefits

In various forms and by multiple people, you may have heard the expression, “No one cares how much you know until they know how much you care.” One of our school walls says, “Build Relationships,” we believe and understand that genuine relationships matter. Enhancing students' relationships with teachers has significant, positive, and long-lasting implications for both students' academic and social development. Developing and fostering teacher-student relationships should be considered an integral part of daily lesson planning (Witmer, 2005). I have been blessed to live out these experiences in the twenty-four years of experience. For educators, relationships are essential for all learners. Creating relationships is necessary.

John Hattie (2012) developed a way of synthesizing various influences in different meta-analyses according to their effect size. Visible Learning shows the .72 effect a positive student-teacher relationship can have on student growth. That the importance of our relationships breaks down any barrier. Witmer (2005) states it is life's most profound purpose, connectedness. Connectedness in these relationships is for parents, children, spouses, siblings, friends, and teachers to provide meaning and genuine learning. Those teachers who can connect and build relationships impact whether they will make learning meaningful. Relationships in the classroom affect student achievement because the brain does not automatically or perceptually separate cognition from emotions (Siegel, 2017). Siegel believes that instead of the three Rs in schools, there should be a focus on the “six R's that includes: Reflection, Relationships, and Resilience.” He believes the best predictor for any student's success is the relationships they have with others. Our relationships influence mental health, physical longevity, and happiness (Siegel, 2014).

Taking time to share and listen to another person's story involves caring. Caring leadership builds a learning community that includes everyone involved with a school. From a
variety of disciplines, scholars suggest directly or by implication that the presence or absence of caring affects, and some say determines, the degree of learning in schools (Barth, 1990). Research on brain processes has verified that emotion is fundamental to the educative process because it drives attention, driving learning and memory. If children are deprived of the opportunities to relate to others with warmth and trust, then the school's role must be to furnish them with these experiences (Sylwester, 1994). Storytelling is the oldest form of narrative globally. It's not the same as reading aloud because, in storytelling, the interaction between teller and listener is immediate, personal, active, and direct (Rosen & Rosen, 1988). Storytelling is an effective strategy that incorporates aesthetic ways of knowing into instruction. In addition to improving students' academic performance in reading and writing, storytelling can also enhance the arts in education and motivate children to connect with teaching (Miller & Pennycuff, 2008).

James Comer said, in a 1995 lecture given at the Education Service Center in Houston, Texas, “No significant learning can occur, without a significant relationship.” When looking at caring, compassion, conversation, and storytelling in schools, many schools practice and strive for that unconditional love. That is the basis of the Comer Model. All school community members work together for the children's well-being; the beautiful rewards belong to everyone. Comer's belief was “the relationship between school and family is at the heart of a poor child's success or lack of it.” Comer created the School Development Program in 1968 to help schools recreate those social bonds by working with administration, parents, and teachers to foster student development. These teams looked at communication, creating positive school climate, creating a platform for staff development for how to improve skills working with poor children and parents (Comer, 2005). To accomplish this aim, you need to advocate for a collaborative, consensus building, no-fault approach to problem-solving. Teams that adopt this model need to
establish teams of stakeholders that will create a comprehensive plan that includes goals for staff
development. In a Comer model, school students know that we value them by listening to their
stories. By sharing our own. The Comer model instills a spirit of unity that can be missing in
many schools. With high expectations and everyone working together, the potential for success
has become an attitude, a way of learning, and an education for life for schools (Comer, 2005).
The relationships that are formed within the Comer model focusing on relationships leads to a
student’s desire to achieve the high expectations that are expected of them.

The primary purpose of schooling should be to advance students' social-emotional state,
youth who feel connected to people, and schools can be a buffer for other risk factors in their
lives (Blum, 2005). The study shared that those who felt more connected reported lower levels of
depression, suicidal ideation, conduct problems, and higher self-esteem. Connection in schools is
defined by the degree in which individuals or groups are socially close, interrelated, or share
resources (Hughes & Pickeral, 2013). Our current youth experience various risk factors that
distract them from the importance of being connected to others. These relationships don't include
friends only through Facebook. Real connectedness can exist between others, and our schools
include care where people have a sense of belonging, collaborate, and contribute to each other's
lives. The National Survey of Children's Health demonstrated a three-fold increased risk of
depression, anxiety, and ADHD among students with limited connectedness at schools (Foster et
al., 2017). These risk factors lead to one of the negative impacts we see now, and that is isolation
driven culture. In these moments of loneliness is when various influences can affect students and
adults. Youth with close, supportive relationships at school, church, or elsewhere in the
community were less likely to report suicide risk, aggression, or sexually transmitted infections,
including improved overall health. The school connectedness study results hypothesized as many
of the facts showed us that connectedness lowered the rates of emotional and physical problems. Indeed, the relationships we form in school matter. When we connect to those around us, we are more willing to take risks and put others first. It also means students are more likely to succeed, both academically and socially.

Early absenteeism negatively impacts academic achievement in reading, math, and general knowledge in the first school years (García & Weiss, 2018). One of the risk factors associated with attendance is relationships. Much research, especially research on truancy prevention, views attendance problems as a result of functional problems. Relationships involve a certain amount of trust. As we share our stories, we learn to build trust with others. When addressing attendance, it is important to involve families and know their stories to better understand where they are coming from. This mutual trust will increase communication and help in solving any problems that can involve academics and attendance. Students are more likely to remain in school and achieve academically where people care about them (Benard, 2004). A caring and supportive school is where children can identify and make connections with others (Strand & Peacock, 2002). When we intentionally share our stories, students make more connections. This would include learning opportunities for students to work together.

Other Curriculum

In my research, there are not many unique storytelling platforms with a curricular foundation. There are a few programs that have similar components that include using personal storytelling. These programs emphasize the importance of storytelling and building relationships between students.
Porch Talks

Every teacher knows the magic of casting a story net over the classroom. One curriculum is based on Zora Neale Hurston’s work based on storytelling. Porch talks was created for high school juniors where students participate in all-class storytelling (Garrigues 2003). Porch Talks include a notebook swap by students. Students then get into porch groups and discuss what they have read and heard. Lisa Garrigues developed the idea of Porch Talk while teaching at Ridgewood High School in New Jersey. Garrigues' approach based on the book, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, written by Zora Neale Hurston. Hurston’s work underscores the importance of the oral tradition of storytelling. Some students in the class said that people tell stories to educate and edify. The theme behind this storytelling work included finding themselves. The Front Porch Initiative has students reflect and share their personal narrative. The finding themselves theme was borrowed from Bill Roorbach’s Writing Life Stories book that shares how to turn your untold life stories into vivid personal essays. These stories are eventually shared on a platform looking like a porch where they would have “Porch talks” (Garrigues, 2003).

Second Step

The Second Step program is an evidence-based program for children from preschool through middle school. Each grade level features developmentally appropriate and sequenced ways to teach social, emotional skills such as self-regulation, empathy, emotion management, problem solving, and executive function skills (Valenzuela, 2021). It uses a holistic approach to building supportive communities for every child using social emotional learning. It has students work through discussing life problems and what possible ways there are to find solutions. Students shared what experiences they have had and how to make friends. Educator and researcher Dr. Michele Borba presents new and compelling research that explains how to impart
in our hyper connected, social-media-saturated society, many of us (especially young people) are so obsessed with snapping “selfies” and living virtual lives online that we’re forgetting how to care for the people right in front of us IRL (that’s “in real life”). The resulting Selfie Syndrome is leading to an empathy crisis among today’s youth. Teens today are 40% less empathetic than they were just a generation ago, and narcissism has increased 58% during that same period. But there is a solution: Studies show that the antidote to Selfie Syndrome is empathy.

The book, *UnSelfie* offers nine essential habits teachers can utilize to provide empathy to students (Borba, 2016). One of these habits is storytelling. Many schools use supplemental resources like the Second Step to address social-emotional learning and teaching to the whole child. This program offers a curriculum that the instructor can share with an individual or with a class. We also use many of these tools as a school-wide system of learning behaviors. The Front Porch Initiative allows students to self-reflect, physically write down their thoughts, feelings, and experiences, and then share with others. This experience combines many necessary standards and resources into one platform. Also, schools have started to utilize more restorative practices approaches to the student concerning student conflict.

**Restorative Practices**

The practice of storytelling sets valuable foundations of how restorative practices can thrive in groups of students and adults. The emphasis on relationship building in restorative practices provides school administrators and teachers with collaborative solutions to disciplinary actions. The use of therapeutic principles seeks to make students aware of the impact of their behavior on others. To understand the obligation and to take responsibility. Their actions steps to repair the harm caused and to prevent future damage (Bhandari, 2018). Restorative Practices require students to get together and have a conversation. The premise of using restorative
practices comes from the need to restore the proper relationships when there has been conflicting or harm. Restorative practices can also include the use of circles in our classrooms to discuss different topics (Bhandari, 2018). Restorative practices often can involve allowing students to share parts of their stories. At first, students may be awkward or reluctant in their response when restorative practices are first introduced in a school. As students use circles to discuss it will engage students. A circle is simply a path for storytelling to happen and build relationships. In restorative practices students will ask questions about why they like each other and the goals they have. These conversations mirror the intentional conversations had using the Front Porch Initiative. Learning and engaging with the craft of storytelling prepares people of all ages within a community to be able to carry simultaneous roles of active listeners and owner of their own story (Bhandari, 2018).

Storytelling builds a platform to be able to examine yourself in relationship to the world. It allows you to walk in the shoes of others. It allows people not to judge others based on a single story, and its telling can shift day to day perceptions. Each of these above programs have parts of The Front Porch Initiative embedded in it. In the next section I will provide an overview of The Front Porch Initiative, including how it is similar but also unique to the curriculum approaches I just discussed.

**The Front Porch Initiative Curriculum**

This curriculum uses a personal narrative storytelling platform that allows themselves and others to share their story. One of the Front Porch Initiatives’ many goals are to deepen relationships to build conversations, commonality, and community. Truly listening to others and showing love to others in the form of listening and connecting with others. This research describes the data gathered from a sample of teachers who have used this platform to
communicate with students in their classrooms and school. Also, there is one administrator who shared this experience with his staff.

**The Front Porch Initiative Implementation**

The Front Porch Initiative white pages provide the history of the idea of the front porch connection and reasons why we need to look back at how communities were formed to help with our world’s current disconnect (LaFrance, 2018). The Front Porch Initiative curriculum includes three types of My Story curriculum books. These include Lower Elementary, Middle, High School and our staff booklets.

**The Elementary School Edition**

This was the original booklet designed for our youngest learners. This curriculum book is very colorful, animated, and has lots of space for students to share. This book comes with a larger space to color or bring in pictures from home to help describe stories. There are larger print spaces for students developing writing skills. Each booklet comes with the four parts of the story to share: Beginnings, Challenges, Hope, and Future. Each book has age-appropriate vocabulary to accompany the chapters and to provide resources designed to assist students and staff of all ages in crafting and sharing their own life stories. There is information to describe the plot line and how our stories are a connected series of events that form a story. The Front Porch Initiative curriculum shares how our brains connect when we tell a story.

**The Middle School Edition**

This curriculum uses more infographics for our *screenagers*. It has students use hashtags and provides more details behind the creation of stories including their own. You will notice the writing space has more lines than the elementary book to accommodate more creative writers. The vocabulary guiding questions is more appropriate for middle school age students and allows
for deeper level responses. This edition has sharing tips, listening tips, and the hashtag #YourStoryMatters.

The High School Edition

This version has the connections back to conversations, commonality, and community. This version is rich in vocabulary providing the Literary Plot Line. This book helps high school students take a guided journey through their lives up to this point. The high school version describes the art and science of storytelling providing students the encouragement to not let their single story be a onetime project but a lifetime of honoring others and becoming a good listener.

The Corporate Edition

The version of the Front Porch Initiative curriculum allows groups and teams to enhance and validate connections through the use of writing their own stories and sharing them. The Corporate Edition uses the same four chapters for writing and provides conversation starters and next steps for growing conversation, commonality, and community. The Front Porch Initiative talks about our unique stories and how our stories bind us together, so we don’t feel so isolated. The stories shared by our adults is proven to build community, propel team success, and promote empathy.

The Present Study

There once was a time when people gathered on the front porch to swap stories, share a laugh, and enjoy each other’s company. Sadly, many of us have replaced our front porch discussions with weak substitutes, such as the internet, entertainment, busyness, and isolation. The Front Porch Initiative organization was created in 2017 by me and some other community leaders who wanted to create a curriculum to go through together and a platform for students to share their stories. The Front Porch Initiative curriculum stimulates empathy and connectedness
as students, faculty, and staff learn how to craft their life stories and share them with each other. It all starts with crafting your own life stories following four simple chapters in a booklet. Beginnings, Challenges, Hope, and Future. Students answer the writing prompts and then choose one meaningful memory to craft as a story for sharing. Participants are encouraged to use details, characters, emotions, thoughts, and reactions necessary to unfold the story in a captivating way. The Front Porch Initiative curriculum books provide a guided journey through your stories and the stories of others. These stories are all captured in a book students utilize to share pictures and drawings of their story. This allows students and teachers to know about each other than what’s on the surface. The goal was to re-create space for conversations, commonality, and community. The non-profit group created books for elementary, middle, and high school students. The books created allow for self-reflection and empower students to share their story. This allows students and teachers to work on their listening skills and develop empathy with the teller of their story because you share in the experiences.

Through the Front Porch Initiative curriculum, teachers and students practice sharing their stories that make us human and connect us. As a principal of an elementary school, I was aware of the negative impact on students who struggle because they lack a sense of community, belonging, and acceptance. It is the hope that the Front Porch Initiative curriculum will help replace the connections that are made authentic and genuine in face-to-face conversations.

The Front Porch Initiative is a not-for-profit organization inspired by relationships. The members of the Front Porch Initiative all have a Christian belief that we are all part of a bigger story. It has inspiration from educators like Fred Rogers, Robert Marzano, and James Comer, who focused on others’ compassion and getting to know others’ stories. The program is aligned to the Common Core Social-Emotional Learning Standards, which requires recognizing and
managing emotions, demonstrating care and concern for others, and making responsible decisions. It connects to the Speaking and Listening Standards that students need to have. The interactive Front Porch Initiative curriculum was designed to create a safe space for sharing and creating empathy. The program was first introduced in May 2017 to fifth and eighth-grade students.

The overall project centers on journaling activities that encourage students to record perspectives about their beginnings, challenges, hopes, and futures. Students are directed and supported by developing their stories and sharing with classmates to inspire similarities despite cultural or environmental differences. The program drivers are three colorful, age-appropriate workbooks designated for lower and upper elementary grades and middle school and high school students.

**Summary**

The Front Porch Initiative My Story experience stimulates empathy and connectedness as students, families, and staff learn how to craft their life stories and then share them. Through the My Story resources, workbooks, and app for lower elementary, upper elementary, middle/high school, and staff, students and staff work though age-appropriate questions. Each group has a book of age-specific focus points and life experience-based questions to write your story. More importantly the curriculum and the embedded storytelling is consistent with teaching research which suggests cognitive performance of students should not be separated from the social and emotional progress of students (Hattie, 2012, Comer, 2005). In furtherance of that goal, this section offered a review of literature on teaching practice which created more empathetic students and classroom climates amid growing isolation in the nation exacerbated by technology.
It is important that educators continue to find ways to create healthy classrooms for students and my work is intended to do just that.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research was to share data results from the implementation of the Front Porch Initiative curriculum to show the functions that personal storytelling can serve in classrooms. The aim is to check whether personal storytelling allows students and teachers to be reflective on their own story and create or build upon relationships in the classroom. Research has demonstrated that stronger relationships in classrooms can lead to teachers making more meaningful connections with students and their colleagues (Green, 2004; Rosen & Rosen, 1988). Teachers who can connect with their students are generally more engaging in the classroom and can make learning more meaningful for their students. Students feel more valued when relationships are the building blocks for teachers (Witmer, 2005). Studies show students with caring and supportive interpersonal relationships in school report more positive academic attitudes and values, and more satisfaction with schools. Students who perceive teachers as creating a caring environment have higher levels of engagement in schools (Klem & Connell, 2004). From the research, we will be able to find out the impact of the program and if it has had an impact on the classroom and school culture.

The following questions guided this research:

1. What is the nature of the implementation of the storytelling curriculum, The Front Porch Initiative, in K-12 classrooms?
   a. What are the variety of ways teachers incorporated the curricula into their classrooms?
   b. According to teachers, what are the perceived benefits of the program?
   c. According to teachers, what are the perceived challenges and suggestions for improvement regarding the curriculum?
Based on teacher responses, how has storytelling functioned in their classrooms through the curricula?

Within the rest of this chapter, I share the research paradigm and design that has framed my research, my positionality on the topic based on my role in developing the Front Porch Initiative Curriculum. Also, the chapter includes a description of the research setting and participants, Front Porch Initiative information, data collection, research ethics, data analysis techniques employed in the study, and trustworthiness.

**Research Paradigm and Design**

The purpose of this research was largely grounded in the impact of the Front Porch Initiative curriculum and how using personal storytelling to engage students and staff in self-reflection can build relationships and empathy among students and staff through the listening and sharing experience. The Front Porch Curriculum re-establishes a space for conversations, commonality, and community. The findings from the research demonstrate the effectiveness of the Front Porch Initiative.

Qualitative research was the most appropriate method and was employed in this study to examine and understand the importance of storytelling and building relationships through this curriculum. According to Glesne (2016), qualitative research is the “type of research that focuses on qualities such as words or observations that are difficult to quantify and that lend themselves to interpretation or deconstruction” (p. 283). Qualitative research study enables the researcher to investigate the teachers’ responses to the survey. More importantly, the researcher is the key instrument to collect data during a qualitative research study, providing opportunities to examine documents, observe behavior, and interview study participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).
The paradigm that frames my research on the use of storytelling to build empathy is interpretivism. Interpretivism is a form of social science that shares the common goal of understanding human ideas, actions, and interactions in specific contexts or terms of the broader culture (Connor, 2020). As with interpretivism, The Front Porch Initiative curriculum believes that every person has a story and that our experiences in the world are valuable.

**Positionality Statement**

I have been blessed to be part of the creation and implementation of the Front Porch Initiative curriculum. The intention of this research does have a direct connection back to this storytelling platform but in ways that can share highlights of the successes of this curriculum as well as provide meaningful input for enhancements. The Front Porch Initiative is an organization that has a focus on sharing stories (LaFrance, 2018). I believe that everyone has a story and once you take time to connect with others is when true relationships are formed. My story connects with a bigger story that can connect with yours. The more we know about each other the better. Humans are meant to connect with others. Relationships and taking time to get to know other's stories have always been a focus in my educational career because it was teachers who spent intentional time with me that made an impact on my future. The very nature of a teacher is interacting with students and other people daily. I have lived with many families and have been blessed to meet others throughout my life experiences. My current occupation as an educator and my faith have provided a link that has connected me with so many others. The research conducted was in districts where I shared information about the Front Porch Initiative organization and the curriculum. As the current vice president of the Front Porch Initiative, I have a direct connection to the research and curriculum being investigated. As such, through this research and analysis of the data collected, I tried to remain aware of any biases in connection
with this role. When looking at the data I was focused on sharing all data and everything that was shared by the educators. I was intentional in asking questions on my survey that asked about ways to improve the curriculum, things from the curriculum they did not like, and any additional thoughts on the curriculum. Also, in reviewing the data, I used charts that allowed me to share specific data from each participant.

**Research Setting and Participants**

This research began in the fall of 2020 when I employed purposeful sampling to identify 1 administrator and 22 teachers who taught or worked in elementary, intermediate/middle, and high schools from across the State of Illinois. These districts included both large and small unit districts. Each participant had utilized the curriculum in the last year and had experiences in the classroom that ranged from one year to over thirty years. The participants had used the program at least one time in their classroom. There were few participants that have used the curriculum multiple years while I was in the designing phases of the various curriculum leveled books. The educators involved in the research come from various backgrounds and years of experience, ranging from six years to over 20 years in the classroom.

**Instrumentation and Data Collection**

Originally, the data collection was going to include interviews with students, but after the COVID19 pandemic began and schools were shutdown, the interviews had to be eliminated as a data source. Rather, for the purpose of data collection, I developed a 30-item survey (see Appendix A) comprising demographic and open-ended questions asking educators to share their experiences with the Front Porch Initiative curriculum. Through the survey, the educators provided feedback from their initial reactions to outcomes that they personally experienced, to student outcomes teachers witnessed. The teachers were asked a variety of questions that allowed
them to share their Front Porch Initiatives storytelling experiences and how this affected relationships and empathy in the classroom and among students. They also shared highlights and ways this curriculum could be enhanced.

The survey was first tested for content validity using a panel of experts. This included using numerous educators at various levels of experience to review and make sure the survey aligned with the research. I was able to meet with colleagues who are part of the Front Porch Initiative organization and discuss the research needed to accurately provide a meaningful curriculum to schools. It was administered to a purposeful sample of educators who had some experience with the curriculum. The selection of purposeful educators came from various districts both large and small with a variety of differences in the populations of students who would participate in the curriculum. The survey was initially sent to twenty-three educators. About twenty of the educators completed it, offering an 86 percent response rate.

Data Analysis

In this research, I used a qualitative analysis technique which includes data coding and thematic analysis. I used coding to label data gathered through the survey. Using qualitative data coding allowed me to assign codes to categorize data extracts. I then used these codes to derive themes and patterns.

The coding I used for this research included In-Vivo, Process, Evaluation, and Causation coding. In-Vivo coding is a form of qualitative coding where I used the participant’s own words. With In Vivo coding, the researcher codes an excerpt based on a participant’s own words, and not the interpretation as a researcher. The researcher utilizes the participant’s own spoken language and stays as close to their intent and meaning as possible (Glesne, 2016). Process coding includes capturing an action. With process coding, the researcher uses codes to
communicate an action in the qualitative data (Glesne, 2016). These codes are typically gerunds that end with “ing.” Evaluation coding is a method that applies primarily nonquantitative codes onto qualitative data that assign judgments about the merit, worth, or significance of a program. Causation coding is a method that extracts attributions or casual beliefs from participant data about how and why particular outcomes came about. Causation coding helps evaluate the efficacy of a program. (Glesne, 2016).

Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis method that involves reading through a data set (such as transcripts from in-depth interviews or focus groups) and identifying patterns in meaning across the data to derive themes (Clark et al., 2020). The analysis of the Front Porch Initiative curriculum focused on teacher and administrator feedback through the survey.

**Research Ethics**

Research ethics provides guidelines for the responsible conduct of research (The CITI Program, 2021). In conducting the research on the Front Porch Initiative curriculum, I focused on honesty, integrity, objectivity, and openness. Participants were provided documentation on how none of their feedback provided back would have any impact on the current positions. In addition, there was no impact on their purchasing of the curriculum. Honesty included making sure to report data, results, methods, and procedures. It was essential being connected to the Front Porch Initiative to not fabricate, falsify, or misrepresent data that was shared with me for the purpose of the success of the curriculum. Integrity included acting with sincerity through the process and not doing anything for my glory or success no matter the obstacles. Objectivity is how I strived to avoid any biases through current and past professional and personal relationships with any of the participants. Finally, as part of my research ethics I focused on vulnerability.
The Front Porch Initiative asks participants to be open and draw from previous experiences and share hopes for their future. I wanted the participants to be open about the curriculum and how it had an impact on them and students. Following these research ethics allowed me to have a genuine knowledge of the Front Porch Initiative and its impact on students and staff and their empathy for others. There were specific district level guidelines I had to make sure I followed since there was a portion of my study group that I directly supervise. The educators who participated in this study were provided a district level form and letter through Illinois State University letting them know that their participation was voluntary, and no responses would impact their employment. This letter and conversations were personally communicated by me to ensure this trust. The study participants were told that their data would be anonymous.

**Validity and Trustworthiness**

To ensure trustworthiness in this qualitative study, I used peer debriefing. Peer debriefing allows the researcher to collaborate at stages of the research with one or more peers who have impartial dispositions about the study. Peers are tasked to ensure a balanced approach during the study minimizing over or under amplification of any point in the investigation; effectively identifying bias within the study and reducing publication errors. I also chose to spend prolonged time in the field with the data and my peer debriefer to enhance the credibility of the narrative used to make sense of the data (Creswell, 2003, p. 196).
Summary

In this chapter, I explained the research methodology used in this study. After re-stating the research problem and research questions, I described the research paradigm used to guide the research. I shared my positionality with the Front Porch Initiative curriculum and how it may influence the analysis of the participant data. I explained how the survey was distributed, conducted, and collected. In addition, provided information regarding how the participants were selected and where the participants had implemented the curriculum.
CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore how implementation of a storytelling curriculum, the Front Porch Initiative, in a school setting had an impact on relationships and empathy. More specifically, to the research questions sort to gather (a) how teachers implement the program, (b) the perceived benefits and challenges involved with implementation of the program, and (c) learn from the educators how storytelling functioned in their classrooms through the curricula. I used a Qualtrics survey to get responses from the teachers and an administrator in Illinois public schools. Four levels of coding: Invivo, process, causation, and evaluation coding were employed to support a constant comparative process for sense-making of the data in form of themes and subthemes which answer the research questions.

Participant Demographic Information

A total of 22 of 23 participants responded to all survey questions. Of the 23 participants, 22 were teachers and one administrator. The participants all worked in the public K-12 school system in Illinois. These educators came from both small and large school districts. The average number of years of teaching or service for the educators was 15 years. The teachers’ average number of years taught was 2.45 years. Except for two teachers, participants 15 and 18 who implemented the curriculum 5 and 4 years respectively, all other teachers indicated that they had implemented the Front Porch Initiative program for about 1-3 years. The number of years of teaching and experience for each educator is presented in Table 1.
Table 1

*Participant by Teach Experience and No. Times Use of Front Porch Curriculum*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Teach Exp</th>
<th># Times</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Teach Exp</th>
<th># Times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Participant 13</td>
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<td>Participant 15</td>
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</table>

**Implementation of the Front Porch Initiative**

The first major research questions that drove this study was what is the nature of implementation of the storytelling curriculum, The Front Porch Initiative, in K-12 classrooms and what were the variety of ways teachers incorporated the curricula into their classrooms? To that end, participants were asked to respond to the survey question, “Please describe how you implemented the curriculum? (i.e. time of year, amount of time, days per week)

When asked how many times they had utilized or been part of the Front Porch curriculum, the educator responses revealed implementation had occurred as few as only one time for two out of the twenty participants. These two participants had about 20 or more years of teaching experience. On the other hand, one educator, participant 15, who had about 10 years of
experience indicated that they had implemented the curriculum as many as five times.

Collectively, the educators reported that they had utilized or had been involved in the use of the Front Porch curriculum on 54 different occasions. My analysis revealed no discerning patterns in the number of times participants used the curriculum. Survey responses revealed participants were able to introduce, implement, and complete the curriculum within a range of 20 hours to an entire year spreading the workload out within a school year.

All of the educators said they implemented the curriculum in the classroom setting. Some of the educators indicated they were extending the implementation to after school involving families and community members; each teacher, based on their comfort level, determined implementation that varied from years of experience with the curriculum to the opportunity to get to know their students. From the data it appeared that each of the educators have their own comfort level with what they share with students when it comes to the curriculum. Going through this curriculum allows educators to become more reflective on their personal stories and creates opportunities to grow in vulnerability in sharing personal unique experiences. Teachers who had previously utilized the curriculum had altered the time frame based on students and when it made sense for their class. To align with teacher’s current curriculum and daily content, teachers are provided the autonomy to cover the Front Porch Initiative curriculum.

Most of the educators reported that they had dedicated about fifteen to twenty total hours on the implementation of the curriculum but also mentioned that they would like to focus more time on the curriculum if time were allotted. One educator could not recall the implementation time they used but did note, “I have no answer to this - because I honestly do not know. I think it's not about implementation; it's a lifestyle and mindset change that isn't intentionally done but naturally done.”
Further analysis of the survey data showed that the implementation of the Front Porch Initiative curriculum was based on student ability, age, time of year, and time constraints teachers had throughout the school year. There was also some variation based on the amount of time spent on implementation.

**Implementation Based on Student Age**

Depending on the age of the students you implement the curriculum with can impact the responses. There are also the resources you can have students take home to families to help write their stories. Depending on the age of the students also determines if you allow for any outside the classroom reflection time. Based on the age of students can impact how much one-to-one assistance you may need to provide to help students build their stories. For example, one participant noted, “I think it is a good idea but more towards upper elementary grades. It is very hard for younger students to understand some of these small moments in time that have impacted their lives.” Another explained, “Students at the intermediate age have common loss in the death of a pet. This experience is extremely hard for them. They turn to family and friends to find hope and comfort. It taught me to recognize students' needs rather than rank them.” A third participant noted, “Also, some students could make themselves overly vulnerable by sharing details that their peers might not treat with the gravity or respect required, due to their age/background.”

Two participants seemed to focus on implementation for older students. One of them wrote, “I felt that older students would be better suited for the writing portions. I had to adapt the directions so that it was manageable for my age group,” while another explained, “I think this is a great tool for the classroom. I would love to see this implemented in the older grades also. I think adults would benefit from this type of activity in their workplace.” One participant said that “My students confidence has grown once I start implementing”.

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Implementation Based on Time of Year

Six of the 23 respondents seemed to implement the Front Porch curriculum at quarterly points or at the start of the school year. For example, one of the educators said, “began second quarter and worked daily until Christmas,” while another noted, “we completed one section of the book each quarter.” A third educator reported, “it all depends on the class. This year I have implemented the curriculum second quarter.” Another educator said, “I started it in the middle of the first quarter, and until we finished.”

The remaining teachers described implementing the Front Porch curriculum annually or biannually. One teacher said, “I used the Front Porch curriculum at the beginning of the year in 6th grade,” while another mentioned, “this was implemented within my writing curriculum at the end of first grade.” Yet another educator noted, “it can be used year-round.” While two others wrote, “I implemented the curriculum at the beginning of the school year.” and “we completed one portion of their story each quarter.”

Implementation Based on Time Constraints Throughout the School Year

In any given school year educators are faced with time constraints of all the content that needs to be completed each year. In addition to academic standards there are also standards that include social emotional learning. Implementing a new curriculum is anytime let alone after a pandemic makes it necessary to connect learning standards to the Front Porch Initiative. For example, one participant wrote,

Due to time restraints, I limited the students to 20minutes of writing time each
Friday for nine weeks. At that point, I allowed the students to continue working on their story with their families at home. This allowed them to build questioning and discussion techniques as they continued to add details to their story.
Another participant said, “Often times we don’t have enough time to just let kids tell their stories. I was interested in how it may create a more family like atmosphere in the classroom,” while another was overall concerned with, “Having enough time to implement it with integrity.”

**Implementation Based on Educator and Student Comfort with Curriculum**

The Front Porch Initiative exposes teachers to a certain level of vulnerability. In order for teachers to get a deeper level impact, they need to be willing to be vulnerable and share their story. Brené Brown (2015) talks about the importance of our vulnerability. There are some places that may be afraid to let others see any weakness or shortcomings along their journey. The Front Porch Initiative curriculum encourages everyone to share those challenges to help recognize and deal with them while also connecting with others that may have the same story. For example, one participant noted, “I felt more comfortable with the curriculum over time.” Another participant shared, “I was amazed at the details students shared with me, when they were writing, and we were conferencing. I felt that they divulged information they would not have otherwise shared with me, due to it being a writing project in which myself and all of their peers were engaging.”

**Implementation Based on Student Comfort with Curriculum**

Several participant responses connoted that student comfort with the Front Porch Curriculum was a key factor in implementation. One participant noted, “We did approx. a lesson a week. Sometimes the lessons rolled over and we shared what we wrote amongst the class, other times we kept it to ourselves. Each student was able to do what he or she felt comfortable doing. Another explained, implementation of the program, [It] is not prescriptive and allows each student to go as deep as they feel comfortable with their own story.” While another wrote, “Everyone that shared benefitted, but many students did not feel comfortable sharing at times. I
respected their wishes.” Another participant commented, “Yes. It creates a safe atmosphere where they can share and support one another and if they aren't comfortable or are having a bad day they are still there for one another.” Another elaborated, “Yes, it creates a sense of community, and the students feel more comfortable communicating with one another. Absolutely. I believe my students were more empathetic towards each other. This gave them a platform to not only feel comfortable to tell their own story, but really listen to others and be there for their peers.”

Two more participants expressed the need to check for student comfort while implementing the curriculum in their replies. The first explained, “I think I would ask them to work on the story that is calling to be written and shared. That way those that don't feel comfortable sharing their challenge story would be comfortable sharing a different one.” The second wrote, “Absolutely. I believe my students were more empathetic towards each other. This gave them a platform to not only feel comfortable to tell their own story, but really listen to others and be there for their peers.”

**Variation in the Amount of Time Implemented**

Nearly half the teacher responses revealed they implemented the Front Porch curriculum using days of the week to categorize time spent on implementation while others indicated they implemented the program on a weekly basis. For example, those using days of the week as an indicator reported the following: One educator wrote, “I started it in the middle of the first quarter and worked on it 2 days a week for 25 min each day until we finished, Another said “it took about 2-3 weeks to complete each section.” A third educator reported, “we did approximately a lesson a week. Sometimes the lessons rolled over, and we shared what we wrote amongst the class, other times we kept it to ourselves.” Another said, “we worked 5 days a week
for a month. Our reading/writing time included 15-minute mini-lessons and 30-minute writing workshop time for brainstorming, drafting, writing, revising, editing, and publishing our stories.”

Another teacher shared that this:

The Front Porch Club lasts for 15 weeks, beginning in the winter month of January.

While we did not work on it daily, we did meet either in small groups or one-on-one with students to help them organize ideas and create a first draft before writing the final draft in their books,

Two others said, “I do a section at a time over the course of the year. It takes about a week per section,” and “we worked on it 2 days a week for 25 min each day until we finished”

Respondents who noted daily implementation of the curriculum said the following: One wrote, “we worked daily until Christmas,” while another said, “we worked on writing our stories for 45 minutes a day.” Again, another educator reported they began this curriculum mid-fall and “we worked on it for about 3 days a week throughout the 2nd quarter of school.” One educator explained their answer by saying,

We would spend two days on each section. One day to brainstorm and begin writing. One day to finish writing and illustrate. Other times we did one section in between each of our regular writing units to break it up.

While another said, they “completed one portion of their story each quarter. I would give students the opportunity to work on their own or with peers. Students could work on it daily until they were done.”
Program Benefits

The teachers’ responses noted there were notable benefits in how the implementation of the Front Porch curriculum impacted students. Benefits included a Friendly and Engaging Classroom Community, and Student Social Development.

A Friendly and Engaging Classroom Community

The educators reported that they had observed a more friendly and engaging community develop among their students who seemed to be more connected in caring ways. For example, one teacher noted, “There is a mutual respect for what path we walked together. Students who normally would pass one another by in the hallway are now acknowledging one another with a smile and a kind word.” Another responded and said, “the sharing activities have led to students being kinder to one another. They are caring and less judgmental.” Another participant shared, “I see all my students benefiting from the curriculum in different ways. Some students benefit from just having their voices heard and receiving the time and attention of others. Yet, some students benefit from pouring their hearts into the writing process and connecting with others. The major pattern that I see is that students get back what they give to their storytelling.” One of participants shared, “Yes, a deeper relationship. Not just "Hey Buddy." But reaching out for help outside of school hours, creating a friendship with parents. I have a student with health needs, even at a public school the mother came in and we have prayed over this child. We have become friends and do Bible studies together. We text with things that make us worry and things that bring us joy.”

Student Social Development

Another benefit that was noted by the teachers related to student social development. One teacher shared, “there has been a huge amount of social development. Students were more
empathetic towards each other. It creates a sense of community.” Another participant noted, “There is always a huge amount of social development at this age. It was definitely a positive influence.” A participant shared, “I feel that it helped us all feel more open to share, trust each other, and learn from each other's experiences.” A participant shared, “Absolutely. Students are more desperate to share their lives than I think we sometimes acknowledge. I believe this helped their overall self-worth.” One participant said, “YES! When students were able to hear other's stories, they made connections. I saw students talked to each other about their similar experiences.”

**Challenges**

When asked their perceived challenges and suggestions for improvement regarding the curriculum, the educator responses suggested the following as challenges and suggestions for improvement: lack of time, need for more time for implementation, and expanding the application of technology.

**Lack of Time**

Based on their responses, it is clear some of the teachers wanted more time to implement the Front Porch curriculum in ways to provide students the greatest benefits. One teacher noted, “Just timing and wanting to dedicate appropriate time to make this a meaningful and purposeful project.” Another teacher explained, “I did my best to ensure that adequate time and focus was dedicated to telling our stories,” while another stated, “my biggest worry was about the time it would take to complete it and to help students create this keepsake.” One of the educators also said, “they had an issue with timing and wanting to dedicate appropriate time to make the curriculum implementation meaningful and purposeful.” Another educator responded, “Finding the time to implement it and the varying levels of writing skills in the classroom.” Finally, one
more educator said, “Having enough time to implement it with integrity.” Overall, the participants demonstrated a tension between their desire to implement the curriculum and their concern about having an ample amount of time to do it well.

**Need More Time for Implementation**

Not surprisingly, when asked what would you do differently next time, the educators suggested they would spend more time as needed to improve the implementation of the Front Porch curriculum. One teacher responded, “I would try to rearrange my schedule and spend more time on it.” Another pointed to spending more time “spelling out expectations,” while another teacher said, they would “spend more time on it, time in the classroom is hard to come by.” Another teacher noted, “I would probably spend more time leading up to the project and giving students the chance to share out even more,” and one more educator said, “I would make the sharing time more special and spend more time with it. I would practice ways to listen and respond to others.”

**Expanding the Application of Technology**

The educators said there was the need for an expanded use of technology to support the implementation of the Front Porch curriculum. For example, one teacher wrote, “I would love to see more free and accessible online videos to introduce and inspire the Front Porch Initiative in all communities,” while another noted, “Much like the video ‘Chad’ has helped with the challenge section of the writing, I wish there was a video for each portion of the storytelling. This could give a greater understanding of purpose and modeling for students.” Finally, another teacher noted, “It would be nice if I could access it other than the app on the iPad. I could display it on the Promethean Board.”
Front Porch Curriculum’s Storytelling Functionality

When asked about how storytelling functioned in their classrooms through the curricula, the teacher responses highlighted evidence of increased connectedness, relationship building among students, and a more empathetic learning community for both teachers and students.

Increased Connectedness

Speaking on the issue of increased connectedness, one teacher wrote, “there is a mutual respect for what path we walked together. Students who normally would pass one another by in the hallway are now acknowledging one another with a smile and a kind word.” Another responded, “I have witnessed personal storytelling help make connect students in my classroom and help build solid relationships.” Again, another teacher explained, “I think that stories and storytelling are important ways to tap into understanding who we are, what we value, and what we want to be. Stories and storytelling also provide a window into understanding and accepting others.” One participant stated, “Yes, there is a stronger connection between them.”

Relationship Building Among Students

On the issue of relationship building, another teacher elaborated,

The amazing idea of storytelling using the Front Porch Initiative is what our students and families are missing. The idea of community, relationships, and storytelling about our challenges, hopes, and futures. So often, students and families are overwhelmed by the hustle and bustle of life, lacking the intentionality of time with one another. The Front Porch Initiative gave me a platform, as an educator, to bring intentionally back times we can treasure together.

Another participant shared,
Yes, though some of the students from the club may not be best of friends after our experience. There is a mutual respect for what path we've walked together. Students who normally would pass one another by in the hallway are now acknowledging one another with a smile and kind word.

**A More Empathetic Learning Community for Both Teachers and Students**

Based on the educators’ perceptions, the Front Porch Curriculum helped develop more empathetic learning community in their classrooms. One teacher noted, “staff have more grace and understanding for one another,” and another said, “I saw it help them grow in empathy for others. Once they hear other’s stories, they develop a new deeper level of care and empathy for their classmates.” Another participant shared, “Respect and empathy are the words that come to mind first. Students are able to hear and rationalize the weight of their experiences in comparison to others. This, to me, helps in having a worldly view of our uniqueness.” A participant shared that among teachers, “Colleagues developed an increased appreciation for being vulnerable with others in the pursuit of building stronger relationships.”

**Summary of Findings**

The findings in this chapter suggest teachers strive to build rapport with their students and between students. Teachers were able to integrate the curriculum based on personal experience. The curriculum allows teachers to have autonomy based on classroom and school year expectations. The implementation time frame varied for implementation from start to finish ranged from hours to months to complete the whole process. Teachers felt the implementation was easy to use but essential for relationship building but certainly would have liked more time for implementation. Teachers have become more intentional with seeking to know their students’ stories as they enter the classroom. Also, the teachers were able to share the benefits of bonding
with others. They were encouraged by the tool and its impact on relationship building for teachers and students. The perceived benefits of the curriculum are that storytelling is a positive way for students to get to know themselves and others. Students have been able to walk in other’s shoes and develop empathy along the way. Teachers felt that students’ social emotional needs were being addressed as they shared personal testimonies of perseverance. The experience is eye-opening to what others have been through. The study’s findings suggest that the use of the Front Porch curriculum and storytelling; listening, tolerance, and trust are skills enhanced to create deeper relationships between students, teachers, and families.

The challenges that come with the storytelling curriculum focused mainly on the social development of the writers involved (see Table in Appendix B). Students that were still young in their writing needed more support. The other challenge included the amount of time that was needed to make the experience with the Front Porch curriculum meaningful. Time is one of the most precious commodities. Additionally, one teacher wanted to have the curriculum available to allow students to type. This technology is an option to add to individuals when needed but always encourage students physical writing has its importance.

The themes that developed from the educators’ responses can be connected back to (Figure I) created to relate to the goal of developing more empathy in others by using a storytelling curriculum. Through the use of the Front Porch curriculum, space was reestablished for face-to-face conversations between students. Additionally, commonality was reestablished by hearing each other’s stories and seeing how we all connect. That is, in our unique differences we learn to walk in each other’s shoes to grow in empathy. When students share their personal narratives, they become more engaged with each other. Lastly, communities were built in classrooms that made their way into the schools’ communities. The stories collected from this
data pointed back to many stories shared in the classrooms. The phrases like, “build each other up,” “truly do care for one another,” “great amount of empathy present among class,” and “greater tolerance for each other, respect” revealed important links between the impact of the storytelling through the Front Porch Initiative.

Results from implementing the Front Porch Initiative provided much information about the value of the program. The data from the educators demonstrated many positive social-emotional and academic outcomes. The teachers shared over and over again how the curriculum offered opportunities for students to connect at a deeper level. The curriculum opened a door for students in a way that they had not associated with yet. The teachers’ said relationships were deepened, and students had more value and empathy for others. Another important detail is that the curriculum helped teachers make connections with their students, especially those who they had not been able to connect with yet during the school year. Finally, through the use of the Front Porch Initiative and story writing, students’ writing ability improved. The curriculum allowed students to learn about each other's cultures. When the Front Porch Initiative was used with an administrator, they said it built staff morale and a positive school culture (see Table in Appendix B).
CHAPTER V: REFLECTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

In the previous chapter I shared my data and the multiple levels of analysis that were conducted to generate findings from my study. The purpose of this research was to share data results from the implementation of the Front Porch Initiative curriculum to show the functions that personal storytelling can serve in classrooms. The aim is to check whether personal storytelling allows students and teachers to be reflective on their own story and create or build upon relationships in the classroom. In this chapter, I reveal additional limitations of the study, present a summary of the study, discuss my findings as they relate to past research, provide the implications of my research for practice, and point out suggestions for future research.

Limitations of the Study

Although survey data collection using Qualtrics software proved to be a solid method for data collection during the Global Pandemic, it limited my ability to inquire beyond the initial survey responses. Lost was the opportunity to engage in an iterative conversation with teachers to probe deeper and gain clarity beyond initial responses to survey questions.

Summary of the Current Research

A survey with demographic and open-ended questions was administered to educators in PK-12 public schools located in North Central Illinois to gather their perceptions of school personnel who implemented the Front Porch Curriculum. A total of 23 educators (22 teachers and one administrator) responded to the survey. Findings from the coding of data collected though survey data generated the following discussion of themes and subthemes.

Discussions of Study Findings to Past Research

In this section, I discuss my findings on various notable benefits of the Front Porch Initiative. The findings from the study showed that the use of the curriculum led to more respect
towards others in the classroom and created a space where students would acknowledge each other more. The data showed more care towards each other and instances where students were less judgmental. Again, the teachers perceived that the use of the Front Porch curriculum brought about an increase in social and emotional development skills among the students. These relationships formed through going through this storytelling curriculum will have a direct (.72) impact on their academic achievement (Hattie, 2012). More specifically these noted findings are consistent with Hattie’s study which offers more than a decade of evidence of the utilization of checklists, exercises, case studies and best practices shown to demonstrate student achievement. The study revealed “students were more empathetic towards each other,” and “It creates a sense of community” affirming Hattie’s research which implores school personnel to examine the social and emotional learning, student relationships, and the trust established in each classroom.

The Front Porch Initiative curriculum is a storytelling platform that can be implemented by classroom teachers and administrators to build empathy and relationships among students and teachers (Witmer, 2005). The data shows that when using the curriculum there is an increase of conversations, commonality, and community among participants. These commonalities found allow opportunity to foster empathy and help others to understand better other students or teachers’ perspectives (Gordon, 2009). In addition to these benefits the data has provided a platform for forming and deepening relationships of those who previously knew each other. The data shows that the relationships established break down previous barriers between students based on previous surface level assumptions. The implementation provided opportunities for participants to experience vulnerability in sharing personal stories and deepening an understanding of self (Brown, 2015). The data showed that using storytelling participants noticed examples of increased empathy among students and staff providing participants with a better
The educators shared that the use of personal storytelling was important in their school. It led to positive impact such as building deeper connections among students and teachers. Teachers allowed themselves to be more vulnerable with others allowing staff to find more commonality for conversations that were once not there. This finding demonstrates the significance of building relationships through storytelling for meaningful learning. Barth (1990) said that time spent on relationships is what improves schools.

Additionally, findings from the study show the challenges faced by facilitators who used the curriculum. The challenges included the amount of time it takes to go through the curriculum. Also, there was a difference in written outcomes based on the skill level of the students who participated in the program. These written responses would require additional time or resources to help guide participants. This development of literacy was available through the storytelling process and helped develop student skills (Fredricks, 1997). The suggestions for improvement included resources to provide our younger participants’ writing support. In order to help in these situations, educators may need additional support from staff members or community members, to assist in the writing process. If the challenge comes from physical writing, students can also utilize typing or speech-to-text tools to allow students to best express themselves. To improve this challenge, the Front Porch shares out the many standards that are addressed that are already required in schools. Having additional staff available allows help with brainstorming, writing, and sharing.
The findings from this study help generate a number of recommendations for practice. Based on the teacher responses, this study has implications for the introduction and implementation of a storytelling platform like the Front Porch Initiative into PK 12 classrooms to help build relationships among students. This is an essential skill needed in our classrooms, schools, and communities (Coulter, C., Michael, C., & Poynor, L. (2007). Rosen, B., & Rosen, H., 1988). The themes generated from the study findings suggest that student shared their stories of beginnings, challenges, hope, and future through the Front Porch Initiative, this led to connectedness in the classrooms, which could potentially have an effect on improved learning. When students began to listen more and show more respect through a mutual understanding of paths others have walked along, this could lead to an increase in awareness of meaningful learning in the classroom (Miller & Pennycuff, 2008).

Teachers can learn more about their students and their families by making connections to each other stronger and providing increased engagement. This intentional storytelling curriculum was able to help build staff morale and a create more positive school culture.

When students have the opportunity to genuinely listen and learn about the lives of other students and their respective families, positive morale and mutual trust will provide a healthy environment for student learning. This is vital because learning experiences that ignore the social and emotional development of students risk the success of any curriculum reforms or new designs (Comer, 2005).

The Front Porch Initiative provides a means for students to tell their stories. As results came back from those who had participated in this survey, I was affirmed of this feeling of personal storytelling and its opportunity to increase empathy among others and ourselves. And hence would recommend the use of such a platform in teachers’ practice. The teachers were
excited to use the Front Porch Initiative. They shared how for them; this tool was a great way to connect with students. As educators and people, we need to be intentional with finding ways to move past a superficial gesture or comment that can easily be shared in our fast-paced culture. When there was a more authentic conversation in the classroom, genuine relationships were built and more tolerance and acceptance. Storytelling allows more reflections and understanding of how and why to offer grace. Also, being connected in schools is what makes schools run effectively (Blum, 2005). Overall, the study’s findings have implications for the implementation of a storytelling curriculum in PK-12 schools. This strategy could be implemented on a larger scale and with the guidance of policy and curriculum writers.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

In this section, I present the recommendations for practice for schoolteachers and administrators who utilize the Front Porch Curriculum and storytelling as instructional tools within their learning communities. The implementation of the Front Porch curriculum contributed to a range of successes in the classroom, including the time dedicated and writing skill set of the participants. The data shows that the curriculum allows for autonomy from the facilitator and the range of time can impact the success. As a researcher I was able to notice some trends of participants based on time and dedication factors that showed overall participant experiences.

Recommendations for School Teacher and Administrators

This study provides an interpretation of the experiences of public-school personnel in North Central Illinois who have implemented the Front Porch Curriculum. Given the findings that emerged from the constant-comparative analysis of survey data, I offer the following recommendations.
Schoolteachers and administrators should:

1. Work collaboratively to plan the master schedule to incorporate the Front Porch Curriculum in ways that allow time needed to provide students with meaningful socioemotional learning experiences.

2. Plan all their lessons and extracurricular activities using backward design, engagement, and storytelling to create a trusting learning environment beyond the implementation of the Front Porch curriculum.

3. Establish formative and summative ways to assess the Front Porch curriculum and make adjustments needed to improve program implementation.

**Implications for Future Research**

The findings in this study unpacked the way in which teachers implemented the Front Porch curriculum and the effect on student learning experiences. Implications for this study provided data to show the impact of having students and teachers share their personal stories through narrative writing and group sharing. The data shows classroom connections being enhanced among student to student, teacher to student, and teacher to teacher when facilitated. The data shows that using beginnings, challenges, hope, and future provides a platform for students to discover information about others that may not have been able to be previously shared in a setting that doesn’t implement the curriculum.

The following are recommendations for future research studies:

1. A qualitative study employing focus groups of teachers to gain broad in and in-depth narrative of the implementation of the Front Porch curriculum and storytelling. This will permit the research to direct the conversations with follow-up questions to focus on major points of emphasis.
2. A qualitative research study employing focus groups of administrators to learn how they understand the probative value of the Front Porch curriculum and storytelling.

3. A case study to examine implementation of the Front Porch in schools using a variety of lenses so multiple angles of the curriculum can be revealed and understood (Yin, 2018).

4. Perform in depth interviews of students to reveal and understand their individual experiences participating in the Front Porch Curriculum. This would give the perspective of students and how it impacted the relationships they have with others before and after the experience. Additional trend data could be collected about how the experience impacted students’ years after they had shared the experience with others. How did it impact any relationships and did their hope and future part of their writing prompts come true?

Conclusions

The findings from this research highlighted storytelling and the value of storytelling in schools. Based on my research, I was able to see how all students had benefited from this experience. While the perceived benefits varied, there were also mention of perceived challenges from implementation of a storytelling curriculum in the classroom.

These findings from my research supported the importance of having a storytelling curriculum implemented in PK12 schools. The relationships that were created and strengthened amongst groups of students and individuals with the use of the curriculum allowed classes to become more “cohesive” and teachers reported that the students felt more “belonging” in the classroom. There was more trust built among students and teachers in most cases even when some initial fears surrounded what would be shared and how others may respond. This intentional time when space is created to journey through the process allowed for students to
connect when they heard each other’s stories. My model of storytelling in Figure 1 establishes that the storytelling platform provides a space that creates conversation, commonality, and community. These conversations were conducted in a face-to-face setting where students were able to see and hear the emotion from another student or teacher. The teachers shared that the commonalities that were revealed through storytelling made an impact on how students came to understand each other more. These commonalities helped break previous barriers between students and staffing the classrooms and beyond. All these positive outcomes came from implementation the Front Porch Initiative storytelling curriculum to a classroom. This research supports the value of storytelling in a school classroom and its impact beyond the class.

The weight of the digital world has made things more complex. The importance of commitment to a curriculum puts back value into the person, and not their accomplishments, will help with building more understanding of others. Our schools that use a storytelling curriculum as the Front Porch Initiative can be a place that can transform our past and present lives of isolation and disconnection into incredible examples of supportive communities where barriers are broken, commonalities are discovered, and friendships are born.

Our schools thrive in pursuing the culture of a family. Historically, our schools have always been an extension of the family (Coleman, 1966). Where caring adults all came around to raise our children together, instead of others first, we have shifted to a me first approach. The importance of making school a place of showing genuine care is essential (Noddings, 2012). Schools have been and should be a place where everyone feels like they belong. As the Front Porch Initiative has shown, this curriculum promotes empathy, listening, reflection, relationships, and helps students realize their lives are essential. It enables an authentic
experience that will serve as a springboard into a relationship that will last as long as we are willing to take time to share our story and listen to others.

The result from my research shows much favor in the success of storytelling in the classroom. It provides a path for more meaningful relationships between teachers and students. This research helped many of the participants be more reflective in their teaching practices. We all have a story. Doesn’t it make a difference when you know them? The implementation of a storytelling curriculum is essential for K-12 classrooms as we re-establish a space for conversations, commonality, and community. Creating and implementing a new curriculum on storytelling addresses many of the standards that schools need to address and more importantly creates a space to grow in empathy and form relationships. The Front Porch Initiative curriculum has been impactful as the world has kept us busy, isolated, and entertained with instant gratification. As the emotional toll of a global pandemic decreases our opportunities for authentic conversations, the Front Porch Initiative Curriculum provides a space for schools to intentionally create a space to connect. “Frankly, there isn’t anyone you couldn’t learn to love once you’ve heard their story.” A quote Mr. Rodgers carried with him. We all have a story, What’s Yours?
REFERENCE LIST


https://doi.org/10.1080/0305724980270201


www.alfiekohn.org


https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0264250


APPENDIX A: TEACHER SURVEY

Front Porch Initiative My Story Teacher Survey

Do you agree to participate in the study described above?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

Q3 How many years have you been teaching?

○ 1 (1)

○ 2 (2)

○ 3 (3)

○ 4 (4)

○ 5 (5)

○ 6 (6)

○ 7 (7)

○ 8 (8)

○ 9 (9)

○ 10 (10)

○ 11 (11)

○ 12 (12)
Q4 Have you implemented or been part of the Front Porch Initiative curriculum?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q5 How many times have you utilized or been part of the Front Porch curriculum?

- 1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5+ (5)
Q6 What was your initial reaction when you learned about the curriculum? Please describe why you felt that way?

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Q7 Based upon your experience with the curriculum, what do you feel and think about stories and storytelling?

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Q8 Please describe how you implemented the curriculum? (i.e., time of year, amount of time, days per week)

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Q9 Please estimate the total amount of time you used to implement this curriculum within your classroom.

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Q10 What was your biggest worry about implementing the curriculum?

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Q11 What makes the Front Porch Initiative distinct from other packaged curricula?

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Q12 Please describe your own overall reaction to the curriculum once you experienced it.

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Q13 From your perspective, what has been the most significant impact you have seen while using the Front Porch Initiative storytelling experience?

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Q14 Have you noticed a pattern in which types of kids benefit the most from the Front Porch Initiative curricula? Why do you think this pattern exists?

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Q15 Please describe an example of something you learned about a student after going through the Front Porch Initiative storytelling experience?

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Q16 Has the Front Porch Initiative impacted you? If so, please explain.

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________________________________________________________________
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________________________________________________________________

Q17 Have you experienced a difference in the relationships you have with students after implementing the curriculum? If so, please provide an example.

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________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
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________________________________________________________________

Q18 Have you experienced a difference in the relationships you have with your colleagues after implementing the curriculum? If so, please provide an example.

________________________________________________________________

Q19 Is there a particular experience or moment that stands out in your mind when you implemented the curriculum? If so, please describe.

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________________________________________________________________
Q20 Do you believe the Front Porch Initiative influences a sense of community in the classroom? If so, please provide an example.

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Q21 How would you describe the impact of the curriculum on students' social-emotional skills?

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________________________________________________________________

Q22 How would you describe the impact of the curriculum on students' academic skills?

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Q23 Have you seen a difference in relationships between students after implementing the curriculum? If so, please provide an example.

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________________________________________________________________
Q24 Have you observed a change in a student towards others as a result of implementing the curriculum? If so, please provide an example.

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________________________________________________________________
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________________________________________________________________

Q25 Have you observed a change in how adults interact with each other as a result of the curriculum? If so, please provide an example.

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Q26 What would you want your colleagues to know about the curriculum and its implementation?

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Q27 What challenges arose for you in implementing the curriculum?

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________________________________________________________________
Q28 In reflecting on how the curriculum's implementation most recently, what would you do differently next time and why?

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Q29 What advice would you give to teachers who are about to implement the curriculum for the first time?

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________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________

Q30 How do you feel the curriculum could be improved?

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________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________
Q31 Please share any additional information you would like us to know about the Front Porch Initiative curriculum.
# APPENDIX B: TABLES

## Table 1

Participant Information and Implementation Time Frame

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Years Taught</th>
<th># of Implementations</th>
<th>Implementation Time Frame(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Kick-off/Conferencing/varied based on writing ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Eight to Nine weeks throughout year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Three months throughout year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>20+</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ten total hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>20+</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>One hundred eighty minutes a quarter – Additional time spent at home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Seven-Eight hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>90 min. Week for nine weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5+</td>
<td>Two weeks in class - shared with other classes too</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Six weeks 3-4 days a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Three weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>*No time provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 13</td>
<td>20+</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20 hours class &amp; Front Porch Club Night - 3 Hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 14</td>
<td>20+</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>900 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Time was presented throughout as needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 17</td>
<td>20+</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Six weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Two weeks of writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Nine weeks 20-30 minutes daily</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2
In-Vivo Coding Participant Personal Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Years Taught</th>
<th>InVivo Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>“I have become more intentional about seeking out others’ stories. Assisting my students in telling their stories was such a great experience that it became something I wanted to do in future years.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>“I think being vulnerable and sharing parts of our stories is what bonds people together.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>“It made me aware of each person’s story.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>20+</td>
<td>“I have witnessed personal storytelling connect students in my classroom and help to build solid relationships.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>20+</td>
<td>“I often think that storytelling can help make connections. They work with memory, feelings, and can awaken the unknown.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>“This curriculum was easy to use and implement. It wasn’t hard for the students to “buy into.” It was therapeutic. It allows each person to give as much or as little as they want to. If they are willing to be vulnerable, they can be, and can get what they put into it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>“I think that stories and storytelling are important ways to tap into understanding who we are, what we value, and what we want to be. Stories and storytelling also provide a window into understanding and accepting others.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Participant 8 | 10           | “On a cold December day, I was able to present at the Raising Student Achievement Conference. This conference is where I was first introduced to David LaFrance and the amazing idea of storytelling using the Front Porch Initiative. I remember feeling like I wanted to shout, “YES!” This is what our
students and families are missing. The idea of community, relationships, and storytelling about our challenges, hopes, and plans. So often, students and families are overwhelmed by the hustle and bustle of life, lacking the intentionality of

Table 2 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Years Taught</th>
<th>InVivo Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>“Encouraged to find a platform to help adults and kids to tell their story and create an empathetic classroom.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>“It’s a great relationship-building tool. It creates an emotionally safe classroom.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>“I was very excited. I could see the benefits of using The FPI in my room as a platform to connect with students and learn each other’s stories. By creating authentic relationships through vulnerability and connection, I was hoping I could break down walls with my students and create meaningful relationships.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>“I agree that stories and storytelling are crucial to building relationships and the positive forward motion of society and generations to come. I agree that relationships are crucial, and with the advancement of the digital age, it takes more effort to improve and maintain them.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Years Taught</th>
<th>InVivo Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 13</td>
<td>20+</td>
<td>“It has been eye-opening to read about the stories of my students. It has made me have a general attitude that everyone does have a story – and there should not be any judgment made on a person because you don’t know what that person is going through. I loved hearing where my students were coming from and their perspective on life.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 14</td>
<td>20+</td>
<td>“I thought it was a wonderful opportunity for kids to tell their own story and make a deep, impactful connection to the academic side or ELA instruction while also targeting social/emotional content.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“That it was a great way to connect with kids.” “I think it is an important part of building relationships and promotes listening and making connections with others. It helps build empathy and perspective.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>“At first, I was unsure about adding one more thing to my curriculum. However, I found this program worked well with the curriculum already in place and presented another means for the students to tell a story.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 17</td>
<td>20+</td>
<td>“I was excited as there isn’t anything else out there similar to this.” “Students and I got to know each other at a deeper level. It has made me think about my past experiences and how it has shaped me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>“Storytelling is powerful and important for students. They need to know that they are in charge of writing their own story.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>“I thought it seemed like a great way for students to learn about each other’s culture as background.” “I think we can learn volumes from each other when we just take the time to sit and listen to each other’s stories.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Use it as a vehicle to address social and emotional needs.”
“Students who had felt safe sharing with others gravitated towards each other.”
“My relationships with students improved with a greater and deeper understanding.”

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Years Taught</th>
<th>Process Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Participant 1 | 17 | ● Builds Writing Skills  
  ● Enhanced listening among students and teachers |
| Participant 2 | 18 | ● Trusting between other students  
  ● Creating a family atmosphere |
| Participant 3 | 9 | ● Made staff more aware of students’ stories  
  ● Intentional platform for sharing |
| Participant 4 | 20+ | ● Connects with various academic and social emotional standards  
  ● Helped realize similarities and differences of students |
| Participant 5 | 20+ | ● Acknowledges others  
  ● Created deeper relationships with students and parents. |
| Participant 6 | 11 | ● Therapeutic for participants  
  ● Empathetic with how I approach situations |
| Participant 7 | 13 | ● Validates connecting with others  
  ● Personalizes and humanizes my instruction with students |
| Participant 8 | 10 | ● Creates intentional time among students/staff  
  ● Helped me to understand more of the story instead of just change the behavior |

(continued)
Participant 9 12  ● Treasuring time between people  
● Empathy increased among teachers on how to connect with students.

Participant 10 14  ● Relationship building  
● Tolerance enhanced among students

Participant 11 16  ● Sense of belonging  
● Opens the door for more academic gains and fosters a safer learning environment.

Participant 12 19  ● Building authentic relationships  
● Sharing of all parts of life. Good and bad.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Years Taught</th>
<th>Process Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Participant 13 | 20+ | ● Brings compassion back to the classroom  
● Students were able to have basic conversations |
| Participant 14 | 20+ | ● Connecting, empowering  
● Deeper than surface level conversations |
| Participant 15 | 6 | ● Respectful listening  
● Builds community in the classroom |
| Participant 16 | 17 | ● Platform for students to share their story  
● Built cohesion among students as they discovered similarities among themselves. |
| Participant 17 | 20+ | ● Caring  
● Know each other on a deeper level |
| Participant 18 | 15 | ● Students benefit, allowed students to write personal experiences  
● Helped me learn about early difficult experiences |
| Participant 19 | 19 | ● Learning from others  
● Deepens connections between students |
| Participant 20 | 13 | ● Amazed at connections  
● Created trust among students |
Table 4

Evaluation Code Positive and Negative Aspects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Years Taught</th>
<th>Evaluation Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1 (+)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>+ This curriculum is distinct from others because teachers can tailor it to fit their classroom needs (student abilities, time constraints, etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2 (+) (-)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>+ The personal aspect to it. The kids felt like they owned it by the end. It was their story (-) writing not mature yet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>+ Encourages others to share experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>20+</td>
<td>+ Positively impacted the connections and commonality among students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>20+</td>
<td>+ It's personal to each district and individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>+ It is very individualized. No book or story looked the same when it was finished. It wasn't your typical generic question or prompt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 7 (+)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>+ I love how the &quot;My Story&quot; book is colorfully categorized and focused on four critical components of telling our stories. It is structured into one memorable, real-life looking and feeling book. I believe this inspires readers and writers of all ages to &quot;read their writing like it's gold,&quot; just as Lucy Calkins teaches us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 8 (+) (-)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>+ The Front Porch Initiative is unique based on the relational piece of the curricula. It's not just a route program to follow for students to gain writing skills and written language content. It is much more than that. The Front Porch Initiative is an experience creating new stories to tell from year to year. (-) writing process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 9 (+)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>+ It focuses on the idea of creating relationships first and then content, which I love.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>+ Student friendly materials + Connected students and created a sense of belonging + Provided authentic conversations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Years Taught</th>
<th>Evaluation Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 11 (+)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>+I appreciate the colorful workbook as well as the ease of using it. I also appreciate how simple it is. It’s not overwhelming with lots of steps.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>+The Front Porch Initiative seems to focus on bringing back relationships and making genuine improvements in society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 13</td>
<td>20+</td>
<td>+enjoyed getting to know students’ stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 14 (+)</td>
<td>20+</td>
<td>+It's so personal and real for each student. Allows them to take ownership completely and navigate their way through the writing process and their narrative. I felt it was very empowering to students and not just surface level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 15 (+)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>+It seeks to make connections with kids and builds community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 16 (+)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>+The final project is a keepsake for students and families. The process, however, built cohesion among students as they discovered similarities amongst themselves. I also saw empathy among students as someone shared a difficult moment in their lives. (-) time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 17 (+)</td>
<td>20+</td>
<td>+It is personal, it is relevant, it is a keepsake for them to have forever.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>+all students benefited sharing their own story provided a real purpose for their writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 19 (+) (-)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>+It is not prescriptive and allows each student to go as deep as they feel comfortable with their own story. (-) Integrity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 20</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>+it helped me to know students and families better +relationships with certain students improved with greater and deeper understanding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5

Causation Code Value of the Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Years Taught</th>
<th>Causation Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Participant 1 | 17           | ● Build relationships in the classroom.  
|              |              | ● Helped classroom community grow |
| Participant 2 | 18           | ● Students saw the value of their lives  
|              |              | ● Created more empathy |
| Participant 3 | 9            | ● It gave me better awareness of students’ story  
|              |              | ● Students had a forum to share their story |
| Participant 4 | 20+          | ● When they heard stories, they made connections.  
|              |              | ● Helped build solid relationships |
| Participant 5 | 20+          | ● Acknowledges the voices of all students  
|              |              | ● Allowed others to share insight into hope and future |
| Participant 6 | 11           | ● It helped me as a teacher know where students struggled  
|              |              | ● Excited about the curriculum and exactly what students needed |
| Participant 7 | 13           | ● Provided a window into understanding students  
|              |              | ● Students learned each other’s stories through listening |
| Participant 8 | 10           | ● Create intentional time with each other, promoting empathy  
|              |              | ● Students are more open, honest, and reflective in class |
| Participant 9 | 12           | ● Build staff morale and positive school culture  
|              |              | ● Platform for students and teachers to tell their story |
| Participant 10 | 14          | ● Great relationship building tool  
|               |              | ● Very simple and not overwhelming, very colorful workbook |
| Participant 11 | 16          | ● Authentic relationships and belonging.  
|               |              | ● Emotionally and socially safe  
|               |              | ● Opened the door for academic gains |
| Participant 12 | 19          | ● Positive impact while we have a growing concern for students in our society  
|               |              | ● Special to see students share work with families and learn more about students myself. |

(continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Years Taught</th>
<th>Causation Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Participant 13 | 20+ | ● Helped me not be judgmental  
                 Conversations were being had between students |
| Participant 14 | 20+ | ● Deep, impactful conversations  
                  ● Empowering to students |
| Participant 15 | 6 | ● Students were connected when they were able to relate to each other’s stories.  
               ● Kids learn from each other in groups. |
| Participant 16 | 17 | ● Means for students to tell their story  
               ● Being able to share in groups is important |
| Participant 17 | 20+ | ● Students got to know others on a deeper level  
               ● Students in households that lacked child attention benefited |
| Participant 18 | 15 | ● Purpose for writing  
               ● The Front Porch Initiative is personal, relevant, and a keepsake for the future. |
| Participant 19 | 19 | ● Students were able to learn about others cultures they hadn’t previously connected with  
               ● positive impact on academics  
               ● Formed deeper relationships among students |
| Participant 20 | 13 | ● People are more cohesive.  
               ● The details involved allowed me to know more than usual. |