

*NARRATIVE EDUCATORS:  
Teachers and Staff  
of  
Moore Elementary School*

October 2018

**THE NARRATIVE INITIATIVE, LLC**



2018

Authored by: Lorraine A. Dickey, MD MBA  
Founder and CEO, The Narrative Initiative



# NARRATIVE EDUCATORS: TEACHERS AND STAFF OF MOORE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Background

**The Narrative Initiative, LLC**, (or **TNI**) uses unique facilitated narrative techniques and interactive didactic sessions to invite professionals to come together and examine cultural challenges in their workplace environments. One such initiative is our *Narrative Kindness Project* where participants in narrative sessions use personal story to identify specific barriers to kindness in their workplace and then examine ways to overcome these barriers. We know that a “culture of kindness” decreases the potential for non-professional behavior while promoting staff wellness and mitigating the effects compassion fatigue inherent in certain professions such as health care. Yet there are many challenges to acting in a kind manner on a consistent basis in our current culture. Such challenges include time constraints for interactions, lack of opportunities to proactively decompress difficult experiences (a significant contributor to compassion fatigue), and *lack of effective critical communication skills*. Dr. Lorraine Dickey founded **TNI** in 2017 based on 10+ years of research-based, peer-reviewed, unique, facilitated narrative techniques designed to help healthcare professionals and community members examine communication challenges inherent in critical relationships, including the critical relationships found between patient and provider.

**This is a report on a bold experiment to answer the question:** *Are TNI’s unique facilitated narrative techniques using personal story, already demonstrated to be effective for frontline health care professionals, also effective with frontline professional educators in helping them to address difficult issues in the school workplace environment?*

At the invitation of Mr. Curtis Dimmick, principle at Moore Elementary School, Northampton, PA, TNI met twice with teachers for ~ 45 min at the beginning of their day before students arrived. Our first step is to lay the educational foundation of perceived communication. We have named this paradigm “**The Sweet Spot of Communication**®” (SSOC). The primary teaching point was learning to identify when verbal and non-verbal communication along with tone can be leveraged to enhance understanding while simultaneously supporting the needs of the listener (a.k.a. the perceiver of the communication.) Finding this “sweet spot” can prove very effective in enhancing the success of any critical communication, personal or professional. By success we mean communication where the person speaking and the person listening both walk away from the conversation with very similar understandings of what transpired. It is important to realize an act of kindness is only felt to be kind *if* the receiver/perceiver of the act *believes* the act is kind...regardless of the intent of the person performing the act. The primary point here is: Perception is Reality.

We followed this brief didactic teaching with a facilitated narrative session on a topic of interest to the group. This involves a specific short writing and reading exercise. Our first session employed an introductory prompt on the topic of their name. This allows participants to become acquainted with our narrative process. Our second session focused on the topic of Kindness and the challenges they perceive to Kindness in their lives. Participants also completed a validated survey about their narrative experience. Participants could also voluntarily sign a consent and leave their short narrative with the staff of TNI for research and educational purposes. This report is based on the results of this survey and is accented with selected narratives from the participating educators.

This report details the following results: 1) Participant demographics, 2) Participants impressions of their narrative experience benefitting their personal and professional resiliency, their ability to listen closely without judgement, and their ability to immediately use new learned skills in their personal and professional lives, as measured by Likert scores, 3) Participant open comments on the value of this narrative experience, and 4) inclusion of select participant narratives.

### **Key findings:**

This Narrative Educators experience was **very well received** among participating teachers! In fact, results are very similar to those seen with health care professionals over the past 10+ years.

Participants represented elementary school professionals from the fields of teaching, administration, and support staff. This is a very experienced group of educators. Most participants, 70%, have worked over 10 years their reported field of work with 24% reporting working > 20 years in their field.

The results of the Likert questions on our validated narrative surveys demonstrate the following:

- 91% of participants “definitely agree” or “strongly agree” their narrative experience benefited their personal and professional sense of resiliency

- 97% “definitely agree” or “strongly agree” their narrative experience enhanced their ability to listen without expectations.

- 91% also “definitely agree” or “strongly agree” they left with the ability to immediately use new communication skills they practiced in their professional and personal lives.

- Of particular note, 2% (one participant) noted this was a difficult experience. It is critical to recognize that our form of facilitated narrative exchange may not be everyone’s cup of tea though the vast majority feel it is a positive and beneficial experience.

Participant themes on open-ended comments about the value of their narrative experience centered on: *reflection/heightened awareness, positive value statements, the value of this experience for their professional and personal lives, and comments on the value of listening and the importance of perception*. The major comment as to how their narrative experience could be improved: **More!**

- 82% of participant comments addressed wanting more exposure to our narrative work.

Participant final reflections on their narrative experience were very positive:

- 79% of comments expressing their feelings of a positive experience.

- 14% of comments noted the importance of continuing to offer TNI Narrative sessions in schools





## DETAILED RESULTS

### Narrative Prompt

Participants wrote on the following narrative prompts developed specifically for this workshop:

#### **Session 1: Introduction to technique**

*Please take 3 minutes to write about an experience with your name that was either: either: particularly difficult or challenging---or alternatively---particularly uplifting and inspiring.*

#### **Session 2: Narrative Kindness**

*Please take 3 minutes to write about a time in your professional life with a patient, their family member or a colleague ...or in your personal life...when you experienced a kind act (spoken act or physical gesture) or a kind act of omission that was either: particularly difficult or challenging---or alternatively---particularly uplifting and inspiring.*

### TNI Narrative Participant Survey Results

#### **Part I: Overall survey response and demographics**

A total of 41 teachers and staff participated in these two narrative sessions: 23 in Session 1 and 18 in session 2.

A total of 33 completed narrative surveys were collected for an overall 80% completion rate. Session 1 surveys were not collected immediately after the session and this resulted in a lower than expected return rate (15 of 23, 65%). Session 2 surveys were collected immediately after the session and this resulted in a higher return rate (18 of 18, 100%).

For reporting purposes, the following fields of work were divided into three major categories: Teachers (in the classroom), Administration, and Support Staff (not in the classroom, ex. counselor).

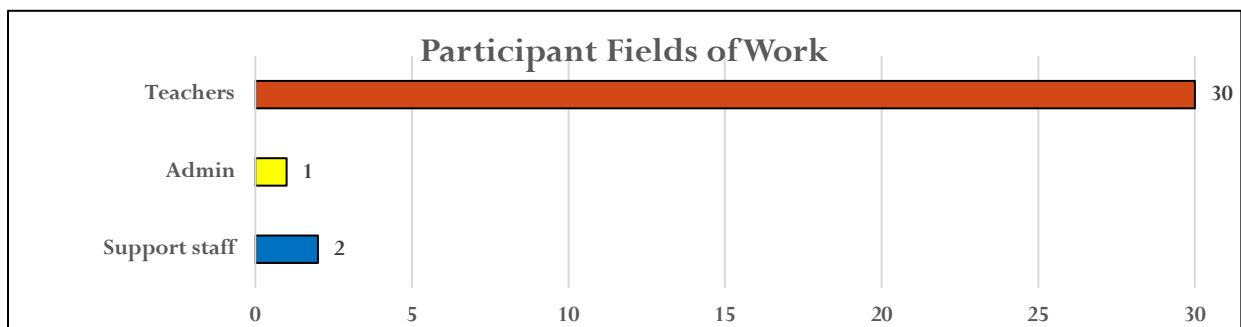
#### **Field of Work**

33 participants reported the following fields of work

Teachers  
n = 30

Administration  
n = 1

Support Staff  
n = 2



## Years in Field of Work

Participants ranged in experience in their field of work from < 1 year to > 20 years. **Note: 70% of participants reported > 10 years of experience, and 24% reported > 20 years of experience.**

1 year = 2

5-10 years = 5

1-2 years = 0

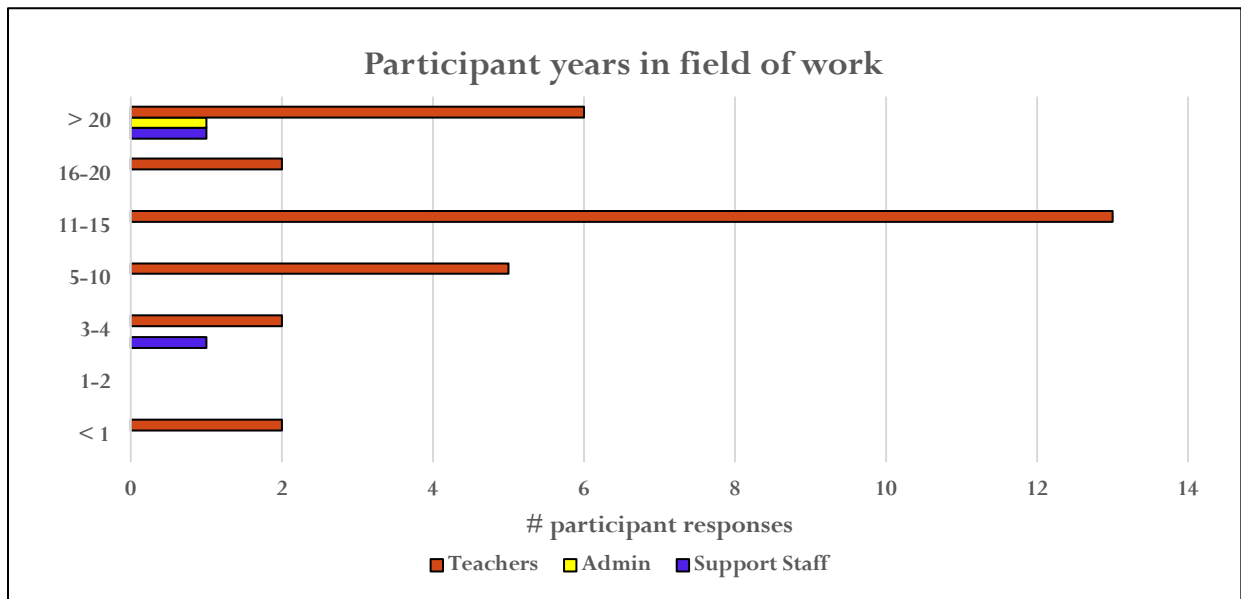
11-15 years = 13

3-4 years = 3

16-20 years = 2

> 20 years = 8

The following graph shows participant years of experience in their reported field of work by the same major categories: Teachers, Administration, and Support Staff.



## Part II: Participant responses to statements evaluated with Likert scoring

Participants were asked to respond to the following three statements:

*Please give your honest opinion for each statement. Circle 1 of 5 possible answers that **BEST DESCRIBE** your opinion of your experience with today's narrative session.*

Likert Scoring

5 = definitely agree

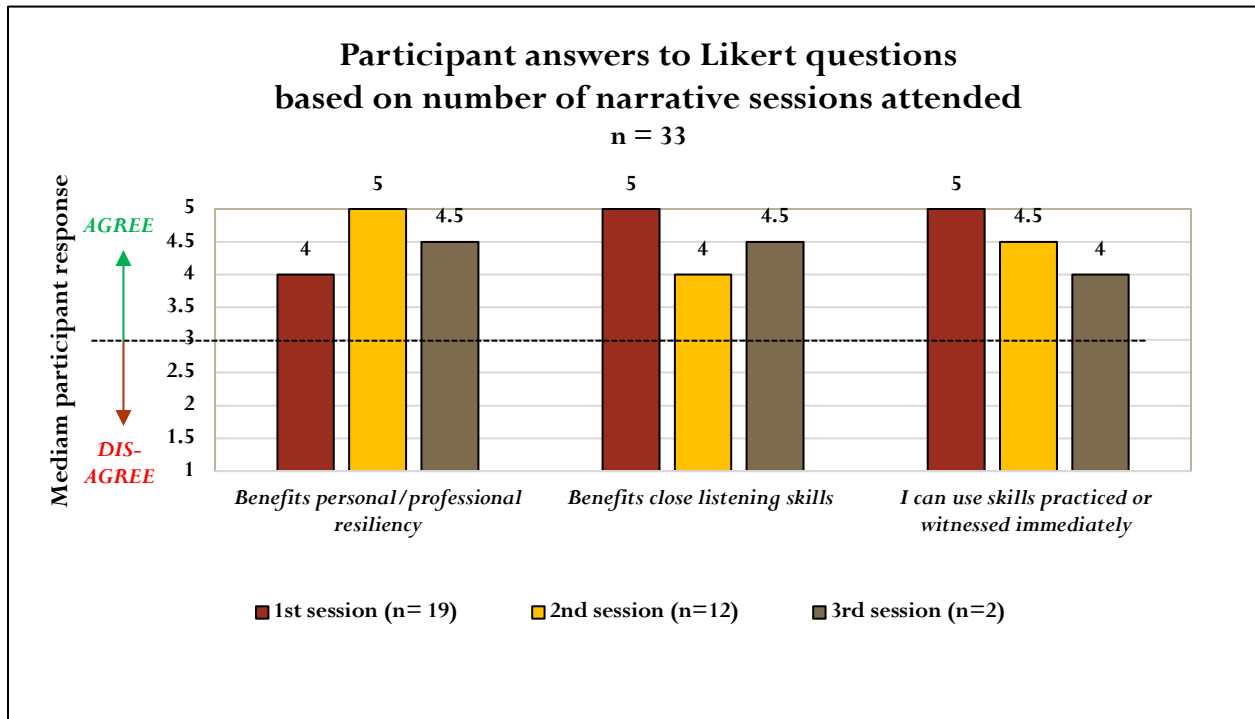
4 = probably agree

3 = not sure

2 = probably disagree

1 = definitely disagree

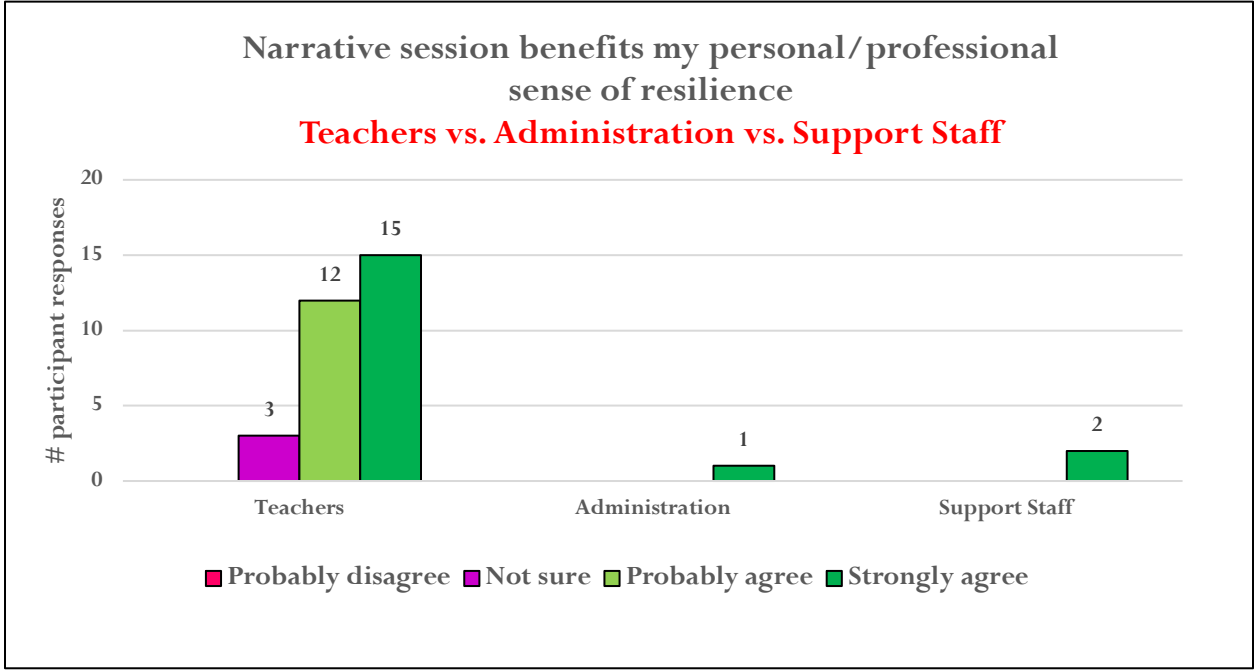
**NOTE:** No significant difference was reported by participants to three Likert questions based on whether this is their first, second, or third experience with our facilitated narrative technique (as shown in following graph). Although the prompt was different each session, participant experience remained similar. Therefore, both narrative sessions with educators are grouped together for further analysis in this report. Of particular note, there appears to be no dilution of perceived positive effect on resilience, close listening skills, and ability to use skills learned immediately with repeat attendance.





*Question 1: Today’s narrative experience will benefit my personal and/or professional sense of well-being and resilience.*

	<u>Median</u>	<u>Range</u>
Teachers	4.5	3-5
Administration	5	0
Support Staff	5	0

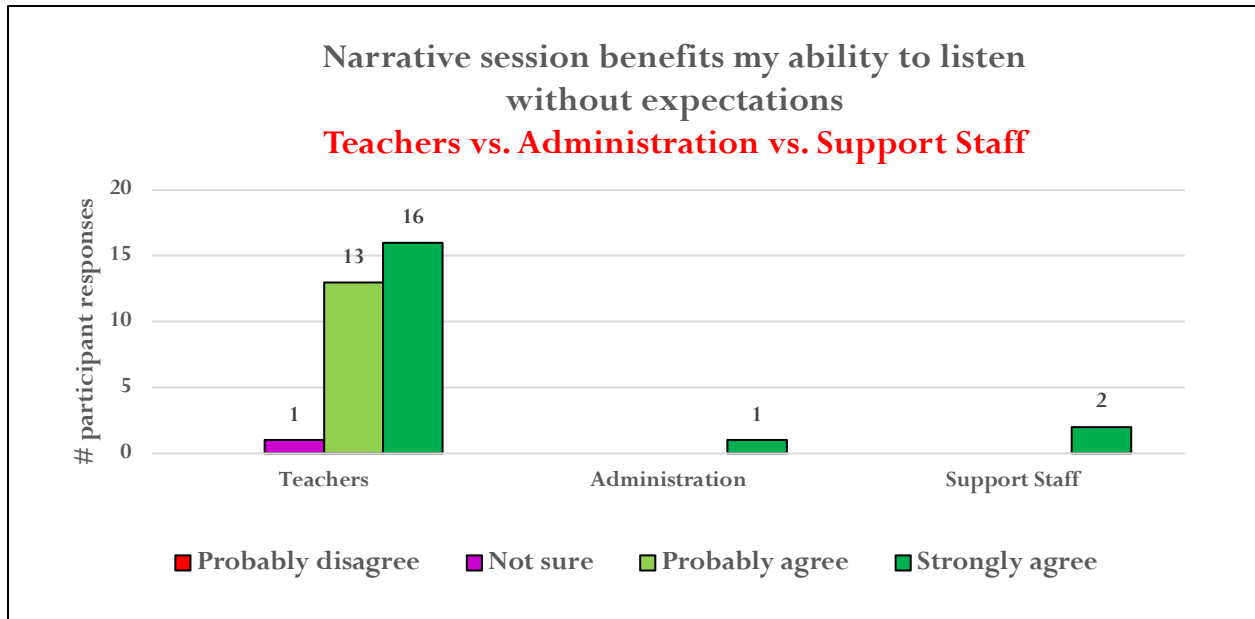


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*Question 2: Today’s narrative experience will benefit my ability to listen closely without expectations.*

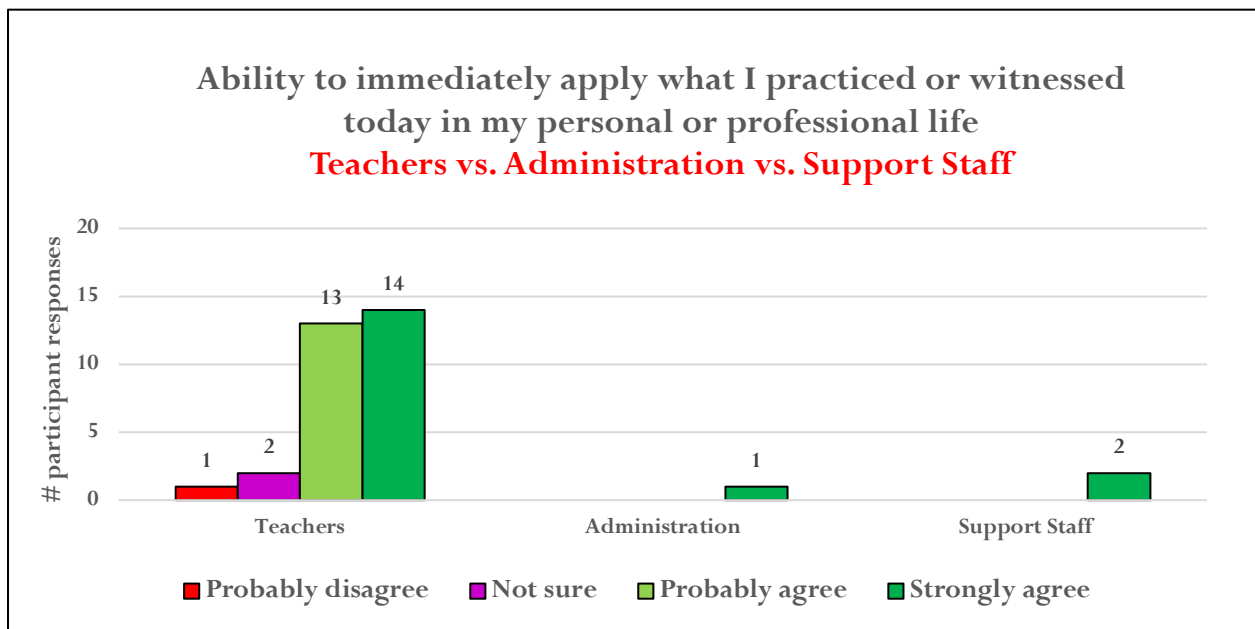
	<u>Median</u>	<u>Range</u>
Teachers	5	3-5
Administration	5	0
Support staff	5	0

NARRATIVE EDUCATORS:  
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Question 3: I will be able to apply what I practiced or witnessed today to my personal and/or professional life.

	Median	Range
Teachers	4	2-5
Administration	5	0
Support staff	5	0



### Part III: Participant open-ended comments

Participants were asked to comment on three open-ended questions. Results are shown by frequency of major category of comment. Individual comments are then detailed by category.

*Question 1: What are your impressions about the value of this narrative experience as it relates to your personal and/or professional life?*

#### **Key findings:**

*A total of 43 participant comments were made.*

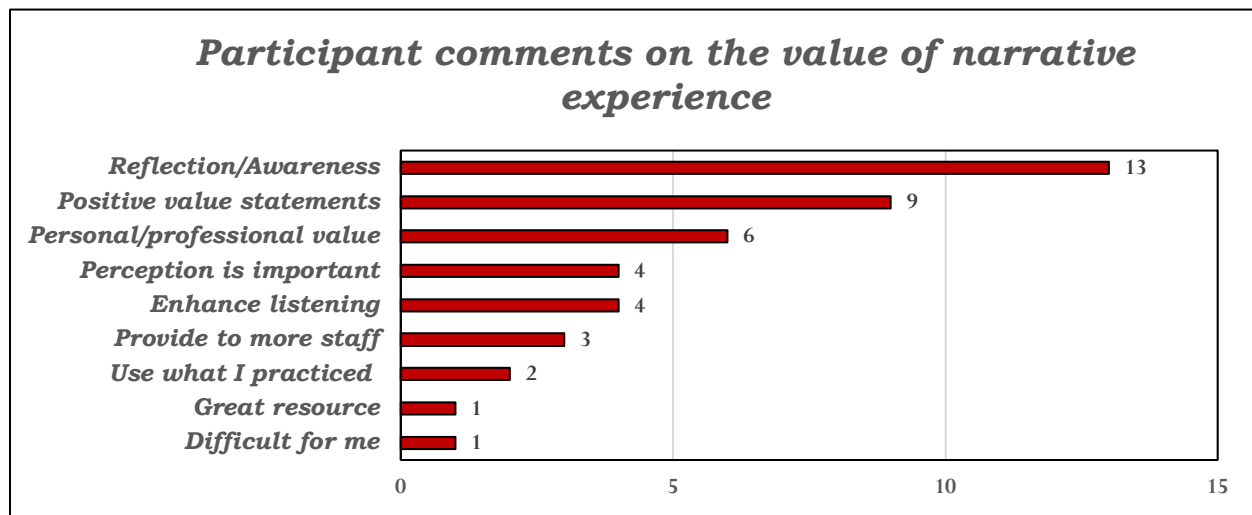
*30% made comments about Reflection/Heightened Awareness*

*21% made comments on the positive value of this experience*

*\* 19% made comments referring to the value to listening and to the importance of perception*

*14% made comments on the value of this experience in their personal and/or professional lives*

*\*2% made the comment this experience was difficult for them.*



#### **Reflection/Awareness**

1. Breaks barriers between colleagues/family/friends
2. It was very insightful
3. Our students and fellow teachers all have their stories that are super important
4. This was helpful and insightful.
5. Everyone brought something a little different to peer sharing
6. It was easier to share my experiences the second time around.
7. It makes you think about students' stories and how they affect everyone.
8. It is good to reflect and hear others
9. It is always good to remind people to be kind especially when working with children
10. This experience makes me step back and think about how we see, hear kindness
11. I think this could be helpful with someone who does not know about the profession.
12. Often times I eat lunch or hang alone b/c I don't want to get caught up in other people's problems or stories. This opened me up just a bit to stopping and listening to others.
13. Very insightful

**Positive value statements**

1. Uplifting.
2. Decompressing.
3. Humanizing
4. Love it
5. Love this program.
6. I liked today's writing prompt
7. Very enlightening
8. Very enjoyable
9. I enjoyed it thoroughly

**Personal/Professional value**

1. Great to get to know staff we work with daily
2. I believe it is beneficial to mental health.
3. Writing is a favorite thing for me to do.
4. I feel writing helps one deal with feelings
5. I find this is valuable. I am a journaler.
6. So valuable to vent and share

**Perception is important**

1. Perception is so important to consider
2. Perception is key to kindness
3. Also, how perception of kindness may be different for different people
4. Gives you different perspective

**Listening**

1. Hopefully it will allow everyone to listen more closely to each other
2. Good for us to actually be able to fully listen to and take in.
3. I enjoyed sharing and listening to other people's stories
4. helps to listen to others closely.

**Provide to more staff**

1. I wish all staff was required to take part.
2. I wish all faculty was here!
3. Hope we can bring you back again and again!

**Use what I practiced today**

1. I will try to use what I learned every day to practice kindness
2. I will do my best to use this in my everyday life.

**Great resource**

1. A great resource for children and adults in the academic setting

**Difficult for me**

1. I do not like to write so this is difficult for me.

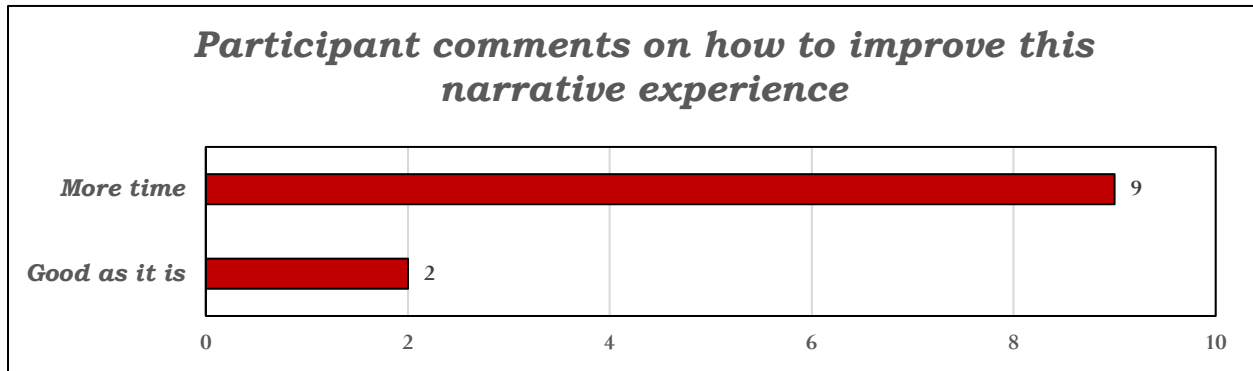
**Question 2: How can we improve this narrative experience to better benefit you?**

**Key findings:**

**A total of 11 participant comments were made.**

**\*82% made comments about wanting more time for this experience**

**18% made comments this format was good the way it is/enjoyed this**



**More time**

1. Come back many times please!
2. Do it more.
3. We just needed more time
4. Having in-service
5. More time would be great but obviously time restraints prevented that
6. I would like a little longer session to learn more!!
7. Time! more time
8. More time
9. More time...very valuable

**Good the way it is**

1. I don't think there's anything that needs improvement
2. I was happy with today's experience

**Question 3: Participant open comment section: Any further comments?**

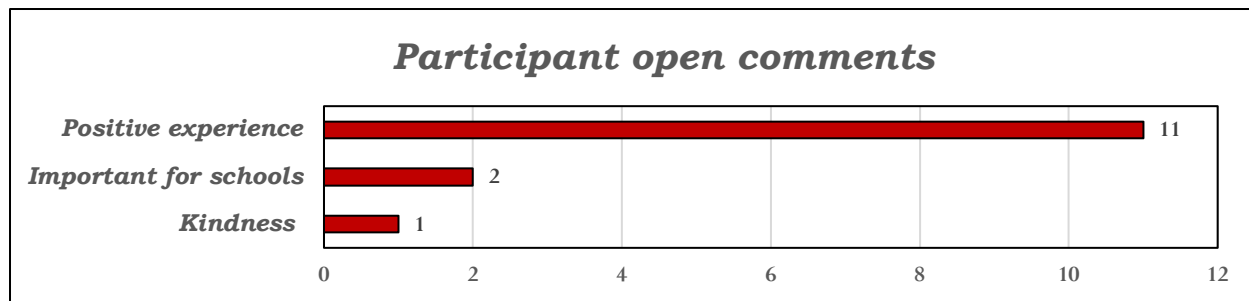
**Key findings:**

**A total of 14 participant comments were made.**

**79% made comments reflecting a positive experience**

**14% made comments about this work being important in schools**

**7% commented on usefulness of narrative technique for reflecting on kindness**



**Positive comments**

1. Thank you
2. Thank you for coming!
3. Love to your cause!
4. Emoji heart
5. Thank you for this!
6. Thank you!
7. Excellent
8. Keep up the great work Dr. Dickey
9. Thank you.
10. Thank you!
11. You guys rock!

**This is important for schools**

1. I think this is super important to have in our school
2. Continue to come back and work with us!

**Reflection on kindness**

1. Great way to reflect on positive and negative acts of kindness.

## Selected participant narratives

**Note:** Selected participants narratives are included in this report. All participants had the option of keeping their personal stories or leaving them with TNI for educational use, research, and possible publication. Those who opted to leave their narrative with us signed a consent form releasing TNI to use their story in a de-identified format.

### **Prompt:**

#### **Session 1: Introduction to narrative technique**

Please take 3 minutes to write about an experience with your name –any part of your name-- that was either: either: particularly difficult or challenging---or alternatively---particularly uplifting and inspiring.

-When I was younger I asked my mom where my first name came from. She said I was named after my dad's aunt. When she met her, she liked the name and she picket it. I thought it was neat that I was named after a relative.

-I have been married for 8 wonderful years. One thing I was beyond happy to do was to take my husband's last name. My maiden name linked me to a horrible past. All I wanted was to finally be free. My last name was the only connection I had left. Thankfully my parents divorced and the abuse/trauma ended. The years after I had my mom and step-father, who became my dad, to guide me down a new positive path. My husband...he understood my reservations and issues but continues to stand by my side. The day I became [married], the past became the past and I was free.

-Growing up, having my last name always seemed to have challenges. People knew who I was even before I had any idea who they were. I was held to a higher standard because of my father's prominence in the community. He always taught us that he would know if we got in trouble before we did because he had eyes everywhere. For that reason I always held myself to that higher standard which I believe benefitted me in the long run.

-As a school psychologist I often get pushback from parents especially because of the information I have to share about their child and the outcome of the evaluation I am reviewing, but there are a handful of parents that have been beyond appreciative of the information I provide. This past summer I called a parent and they shared with me that I helped them to see their child in a new light and that they finally felt someone understood what they were going through at school and at home. This is why I am a school psychologist.

#### **Session 2: Narrative Kindness**

Please take 3 minutes to write about a time in your professional life with a patient, their family member or a colleague ...or in your personal life...when you experienced a kind act (spoken act or physical gesture) or a kind act of omission that was either: particularly difficult or challenging---or alternatively---particularly uplifting and inspiring.

-Years ago I was nominated by a former student for the Disney Teacher of the Year. It was early on in my career and it affirmed that I was in the right profession. I did not get the award but it was great to have been nominated.

-To celebrate the end of a school year, I hosted a gathering in my house for close friends and colleagues. I invited nay and prepared for a fun afternoon. Many offered snacks and beverages to share. However, a colleague who obviously felt left out put a nasty note on the back of the office bathroom door. Several staff people saw it, and it got back me. I was hurt and embarrassed that I caused this to happen. It felt to me like I was offering a happy gathering, but it was not perceived that way by one.

-Being kind posed as being a challenge during a conversation with another co-worker. They were talking disrespectfully about a parent and child I am involved with, to which I did not agree with their opinion. To avoid a confrontation, I allowed them to share their thoughts and politely tried to exit the conversation. This co-worker was someone I did not know well and it changed my thoughts toward them.

-A few years back when I first started teaching I had a struggling student and I was on the phone with the parent explaining what I'm doing to help and the process we have to follow and she was so upset about things taking so long and I'm not doing everything I can for this student. It was very hard to find the right words to say.

-In the position of Admin we rarely are thanked by anyone. This can be very disheartening and sad. A former student, who graduated this past summer, wrote a wonderful thank you letter to me, because of some words I said to him at a time when he was in my office for a discipline issue. He said he always thought of what I said and it motivated him to do better. This was quite uplifting in a time I needed it.



---End of report ---