



Reflections and Relationships

For many learners, English is a chosen and meaningful pathway toward participation, opportunity, and belonging. At the same time, languages are not neutral, and English carries historical and political weight shaped by colonial and assimilationist projects. Both realities can coexist in the EAL classroom. Rather than resolving this tension, we invite instructors to remain attentive to it, and to respond with care, reflexivity, and respect for learners' agency.

How can we hold space for our learners' identities, languages, and histories in our classrooms? What does it mean to teach a language in ways that foster respect, reciprocity, and relational accountability? How do we centre learners' lived experiences, rather than shaping them to fit dominant norms?

This resource does not offer neat answers. Instead, it offers story as a place to begin: story as relationship, story as resistance, story as a tool for imagining something more just. We invite you to use this resource not only as a teaching tool, but as a mirror, an opportunity to reflect on your own positionality, power, and presence in the classroom. What stories do you carry? What stories do you uphold? What stories do you make room for?

At the same time, we want to be clear about what this resource is not. Narrative *métissage* comes from a place of shared curiosity. It resists rigid structures, neat categories, or ready-made templates. If we turn narrative *métissage* into a set of prescriptive steps, so-called "métissage in a can," we risk reshaping it into the colonial ways of thinking and doing that it can disrupt. While this resource provides guidance on ways you can engage in narrative *métissage*, the practice itself is organic, relational, and responsive.

Narrative métissage invites us to embrace complexity. It is about meaning-making, inviting multiple voices, identities, and truths into conversation without predetermining where that conversation will go. Narrative métissage resists the demand for tidy outcomes and predetermined destinations. It invites uncertainty, openness, and responsiveness, qualities that make classrooms not only sites of language learning, but also of relationship, recognition, and transformation. This may mean allowing space for stories to shape the direction of learning.

To support this process, this resource offers reflections from people who have participated in narrative métissage, and invitations for learners and instructors to engage in reflection themselves. The richness of narrative métissage lives in the act of reflection, where stories are not only shared, but also taken up, questioned, and re-imagined in relationship.

Narrative Métissage and Métissage: *What's the Difference?*

Métissage, in a broader sense, refers to an approach that weaves together different voices, genres, and modes of expression, such as poetry, theory, academic texts, art, music, and other forms of cultural or scholarly production. In research and artistic contexts, métissage may interweave texts that are not personal or autobiographical, functioning as a research praxis, literary strategy, or theoretical intervention.

Narrative métissage, as used in this resource, names a more specific practice: the intentional weaving of autobiographical stories. It focuses on braiding together personal narratives, reflections, and lived experiences in response to a shared theme, question, or curiosity. The emphasis is on lived voice and relational meaning-making, rather than analysis, representation, or textual synthesis.

While this resource centres autobiographical narrative métissage as a practical and accessible entry point for EAL classrooms, instructors may choose to expand the practice by inviting learners to weave in images, drawings, artefacts, movement, or other modes of expression alongside their stories. These multimodal approaches can deepen meaning making while remaining grounded in the core principles of curiosity, connection, reflection, and ethical relationality.

What Narrative Métissage Is Not

To engage respectfully and effectively with narrative métissage, it is important to clarify some common misconceptions:

It is not a creative writing or speaking assignment.

While storytelling is central, the primary goal is not to evaluate grammar, fluency, polish, or performance. While language learning can happen alongside or within a narrative metissage experience, it prioritizes meaning-making and relationship over language 'mastery'.

It is not fiction.

Narrative métissage is rooted in authentic voice. The stories shared belong to the participants themselves: lived experiences, reflections, and truths. Autobiographical stories may be woven alongside other texts or artefacts (such as images or objects), but the narrative remains grounded in personal experience.

It is not the same as casual personal sharing or class discussion.

Narrative métissage involves intentionally weaving individual voices together in response to a shared curiosity, with care, structure, and reflection. It is a collective act of meaning-making, not informal "sharing time."

It is not neutral or apolitical

Narrative métissage emerges from decolonizing practices that challenge dominant narratives of identity, belonging, and nationhood. It makes space for the plurality of selves people carry—selves that may be pressured to choose, simplify, or "fit" within inherited logics of inside/outside, belonging/exclusion, or us/them. Narrative métissage invites attention to history, power, and positioning, not only within stories, but in how stories are held in relationship.

It is not extractive.

Participation is invitational. Narrative métissage is not a tool for mining personal trauma or compelling emotional disclosure. It rests on trust, consent, reciprocity, and participant agency.

It is not prescriptive.

Narrative métissage resists being reduced to a formula or checklist. While facilitators may offer prompts or structures, the practice remains organic, relational, and responsive to the people involved.

It is not about managing or resolving differences.

The aim is not consensus or harmony. Narrative métissage holds multiple voices, truths, tensions, and contradictions in relationship, allowing for convergence, divergence, and ongoing dialogue.



Why Story?

Story is one of the oldest forms of learning we have. It carries memory, identity, emotion, history, and cultural practices. It helps us build relationships, make meaning, and feel belonging. In times of disconnection, displacement, and division—often shaped by colonial histories, migration, and systems that sort people into insiders and outsiders—story becomes a vital form of repair.

In English language classrooms, story creates space for people to express who they are. It allows people to share their experiences, their hopes, their contradictions, and their truths. For many newcomers, this includes navigating multiple selves at once: who they have been, who they are becoming, and who they are expected to be in a new place. Story makes room for this plurality, without demanding coherence, resolution, or a single narrative of identity.

Story brings language to life. And story is not limited to words: it can emerge through many languages, images, sounds, gestures, and movements, depending on what feels most authentic. This openness is especially important in classrooms where learners are carrying layered linguistic, cultural, and emotional histories that may not fit neatly into dominant narratives of settlement or integration.

Story is also how we remember. Neuroscience shows that people retain far more information when it is shared through narrative rather than abstract facts. When we tell or hear stories, we activate mirror neurons—the parts of the brain that help us imagine another’s experience. This builds empathy and perspective-taking, which are vital in classrooms where learners and teachers navigate difference. Story also acts as a form of dialogue: it helps us stay present with complexity, engage conflict without shutting down, and practice curiosity and relational accountability even when our perspectives diverge.

Some people frame language learning as purely transactional: a pathway to employment, citizenship, or assimilation into dominant norms. While these goals matter, they are not the whole story. Language is also how we build relationships, share joy, ask for help, connect across difference, and shape the lives we want to live. Story reminds us that language learning is not just about function—it is about becoming.

Narrative *métissage* invites learners and educators into this deeper purpose. It offers a sensibility for living with plurality: for holding multiple stories of self, place, and belonging in relationship. Rather than asking learners to choose between past and present, here and there, narrative *métissage* makes space for identities that are layered, evolving, and sometimes in tension. It resists the pressure to fit into colonial norms of correctness, coherence, or belonging—norms that often demand singular, simplified versions of who people are.

As Cree scholar Dwayne Donald describes,

narrative métissage is also an exercise in hermeneutics—an interpretation of the world. It is more a sensibility than a methodology: a way that knowledge is formed, recognized, and moved through relationship.

Through story, we come to understand ourselves as historic beings: inheritors of traditions, participants in the present, and shapers of the future. Story allows us to see where we have misunderstood, to reposition ourselves in relation to others, and to articulate different horizons of possibility.

Donald, D. (2012). Indigenous *métissage*: A decolonizing research sensibility. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 25(5), 533–555.