



The Narrative Initiative, LLC
www.TheNarrativeInitiative.com

What to expect at a TNI Narrative Session or Narrative Workshop

What TNI narrative sessions are and what they are not

Narrative Sessions and Narrative Workshops facilitated by TNI are not standard support groups. They are not group therapy nor are they venting sessions. Their scope and concerns are limited to participant stories and the facilitated interpretation of the participant's human experience. While session and workshop members may find their experience to be therapeutic and/or feel supported by others in the group, ***our primary goal is to develop our personal and/or professional interior lives through short reflective personal writing on a specific topic. These stories are then shared by the participant reading his/her story verbatim to the group.*** (Some workshops are large and require reading of narratives in smaller groups). This unique facilitated narrative technique has been developed, researched, and published by TNI. Some of the important dividends of this process include: diminished feelings of isolation, enhanced feelings of team membership, fuller recognition of what people in similar situations endure, and the alleviation of stress, fatigue, and burnout.

The importance of writing

The act of writing makes us slow down. Writing gives form and shape to experiences that seem formless and shapeless, even chaotic. Writing helps us translate complex experiences into a form more easily grasped such as an obituary or a eulogy.

While some participants are talented and accomplished writers it is important to note that TNI narrative sessions make use of informal writing. *Informal writing is not designed to be correct, artistic or accomplished in any special way.* Informal writing is designed to capture the writer's honest reaction to a significant experience. The simple act of reading this type of informal writing aloud, word for word, to an interested and informed audience can itself be a powerfully validating experience.

What happens in a narrative session

Part 1: Writing

Participants are invited at the beginning of each Narrative Session or Narrative Workshop to write for 3 – 5 minutes on a prompt developed specifically to meet the needs of the audience. Any experience that comes to mind that the participant is willing to share with the group is appropriate for this setting.

Part II:

Reading and close listening

Narrative Sessions: One at a time, participants are invited to read the written story verbatim to the session group. Those not reading are invited to develop their “*close listening*” skills or *listening without expectation* to the one currently reading verbatim.

Narrative Workshops: Due to the larger size of the audience in our workshops, the participants are divided **randomly**¹ into smaller groups. Participants are invited to read to one, two or three other participants.

The simple acts of writing, reading, and listening to these personal stories are known to be especially valuable in decreasing distress, enhancing collegiality, and re-moralizing the participant’s environment (personal and professional). These are some of the personal and professional dividends of participating in TNI Narrative Sessions and Workshops.

Our commitment to research²

The Narrative Participant Survey

The Narrative Initiative, LLC, is committed to advancing the use of personal story to address complex challenges in our personal and professional lives. To accomplish this TNI developed a validated Narrative Participant Survey that all participants are invited to complete. This survey collects demographic data, participant reactions to certain research questions, and participant impressions of their narrative experience.

The Participant Consent for use of de-identified narrative by TNI

At the end of each TNI session participants have the option of keeping their story or voluntarily leaving it with the staff of TNI for their use in education, research, and perhaps even publications. All collected stories are de-identified to the greatest extent possible. We ask all those who leave a narrative with us to please sign the Participant consent for use of de-identified narrative for education, research and publication by TNI.

Professional facilitators

The lead facilitator for TNI Narrative Sessions and Narrative Workshops is Lorraine A. Dickey, MD MBA, the CEO and founder of TNI as well as a seasoned Advanced Narrative Medicine Facilitator. Guest facilitators may be present. Facilitators-in-training may also be present at any given session.

These professional facilitators guide participant in framing and interpreting their narratives by addressing themes, images, tone, voice, mood, plot as well as beginnings and endings within the story. Often particular attention is paid to specific use of language, wording, and metaphor. *Our goal is to offer an experience where all participants can collectively discover the richness and meaning in each person’s story.*

¹ Since 2005, participants have reported being seated randomly with participants they do not see every day or work with greatly enhances their narrative experience.

² Dickey, Truten, Gross, & Deitrick. *Promotion of staff resiliency and interdisciplinary team cohesion through two small-group narrative exchange modles designed to facilitate patient- and family-centered care.* J Comm in Healthcare. 2011. Vol 4:No 2. Pg 126-138.