Stories We Carry

Narrative Métissage in EAL Classrooms

ATEAL
ALBERTA TEACHERS OF ENGLISH AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE

FUNDED BY GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA
Alberta

Land Acknowledgement

ATEAL takes this opportunity to acknowledge the traditional territories of the Indigenous peoples and the Métis Settlements and Métis Nation of Alberta. We respect the histories, languages, and cultures of all First Peoples of Canada, whose presence continues to enrich our communities.

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents

Table of Contents


1 Introduction
To Narrative
Métissage

Land and Labour Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the land now known as Canada is situated on the traditional and ancestral territories of diverse Indigenous peoples and nations whose relationships to land, language, and story in this place predate the colonial borders by millennia.

Those using this resource, whether through teaching or participating in its activities as learners, live and learn across Turtle Island and beyond, on lands shaped by colonization and healing, migration and displacement, refuge and resilience. Many arrive in Canada seeking safety, opportunity, and community, bringing with them rich stories, skills, and cultural lineages.

Canada rests on dual foundations: one rooted in pluralistic hope and possibility, and one shaped by dispossession, violence, and systemic inequity. We acknowledge the histories of labour and forced migration that shaped this country, and the ongoing impacts of these histories today.

Canada's cities, institutions, and social infrastructure have been built through the labour of peoples whose contributions have too often been erased or undervalued. This country continues to be sustained by the work of those who have faced displacement, marginalization, or exclusion. We honour the generations of workers, caregivers, knowledge-keepers, and community builders whose labour makes life here possible, including those whose stories remain unrecognized.

We also acknowledge that there continues to be discrimination in Canada. Acts of hate and exclusion shape how people move through workplaces, classrooms, and public life, and the impacts are felt most intensely by those living at multiple intersections of marginalization. These realities influence experiences of belonging, safety, language, and learning.

In the development of this resource, we commit to approaching this work with attentiveness to these histories and present-day conditions, recognizing that narrative, story, and language always emerge within systems of power, and that story can also foster connection, understanding, and transformation.

Colonial governance, educational, and economic systems rooted in settler expansion, capitalism, and imperial rule displaced relational, land-based, and community-held knowledges that long predate Canada. The process of creating spaces where people can listen, tell, and honour their stories helps interrupt these harms and expand what safety, belonging, and community can mean. Narrative métissage begins from this commitment to listening, relationality, and collective possibility.

In the context of English as an Additional Language (EAL), these tensions and opportunities sit side by side. English learning can open doors to employment, connection, and participation, while also carrying the legacies of colonial power through learning the language that has been used to colonize many places. We cannot disentangle teaching EAL from this complexity, but we can make intentional space within it for relational, equity-informed, and decolonizing practice.

We offer this resource in the hope to nurture classrooms that centre humanity, accountability, and intercultural respect.

Purpose of the Resource

This resource was developed as part of ATEAL's Train-the-Trainer initiative to support English as an Additional Language (EAL) instructors, coordinators, and administrators in integrating intercultural competence (IC), anti-racism (AR), and decolonizing practices into their teaching. Rooted in narrative métissage, a collaborative storytelling practice grounded in Indigenous ways of learning, this resource invites educators to view language teaching as a deeply relational, equity-informed experience.

The resource aligns with ATEAL's Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) and Equity, Diversity, Inclusion (EDI) frameworks. It provides guidance on how to engage in narrative métissage as a language learning experience, a community-building experience, and a reflective experience for surfacing lived experience and intercultural insight.

Importantly, this resource does not position the instructor as an expert outside the experience; it invites them into it. Educators are engaged as learners of intercultural practice and narrative métissage themselves and recognize that positionality and identity are not separate from the teaching and learning experiences.

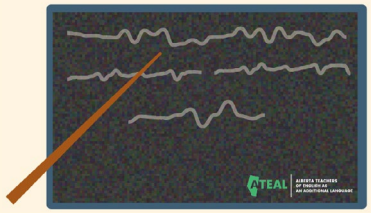
In this context, learning is ongoing, situated, and developmental, not a fixed destination or final product. Whether you're new to EAL, are taking your first steps into learning how to teach within an anti-racist framework, or are years into your teaching journey, this resource supports growth from wherever you are, linguistically, interculturally, and pedagogically.

This resource is accompanied by a short instructional documentary featuring instructor reflections and classroom impact, this resource offers both inspiration and practical tools for building brave, relational, inclusive classrooms.

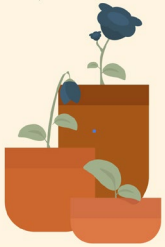
How to Engage with This Resource

This resource is designed to be adaptable, reflective, and non-linear. You do not need to read it cover to cover before getting started; nor do you need to be an expert in intercultural communication or decolonial practice to use it meaningfully.

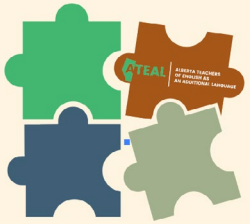
You can begin wherever you are:



in your teaching practice



in your own learning journey as an educator



or in your understanding of intercultural competence

Each section includes practical guidance, reflective prompts, and facilitation strategies tailored for EAL classrooms at various learner levels. The activities can be adapted for different groups, languages, and teaching contexts. While the resource offers step-by-step support for facilitating narrative métissage, it is not meant to prescribe a formula or provide “métissage in a can.” Instead, it emphasizes narrative métissage as a practice of shared curiosity, meaning making, and complexity.

Because the richness of narrative métissage lives in reflection, this resource brings together several interwoven elements:

1. *A process with steps to support facilitation, offered not as a rigid formula but as a flexible framework that can be adapted to context*
2. *Strategies for weaving aspects of narrative métissage into the classroom, including ways to support learners across different language levels and classroom settings*
3. *Invitations for learners and instructors to engage in reflection, so that stories are not only shared but also taken up, questioned, and re-imagined in relationship*
4. *Connections between narrative métissage, intercultural learning, and language learning, highlighting how story work strengthens language development and relational and intercultural competence*
5. *Reflections from people who have participated in narrative métissage, offering insight into how the practice has shaped their perspectives and teaching*

We also encourage instructors to first participate in narrative métissage themselves before facilitating it in their classrooms. Experiencing narrative métissage as a participant, or as an audience member, deepens understanding and helps ensure that the practice is carried into the classroom with care, humility, and authenticity.

Whether you're using this resource to explore a new teaching approach, support professional development in your program, or participate in the Train-the-Trainer workshops, we invite you to approach it as a living resource, one that grows with you and your practice over time.

We invite you to take what serves. Return when you're ready. Invite complexity. Learn in relationship. Begin with story.

What Is Narrative Métissage?

Narrative métissage is a way of learning together through story. By its nature, it doesn't fit neatly into a single category or definition. It draws from storytelling, life writing, performance, and the symbolic act of weaving or braiding.

In practice, narrative métissage brings together short personal stories and placing them side by side so they can speak to one another. These stories might be shared as written text, spoken aloud, or offered in a mix of forms. Sometimes images, sound, or movement are included. Sometimes the process stays very simple and text based. What matters is not the medium, but the act of weaving voices together.

When narrative métissage is shared aloud, it often resembles a simple form of reader's theatre. Participants read from their own stories or segments of them, usually with minimal attention to performance, staging, or polish. The focus is on listening, witnessing, and meaning-making rather than presentation. Hearing the stories aloud, especially when they are interwoven, often brings new insights that are not visible on the page.

At its simplest, narrative métissage involves a small group, often three to five people, each creating a short personal story. These stories may respond to the same prompt, but they do not need to match in topic or tone. Participants usually write or prepare their stories independently, then come together to share them.

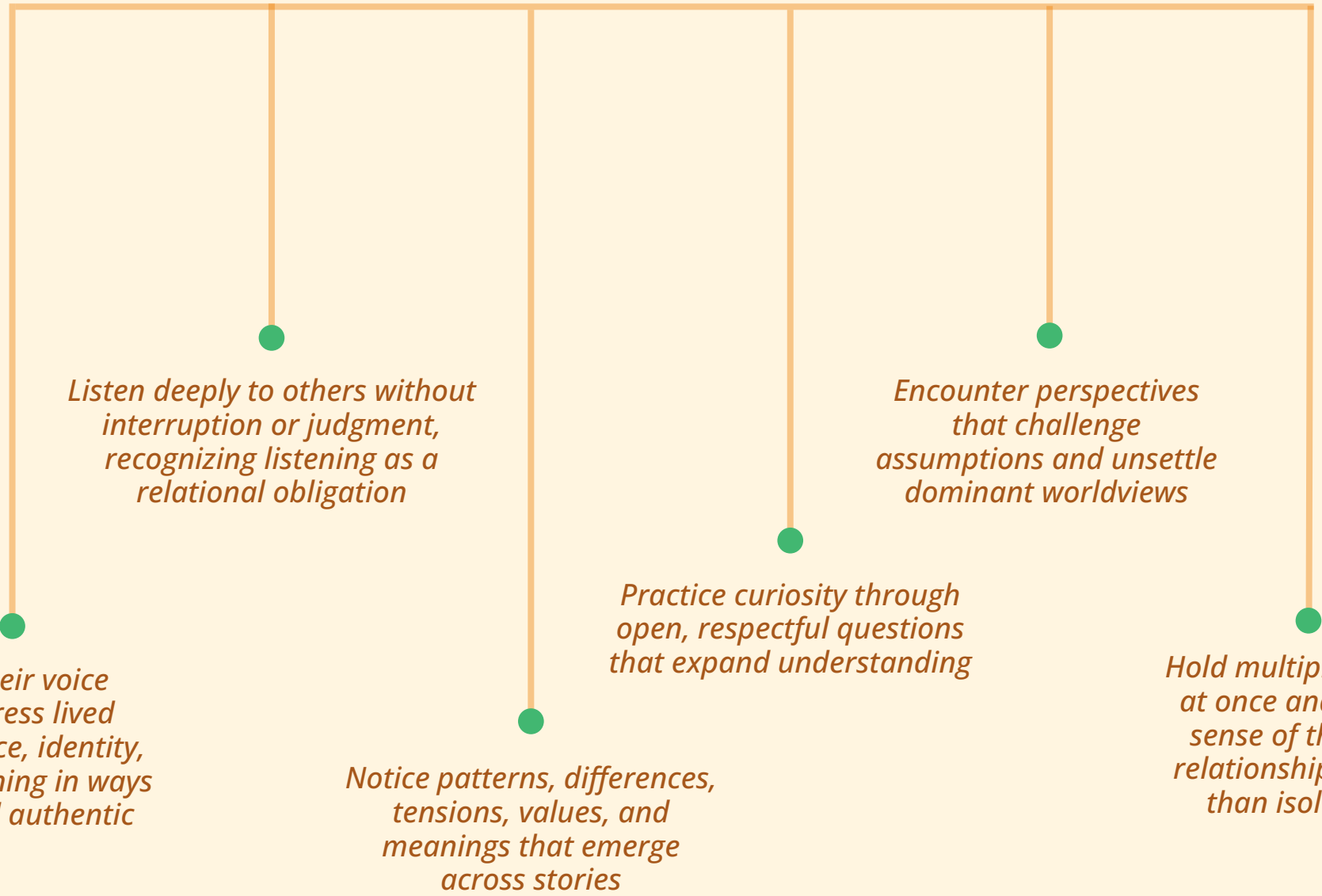
The stories are then divided into shorter pieces, such as sentences, moments, or brief vignettes. Participants take turns reading these segments aloud, moving back and forth between voices. One person shares a short section, then another, then another, before returning to the first voice again. The order of these segments can be decided together or shaped by a facilitator.

The weaving itself creates meaning. When stories are placed beside one another, they begin to echo, contrast, interrupt, and respond. Different experiences of place, identity, language, power, or belonging become visible through juxtaposition. Some moments feel shared; others highlight difference or tension. Both matter.

Through this braided storytelling, no single story stands alone. Individual lives are shown as overlapping, shaped by relationships, history, and social context. Narrative métissage makes space for both uniqueness and connection, helping participants see how personal experience is always connected to larger patterns in the world.

Narrative métissage is not just about telling stories. It is about learning how stories teach us about ourselves, about others, and about how we are living together in the places we inhabit.

What makes narrative métissage a dynamic approach in EAL contexts is that the process invites participants to



The Foundations of Narrative Métissage

Narrative métissage is grounded in Indigenous, decolonizing, and relational ways of knowing, and it begins from the understanding that knowledge is not neutral, individual, or detached. The term métissage evokes the interweaving of story, identity, culture, memory, and voice. It does not separate knowledges into tidy categories or position them in hierarchies. It values complexity, multiplicity, and connection.

This practice emerges in response to enduring tensions over history, culture, identity, and belonging, particularly in places shaped by colonialism, such as what is now known as Canada. The narratives of nationhood, citizenship, and identity that are often dominant in Canada demand clear boundaries: insider or outsider, settler or Indigenous, belonging or exclusion. Narrative métissage resists these either/or logics. It offers a way to live, learn, and tell stories across inherited divides without forcing resolution, assimilation, or erasure of anyone or anyone's story.

Dwayne Donald (2012, 537-538) explains:

> *For me, métissage is a research sensibility that mixes and purposefully juxtaposes diverse forms of texts as a way to reveal that multiple sources and perspectives influence experiences and memories. Métissage, as research praxis, is about relationality and the desire to treat texts – and lives – as relational and braided rather than isolated and independent. I explicitly connect métissage to the legacies of colonialism and the need for recognition of the mutual vulnerability and dependency of colonizer and colonized, insider and outsider, as well as the presumed primacy of 'literate' societies over repressed oral traditions and storytelling.*

Drawing on Indigenous storytelling traditions, narrative métissage brings multiple voices and truths into conversation while refusing the idea that difference must be smoothed over or reconciled into a single account. Métissage makes space for identities that have been pressured to “choose sides,” acknowledging that histories, memories, and ways of being are interconnected and interreferential. In this sense, narrative métissage functions as both a conceptual approach and a practical strategy for holding tension with care.

Métissage has been described as a counternarrative to dominant or “grand” narratives, particularly those produced within colonial knowledge systems. It works by braiding strands of place and space, memory and history, ancestry and identity, language and literacy, the familiar and the strange. As a pedagogical praxis, it actively unsettles traditions that privilege objectivity, argument, and individual authorship, replacing them with collaboration, relational accountability, and collective meaning-making.

At its core, narrative métissage is grounded in an ethical understanding of relationality. Relationality here is not a celebration of shared humanity or sameness. Rather, it requires careful attention to the historical, cultural, ecological, and social contexts that shape how people understand the world and each other. It asks participants to consider how their stories are positioned in relation to others, how they are connected to the land, how histories entangle them, and how their futures are tied together. Listening, in this context, is not a passive skill but an ethical responsibility.

In educational spaces, including EAL classrooms, narrative métissage becomes a way to connect personal (autobiographical) and family stories with broader narratives of migration, nation, language, and belonging. It resists the authority of a single "official" story and instead relies on collaboration and collective authorship. Stories gain meaning not in isolation, but through their interface with the stories of others, highlighting difference without essentializing it, while also locating points of affinity.

The word métissage draws on the French root meaning "interweaving" or "mixed." It does not come from, nor does it belong to, Métis culture. While the term métis has historically been used as a derogatory label for people of mixed ancestry, narrative métissage consciously reclaims the word to name interconnection, complexity, and the refusal of rigid categories, while remaining distinct from Métis cultural identity and cultural practices.

Story is often understood, particularly in educational contexts, as something that exists primarily as a text. This resource does lean toward both text-based and oral approaches to narrative métissage, especially as a practical and accessible entry point for EAL classrooms. At the same time, narrative métissage is not limited to written or spoken language alone.

One of the strengths of narrative métissage lies in its openness. "Story" can take many forms: poetry, academic writing, oral narrative, image, music, art, or movement. This flexibility reflects its grounding in shared curiosity and its commitment to meaning making in relation. Narrative métissage invites a form of truth telling that centres relationship, welcomes vulnerability, and acknowledges contradiction.

In decolonizing pedagogy and arts-based research, narrative métissage is used not only as an approach for expression, but as a way of imagining more just futures. In EAL education, it creates space for learners and instructors to share who they are, where they come from, and how they experience the world through language, culture, memory, and migration. No story stands alone. Each voice becomes part of a woven whole.

Narrative métissage is not about performance or perfection. It is about listening closely, holding space for difference, and learning how to live and learn in ethical relationship with others.

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

Aligning with Indigenous Ways of *Knowing, Learning, Doing,* and *Being*

Narrative métissage is rooted in Indigenous worldviews and ways of knowing, learning, doing, and being. It is grounded in relational, place-based, and non-linear understandings of the world, where knowledge is understood as living, contextual, and shaped through relationship. Narrative métissage is not only an epistemological orientation (how knowledge is understood and held) but also a pedagogical and relational one. It is a way of learning, seeing, and engaging with the world through attentiveness to relationship.

As educators, we engage with this practice not to imitate, perform, or reproduce Indigenous cultural or ceremonial traditions, but to learn from the ethical principles that underlie them, particularly the ways story, relationship, responsibility, and care shape learning. Alignment does not mean adoption. It means learning with humility and accountability, rather than extracting practices or symbols divorced from their cultural contexts.

Indigenous ways of knowing and learning value connection, reciprocity, and complexity. Knowledge does not exist as a discrete object to be extracted, owned, or transferred from one person to another. Rather, it emerges through relationship, witnessing, and participation. Learning is not something we simply receive; it is something that happens when we listen deeply, show up fully, and allow ourselves to be affected by what we encounter. In this sense, learning is inseparable from being: who we are, how we are positioned, and how we relate to others shapes what and how we come to know.

What we “know” may surface, be witnessed, or be co-created in relationship. As Indigenous Hawaiian epistemologist Manulani Aluli-Meyer explains, this kind of knowing can be understood as (k)new, knowledge that may be ancient yet appears new as it resurfaces, or knowledge that has long been embodied and lived before the mind recognizes it consciously. From this perspective, knowing and learning are relational, emergent, and always in motion. They are shaped by place, experience, and responsibility rather than linear accumulation.

Engaging with narrative métissage in an EAL classroom is not cultural appropriation. It does not adopt Indigenous spiritual, ceremonial, or sacred practices. Rather, it draws on ethical pedagogical orientations that challenge colonial norms of extraction, neutrality, and hierarchy, and that centre relational accountability, multiplicity, and care. This includes honouring authentic voice by allowing stories to be shared in many languages and forms of expression. When approached with this awareness, narrative métissage becomes a way to interrupt the colonial logics that language classrooms can unintentionally reproduce, logics that privilege correctness, standardization, and singular ways of knowing.

Mi’kmaq Elder Albert Marshall reminds us that the foundation of ethical relationships is story. We must be able to listen to one another’s stories in order to truly see one another and to recognize how our experiences, knowledges, and worldviews coexist, overlap, and diverge. Story, in this sense, is not simply a teaching tool; it is a relational practice through which learning happens.

This understanding aligns with the principle of Two-Eyed Seeing (Etuaptmumk): a practice of holding Indigenous and Western ways of knowing together, without requiring one to subsume or dominate the other. Story is one pathway into this practice. Through storytelling, and story listening, we learn to see through multiple lenses, to value complexity, and to recognize that insight and wisdom often live in the spaces between perspectives.

Dwayne Donald explains:

> *Ethical relationality is an ecological understanding of human relationality that does not deny difference but rather seeks to more deeply understand how our different histories and experiences position us in relation to each other. This form of relationality is ethical because it does not overlook or render invisible the particular historical, cultural, and social contexts from which a standpoint arises. Rather, it puts these considerations at the forefront of engagements across frontiers of difference. (Donald, 2009, p. 6)*

This ethic of relationality sits at the heart of narrative métissage. It reminds us that story work is not about erasing difference or seeking resolution, but about learning how to live well with difference, how to be in relation across histories, contexts, and positionalities. This resource offers an invitation into that ethic, while encouraging educators to continue learning from Indigenous scholars, Elders, and community members with reciprocity, accountability, and care for protocol.

Aluli-Meyer, M. (1998). Native Hawaiian epistemology: Contemporary narratives. *Pacific Educational Research Journal*, 12, 59–65.

Aluli-Meyer, M. (2011). Holographic epistemology: Native common sense. *China Media Research*, 7(4), 82–90.

Donald, D. (2009). Forts, curriculum, and Indigenous Métissage: Imagining decolonization of Aboriginal-Canadian relations in educational contexts. *First Nations Persp*. 2, 1–24.

Donald, Dwayne. 2021. “We Need a New Story: Walking and the Wâhkôhtowin Imagination.” *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies 18* (2): 53–63.

Marshall, Albert. Mi’kmaq Elder. *Teaching on Two-Eyed Seeing (Etuaptmumk)*. Delivered during “The Practice of Two-Eyed Seeing” workshop, Antigonish Public Library, Antigonish, Nova Scotia, November 29, 2025.

Language Learning Within Narrative Métissage

Language learning often happens most powerfully through storytelling, in contexts that feel meaningful and authentic. This resource engages primarily with oral and text-based storytelling, while remaining open to other forms of expression and communication.

In EAL classrooms, aspects of language learning, such as grammar, punctuation, pronunciation, or vocabulary, may naturally surface through narrative métissage. Instructors may notice recurring patterns, offer brief points of clarification, or model useful language structures as they arise, responding to the needs of the group rather than following a predetermined sequence.

Participants can be invited to draw on their own languages, whether spoken, written, signed, or visual, and to use translation tools or collaborative strategies where helpful. Some ideas, memories, or emotions cannot be fully expressed in English. Others may be more effectively conveyed through another language, or through images, movement, or music. Making space for this multiplicity honours the fullness of participants' meaning making.

Stories can take many forms. Participants may respond to prompts through paragraphs, short narratives, poems, fragments, or non-linear pieces that weave together text, image, sound, or gesture. Narrative métissage supports this openness by valuing multiple languages, multiple forms, and multiple ways of knowing and expressing experience.

When stories include diverse languages or forms of expression, the focus shifts from perfect comprehension to meaningful connection. Facilitators and learners can explore ways of listening and weaving together meaning, through translation, paraphrasing, imagery, gesture, or simply sitting with what cannot be fully translated. In this way, narrative métissage is a site of language learning and also of intercultural learning, where participants experience both the possibilities and the limits of expression while building respect for one another's voices.

This approach keeps the focus on voice, connection, and self-expression, while still allowing space for intentional and responsive language development.

How Narrative Métissage Supports CLB Development

Narrative métissage is not designed to "teach to the benchmark," but it naturally strengthens many of the communicative, intercultural, and literacy skills described in the CLBs. The chart below shows how métissage practices can align with and support CLB development.

1 CLB Listening

CLB Focus:
understanding main ideas, identifying details, interpreting feelings, listening respectfully.

Métissage Connection:
Deep listening to peers' stories builds comprehension of sequence, detail, and purpose.

Reflective practices support processing and meaning-making.

Listening for emotions, values, and themes aligns with CLB tasks that require identifying attitudes or perspectives.

Examples:
CLB 3–8: "I noticed..." supports listening for key ideas.

CLB 4–8: Listening for similarities/differences aligns with comparing information across texts.

2 CLB Speaking

CLB Focus:
describing personal experiences, expressing opinions, sharing feelings, asking questions.

Métissage Connection:
Oral storytelling supports spontaneous speaking in meaningful, low-stakes contexts.

Asking curiosity-based questions ("Can you tell me more about...?") builds inquiry and clarification skills.

Performing the woven story builds fluency, pacing, and oral confidence.

Examples:
CLB 2–4: short personal recounts with visuals or first-language scaffolds.

CLB 5–8: extended narratives, reflection, and intercultural noticing.

3 CLB Reading

CLB Focus:
reading personal texts, identifying main ideas, interpreting emotion, comparing viewpoints.

Métissage Connection:
Learners read their peers' written stories, noticing themes, emotions, or perspectives.

Reading woven stories (group creations) helps learners see multiple voices co-existing.

Multilingual stories support translanguaging and confidence with comprehension strategies.

Examples:
CLB 3–6: Highlighting connection points builds CLB skills like identifying details or viewpoints.

CLB 4–8: Reading drafts aloud and annotating connections supports comprehension tasks.

4 CLB Writing

CLB Focus:
writing personal messages, recounting events, expressing feelings, sequencing ideas.

Métissage Connection:
Story creation aligns directly with CLB personal narrative competencies.

Multiple entry points (*oral recordings, L1 drafting, visuals, translation tools*) ensure access at all levels.

Revision and weaving encourage learners to clarify meaning, sequence, and detail.

Examples:
CLB 1–2: Learners can draw and label and move from oral story to simple written phrases.

CLB 3–4: Learners can write using sentence frames, short paragraphs, and time markers.

CLB 5–8: Learners can engage in reflective writing, comparison, and analysis through story.

5 Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)

CLBs now emphasize sociolinguistic awareness, pragmatic competence, and intercultural interaction.

Métissage Connection:
Narrative métissage cultivates ICC through:

deep listening
noticing cultural perspectives
curiosity-based questioning
navigating ambiguity
reflecting across difference
interpreting the meaning behind stories

These align with CLB expectations for:
expressing respect
showing openness to other perspectives
interpreting culturally embedded meaning
participating in intercultural dialogue

Narrative Métissage Supports CLB Development by Strengthening:

CLB Skill	Métissage Practice	What Learners Develop
Listening	Deep listening | 60-sec pause | noticing	Comprehension | emotion recognition | perspective awareness
Speaking	Oral storytelling | curiosity questions | performing the weave	Fluency | clarity | confidence | intercultural dialogue
Reading	Reading peers' stories | annotating connections	Identifying themes | comparing viewpoints | interpreting feelings
Writing	Drafting stories | L1 → English crafting | revision | weaving	Sequencing | detail | reflection | expressive range
ICC	Noticing + curiosity | relational engagement	Empathy | humility | cultural awareness | flexibility

CLB 1–8 Métissage Participation Chart

CLB Level	Story Creation	Sharing & LIstening	Weaving (Small Groups)	Reflection
CLB 1	• Draw story + label words in English or L1 • Oral story recorded in L1 or simple English • Use visuals/objects/photos	• Listen for key words or emotions • Respond with one word or gesture (happy/sad/nervous) • Use sentence starters: *"I heard…", "I felt…"*	• Match pictures or keywords between stories • Choose colours/symbols to show similarities/differences • Work with cut-up sentences/ pictures	• Choose from picture icons to show emotions • Complete stems: *"I learned…", "I liked…"*
CLB 2	• Oral story in L1 or English (2–3 simple sentences) • Use translation tools • Storyboard with 3–4 boxes	• Listen for main idea • Use simple noticing: *"Same: ___", "Different: ___"*	• Highlight matching words or feelings • Create a simple two-voice weave with short lines	• Answer simple prompts orally: *"I learned ___."* • Choose from provided reflection words
CLB 3	• Short written story (3–5 sentences) • Use sentence frames • Combine English + L1 as needed	• Listen without interrupting • Respond with emotion words (happy/afraid/proud) • Ask simple questions: *"Why…?"*	• Connect stories using simple patterns: *"We both ___"* • Build short woven sections (alternating lines)	• Complete prompts: *"I noticed…", "I was surprised by…"*
CLB 4	• Paragraph-length story • Add one reflection sentence • Use visuals to clarify meaning	• Listen for emotions + values • Use CLB 4 stems: *"I noticed the same…", "I noticed something different…"*	• Identify theme/emotion/ language connections • Create a simple two- or three-voice weave	• Write 3–4 sentences responding to class prompts

CLB Level	Story Creation	Sharing & LIstening	Weaving (Small Groups)	Reflection
CLB 5	• Narrative with clear sequence (5–7 sentences) • Add one sentence of analysis	• Listen for deeper meaning • Ask respectful curiosity questions	• Connect stories through themes and experiences • Draft a polished group weave	• Reflect on cultural meaning: *"I learned about ___."*
CLB 6	• Longer personal narrative (1–2 paragraphs) • Include emotions + interpretation	• Listen for cultural perspectives • Ask questions like: *"How is ___ understood in your culture?"*	• Weave three voices around a shared theme • Use synonyms/contrasts intentionally	• Reflect in writing on similarities/differences (6–8 sentences)
CLB 7	• Multi-paragraph story with comparison or deeper reflection • Integrate abstract ideas	• Listen for worldview differences • Ask interpretive questions	• Weave by contrasting perspectives, values, worldviews • Incorporate multilingual lines deliberately	• Reflect on intercultural insights (½–1 page)
CLB 8	• Extended narrative (1–2 pages) with analysis • Explore symbolic or thematic meaning	• Listen for nuance, metaphor, and cultural worldview • Ask complex questions about meaning and experience	• Weave through thematic emotional, linguistic, and cultural alanysis • Intergrate multimodal elements intentionally	• In-depth reflection (1-2 pages) connecting story, culture, and self

Important Notes for Instructors

All levels can contribute meaningfully — through words, images, gestures, L1, technology, or multimodal creation.

The story does not have to be in English. Both the story and the weaving allow for languages other than English.

- CLB expectations can guide support through the creative process.
- Métissage is about connection, curiosity, and co-creating meaning while allowing room for mistakes and discoveries in language usage.


2
Structuring Narrative Métissage: Stepping Stones
1939

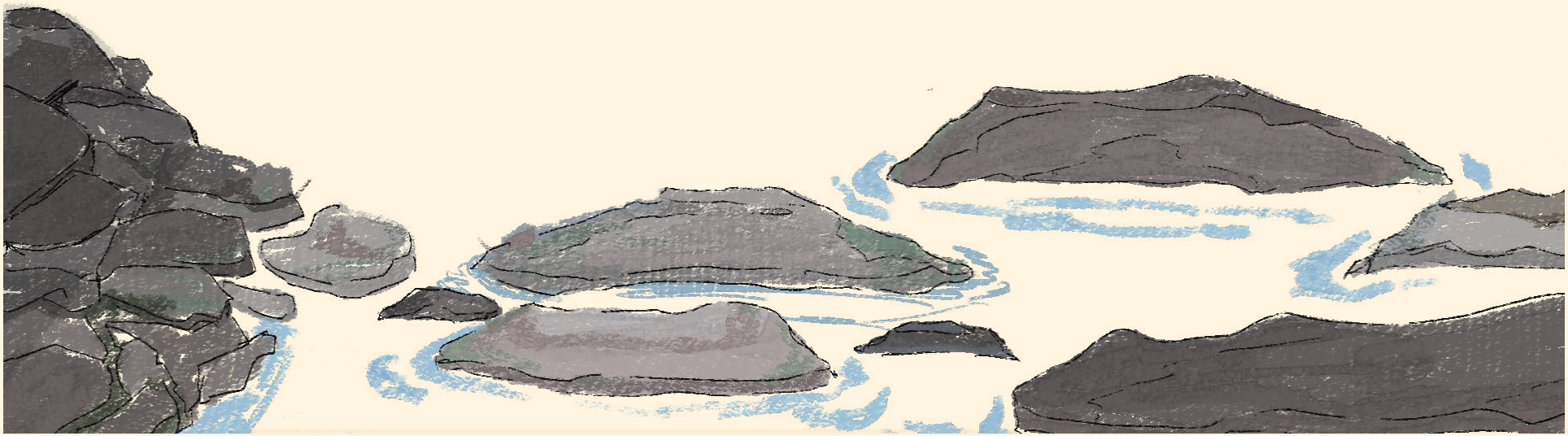
About the “Steps”

Narrative métissage is not a formula. It’s an organic, relational process that responds to the people, stories, and energy in the room. It is also a praxis that attends to historical interrelatedness, how our lives, stories, and identities are shaped by place, history, and one another. An important aspect of narrative métissage is that it creates space to examine dominant mythologies and national myths. In this sense, métissage is also a political praxis.

Because of this, strict, one-size-fits-all instructions can easily turn métissage into what it seeks to disrupt: colonial, standardized practice.

That said, many educators and learners feel more confident when they have a shape, a set of gentle stepping stones to guide the journey. While it’s helpful to think about that *shape*, it can also be helpful to think about narrative métissage as a **sensibility**: a way of noticing how knowledge moves between people, stories, and contexts.

Having a shared sense of the process can create safety, help manage time, and make the experience feel navigable, without controlling it.



Key Idea:

The following steps are offered as guiding markers, not a rigid path. Métissage is about weaving. You might find it helpful to envision the process as a braid; stories, voices, and knowledges are interwoven.

You might follow the steps *loosely* or *out of order*.

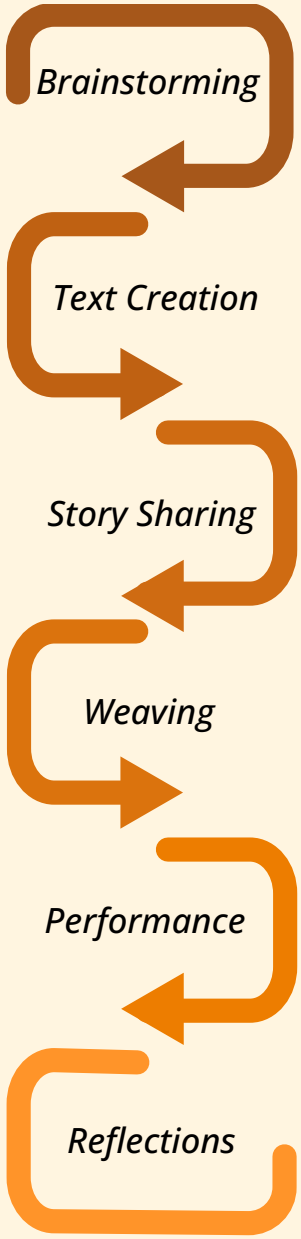
You might linger *longer* in some stages and *move quickly* through others.

You might *skip, adapt,* or *revisit steps* based on your group's **readiness, energy,** and **curiosity.**

Your role as an instructor is to hold space, offer scaffolds, and remain responsive, rather than forcing everyone through a fixed process. Learners can, and often do, shape the journey alongside you.

These steps are here to support, not prescribe. Use them as a flexible framework that honours the living, evolving, and co-created nature of narrative métissage.

How Long Does a Narrative Métissage Take?



There is no single timeline for narrative métissage. The process will look different every time you do it. Some groups may move quickly; others may need more time to write, revise, reflect, or simply sit with one another's stories.

Rather than a fixed sequence, it can be helpful to think in terms of **broad phases** that often show up in narrative métissage. These phases may overlap, repeat, or happen in a different order depending on your context.

1 Story Brainstorming and Text Creation

Time for learners to write, speak, record, or otherwise craft their stories as a text. Stories may begin orally, visually, or through notes, and may gradually move toward a written or shared form.

2 Individual Story Sharing

Time for learners to share their stories in small groups. This stage focuses on listening, witnessing, and making connections. Learners may ask questions, offer reflections, or notice what resonates across stories.

3 Revision and Weaving

Storytellers may choose to clarify, revise, or expand their stories if they wish. Individual stories are then brought together into a collective weave, shared in short segments or vignettes. Revision often continues as the group shapes the shared piece. The order in which stories are woven matters; it creates additional layers of meaning through juxtaposition, interruption, and resonance.

Generally, you can plan for something like the following:

4 Sharing / Performance

The woven text is read aloud, presented, or otherwise offered to the group or to a wider audience. Performance here is not about polish or presentation. It is a way of making shared meaning public, even if only within the classroom. Hearing the collective story aloud often reveals insights about relationship, place, and experience that are not visible on the page.

5 Reflection

Reflection may happen after individual sharing, after weaving, and again after the performance. Learners and facilitators reflect on what was felt, noticed, or learned, both individually and collectively. Reflection can include noticing patterns across stories, connections to place or history, questions that surfaced, or how perspectives shifted through listening and witnessing.

Throughout all of these phases, reflection and language learning are embedded, rather than reserved for a single moment. Facilitators may pause at different points to invite reflection or to support language development, based on what is emerging in the group. Language learning may also happen through discrete lessons outside the métissage process, when instructors decide that focused instruction would meaningfully support a particular phase of the work. These lessons can be woven back into the process in ways that strengthen storytelling, confidence, and expression.

These phases are offered as a guide, not a prescription. Narrative métissage remains responsive to the people in the room, the stories being shared, and the meanings that unfold together.

Facilitator Reflections

How long do you spend on each phase of the métissage process?

It's important to be flexible. I've facilitated an entire narrative métissage process in the span of an afternoon, only in a few hours. I'm not saying that's ideal, and only a few hours makes it feel like a sprint. It would never be my first choice, but under those circumstances I focused on areas that allowed for richness and connection, despite the abbreviated time.

We spent a lot less time on the initial writing and a lot more on listening and reflection. We were still able to get a great weave, and more importantly, a really rich and insightful reflection circle afterwards by choosing on which phases deserved the most time.

Each phase can be lengthened or shortened depending on your group's needs and what feels most meaningful. One class might spend more time crafting and revising stories, another might linger in the weaving or reflection stage. I'd say, plan generously; it's better to have space to slow down than to cut reflection or weaving short.

Facilitator Reflections

How long do you spend on each phase of the métissage process?

Q

A

This is such an important question! I once tried to facilitate for a group of about 30 adults, and I spent so much time explaining it, that we didn't even get to do the métissage experience at all. Time was up!

I think it's good for the facilitator to sit with the question of, how much information do they need, and why? Can we enter into the experience of it without needing to know everything?

Sometimes, getting that buy-in, and establishing a trust between the group and the facilitator, is important. Striking a balance between explaining it and experiencing it can be a facilitator's challenge.

As a participant, not needing to "know" or "understand" everything all at once can be the challenge.

Step 1

Preparing

Deciding on an Intercultural Theme

Before inviting learners into story-sharing, consider the **shared prompt or theme** that will anchor the narrative métissage. In this resource, participants work from the *same prompt*, which creates a common point of entry while allowing for many different responses, perspectives, and lived experiences to emerge.

The prompt does not need to be rigid or over-determined in advance. It can be shaped through listening, drawing on what learners are curious about, what surfaces in class discussion, or what feels alive and relevant in their lives and contexts, such as current events, migration experiences, or issues raised in the news. What matters is that everyone is responding to the same question, even if they take it in very different directions.

Facilitators may find it helpful to begin with prompts connected to place, land, and colonial histories, as these themes naturally invite reflection on belonging, movement, power, and relationship. Working from a shared prompt rooted in place allows stories to be read not in isolation, but in relation to one another and to the larger social and historical contexts in which they unfold.

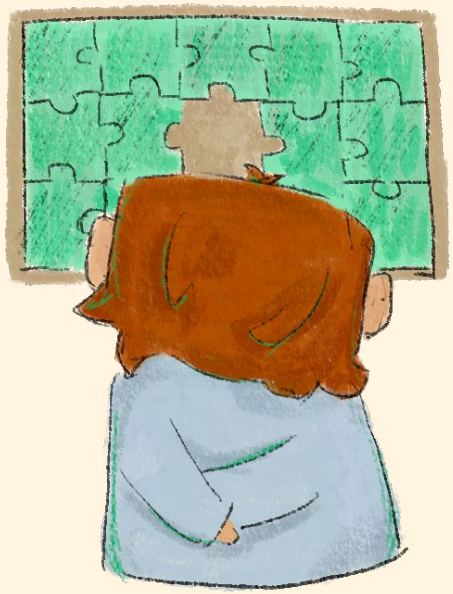
Wherever possible, look for ways to weave in what is local within the shared prompt, such as community histories, regional experiences, or place-based knowledge. This supports the richness that narrative métissage makes possible, helping participants attend not only to cultural difference, but also to the relationship between dominant narratives and lived, personal, or local experience.

Using a shared prompt is not about narrowing stories or producing agreement. It is about creating the conditions for meaningful juxtaposition, where different relationships to the same theme can sit side by side, revealing both divergence and connection through the weave.

Where to Uncover a Theme

Narrative métissage begins with a shared curiosity. Sometimes you'll come to class with a sense of what intercultural skill or question might help you and your learners grow; other times, the theme will emerge naturally from what is happening in the room. A theme doesn't need to be perfect, and you don't have to name it explicitly for learners if that doesn't feel right. Think of it as a guiding thread rather than a fixed target.

Narrative métissage also has the power to explore themes around place, land, and colonialism. Narrative métissage is a praxis that is naturally about disconnecting from colonialism by highlighting it as a factor in the stories we share.



If you're looking for inspiration or ways to surface a theme, you might explore:

Intercultural Competence Frameworks

Byram's ICC Model: *skills like interpreting/relating, critical cultural awareness.*

Deardorff's Model: *attitudes such as respect and curiosity; skills like listening and flexibility.*

Council of Europe / CEFR: *pluricultural competence, savoir-être (attitudes), savoir-faire (skills).*

These models can help you notice which intercultural attitudes or abilities that you and your learners might strengthen.

The Iceberg Model of Culture

Above the waterline (visible): *food, festivals, language, clothing.*

Below the waterline (invisible): *power, leadership, love, conflict, time, friendship, authority, communication styles.*

Each "below-the-surface" element can spark a theme (e.g., Power → How do we show respect for elders or leaders? When have you felt powerful? What's your superpower?).

Language Benchmarks & Classroom Outcomes

Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB): *connect themes to pragmatic competencies like making requests, resolving conflict, or expressing opinions.*

Institutional outcomes: *many EAL programs include goals like "**global citizenship**" or "**intercultural awareness.**"*

Learner & Community Needs

Pay attention to questions, tensions, or curiosities learners bring up (e.g., punctuality, directness, friendship).

Choose themes tied to workplace, academic, or community life *if that's where your learners want to grow.*

Below are some **possible starting points.**

It's not an exhaustive list but ideas you can adapt or expand on with your learners.

Examples of Theme–Skill Pairings

1

Power & Hierarchy

recognizing cultural expectations of authority

2

Love & Friendship

understanding diverse ways care is expressed

3

Leadership

exploring cultural assumptions about leaders or group roles

4

Time

developing tolerance of ambiguity and flexibility around punctuality

5

Communication Styles

interpreting direct vs. indirect language

6

Fitting In & Standing on the edge

navigating inclusion and exclusion; reflecting on belonging

7

Community & Belonging

understanding how people create and sustain community across cultures

8

Change & Transition

making sense of migration, relocation, or personal transformation

9

Tradition & Modernity

exploring tensions between inherited practices and new cultural contexts

10

Identity & Names

sharing the significance of names, self-identification, and cultural heritage

11

Hospitality & Welcome

reflecting on what it means to welcome and be welcomed

12

Home & Place

exploring where and how people feel at home or displaced

Facilitator Reflections

How have you approached intercultural themes in narrative métissage?

Generally, I find it's nice to have a compass of a sort. Something we can all orient around, come together around, like a campfire. Narrative métissage, we come together in shared curiosity, right? And we use that theme to guide us in the storytelling, but I don't want the theme to be a restriction per se.

Because then you're not allowing the stories the freedom they need to affect us naturally. And I hesitate to treat intercultural theme as intercultural content. We're not trying to teach content.

The stories will take shape in ways that are often unexpected. Storytellers may respond in ways that may not be immediately obvious how it connects to the intercultural theme.

And when we later reflect on the stories and the process, what's remarkable is we may find other intercultural themes have emerged.

So I try to have that compass, but it's not necessarily the destination on the map.

Facilitator Reflections

How have you approached intercultural themes in narrative métissage?

Q

I think one of the hardest, and most important, parts of this work is learning how to sit with difference without immediately trying to resolve it. Because when people share stories, especially from the same prompt, they're not going to land in the same place. And that's kind of the point.

Sometimes the differences are subtle. Sometimes they're big. Sometimes they're uncomfortable. And my instinct, especially as an educator, can be to step in and make sense of it, or to soften it, or to help people "understand each other." But I've learned that holding space doesn't mean smoothing things over. It means letting the differences stay visible long enough to teach us something.

A

So, for me, holding space looks like slowing down. It looks like naming what I'm noticing without judging it. Saying things like, "I'm hearing really different relationships to this theme," or "These stories don't agree with each other, and that's interesting." It's resisting the urge to decide which story is more valid, more correct, or more aligned with the theme...

Facilitator Reflections

...It also means trusting the process. Trusting that people can sit with tension without being harmed by it. Trusting that learning doesn't always feel tidy or resolved. Sometimes what learners take away isn't clarity, it's a question. Or a shift. Or a new awareness of how differently the same world can be experienced.

And honestly, part of holding space is recognizing my own limits. I don't have to fix the difference. I don't have to explain it away. My role is to keep the space respectful, grounded, and open, so the stories can do the work they need to do, even when that work feels unfinished.

Deciding on the Story Prompt

A strong prompt does more than ask for a single type of answer. It opens a door to many possible stories and interpretations. Think of it as "juicy:" rich enough to invite complexity, curiosity, and diverse lived experiences, rather than steering everyone toward the same response.

A good prompt will

- Allow multiple interpretations and angles, so learners can enter from their own identities, histories, and imaginations.
- Invite voice rather than performance, encouraging authentic sharing rather than polished or "perfect" English.
- Be accessible for the group's language ability and emotional readiness, clear enough to understand, but open enough to spark depth.
- Connect to the chosen theme without narrowing it to one perspective or "correct" takeaway.

For example, if the theme is *power*:

A too narrow prompt might be:

"What is a good boss?"

"Who is the leader in your family?"

"What does power mean to you?"

These types of prompt risk producing short, abstract, or culturally loaded answers and may limit interpretation.

A **juicier** alternative might be:

"Tell about a moment when you felt you had influence or voice or when you felt silenced."

You could go even broader and more accessible with prompts like:

"Taking charge"	"Standing up"	"Speaking up"
"Taking the wheel"	"Someone looked to me"	"Looking up to you"
"The moment I stepped forward"	"The words I never said"	"I opened a door for someone else"
"Things changed because of me"	"When I made a choice that mattered"	"Being the first *(first to try, first to leave, first to lead)*"

These kinds of prompts open doors to many types of stories and cultural interpretations while still connecting to the theme.

Facilitator Reflections

How have you approached choosing the story prompt

First, let me just say it's easy to get stuck here, trying to find a juicy prompt that "works." You definitely want to be thoughtful about it, but you don't want to get stuck. Perfectionism before you even begin the métissage process will just stress you out.

Personally, I like a prompt that is not necessarily a question but an idea. Something like, "the words I never said", almost approaching the prompt as a title. But there are some storytellers who will get stuck on something like that.

So, part of my preparation before I even do métissage might be to help learners connect a prompt to a short story that's already been written, or even a movie or something.

Like, create two similar prompts, one in the form of a question, the other in that juicy sort of "title" kind of way, and have them match it to the story.

Then, when they actually are responding to a prompt with their own stories, it will seem a familiar exercise.

Facilitator Reflections

How have you approached choosing the story prompt

Q

When I'm choosing a story prompt, I try to remember that narrative métissage isn't just a technique, it's a sensibility. It's a way of paying attention to how our lives are already shaped by history, place, and power, whether we name that or not.

I don't shy away from prompts that brush up against colonial histories, borders, belonging, or systems that shape who gets to move freely and who doesn't. Especially in EAL classrooms, a lot of learners are already living with those realities. They're coming from other nation-states. They're navigating immigration systems. They're negotiating language, legitimacy, and belonging every day. Even if we don't name colonialism explicitly, it's already there in the room. Here are a few I've played around with before. Obviously, I've used these at different language levels and such, but you get the idea:

A

This Place, Displace

Tell a story about a time you crossed a boundary, physical, social, or invisible. What changed on the other side?

Facilitator Reflections

In or Out

Feels Like Home to Me

Where am I?

Now You're Speaking My Language!

Come Again

For me, choosing a prompt is about creating an opening, not to lecture about history, but to let people locate themselves within a larger web of relationships. A prompt can invite someone to speak about home, or land, or language, or movement, and suddenly you start to see how personal stories are entangled with bigger forces. That's where the learning happens.

I also think it's important to give yourself permission here. You don't have to neutralize the prompt. You don't have to avoid anything that feels political. Narrative métissage actually gives us a way to sit with those tensions without forcing agreement or resolution. The stories do that work in their own way.

So I choose prompts that are open enough to hold many truths, but grounded enough to surface how dominant assumptions, about nation, identity, or belonging, shape our lives. I'm not trying to get people to a conclusion. I'm inviting them into a shared inquiry. I also find myself invited into that same inquiry.

Facilitator Reflections

What have you done if a storyteller gets stuck on the prompt

There are lots of people who really don't tolerate ambiguity well. They want to know exactly what to do, what you want to see, what the final product is meant to look like. So a story prompt might make them anxious because you're not necessarily giving them all those things.

You can support that learner by rephrasing the prompt, like if you've chosen the "words I never said" prompt, rephrase it for that anxious learner as a question.

"Was there ever a time you didn't say something, and you wish you did? Tell me about that."

or, "Is there a time you chose to stay silent instead of speaking? Why? What happened?"

Actually, you can see from both the different ways I crafted the prompt question there, you could get very different types of stories emerging, which may or may not be the same as you'd intended with "the words I never said."...

Facilitator Reflections

...Of course, there are lots of pre-writing activities you can do that can also help the anxious writer. Because that's what you're really addressing is not a lack of comprehension, just anxiety.

How can you help the writer feel more in control of their own story?
What activities can help spark an idea or inspire them?
How can you help them explore their own memories and experiences?

Of course, that doesn't happen immediately when you're delivering a prompt. But just because a learner might get a little stuck doesn't mean you've chosen a "bad" prompt. Maybe just the opposite.

Facilitator Reflections

What would you share about culture and choosing a prompt?

Q

A

Prompts that assume a shared cultural reference point or a universal experience will limit the ways that storytellers can respond.

Like, “describe a good boss or a bad boss”.

Not everyone will have been employed in that hierarchal way. Not everyone will ever have been employed, right?

You want to craft a prompt that invites people from very different backgrounds and life experiences to enter into narrative métissage in meaningful different ways.

Think of your prompt as a key that can open many, many doors.

Facilitator Reflections

Q *What happens if you have a storyteller with lower language proficiency, or someone like a literacy learner?*

I would say to that, they may not be proficient in English, but they are proficient in another language, or in many other languages. So, a story prompt doesn't have to depend on their English language proficiency or educational background.

Everyone has a story to tell. How well they speak or write English is not an indicator of the depth of their experience or how they connect to a prompt in a particular way.

That doesn't mean you won't need to model certain language things, scaffold certain things, but you cannot assume that what they think and feel and know, or the quality of what they are able to share, is limited by language proficiency. You want to leave some of those assumptions at the door.

What you can think about is more about where are they in their journey in Canada or in their communities. What intercultural themes and what story prompts are relevant to where they are now socially or emotionally or spiritually.

You know, maybe a prompt about power isn't the right prompt. Maybe they would benefit from sharing stories about belonging or community.

But that will depend on your learners, what emerges, and that shared curiosity. Read the room, as they say.

A

Facilitator Reflections

What would you share about culture and choosing a prompt?

Q

A

Métissage is very well suited to working in multiple languages and across diverse educational backgrounds.

I once used three languages in a métissage, including Cree and Arabic. And this is specifically because the dominant/majority language juxtaposition becomes exposed with the braiding.

It was beautiful.

What CLB Level is Best for Métissage?

You can engage in narrative métissage at any stage of English language development. Even literacy learners (from FL to CLB 4L) or learners at CLB 1, who may not yet form sentences or narratives in English, can fully participate in narrative métissage. The richness of the experience does not depend on English proficiency and does not depend on educational background. It depends on voice, story, and connection.

Narrative métissage welcomes the whole voice of each participant, including every language they speak. When learners bring their first languages, or perhaps the many languages they speak, they bring nuance, emotion, and cultural insight that cannot always be expressed in English.

Ways to Support First-Language Storytelling

1 Invite stories in any language

Explicitly tell learners they may write or speak in their home language(s) first. Emphasize that their authentic story matters more than producing it in English.

2 Use peer or small-group translation

Encourage learners to share their story in a home language, then work with classmates (or the instructor) to summarize, paraphrase, or selectively translate into English.

3 Model translanguaging

Show that it's acceptable to mix languages. For example, leave meaningful words or idioms untranslated when they don't have an exact English equivalent and discuss their meaning together.

4 Offer multimodal options

Invite learners to pair language with drawings, photos, artefacts, gestures, or music. These help express meaning beyond what their current English level allows.

5 Provide sentence starters or frames

For very early learners, offer simple ways to bridge languages:

"In my home language we say..."
"This word means..."
"My story is about..."

6 Use translation tools with intention

Encourage learners to try tools like Google Translate or bilingual dictionaries but discuss their limits and how to check accuracy together.

7 Value the untranslated

Normalize leaving parts of a story in another language. Pause to ask what it means but also allow the group to sit with untranslatable ideas. Not everything needs to be converted into English to have meaning.

Facilitator Reflections

Q *How do you approach the issue of limited English proficiency in narrative métissage?*

By not viewing it as an issue but as an opportunity. As a gift. Narrative métissage invites the whole person into the process, not only the parts that we "want." (And by the way, think about the power you have as an instructor slash facilitator, getting to decide which parts of the learner that we want in our classrooms! Wow!)

In narrative métissage, we don't want to erase their languages. I mean, I don't think any language instructor thinks that way consciously, but sometimes I think it can happen anyway when we have "English only" kinds of classrooms. I treat everyone's language, whether they're CLB 1 or CLB 8, as integral to the narrative métissage. I invite it. I welcome it.

I mean, you can help scaffold understanding, but we don't have to fully correct things or fully translate things. Or if you do translate things, what an interesting exercise in choosing vocabulary and grammars that reflect the meaning of the storyteller.

As the facilitator, I tend to look for opportunities where the storytellers' languages can enrich the experience. I've facilitated métissage where people included their first and second languages, images, photos from home, bits of poetry they liked, even sign language or dance...

A

Facilitator Reflections

…We've created woven stories where one storyteller would speak in language A, and maybe one of their groupmates would translate bits of it into language B or C (not even English yet!), or they found a way to share meaning with the audience in really creative and interesting ways.

Sometimes they have created a sort of PowerPoint backdrop where they had images and English translation. Once, there was a métissage presentation where in the weaving, the storytellers created a sort of dialogue between them…but not in English at first. They had two or three languages on the go.

Sometimes they just let the audience sit without a translation and let them reflect on how that made them feel. Especially because not everything translates to English so cleanly. A

nd sometimes, no matter the language, the feeling and the meaning does translate, simply because you're having a human connection.

All this I realize maybe challenging for EAL instructors, because we think we're supposed to be teaching English. Narrative métissage invites us to think beyond this sort of colonial-shaped logic of English-only.

Facilitator Reflections

Q: How do you support literacy learners (those with interrupted or limited formal education backgrounds) in the métissage process?

Q

Gently. Patiently. And without assuming deficit. Literacy learners already navigate so much judgment around what they *can't* do that the first thing I try to offer is relief from that pressure. Narrative métissage is not a test of reading or writing proficiency, it's a meaning-making practice. So I start there.

Practically, that means I loosen my grip on text as the primary or "proper" mode of storytelling. Literacy learners don't need to be pushed into long written narratives to belong in this process. They might work with oral storytelling, images, objects, gestures, drawing, audio recordings, or short phrases instead of full sentences. Sometimes a learner will dictate their story and have a peer or facilitator write it down, not to "fix" it, but to honour it. Sometimes the written component is minimal, or shared, or entirely optional.

A

I also slow things down. A lot. I check in more often, model aloud what I'm doing, and normalize uncertainty. I'll say things like, *"We're not aiming for perfect here,"* or *"This is allowed to be messy."* Literacy learners often shine when they realize they're not being evaluated on spelling, grammar, or speed, but on presence, connection, and intention...

Facilitator Reflections

…Group structure matters too. I'm intentional about pairing or grouping learners so no one is isolated or positioned as "the one who needs help." Métissage works beautifully when learners co-construct meaning, one person might carry the story, another the language, another the visuals. That shared authorship can be incredibly affirming for literacy learners, because it mirrors how meaning actually works in real life: collectively.

And honestly, some of the most powerful métissage work I've witnessed has come from literacy learners. When you remove the dominance of text, you make room for embodied knowledge, memory, emotion, and ways of knowing that don't rely on print at all. Supporting literacy learners, for me, isn't about simplifying the process, it's about expanding it. Making it wide enough that they don't have to contort themselves to fit.

Planning Language Supports

Narrative métissage is about storytelling, listening, reflecting, and weaving experiences together. Each phase calls for different kinds of language, whether it's telling a story, listening and responding, weaving ideas, or reflecting afterward. Instructors should anticipate these needs and provide scaffolds outside of, not within, the métissage process so learners can fully participate.

Use tools like the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) or other curriculum outcomes to guide the language you support:

Pre-teach or review key vocabulary or sentence frames that might help learners share stories or respond to one another.	Offer functional language for listening and weaving	Support reflective language
	(e.g., *"I hear you saying..."* *"This reminds me of..."*).	(e.g., *"I noticed..."* *"I learned that..."*).

You can also guide learners in revising their own stories if they wish , helping them think about clarity, flow, or impact rather than just correctness. For example, you might ask:

"Is there a word or phrase from your first language that feels important to keep?"

"Could you add a detail that helps the listener picture what happened?"

"Would you like help finding an English word for this idea?"

This keeps revision rooted in voice and meaning, not focused on grammar or form.

Giving Feedback

Narrative métissage is not a space for grammar correction or performance evaluation. That is to say, this kind of feedback might not fit well during the narrative métissage phases, but can be better folded in as part of the language supports that occur outside these phases. Thoughtful pre-activity scaffolding or post-activity feedback can help learners grow their English skills while preserving the authenticity and decolonial intent of the storytelling.

When to Give Feedback

Feedback can be "woven" into pre-performance phases of narrative métissage:

After the storytelling and weaving session

once everyone has shared and the collective meaning-making is complete.

During a later class or follow-up activity

when learners have some distance from the vulnerability of sharing.

In small groups

as part of a debrief between learners, or learners and instructor, after stories have been shared, learners can self-identify or peer-identify areas for change or correction in the writing or speaking.

Only if invited

ask learners whether they would like language suggestions for clarity or future sharing.

What Kind of Feedback Helps

Content-connected language support

Offer options rather than corrections. For example:

*"You said **I felt invisible**. That's a strong phrase. You might also use **unseen**; it's slightly softer. Which one feels closer to your meaning?"*

This keeps the learner's original voice intact and lets them choose.

Positive noticing

Point out effective communication moves, such as imagery, sequencing, or gestures, to affirm learners' choices.

Group Feedback

Invite the group to help. After someone shares, classmates can work together to brainstorm English words, phrases, or expressions that might capture ideas in the story, always leaving the storyteller free to accept or decline suggestions.

This turns language work into a collaborative, supportive process rather than top-down correction.

Useful expansions

Offer additional vocabulary or structures to help retell or deepen a story, but leave the decision with the learner:

"You said I moved countries. You could also say I migrated or I relocated. Do either of those fit what you want to express?"

Mini-lessons sparked by the stories

If many learners use the same grammar pattern in a way that needs support, design a later mini-lesson using their real sentences, but do it after the storytelling, not while they are sharing.

Facilitator Reflections

Q *How have you approached giving feedback?*

By being intentional about when I give it, and how much. And who is giving it. I obviously don't ignore language entirely. I think about grammar and vocabulary type feedback. I think about content feedback, as in, what is necessary to understand this story and the feeling or meaning the storyteller is trying to convey.

And the kind of feedback that will help the weaving. And not all that feedback is going to come from me.

So grammar and vocabulary are a kind of revision or editing type of feedback. Mechanics and structure and all that jazz. So that can happen during traditional language lessons that we all know how to create and teach.

But I also build in feedback during weaving, that isn't corrective feedback, but exploratory.

So maybe an opportunity for Learner A to ask the question, "Is there a part of my story that was confusing to you?" or "Is there a part of my story where you wanted more information or more details?" or "What line of my story is your favourite?" and their groupmates can give a little input...

A

Facilitator Reflections

…Something I also try to avoid is overcorrecting. I think there can actually be a harm in trying to make a story sound flawless in English because I think there is the risk of losing the voice of the storyteller in this moment in time.

And with the narrative métissage, I'll say it again, the product is not the point. It's a fine line. Some learners really want that perfection, so go for it. You can also help them understand the danger in trying to be "perfect," at least within this storytelling process.

And, like, even emphasizing that no native speaker of English is perfect, either. That's what makes our voices unique.

But the key thing is to be organic and responsive to what your learners want.

Step 2

Creating

Scaffolding Text Creation

Once you've:

Chosen an intercultural theme

Selected a meaningful story prompt

Planned how and when you'll give feedback

...ask what supports your learners will need to build their stories with confidence.

With your learners, you might explore:

1

What makes an effective story

characters, tension, detail, emotion, voice

2

Favourite stories

share short examples and discuss why they resonate.

3

Model texts

listen to or read stories connected to your intercultural theme.

4

Guest storytellers

invite community members, Elders, or peers to share lived experiences.

5

Language focus

build mini lessons on vocabulary, connectors, sequencing, descriptive detail.

6

Story artifacts

use photos, objects, poems, songs, or videos that connect to your theme.

7

Forms of communication

compare stories with news reports, journals, essays, or oral accounts.

8

Oral vs written stories

discuss purpose, tone, and structure across modes.

9

Planning Tools

help learners create simple outlines, maps, or timelines.

10

Meta-questions

reflect on how people choose what to share, what to protect, and why.

Here are additional scaffolds that fit naturally with your list and are especially supportive for emerging writers and EAL learners. They're practical, low-prep, and grounded in narrative métissage principles.

Additional Story Scaffolds to Consider

Sentence starters or story stems

Provide optional beginnings

("I remember...,"
"A moment that taught me...,"
"I used to think..., but now...")

to help writers get unstuck.

Word banks or thematic vocabulary lists

Co-create lists of useful words connected to the theme

(identity, belonging, movement, family, place).

Language frames for reflection

Offer structures like

"This story matters because..."
or "What I learned from this experience is..."

to deepen meaning.

Dialogue Practice

Explore how people speak in stories, using simple scripted conversations or improvisation to practice voice.

Five-senses brainstorming

Generate sensory details related to the theme

(sounds of a place, smells of a memory, textures of an object).

Mentor sentence analysis

Choose one strong sentence from a model text and unpack why it works; invite learners to try their own version.

Sequencing practice

Use cut-up stories or shuffled paragraphs that learners must reorder, reinforcing narrative structure.

Story circles

Have learners share short oral stories in a circle format, building confidence and rhythm before writing.

Peer Interviews

Pair learners to interview each other about the prompt; speaking first often unlocks ideas for writing.

Story soundtracks

Use music linked to the theme to spark memory, emotion, and imagery.

Storyboarding

Create a simple series of frames before writing; this is especially helpful for visual thinkers or lower-level learners.

Small-moment focus

Teach learners to zoom in on one meaningful moment rather than trying to tell their whole life story.

Multimodal drafting

Allow learners to start with voice notes, sketches, mind maps, or collages before turning ideas into text.

Rehearsed retellings

Encourage learners to tell the same story multiple times in different ways (short, long, funny, serious) to build flexibility.

Audience awareness

Discuss who the story is for and how that changes choices about tone, detail, and language.

Story Scaffolds: Suggestions for When to Use Them in Narrative Métissage

Scaffold	Most Useful When	Why It Fits There
Story artifacts (photos, objects, poems, songs, videos)	Before text creation/ brainstorming	Helps learners access memory, emotion, and meaning before language
Five-senses brainstorming	Before writing; early drafting	Grounds stories in detail and lived experience
Peer interviews	Before writing; early drafting	Speaking first often unlocks ideas for writing
Story soundtracks (music)	Before writing; during brainstorming	Supports memory, emotion, and imagery
Story circles (oral sharing)	Before writing; early sharing	Builds confidence, rhythm, and trust

Scaffold	Most Useful When	Why It Fits There
Sentence starters/ story stems	Early drafting	Helps learners get started without prescribing content
Word banks/ thematic vocabulary	During drafting	Supports expression without interrupting flow
Planning tools (outlines, maps, timelines)	Before or during drafting	Helps learners organize ideas and sequence events
Storyboarding	Before drafting; early drafting	Especially supportive for visual thinkers and lower CLB levels
Multimodal drafting (voice notes, sketches, collages)	Before or during drafting	Allows ideas to form before full text creation
Small-moment focus	Early drafting	Prevents overwhelm and supports depth

Scaffold	Most Useful When	Why It Fits There
Mentor texts/model stories	Before drafting; early drafting	Offers concrete examples of structure and voice
Mentor sentence analysis	During drafting or revision	Supports language development in context
Dialogue practice	During drafting	Supports voice, interaction, and realism
Sequencing practice (cut-up stories)	Before revision; during weaving	Reinforces narrative structure and flow
Rehearsed retellings	Before weaving; before performance	Builds fluency, confidence, and flexibility
Audience awareness discussions	During revision; before performance	Helps learners make intentional choices

Scaffold	Most Useful When	Why It Fits There
Language mini lessons	Throughout (as needed)	Responds to patterns that emerge organically
Language frames for reflection	After sharing; after weaving; after performance	Supports meaning-making and articulation
Meta-questions (what to share / protect/why)	During revision; during reflection	Supports ethical storytelling and consent
Guest storytellers	Before writing; before performance	Models lived storytelling and relational meaning-making

Not every scaffold needs to be used in every métissage. Choose what supports your learners at this moment Scaffolds can be added, removed, or revisited as the process unfolds.

Facilitator Reflections

How much scaffolding do participants need?

This will always depend on the needs of the learners.

I think it will be apparent to the instructor what kinds of language scaffolds their learners might need, and this is probably the easiest part of choosing scaffolds. But there is always the question of, what other kinds of scaffolding will help the learners connect to story? To theme? To reflection? To community? And this is where an instructor can get creative.

I mean, you don't want to over-scaffold. But choosing activities that provide different kinds of connection to story, beyond the language, is helpful.

During one narrative métissage that a colleague facilitated, their group did an entire day of land-based learning first with a local Indigenous Elder. I'm not saying you have to do something like that, but in that experience, that was the necessary scaffold.

Intentionality is key...

...You know, writers of all language proficiencies can get stuck when it comes to storytelling. A lot of people think it depends on creativity. There are so many... so many exercises out there that can help people connect to story and spark an idea. Some are very structured. Others are more holistic.

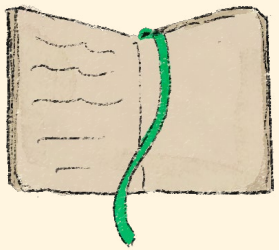
You and your learners can try things that are familiar, and some outside your comfort zones. And what "helps" for one group may not be as meaningful in another.

Text Creation

Once learners have explored the prompt and gathered ideas, they move into story creation. This stage should offer flexibility, choice, and support so that every learner, and the instructor, can participate meaningfully. Stories may begin orally, with learners recording them or creating visual storyboards. Ultimately, a text version of the story may be developed to support sharing, reflection, and weaving, either individually or collaboratively.

Multiple Pathways into Writing

Learners may choose their mode:



Free writing/journaling

Oral recordings
(tell it first, write later)

Drafting in first language (L1),
then translating with peers or tools.

Visual storytelling
(drawing with captions).

Collaborative writing in
pairs or groups.

Translation and Technology as Supports

1. Tools like translators, dictionaries, or AI are not automatically harmful shortcuts—they can be bridges.

2. The priority is for learners to create a story that resonates with them, in whatever language(s) they need.

Adjusting Expectations by Level

> Learners at any language level can participate in narrative métissage if we scaffold thoughtfully. English proficiency should not limit who can tell a meaningful story. We simply adapt how stories are created and shared.

CLB Levels, Outcomes, and Storytelling Supports

CLB Level	Narrative Goal	Sample CLB-Aligned Outcomes	Possible Supports & Scaffolds
CLB 1–2	Share a personal experience or feeling using any mode available.	• Identify self and basic personal details (CLB 1 Listening/Speaking). • Express simple feelings and needs (CLB 2 Speaking).	• Oral storytelling in **first language**, with peer or teacher help to capture key words in English. • Drawings, photos, objects, or symbols to express meaning. • Simple tech tools (voice recorders, speech-to-text, translation apps) to capture ideas. • Sentence stems (e.g., *"I remember…" "I felt…"*).
CLB 3–4	Tell a short, simple story with a beginning, middle, and end.	• Describe a personal experience (CLB 3 Speaking). • Tell a story about a past event (CLB 4 Speaking/Writing).	• Oral retelling with some English sentences. • Guided sentence frames (e.g., *"First… Then… After that…"*). • Visual supports (maps, timelines, drawings).
CLB 5–6	Write or tell a short paragraph with sequencing and some reflection.	• Give a detailed personal story about a familiar event (CLB 5 Speaking/ Writing). • Express feelings and reasons (CLB 6 Speaking).	• Encourage first-language idea generation; co-construct English sentences later. • Introduce vocabulary or functional phrases (e.g., *"This changed me because…"*). • Support transition words (*because, but, so, when*).
CLB 7–9	Share longer narratives with reflection, analysis, or abstract ideas.	• Describe and analyze personal experience or a cultural issue (CLB 7–8 Writing/Speaking). • Express opinions with supporting reasons (CLB 7–9).	• Encourage cause/effect, comparison, and metaphor. • Discuss words/ideas that don't translate neatly; allow them to stay in the first language. • Model reflective language (e.g., *"This made me realize…"*).

Mixed Level Groups

Use multi-modal sharing

Allow drawings, objects, or short recorded clips to support lower levels while higher-level learners model longer narratives.

Celebrate all voices

Remind the group that complexity of language is not the same as depth of story.

Pair or group strategically

Partner lower-level learners with peers who can help translate or co-construct English sentences, while still honoring the original story.

Leverage CLB outcomes:

For CLB 1–4, focus on sharing personal experiences, describing feelings, and participating in group storytelling.

For CLB 5–8, add reflection, comparison, and giving opinions.

For CLB 7–9, integrate analyzing, interpreting, and exploring abstract ideas.

Key principle: Narrative métissage is about meaning-making and connection. Language scaffolding supports learners in sharing, but it should never become a gate that decides whose story is “good enough.”

Structured and Unstructured Options

Narrative métissage is flexible. There is no single "right" way for learners to create their stories. Offer a range of entry points so every participant, regardless of language level or confidence, can contribute meaningfully.

Structured templates

→ **Sentence frames**
("I remember…"
"At that time, I felt…"
"One thing that changed was…").

→ **Story maps or diagrams**
(timeline, mountain shape,
three boxes for beginning/middle/end).

Keep in mind that participants know they can re-order things both in content and in non-chronological ways.

→ **Guided worksheets with prompts and space for drawing or keywords.**

Unstructured free creation

→ **Free writing or journaling.**

→ **Poetic or fragmented responses.**

→ **Mixed forms:** *a few sentences paired with images, song lyrics, or key words.*

Both structured and unstructured creations are valid contributions. Voice matters more than form. Learners should be invited to choose what feels natural, not pushed toward a single "correct" product.

Facilitator Reflections

Q *Do you ever write or tell your own story as the facilitator?*

Yes and no. I think there is value in writing or recording your own story to the same prompt as your learners. Especially if you have not ever participated in a narrative métissage as one of the storytellers. And you then position yourself as a participant rather than an evaluator.

That being said, getting up and sharing your story with the class has its drawbacks. First of all, narrative métissage is not about performing a single story. The performance part of the process depends on a weaving of voices. So...you might end up modeling sort of the wrong thing.

But also, you want to be careful that if you share your story, the learners don't interpret your story as the model for how they should create their stories.

I remember once I did that, I shared my story first, and I then got twenty stories that matched the exact organizational style of my story, even borrowing from some of the phrasing, language choices and all that. There ended up being very little of the storytellers in their own stories, just these really awful...sort of imitations of the story I had shared.

I mean to say, don't share your story before the learners have written theirs. The learners will always find the temptation in seeing yours as the "standard" or "this is what I have to produce." So the timing matters.

A

Facilitator Reflections

If you do share your story, what do you include? What do you keep to yourself?

Q

A

The point of narrative métissage is to be authentic and vulnerable to the point where you still feel safe. You wouldn't want your learners to share things they don't feel comfortable sharing. Same for yourself.

The point of sharing your story is not to provide the model or the standard. But you can position yourself with them as co-creators in this métissage process, or to model vulnerability.

Keep your own story simple, vulnerable, authentic. Use it as an opportunity to maybe share different ways of responding to a prompt.

Let's say you choose the prompt "where am I." You could respond with a story that is physical...or emotional. Cultural. Spiritual. Generational. Career-oriented.

Facilitator Reflections

At what point do you want to exclude technology like AI from the métissage process?

I'm torn on AI. AI has such a tremendous negative human and environmental impact.

Additionally, if students are using it, then they are relegating their own voice to the margins. And this may inhibit their growth of being critical engagers with language.

I have also seen how my own students use AI and it often feels canned, generic. AI used many rhetorical devices that make it sound generic (like triadic phrasing).

Facilitator Reflections

At what point do you want to exclude technology like AI from the métissage process?

I am still working through how to include AI as a tool that doesn't diminish or erase the voices of the students using it. I would say this for all acts of human creation.

Like when it comes to art... I know artists use technology to create art. You know, CGI, Pixar, you know. We've had digital art creation for a long time now. Does that mean...the people who code those animations, that art, whatever, are they not artists or are they just...like, engineers? I know that artists can emulate or copy the styles of artists who came before them. Singers and songwriters might sample other songs and artists or find inspiration in them. And with language...is there harm in learning generic language, which the AI might produce? Formulaic language? Maybe not, not if it helps give you a foundation, right?

So the question I might ask is, at what point is AI...diminishing their own voices, right? So I think there comes a moment where if the machine is the one holding the proverbial paintbrush, then I think we've lost the point. I don't know when that happens in writing, with AI as a sort of digital collaborator...

Facilitator Reflections

…This is why I think a facilitator can help a learner, a storyteller, retain some sense of… self or authenticity. I mean, will a learner be able to tell when… when an AI is giving them some canned crap? Does it even matter to them? What if the essence of the story is still there even with that AI generic language?

Like, do we as instructors have the right to moralize about the use of AI in a learner's storytelling and language choices? I don't know. But I think that's where the push and pull, the discussion, the negotiation a facilitator can offer a learner, you know, things to think about. Options. Vocabulary choices. Style choices.

This is one way we can keep it human.

Facilitator Reflections

Q *In your experience, how important are tending to language outcomes like the CLB in narrative métissage?*

I mean, as a language instructor, I know I'm going to be accountable for certain language outcomes, and I don't want to ignore that responsibility. And let's say the CLB, sure, they're a framework I might have to respect and work with.

I also recognize that an outcome like what we see in the CLB may not be able to recognize or capture all the other kinds of learning that are happening in my classroom, not just with narrative métissage, you know, but these other kinds of learning that we as instructors see happening but can't necessarily describe in a benchmark, you know?

But then I see CLB outcomes like, you know, tell a story with a clear beginning, middle, and end. Well, that's a linear, monochronic understanding of time. That's one particular way of creating a story, right. But is it the only way?

It sure is a dominant way in some cultures. So let's unpack that.

A

Must a story have a clear beginning, middle, and end?

According to whom? And where and when?

Facilitator Reflections

And does memory really work that way?
Do our relationships work that way?

And in a narrative métissage… is that what we're demanding?

Is that what the learners are used to?

So I mean, we can even use something as simple as that outcome, that expectation of "clear beginning, middle, and end" to interrogate dominant norms.

That's very decolonial right there, even asking the learners (and ourselves) to think about how we want to tell our stories, or which stories get to be heard based on our expectations and norms.

And honestly, I have been participant to… and facilitator sometimes… in a métissage process where the final performance, the stories that might have started out as linear (beginning, middle, end) were not constructed that way for the final performance.

Facilitator Reflections

In your experience, how important are tending to language outcomes like the CLB in narrative métissage?

Q

A

This is interesting, because métissage breaks away from the traditional storytelling norm of beginning, middle, and end.

Some of it comes from Cree understandings of time and constructions of memory and story. The confluence of different stories coming together in different timelines is often something that is really honoured in the practice.

I would perhaps stay away from using a linear understanding of story as it would be with fictional stories and really encourage circular understandings of time.

This would be a really important point in recognition that memory and storytelling are polychronic and that would really allow for its roots to surface.

Step 3

Sharing & Listening

Building Community Norms

Before sharing stories, it's important to create a shared understanding of how the group will hold one another's words. Narrative métissage depends on trust, respect, and care, but it also asks us to be brave enough to sit with difference and complexity.

These norms can be introduced or co-created with learners *(post them on the wall, add to them together, revisit them as needed).*

Core Norms for Story-Weaving Spaces

Below are core starting points you can offer:

Respect

Every story belongs to the person telling it. We listen without judgment, interruption, or advice.

We do not debate or correct someone's lived experience.

Intellectual Humility

We do not need to be "right" or to know everything. We stay curious, open to learning, and willing to be changed by what we hear.

Confidentiality

What is shared in the group stays in the group.

Each participant decides what parts of their story to keep private and what to share publicly.

Notice Your Own Reactions

Pay attention to your feelings, memories, or assumptions as they arise. Use them as learning for yourself, not as reasons to correct, silence, or debate someone else's story.

Reciprocity

Listening is an active practice. We receive each story as a gift, not as information to critique or take.

We give back through presence, attention, and, if invited, reflection or language support.

Brave Space *(Discomfort ≠ Harm)*

We may feel discomfort when we encounter experiences or values different from our own. Discomfort is part of learning, not something to avoid or shut down.

Teachers are not here to erase difference or smooth over tension. Instead, we hold it with care and curiosity.

Embrace Ambiguity & Lack of Closure

Stories may not resolve neatly. We accept that some questions or tensions will stay open.

Facilitator Reflections

Q *How have you navigated discomfort?*

My own or my learners'? Haha.

Let me address discomfort in terms of content, like, someone is uncomfortable hearing someone else's story. It's an uncomfortable story.

Well, discomfort is normal. And it's not the same thing as harm. It's not the same as trauma. So let's start there.

Discomfort is a sign of potential growth. It's the growth threshold.

A

So tell people. "It's okay to feel unsettled or unsure right now. This is a space where we can sit with difference rather than fix it."

Or you can say, "Maybe we don't have to talk right now. Maybe we listen and think about it. We can return to this tomorrow."

Facilitator Reflections

You can help the learner name the need attached to the feeling. “I hear you’re feeling anxious or worried. What do you need right now?”

Right, because a lot of the time discomfort can be about an unmet need. Maybe they need more language support. Or more time to think about something.

Maybe they’re having a really hard day and focusing on their story or something else’s story just isn’t possible in that moment. Our role is not to manage or erase discomfort but to hold the space with empathy and curiosity. Invite reflection instead of resolution.

Facilitator Reflections

What other kinds of discomfort are there?

Q

A

Oh. Learners may be uncomfortable with the whole métissage process as a whole because it's new to them. And that's exhilarating! Some people may readily get caught up in the thrill of the newness. Or you may experience discomfort or uncertainty at certain points. Like, what do I do here?

But there's also the comfort around sharing a story at all. And you can't force it. Learners can still participate in a métissage without sharing a story. Though if you've set a good foundation, maybe modeled that vulnerability, set your community standards and norms, gone through the story-creation process with some good scaffolds and revisions...hopefully learners will feel comfortable sharing their stories.

I mean, they only have to share what they are comfortable sharing. One of the things you should have them asking themselves, which parts of my story are just for me? Which can I share with the group?

Facilitator Reflections

Q *You mention trauma. What happens when stories are triggering or trauma-related?*

Real quick, let's unpack that word triggering. It's a clinical word, so we don't want to use it to mean that someone becomes emotional. Like, you're feeling emotions? Great. Glad you noticed. Thank you for sharing that. Let's name those emotions. Let's explore those.

But certainly, there are learners who have had traumatizing experiences or may choose to share stories that may involve trauma, or in the clinical sense, trigger someone else's trauma response.

And it is impossible to know what kinds of things may activate a trauma response. They are involuntary. And it's not like you can have an inventory of every learner's trauma responses or your own. So you want to have skills and strategies for navigating trauma responses if they occur.

This is what's often called a healing-centered approach. That means we're not trying to manage or diagnose trauma. We're focused on care, agency, and relationship when hard things come up.

A

Facilitator Reflections

So if high emotion arises, or a trauma response arises, be calm. Acknowledge the moment calmly. Pause. Breathe. Silence can still be respectful.

You can thank people who shared difficult parts of their stories. "Thank you for trusting us with that part of your experience."

You can also teach them how to get consent before they share or discuss certain things.

Or you can ask,

"Would you like us to stay with this story right now, or move on to another story?"

And definitely check in.

"That sounded like a very important story. How are you feeling after sharing it?"

Facilitator Reflections

Or you can tell them,

“It’s okay to step out if you need some space.”

Narrative métissage is not therapy and you are not a therapist. But you can definitely provide ethical spaces of care during discomfort or possible trauma responses.

That’s the work here: not fixing, not extracting, just holding space with care.

Facilitator Reflections

You mention trauma. What happens when stories are triggering or trauma-related?

Q

A

I facilitated a métissage where during the first story-sharing, one of the participants started crying. And her groupmate wanted to comfort her, wanted to intervene. Wanted to give her a hug, all these instincts you might imagine when you see someone crying.

But based on our community norms, she didn't hug her or offer words of comfort. She just let herself and her classmate sit in those emotions until she was ready to keep going. She didn't interrupt the crying. And she reflected that it was difficult for her to do that, and she almost felt guilty for not doing something.

But she also recognized how important it was, because later she observed that the classmate who was crying seemed even more engaged and calm and what have you the rest of the process.

And so interrupting the crying would not have been about what her classmate needed, but more about alleviating her own discomfort with the tears. Like, she wanted to "fix" the emotion, whatever was associated with the crying. But in allowing the crying to happen, that's what was necessary. There was nothing to fix, per se.

Facilitator Reflections

I am reminded of someone who once told me, like, in response to someone trying to comfort another, “How dare you interrupt the flow of water?”

And really those emotions, those tears, are really a transmission of knowledge. They are a kind of learning. The person crying needs to experience and express those emotions.

Should we interrupt them with comfort? Should we interrupt the natural flow of water? And that moment was a real learning opportunity for her.

That came out later in our class/group reflections.

Facilitator Reflections

Q *It sounds like taking the time to establish those community norms is important.*

It is. And a lot of people make the mistake of skipping this or rushing this, but in narrative métissage, we are co-creating a space where we can speak and listen and connect. And that in itself is an intercultural sort of process, isn't it?

Like some learners just want you, the "boss," to tell them what to do. What the rules are. And there are those that expect the group consensus. So that doesn't always happen without... without talking about it, and our expectations. How we treat each other in the space.

And you can always re-negotiate those community norms throughout. In the past, I've also had métissage participants identify an individual "rule" so to speak. Something that might be unique to them. So maybe you establish a community norm around respect or whatever, but maybe a participant has something that would really help them.

So I ask everyone, "What is one thing that would help you feel safe?" Or, "What is one thing that would help you succeed in this space?" and they can write down on a piece of paper and display it or share it with the group. So we look at group norms as well as individual needs.

A

Facilitator Reflections

How do you get buy in? Isn't it possible that one or two learners who are experiencing anxiety or discomfort around trying something new can disrupt the whole process?

Q

Buy in is so important. It's part of managing expectations and managing that idea about how much information do your learners need to feel confident going into a potentially new kind of language learning process.

You don't want to spend all day defending narrative métissage. And there are people who don't always see the inherent value of arts-based learning, holistic learning, like storytelling straight away. The ones who just want to pick up a grammar textbook and get on with it.

But that doesn't mean I give a huge performance on why narrative métissage is so great. It depends on the vibe I get from the learners.

A

So if I get the sense that there is resistance or anxiety, I invite people into the process. I acknowledge that it might be new and new things can be uncomfortable. But I ask them to trust me and trust the process. And this is why community norms can help because they can see that we have some rules and structure about things...

Facilitator Reflections

...But I also tell the skeptics in the room straight away that this process is going to be really rich for language learning, for their cultural learning, and for their personal growth. And only they can decide, really, how much they're going to get out of it. It will depend on how willing they are to participate in this new experience. Once you invite them in, most people see themselves as partners or at least feel like they have some agency or control. Some of the biggest skeptics I've worked with have turned out to be the most profoundly affected by the end of the métissage process.

The reflective process is helpful too because at the end, you can be asking questions about what it was like for them. How they got through discomfort, if there was any...

..."Was any part of métissage difficult for you? What did you do to overcome that difficulty?"

or "What advice would you give to someone who is doing narrative métissage for the first time?"

Ask how they felt their language improving at all. What kind of intercultural insights they're developing. And you can ask all these things of any CLB level, in linguistically appropriate ways...

Facilitator Reflections

…“Name something you learned about ABC”

or “Share one thing that improved in your language”

or “What is a new word or a new grammar you learned”

and “tell me more about Intercultural Theme X, like, belonging in your community.”

There are lots of ways to help learners see the value of the métissage process simply by leveraging the process itself.

When Emotion Arises

Narrative métissage can bring up strong feelings such as joy, sadness, anger, or grief. This is normal and can be part of the learning. As instructors, we don't need to stop or "fix" emotion; we hold space with care and dignity.

Tips for Responding

Stay Present and calm

Pause and allow silence. Don't rush to fill it.

A simple, quiet "Thank you for sharing" can help.

Acknowledge, don't analyze

Avoid turning someone's emotion into a teaching moment.

You might say: "I see this is meaningful for you. Thank you for trusting us with it."

Normalize feelings

Remind the group:

"Stories can touch deep places; it's okay to feel."

Give choice and agency

Ask privately or gently: "Would you like a break, or to keep going?"

Respect the storyteller's decision. Don't push them to continue or to stop.

Model compassionate listening

Encourage the group to stay quiet, attentive, and respectful while emotion moves through.

Remind listeners that silence can be support.

Offer support beyond the session if needed

After class, quietly check in: "How are you feeling after sharing today?"

Know where to refer learners for counselling, settlement, or wellness support if the need arises.

Quick Response Checklist

1 Pause
let silence hold the moment.

2 Acknowledge
thank the storyteller for sharing.

3 Normalize
remind the group that feelings are okay.

4 Offer choice
ask if the speaker wants to pause or continue.

5 Support
check in after and share resources if needed.

Keep it simple: your job is to witness, not fix.
Emotional responses show that storytelling matters.

Learning How to Listen

Narrative métissage calls for a kind of listening that is different from everyday classroom listening. We are not listening for grammar, details to correct, or information to debate.

We are listening to understand, witness, and connect.

Key Listening Practices

Listen to understand, not to respond.

Your goal is to receive the story, not to correct it, judge it, or jump in with advice.

No interruptions.

The storyteller has the floor until they are fully finished.

Keep your body as still as you can.

Stillness signals attentiveness and respect; it can help the speaker feel truly heard. Often, when we listen, we unconsciously respond with movement, nodding, shaking our heads, shifting. These gestures can pull us back into “listening to reply.” Choosing stillness invites us to be fully present,

Pause before speaking.

After someone finishes, stay quiet for at least 60 seconds to let the story settle. Silence is part of listening. Waiting allows us to emotionally and intellectually process what we’ve heard, rather than rushing to respond.

Facilitator Reflections

What is the biggest challenge when it comes to listening?

Listening at all. Instructors even have the habit of skipping or rushing listening. I mean, people rush to respond and speak, whether it's with their mouths and words or with their bodies. And it's easy for both facilitators and participants to say,

"oh, well, this doesn't matter. So what if they skipped the sixty seconds of silence we asked them to keep? It's fine."

Well, no. It's not.

So you'll want to gently but consistently nudge participants when you notice them rushing to respond. Because they may be still very self-centered, not practicing that very important listening skill. And when some participants do listen, and others don't, it can really disrupt the dynamic you're trying to maintain. The trust.

And let me tell you about those sixty seconds. When we experience an emotion, it usually lasts for up to like a maximum of 90 seconds. Science has described this. Google it. But what remains after the emotion is the story that we attach to that feeling. And those stories are often shaped by instinct. Bias. Implicit association. Filling in incomplete information with our own assumptions and experiences...

Facilitator Reflections

...We react instinctually and emotionally first but we don't really give ourselves a chance to sit critically and reflectively with that information. So this is how we get judgment and assumption and sometimes hurt and harm.

So like, asking someone to slow down and be silent and listen in these ways can interrupt some of the habits that allow our biases or judgments to lead us. Otherwise, I think when we rush to respond, we're not truly listening to someone else's experience; we're listening to our own stories coming out of someone else's mouth.

We might as well just be talking to ourselves.

Is that making sense?

Facilitator Reflections

What is the biggest challenge when it comes to listening?

I remember presenting once, and people in the audience was moved to tears, they shared their take-aways and insights but also a deep yearning for telling their own stories, and then the audience starting sharing, moved by our work.

It was spontaneous and amazing. Very heart-opening.

Small Group Story Sharing

Participants will first share their stories in small groups, not with the whole class. Smaller groups create safety, allow more time for each voice, and make it easier to practice deep listening. Groups of three or four people are a good balance.

One person shares while the others listen.

After the story, everyone waits quietly for one full minute before responding.

Then each listener may offer a response, using the three guiding questions below.

Rotate roles so everyone shares and listens.

Responding After Listening

When it's time to speak, we keep responses supportive and humanizing, focused on connection, not correction. The goal is not to analyze or fix a story, but to respond in ways that honour what was shared and how it was shared.

At the same time, these responses are not only about individual connection. Together, they help the group notice patterns across stories, including how experiences are shaped by place, history, migration, language, and systems of power. As stories sit beside one another, they begin to teach us something about how people are learning to live in the world, navigate belonging, and make meaning in relation to where they are and where they come from.

Use the three guiding questions below to support this kind of listening and response, adapting the language to your learners' CLB level.

What emotions were present for you during the sharing?

CLB 1–2	"I felt ___." *(happy, sad, surprised, proud…)*
CLB 3–4	"I felt ___ when I listened." / "The story made me feel ___."
CLB 5–6	"I felt ___ because ___." / "It gave me a feeling of ___."
CLB 7–9	"The story made me feel ___; I think because ___." / "I noticed I felt ___ as I listened."

What strengths or values did you notice in the story?

CLB 1–2	"You are ___." *(strong, brave, kind, smart…)*
CLB 3–4	"I think you are ___ because you ___."
CLB 5–6	"I noticed your ___ *(courage, patience, love)* in your story."
CLB 7–9	"Your story shows ___ *(perseverance, hope, strength)* when you ___."

What resonated with you or what might you have in common?

CLB 1–2	"Me too." / "I also ___." *(came here, felt scared, had a teacher…)*
CLB 3–4	"I am the same. I ___ too." / "I understand because I ___."
CLB 5–6	"I connect with your story because I also ___."
CLB 7–9	"Something in your story resonated with me: ___." / "I have a similar experience with ___."

Instructor Tip:

Post or project these sentence starters during listening circles.

For mixed-level groups, encourage higher-level learners to model longer responses while respecting that lower-level learners can respond simply and powerfully.

Remind everyone: all responses are valued. One word or a full reflection can both honour a story.

Practice this once with a light, low-stakes topic. Let learners feel what deep listening and silence are like before they share personal stories.

Consider timing the one-minute silence so groups know it's intentional.

Remind learners: "You do not have to fix, debate, or add advice. Just listen, feel, and notice."

Going Deeper

After the first round of listening and gentle responses, groups or the whole class may be ready to move into deeper meaning-making. These questions work well once trust is built, either after each small group finishes weaving, or after the entire class experiences a collective métissage performance.

Deeper Process Questions

Theme noticing

What additional themes did you notice among the stories? Were there other themes that emerged from the larger, shared theme (from the shared prompt)?

Did you notice any anomalies or outliers?

Learning from difference

What did you learn from these themes or anomalies?

Did anything surprise you?

Did you notice any differences (e.g., based on gender, culture, role, or background)?

Personal resonance

How did the various stories resonate with you?

Did anything confirm or challenge what you currently think about the story topic or theme?

Adapting for CLB Levels

Question Area	CLB 1–2 (simple)	CLB 3–4 (supported)	CLB 5+ (full question)
Themes	"Did you hear anything the same?"	"What ideas came up many times?"	"What themes did you notice among the stories?"
Anomalies	"Did one story feel different?"	"Was there a story that surprised you?"	"Did you notice any anomalies or outliers?"
Learning	"What did you learn?"	"What new thing did you learn from the stories?"	"What did you learn from these themes or anomalies?"
Surprise	"Anything surprise you?"	"What story surprised you?"	"Did anything surprise you?"

Question Area	CLB 1–2 (simple)	CLB 3–4 (supported)	CLB 5+ (full question)
Difference	"Were stories different?"	"Did you notice differences (e.g., men/women, cultures)?"	"Did you notice any differences (e.g., based on gender, culture, role, or background)?"
Resonance	"Me too" / "Same for me"	"What story felt like yours?"	"How did the various stories resonate with you?"
Confirmation	"Did the story feel true for you?"	"Did a story match what you think?"	"Did anything confirm or challenge what you currently think about the story topic or theme?"
Process	"Did you like this?"	"What did you learn about telling stories this way?"	"What did you learn about the story prompt, the theme, or métissage itself?"

Facilitator Reflections

How important are those reflection questions?

Important.

They are a way of showing you're listening, but also a chance to dig for deeper meaning.

Before the participants even get to the weaving stage "officially," these reflection questions often start connecting threads. Because learners are noticing things about each other's stories. Asking curious questions. Interpreting values, seeing the values that emerge from each other's stories, or from their own stories.

So this is sort of informally beginning those first steps to weaving.

But you are also practicing those intercultural skills of deep listening, noticing, empathy, relating. Comparing, even. And reflection

Facilitator Reflections

How many rounds of storytelling, listening, and reflection do you do before getting to the "final performance" of the woven story?

Q

A

It depends. Maybe a couple.

Like, in the early phases of the métissage process, a person can tell their story once, and have their group do two rounds of reflection or questions.

Or maybe the storyteller tells their story once, gets a round of questions or reflections, tells it again, gets another question or reflection.

Sometimes we repeat the process a couple days later, after the storyteller has had a chance to digest some of the questions and maybe even make revisions to their story.

Honestly, I find the listening stage of the narrative métissage to be the most exciting, hearing those questions of curiosity, or hearing those groupmates reflecting back their understanding, getting clarification and deeper understanding.

After-Sharing Activities

After the first round of small-group story sharing and listening, you may choose to pause for a brief micro-revision or gather the whole class for a collective reflection circle.

Keep in mind, after-sharing activities might be overwhelming. An instructor/facilitator can use their discretion to "read the room" and get a sense of whether an after-sharing activity would be enriching or might overload a learner emotionally and cognitively.

Because different groups will be a different stages of the same process, it may help for facilitators to circulate and pause with individual groups rather than as a whole class.

Some reflection and revision done silently and independently can also benefit the métissage process.

Micro-Revision

Invite learners to revisit their story briefly if they wish:

> *Add one detail you realized matters.*
>
> *Clarify one part that listeners asked about.*
>
> *Underline one sentence that shows one of your values or one of your strengths that emerged in your story and read it again with confidence.*
>
> *Record a second oral version using a listener's exact word for your feeling or value.*

Keep it low-stakes and voluntary. Learners can revise or simply stay with their original story.

Collective Reflection

If the group is ready to reflect together, gather in a circle (or as close as possible):

Use a talking piece or go-around format so everyone speaks once.

After each contribution, the group responds together:

"Thank you for sharing."

Post prompts visibly and invite short, heartfelt responses:

"One thing I learned from my partner's story was..."

"One strength or personal value I heard today was..."

"One emotion that stayed with me is..."

Timing Tip:

This step often works best in a second session or after a break, especially if the first round of sharing was emotional or intense. Give time for trust and safety to build before moving into deeper intercultural dialogue.

Protocol (Suggested Flow)

→ Storyteller reads or tells their revised story.

→ Listener responds with:

> *One "I noticed..." statement*
> *(a similarity or difference about the intercultural theme).*
>
> *One respectful curiosity question about the story.*

→ Switch roles.

→ (Optional) Debrief as a whole class:

> *Chart similarities and differences that came up.*
>
> *Collect 2–3 questions that sparked meaningful dialogue.*

Intercultural Noticing Prompts by CLB Level

CLB Level	Noticing	Question
CLB 1–3	• "I saw the same in your story: ___." • "Your story is different: ___."	• "Can you tell me more about ___?" • "Why is ___ important?"
CLB 4	• "I noticed something the same in your story and mine: ___." • "I noticed something different: ___."	• "Can you tell me more about ___?" • "Why was ___ important in your story?"
CLB 5–6	• "I noticed we both value ___, but we show it in different ways." • "I noticed something different about how you experienced ___ compared to me."	• "What does ___ mean for you in your culture?" • "How do people usually show ___ in your family/ community?"
CLB 7–9	• "I noticed a similarity between your story and mine about ___, which shows how ___ matters in both our cultures." / • "I noticed a difference in how we understand ___, and it made me think about how culture shapes experience."	• "How is ___ understood in your culture compared to here?" • "What might people from my culture not understand about your experience?"

Facilitator Reflections

How much reflection and noticing do you build into your métissage processes?

You're going to hate this answer, but I'll say again, it depends.

If I find the group to be getting drained or to be emotionally raw, I'll only focus on a couple of reflective or curiosity-sparking exercises.

A lot of these prompts and questions can actually be incorporated into the weaving process itself, which comes after the story sharing/text sharing.

You'll see that when participants start answering these questions, noticing things about their own stories, noticing things about their partners' stories, that the wheels start turning, because they're identifying points of intersection. Or they notice where things start to separate.

But even these points of divergence are in a way a connection. So a facilitator shouldn't feel like they have to do all these questions, all these activities. You can also spread them out over several days.

Facilitator Reflections

How much reflection and noticing do you build into your métissage processes?

Q

A

One thing I will say is that we sometimes forget to do silent activities, or individual activities.

Like reflecting doesn't always have to happen with another person. If you allow people time and space to do so, reflection can be quite profound and deep and helpful. Sure, some people are going to need some reflection prompts, but it can be internal, not necessarily an interactive activity.

And this is where the learner's first language can be very helpful. Maybe they can complete some reflection activities in their first languages, because they might be able to process more or unpack more if they're not trying to navigate all the things in another language.

I mean, what's the goal? Cognitive and emotional overload, or, you know, moving through the complexity of... growth and new understanding, you know what I mean?

Step 4

Weaving

Weaving the Stories

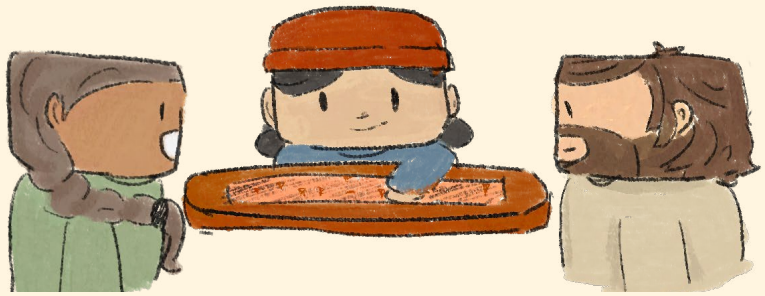
The goal of the weaving process is to transform individual stories into a collective métissage text. Storytellers will find threads of connection, such as similarities and differences in theme, emotion, language choices, lived experiences, and so on.

There is no single “right” way to weave. It is a creative, relational, and responsive process. Each group may weave differently.

Weaving is challenging with large numbers of voices. Aim for trios or groups of four so every voice can be heard and connections can form naturally.

Multilingual & multimodal weaving is welcome.

Learners may choose to weave using other languages or integrate images, sound, movement, or visual elements. Moving beyond text alone turns the process into full métissage, and that is encouraged.



What to Look For When Weaving

When you listen to each other's stories, notice:

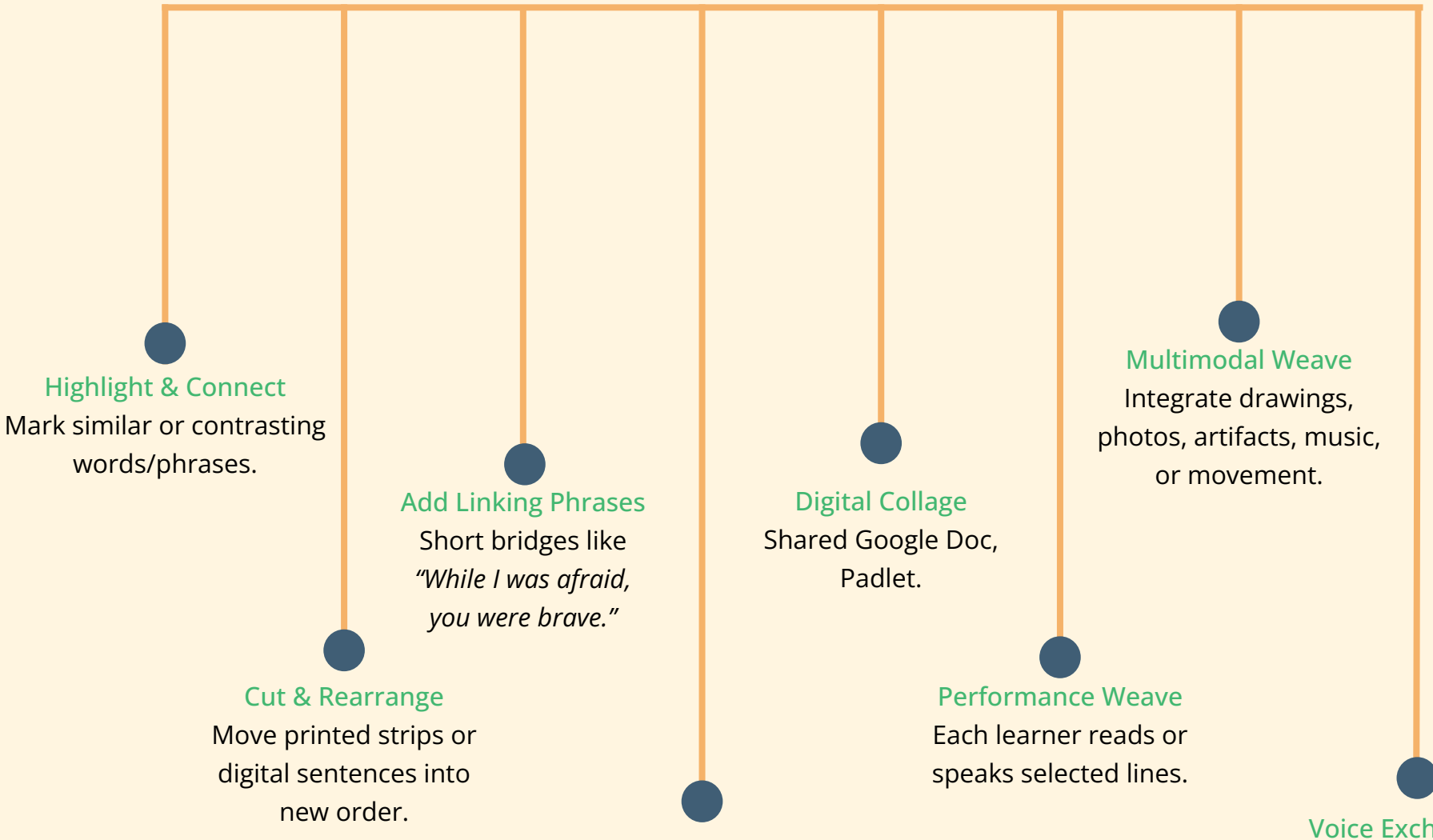
Thematic connections	→	Did we all write about family? Respect? Belonging?
Emotional connections	→	Did we all feel nervous? Or one proud, the other afraid?
Word connections	→	Did we use the same word? A synonym? An opposite word?
Experiential connections	→	Did something similar happen to all of us? Or do our stories show very different ways of living the same theme?

All of these can become weaving threads. You can weave by joining similarities or by placing differences side by side. Both are valuable.

Why This Step Matters

Weaving is the most creative and often the most challenging part of narrative métissage. It invites learners to bring stories together without erasing individuality: voices remain distinct yet now speak to each other. The goal is meaning-making, not perfection. Some groups may weave a single text; others might create a performance, collage, movement piece, or visual/audio braid.

Ways to Weave (Choose One or Combine)



Highlight & Connect
Mark similar or contrasting words/phrases.

Cut & Rearrange
Move printed strips or digital sentences into new order.

Add Linking Phrases
Short bridges like *"While I was afraid, you were brave."*

Visual Weaving
Use string, colour, sticky notes to map connections.

Digital Collage
Shared Google Doc, Padlet.

Performance Weave
Each learner reads or speaks selected lines.

Multimodal Weave
Integrate drawings, photos, artifacts, music, or movement.

Voice Exchange
Learners may read/recite each other's words or choose to only perform their own. Each group decides what feels right.

Possible Facilitation Steps

1 Explain the purpose

"In weaving, we bring our stories together. We look for where they are similar, where they are different, and where they connect. We braid them into one story."

2 Provide a Model

Share a sample woven story or performance (written, audio, visual).

Point out how similarities, contrasts, and shared language strengthen the braid.

3 Choose Connection Points

Groups highlight, mark, or cut sentences to show where connections live.

Encourage trimming or expanding parts to help the weave make sense. It's okay to shorten, rearrange, or add linking lines if everyone agrees.

4 Draft the Weave

Decide: will each person only speak their own words, or will they read/perform each other's lines to create flow?

Experiment with order — spoken, visual, or movement-based.

Use tech (Google Doc, Padlet) or paper strips.

5 Adjust Time

Session 1: Identify threads + highlight.

Session 2: Arrange and draft.

Session 3 (optional): Refine or prepare to share.

Time is flexible. Rushing can flatten the process; let groups spend longer on whichever part feels alive (e.g., connecting stories vs. rehearsing).

Scaffolds for Connection

Focus	CLB 1–2	CLB 3–4	CLB 5-6	CLB 7-8
Themes	"We both said ___."	"We both wrote about ___."	"Our stories are similar because ___."	"Together our stories show two sides of ___."
Differences	"Your story is ___, mine is ___."	"Your story was ___, my story was different: ___."	"Even though our stories were different, we both showed ___."	"Our experiences are different, but the theme of ___ connects them."
Emotions	"You felt ___, I felt ___."	"I was ___, you were ___."	"I felt ___, you felt ___, but both stories show ___."	"One story revealed ___, another showed ___; together they highlight ___."
Words	(Match key words)	"We both said ___."	"We used different words: ___ and ___."	"We used ___ and ___ to describe the same idea."

Example of Mini-Weaves

Theme: Belonging

Let's imagine these sentences belong to stories from two learners in an EAL classroom. How might these learners weave their words?

Story A:

"I was the only one in class who wore a headscarf."

I felt

Story B:

"My teacher said my name correctly."

Alone Welcome

A: I walked into the classroom and—

B: I walked into the classroom and—

A: I was the only one wearing a headscarf.

B: The teacher was waiting with the class roster.

A: The teacher pointed to a sign on the wall. No hats allowed.

B: The teacher went down the list one by one. Jones. McDonald. Patterson. Smith. My name is coming soon.

A+B: I started to sweat.

A+B: And then—

A: She pointed to my headscarf.

B: She said my name correctly.

A: I felt so....

B: I felt so....

Alone Welcome

Facilitator Reflections

How involved are you in the weaving process?

I think there is a temptation for facilitators to be either too hands-on or too hands-off during this process.

I, for example, noticed of myself, that when a group seems to be chugging along quite happily and easily weaving their stories, in what I perceive to be a highly engaged kind of way, I might back off. It's like, oh, they're fine. They're enjoying it and they get it. And when I perceive struggle, I notice I tend to jump in and get my hands in there and try to guide them more.

And in my own reflecting, I think I need to do the opposite. Because if something seems to be flowing "easily," does this mean I haven't given them an... an opportunity to be challenged or to dig deeper or to be a little uncomfortable? So maybe I need to get in there with a prompt or an exercise that challenges them to see their stories differently, in a way that is less "easy."

If I try to jump in and help a group who seems to be struggling...am I robbing them of the chance to experience the struggle? Because again, is my role to "fix" the struggle? ...

Facilitator Reflections

...Like, no. Maybe not. Discomfort is totally fine. Being frustrated is totally fine, right? And how can we use that discomfort or frustration as a tool for learning something about ourselves. Why are we frustrated right now? What's stumping us? What would happen if I let them just go through it and sort it? Or is that an opportunity as well to give them a weaving prompt or exercise that can help them explore the challenge from another angle?

So the way I see it, I'm a facilitator, and my role is to be a sort of way finder through the métissage process. I am constantly navigating that process myself, navigating what it means to be a facilitator. It's exhilarating.

Participant Reflections on Weaving

These comments come from three people that participated in a narrative métissage as part of their personal leadership development. In this interview, they were asked to discuss the weaving aspect of the métissage specifically.

I understand your group responded to the story prompt, "The Words I Never Said."
What was the weaving experience like?

Difficult to describe exactly. We were five people, which is a bigger group, which couldn't be helped. What helped a lot is the facilitator.

We already had some really good question prompts and weaving activities that helped us notice things about our own stories and our partners' stories straight away, so we went in with this understanding of what some of the strengths were, what we had in common. What was different.

Let me just start by saying we all responded to that prompt in really, really different ways. And this became obvious during the previous phase, during the story sharing.

So I was like, how the heck are we going to weave these into one? Should I go back and re-write my story to match theirs more? (Which I didn't do.)...

Participant Reflections on Weaving

Like, we had two stories about people regretting not telling someone special or important how much they meant to them.

One about domestic abuse and not speaking up on behalf of someone who was getting abused, right?

One about mental illness and not asking for help when they needed it, and one about someone who didn't take accountability for a racist joke they made.

Like, how do you weave those together?

Totally.

And I think if we hadn't done a lot of those reflections and activities, and asking curious questions, really intentional questions, we might not have been able to do it.

But then it was possible to see certain emotions in the stories that connected. Or words that we all actually used or repeated in our stories. Or even when there were some gaps, like, parts of my own story I hadn't even really considered.

Participant Reflections on Weaving

I remember you asking me why I didn't say the thing I wanted to say.

Like, what held me back?

Yeah I remember that too.

It was a really big awakening for us in terms of weaving. We sort of discovered our own themes. Our own sense of relationship.

And sometimes it wasn't even the words that were making sense or connecting with another person's story. It was the way they told it or the emotion or even the craft of it.

And I liked one of the questions our facilitator had us ask.

Like, "Tell your partner what you think the most important moment in their story is."

Participant Reflections on Weaving

Like, wow.

And interestingly, when we began to weave our stories together, we ended up starting the métissage with those moments.

So our stories didn't end up getting woven together in the same sequence. Not exactly. Not like a linear timeline, not at first. It got a bit circular for a bit, and then, like connected through emotion.

And we questioned it for a while because we were like, is that how you tell a story?

And then there were parts, where we saw our métissage, and it was like.

Oh that bit there from your story, it's not really connecting in the métissage.

Do you want to add to it?

How did you feel here?

How can we connect your bit to my bit here?

Participant Reflections on Weaving

At one point during the weaving, we went through and colour coded things. Cut things up and moved them around. And gave each part like a name. Like we gave each section of our métissage a name.

And if we saw one of our partners' voices wasn't quite as strong there or was missing, we had a good talk about it to see what we might want to add.

In one case we actually wanted to add a picture instead of more words. And in another bit, we actually decided that I would read a part of my partner's story, and they would read a part of mine, like because we almost had the same story and we wanted to show that.

Actually it was really neat to hear some of the stories read by a person of a different gender. Because like the story felt different. And we talked about that, too.

Sorry, I guess you can see how kind of crazy and organic this was. But it didn't feel crazy or disorganized or anything. I mean there was definitely a kind of process. The facilitator stepped in and gently guided from time to time. And that was super helpful.

Participant Reflections on Weaving

But if you asked me for like a step by step of what we did during the weaving, I couldn't say exactly, I could tell you the steps we did, but would that like give you everything that happened to us?

What we felt?

What was happening inside us?

But I could easily show you our métissage and talk about how we wove those pieces together and why we did it.

I feel confident about that now. And how special that was.

Step 5

Performing

Practicing & Performing the Weaving

Give learners time to rehearse and refine oral performance, build confidence, and culminate in a full-class woven storytelling experience. This phase allows the collective narrative métissage to be heard, witnessed, and celebrated, while still honoring choice, safety, and process.

Performing is an invitation, not a requirement. Each group decides how public, polished, or multimodal they want their weaving to be. Some may wish to keep their braid private; others may want to share widely or create an artifact.

The following are some optional ideas for rehearsing the weave.

Individual Rehearsal (Self-Practice)

- Learners quietly practice reading or speaking their part of the weave alone.
- They can record themselves on a phone or computer to hear pacing and clarity.
- Offer simple self-reflection prompts:

Am I clear?
Where do I want to pause?
Does this still sound like me?
Do I feel connected to these words?

Encourage learners to rehearse in the language(s) they will use. This may include their first language. Remind them: perfection isn't the goal; connection and authenticity are.

Small-Group Rehearsal (Peer Practice)

Groups pair up
(Group A + Group B)

One group performs while the other listens actively, using listening-without-interruption norms.

After listening, Group B creates a collective response such as:

a painted canvas, collage, or mural tile

a word cloud or key-words poster

a short poem or phrase chain echoing what they heard

These visual or written responses show how stories were received rather than evaluated.

Whole-Class Performance (Final Weaving)

Each group shares their weave with the whole class.

Audience members listen deeply, then reflect using prompts such as:

"One connection I noticed was..."
"One thing I learned or felt was..."
"A difference that helped me think differently was..."

Encourage applause or gratitude gestures that honour vulnerability without judgment.

Optional Tapestry or Quilt (Extending the Experience)

Recordings	:	Audio or video (with informed consent — learners can opt out).
Digital tapestry	:	Class Padlet, blog, slideshow, or website that gathers all the weaves.
Physical artifact	:	Wall collage, "story quilt," or mural made of drawings, photos, and key words.

These can be shared within the class, program, or (if everyone agrees) a broader school/ community space. They become a visible symbol of belonging and shared learning.

Always check consent. Learners should choose: Do I want this recorded or displayed?

Respect privacy and allow anonymous or partial contributions if desired.

Facilitator Reflections

Q *How do you choose your métissage audience?*

It depends. More often than not, the groups within your class just perform for, like, their classmates there. But it doesn't have to be that way.

I've facilitated métissage processes where two small groups performed for each other rather than the whole group.

I've also had very small métissage groups, like only five participants total, perform their woven story for an external audience, one that wasn't involved in the métissage itself.

Some groups prefer to do a recording and then show it that way, like as a video or play it as an audio. Sometimes they just want you to listen to it.

But I mean, that can all be a discussion. Because you want to be intentional about audience. They are in an important role and not exactly separate or neutral when it comes to the métissage.

Like, as soon as you are an audience member, you are participating in métissage, right? Because now your thoughts and experiences and selves and whatever are getting mixed in with the story you're hearing and how you interpret and understand it and what you are learning.

A

Facilitator Reflections

What are some considerations for including an external audience?

Q

Well first of all, you want them to listen under the same conditions you helped your class learn to listen. With respect. With intention. You also want to give them the tools to respond in a respectful, intentional kind of way. And that response does not have to happen with the "performers" present.

Of course, if they are present...you want to be asking yourself, what is the goal of inviting an external audience? Do your learners want it? Do they consent? Like, why are you inviting that audience? Why are they entitled to this story? Because the receiving of that story is a privilege. It's a gift, and not everyone is entitled, right?

Because sometimes having an external audience is very powerful. They can learn something. But you need to be prepared to facilitate reflection and dialogue with that audience group.

A

For example, I once facilitated narrative métissage with a group of students and administrators who just did not understand each other on a particular conflict. Quite a terrible conflict. And it could have become a valid and ugly human rights complaint, easily, the way things were escalating...

Facilitator Reflections

...And the experience of coming together through métissage and hearing each other really had an impact. Reflection and understanding power dynamics and all those...those things in context, in relationship, really reframed that conflict in a way that I don't think would have been possible through more...more conventional "mediation" approaches, you know?

And the reason we thought to do métissage in that case is that the...the policies, the dominant expectations of how people resolve a conflict in that professional/ academic environment were doing more harm than good, in that moment in time. The...the unequal power dynamics at play. Historical context, at play.

So we needed something that wasn't...like, not apolitical exactly, but something more human.

Another time, I facilitated a narrative métissage that was later performed for a group of school administrators. The unpacking and reflection dialogue that happened afterwards helped those administrators understand certain values and realities that the students experienced. And those revelations directly informed the revision of the student code of conduct, in a way that really enriched that particular policy piece. Made it more human, less...less sort of about crime and punishment...

Facilitator Reflections

...I like to think that hearing that métissage, and going through the reflection process, really opened the administration's eyes, and helped them be more empathetic and compassionate. But you have to remember, your learners do not owe anyone that.

At first, after hearing the métissage, those administrators were like, listening to this was very heavy. And if they had gotten stuck in those initial reactions and feelings, they might not have noticed the bigger things happening in the métissage story. Like, the students' need for safety to speak. Their desire to be responsive to their community, pathways for support. Mental health. Social justice. Pathways to recognize each other's strengths. The desire for more community connection and leadership.

And so when you start drawing attention to certain things through the reflection and dialogue, you can start to...in a way unweave the story, and see the connecting threads, and what we can learn about ourselves, our community, and how to transmit that knowledge forward...

Step 6

Reflecting

Unweaving & Reflection

Purpose:

The performance of the narrative métissage is not the "product" or the purpose of a narrative métissage process. Reflecting on the experience is vital. The goal of this phase is to close the narrative métissage process by making sense of what happened, noticing connections, surfacing learning, and giving space for personal and intercultural reflection.

This stage invites participants to "unweave," to step back from the collective braid and explore what it revealed about self, others, and the world.

Reflection is not about evaluating correctness. It's about sense making and meaning-making. Keep it invitational. Learners can engage at the level and language they're comfortable with.

How to Facilitate the Unweaving

Set the Tone

1. Remind learners: "We are now stepping back to notice what we built together. You can share thoughts, feelings, or questions. You don't have to have answers."

2. Revisit community norms: respect, confidentiality, brave space, and choice to pass.

Choose the Format

Whole-class circle with a talking piece.

Small group conversations for those more comfortable in smaller settings.

If there was an outside audience:

Invite audience members to join reflection, either by sharing what resonated with them or asking respectful questions.

You may also ask them to read aloud selected lines from the groups' woven stories. Hearing one's own story echoed by others can deepen its impact and affirm its value.

Creative reflection with drawings, key words, collage, or word art before talking.

Silent reflection with sticky notes, journals, or anonymous digital boards (Padlet).

Revisit Earlier Questions

1. Return to listening questions

   (e.g., *"What did you notice? What emotions stayed with you?"*).

2. Move into deeper exploration if the group is ready

Sample Deeper Reflection Questions

Identity & Connection

Did you see yourself reflected in someone else's story?

Did you notice something about yourself you hadn't thought of before?

How did it feel to have your story woven into something larger?

About the Sensibility of Métissage

What did you learn about métissage as a way of making meaning together?

What was the difference between hearing the facilitator's or instructor's story and telling your own?

How was weaving different from simply sharing?

About the Theme/Content

What does this experience tell us about [story theme/topic]?

Did anything surprise you or challenge what you believed?

Did you notice differences that expanded your perspective?

Application & Next Steps

Might you apply what you learned about language, culture, or storytelling in your life or community?

Did you gain any tools for listening or connecting across difference?

How might this process help you navigate living/working/learning in a new culture?

CLB Level Adaptations

CLB Level	Simple Prompts	Expanded Prompts
CLB 1–2	• "I felt ___." • "I learned ___." • "Same as me: ___."	• "I saw my life in another story when ___." • "I learned about ___ today."
CLB 3-4	• "I was surprised when ___." • "I felt close to ___."	• "I learned that ___ can be different in other places." • "I was surprised when someone said ___."
CLB 5–6	• "I learned that ___ is important in other cultures." • "I found out ___ about myself."	• "Hearing ___'s story made me think differently about ___." • "I saw that ___ is not the same everywhere."
CLB 7–8	• "I realized ___ about identity or culture." • "I will use ___ I learned here."	• "This process taught me ___ about how we build understanding across difference." • "I will use this when ___."

Audience Reflection Guide

For Guests Experiencing a Narrative Métissage Performance

Thank you for witnessing our stories. Your role is to listen deeply and respond with care.

You are part of a shared space where vulnerability and courage are welcomed.

How to Listen

1. **Be fully present.** Put away distractions.
2. **Listen to understand,** not to judge or fix.
3. **Notice emotions, images, and connections** that arise for you.
4. **Honour silence.** Some moments may need space.

How to Respond

If invited to share after the performance, you can use these stems to express what you noticed or felt:

Simple Responses	Reflective Responses	Respectful Responses
• "I noticed ___."	• "One thing that stayed with me was ___."	• "Could you share more about ___ (only if you feel comfortable)?"
• "I felt ___ while listening."	• "Something that surprised me was ___."	• "What does ___ mean to you?"
• "I connected with ___."	• "Your stories helped me see ___ differently."	• "What inspired you to include ___ in your story?"

Remember:

Ask only questions that come from curiosity, not judgment.

Some stories may touch on trauma or deep emotion. Avoid probing if it may cause harm.

Ways You Might Participate

Read Aloud (If Invited):

You may be asked to read selected lines from the stories.

Speak clearly, with respect, and let the words stand as they are. Do not edit or interpret.

Silent Acknowledgment:

A simple *"Thank you for sharing,"* a nod, or applause is welcome.

Audience Mindset

Be humble. You are entering someone else's lived experience.

Accept complexity and difference.

Honour that these stories belong to the tellers.

Your role is to witness, not evaluate.

Beyond the Story: Extending Narrative Métissage

Narrative métissage begins as a relational, meaning-making practice, but it doesn't have to end when the last story is told. Once stories are woven and shared, they can spark new learning, dialogue, and action, both for participants and for any audience who encounters the work. These are possibilities, not prescriptions; they show how métissage can ripple outward without becoming extractive or prescriptive.

Possible Pathways

Deepening Learner Reflection

After performance, learners may journal, discuss, or create new art to explore what they learned about themselves, others, and culture.

Groups might turn their collective story into written or multimedia pieces with consent to continue meaning-making beyond the classroom.

Audience Reflection & Engagement

Inviting the audience in: When a métissage is performed for others *(e.g., other classes, community members, program leaders),* the audience can also respond and reflect.

Facilitated dialogue: Audience members might share:

What did you notice? What surprised you?
What did you learn about belonging, identity, or language?

Participatory reading: Audiences can be invited to read aloud or perform selected segments of the woven story themselves. This can be deeply moving, hearing one's own words voiced by others creates solidarity and shifts power.

Response artifacts: Audiences may create word clouds, collages, or collective murals in response to the weaving.

Professional & Program Development

Program leaders and colleagues can use the stories to review curriculum, assessment, or learner supports.

Participants would be able to synthesize what they learned into learnings to share so that program leaders can see the original intent of the métissage process and the stories that were shared.

Métissage can serve as teacher PD, offering a living example of decolonial, relational language teaching.

Policy & Systems Change

With ethical safeguards, anonymized woven texts can inform policy or service design *(e.g., settlement programs, language access strategies)*.

Stories can help decision-makers see the lived reality behind statistics and invite more human-centred policy making.

Research & Knowledge Creation

Educators may integrate métissage into participatory action research, where learners help interpret their own narratives.

Woven texts can become part of academic articles, conference presentations, or practitioner reports with co-authorship or credit for learners.

Art & Community Expression

Weavings can evolve into spoken word, installations, podcasts, zines, or multimedia exhibits that invite dialogue far beyond the classroom.

Ethical Anchors

Consent & control:

Sharing beyond the classroom must always be voluntary and transparent; learners should know and agree to where their words will go.

Co-authorship & recognition:

If stories inform publications, policy briefs, or public performances, credit storytellers meaningfully.

Relational accountability:

Honour the trust that storytelling requires; don't turn lived experience into data to be mined.

Instructor Tip

Think of the weaving as a ***seed***. It may stay private and personal, or it may grow into ***research, policy conversations, or community art.***

Both choices are valid. The power lies in ***agency, curiosity, and shared responsibility*** for how stories live on.

Working Glossary

These definitions are offered as accessible starting points, not fixed or exhaustive meanings. They reflect how terms are used within this resource and are intended to support shared understanding rather than enforce correctness.

Intercultural Competence (IC)

The ability to engage across cultural difference with awareness, curiosity, and care. In this resource, intercultural competence is understood as developmental and relational, shaped through lived experience, reflection, and interaction rather than as a static skill set or checklist.

Narrative Métissage

A story-weaving practice that brings autobiographical narratives into conversation with one another in response to a shared question or theme. Narrative métissage centres lived voice, relationship, and collective meaning-making, and values holding multiple truths without forcing resolution or consensus.

Métissage (Broader Sense)

An approach to weaving together multiple voices, texts, genres, or forms of expression. In research and artistic contexts, métissage may include theoretical, creative, or academic texts and does not necessarily centre autobiographical storytelling.

Indigenous Ways of Knowing

Ways of understanding the world that are grounded in relationship, place, responsibility, and lived experience. Knowledge is understood as relational and contextual rather than abstract, detached, or owned by individuals.

Indigenous Ways of Learning

Approaches to learning that are grounded in relationship, place, responsibility, and lived experience. Learning is understood as relational and holistic, emerging through listening, observing, participating, and reflecting over time. Knowledge is not something to be acquired or mastered, but something that unfolds through connection to people, land, story, and community.

Indigenous Ways of Doing

Ways of acting and engaging in the world that are guided by responsibility, reciprocity, and care for relationships. Indigenous ways of doing emphasize how actions affect others, the land, and future generations. In learning contexts, this includes attentiveness to process, consent, accountability, and how learning is carried out, not just what is learned.

Colonial Logics

Ways of thinking and organizing the world that come from colonial histories and continue to shape institutions, education, and everyday interactions. Colonial logics often prioritize hierarchy, extraction, individualism, standardization, and either/or categories (such as civilized/uncivilized, inside/outside, correct/incorrect). In learning spaces, they can show up as assumptions about whose knowledge counts, whose language is valued, and what it means to belong or be “successful.”

Decolonization/Decolonial

In this resource, decolonization refers to questioning and interrupting colonial assumptions about whose knowledge, language, and ways of being are valued in learning spaces. It is an ongoing practice of noticing power, centring Indigenous knowledge, and resisting deficit-based narratives, rather than a metaphor or checklist.

Dominant Narrative

A widely accepted story or explanation that shapes how events, identities, or histories are understood and valued within a society or institution. Dominant narratives often reflect the perspectives and interests of those with social or political power and can marginalize or simplify other experiences. In learning contexts, they influence whose stories are centered, whose knowledge is treated as legitimate, and what ways of being are seen as "normal" or desirable.

Anti-Racism

An approach that focuses on recognizing and challenging systems, structures, and practices that produce racial inequity. In this resource, anti-racism involves naming racism as ongoing, attending to power and positionality, and supporting learning environments that affirm dignity and belonging.

Relationality/Ethical Relationality

An understanding of human relationships that emphasizes responsibility, context, and connection. Ethical relationality involves attending to how histories, identities, and experiences position people in relation to one another, and engaging difference with care rather than neutrality.

Two-Eyed Seeing (Etuaptmumk)

A principle articulated by Mi'kmaq Elders that involves holding Indigenous and Western ways of knowing together without requiring one to dominate the other. It values learning through multiple lenses and recognizes that insight often emerges between perspectives.

Place/Place-Based Learning

An approach that recognizes learning as shaped by where it happens and by the histories, relationships, and responsibilities connected to that place. Place-based learning attends to land, migration, and belonging as part of meaning-making.

Dominant Culture/Dominant Norms

The values, behaviours, and ways of knowing that are treated as standard or neutral within a society or institution. These norms often reflect colonial, Western, or majority perspectives and may marginalize other ways of being or knowing.

Deficit-Based vs. Asset-Based Approaches

Deficit-based approaches focus on what learners are perceived to lack. Asset-based approaches recognize and build upon learners' existing knowledge, skills, languages, and lived experiences.

Plural Selves

The understanding that people carry multiple, evolving identities shaped by history, culture, language, place, and experience. Plural selves resist the idea that individuals must present a single, coherent, or fixed identity.

Meaning-making

The process through which people interpret experiences, stories, and interactions to understand themselves and the world. Meaning-making is relational and contextual rather than purely individual or cognitive.

Relational Accountability

An ethical orientation that emphasizes responsibility to others within learning and storytelling spaces. It involves attentiveness to consent, care, and the impacts of how stories are shared and held.

Consent (in Storytelling Contexts)

An ongoing practice of checking in about what is shared, how it is shared, and how it is responded to. Consent in storytelling recognizes participants' agency and right to choose what they disclose or withhold.

Trauma-Informed vs. Healing-Centered

Trauma-informed approaches focus on recognizing the impact of trauma and minimizing the risk of re-harm. They emphasize safety, predictability, and awareness of trauma responses, and are often used to help educators avoid unintentionally causing distress.

Healing-centered approaches expand this focus by centering strengths, agency, culture, and relationship alongside care. Rather than defining people primarily by trauma, healing-centered engagement emphasizes wholeness, connection, and collective well-being. In this resource, a healing-centered orientation supports learning spaces where emotion and lived experience are acknowledged without requiring disclosure or positioning learners as sites of damage.

Ethical Storytelling

An approach to sharing and listening to stories that centres care, consent, and responsibility. Ethical storytelling attends to how stories are told, who is affected by them, and how they are held in relationship. In this resource, it involves inviting stories rather than extracting them, respecting boundaries, and recognizing that stories are connected to people, communities, histories, and place.

Land Acknowledgement

A practice of recognizing the Indigenous Peoples whose lands we are on, and the ongoing relationships between land, history, and responsibility. When done thoughtfully, land acknowledgements invite reflection on colonial histories, Indigenous presence, and our roles within these relationships. In this resource, land acknowledgement is understood as a beginning, not an endpoint, and is most meaningful when connected to ongoing learning, accountability, and action.

Treaty Acknowledgement

A practice of recognizing the treaties that govern relationships between Indigenous Nations and settlers, institutions, and governments in a particular place. Treaty acknowledgement draws attention to treaties as living agreements, not historical artifacts, and invites reflection on shared responsibilities, obligations, and ongoing relationships. In this resource, treaty acknowledgement emphasizes learning about what treaties mean, how they continue to shape life in the present, and how we are positioned within them.

Labour (Labor) Acknowledgement

A practice of recognizing the often-invisible labour, including intellectual, emotional, cultural, and relational, that makes learning spaces possible. Labour acknowledgement is especially common in Black communities and Black-led spaces, where it has been used to name and honour labour that has historically been exploited, erased, or taken for granted. It is also used more broadly to acknowledge the work of marginalized people, including Indigenous scholars, community members, facilitators, and learners whose knowledge, care, and lived experience contribute to collective learning.

In this resource, labour acknowledgement draws attention to power, authorship, and responsibility, and helps prevent the erasure or extraction of people's contributions.

Positionality

An understanding of how a person's social location, such as culture, race, language, migration history, education, gender, or relationship to place, influences how they see the world and how the world responds to them. Positionality is not fixed; it shifts across contexts and relationships. In this resource, attending to positionality means noticing how our perspectives, assumptions, and responsibilities are shaped by where we stand in relation to others, history, and place.

Positionality Statement

A reflective practice in which a person names aspects of their positionality to provide context for how they are speaking, listening, or facilitating. A positionality statement is not a confession or a performance of identity. Rather, it is an act of transparency that supports relational accountability by helping others understand the standpoint from which someone is engaging.

Marginalized vs. Minoritized

Marginalized refers to people or groups who are pushed to the edges of social, political, or economic systems through structures of power, policy, and practice. Marginalization describes a process, something that happens through systems and relationships, not an inherent quality of a group.

Minoritized emphasizes that a group is made into a “minority” through social, political, or institutional processes, regardless of actual population size. The term highlights that reduced power or representation is produced, not natural.

For example, women are not a numerical minority in most societies, yet they are often marginalized through unequal access to power, safety, pay, and representation.

Similarly, many racialized people are part of the global majority of the world’s population. However, in specific national, institutional, or social contexts, they may be minoritized or marginalized through policies, practices, and dominant narratives that limit access, visibility, or belonging.

In this resource, both terms are used intentionally. Marginalized helps name the impacts of exclusion and inequity, while minoritized draws attention to the processes that create and sustain those conditions.


3
Intercultural
Competence
& Narrative
Métissage

Defining IC in EAL Contexts

Intercultural Competence (IC) refers to the ability to communicate, relate, and work effectively and appropriately across cultural differences. It involves curiosity, self-awareness, empathy, and the willingness to engage with unfamiliar perspectives without judgment. IC is not about mastering other cultures—it's about learning to listen, reflect, and adapt with respect.

Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) builds on this by combining language learning with cultural awareness. In EAL classrooms, ICC means supporting learners not only in acquiring English, but also in developing the skills to navigate diverse social and cultural contexts where the language is used.

This includes:

- → *understanding how language and culture shape meaning*
  - → *interpreting gestures, tone, or silence across contexts*
    - → *reflecting on one's own cultural assumptions and communication style*
      - → *learning to manage misunderstandings or discomfort in intercultural interactions*

The skills people can develop to build ICC include:

1 Noticing

Paying attention to language, behaviour, context, and interaction patterns—both in oneself and in others.

2 Curiosity

Showing interest in other perspectives, experiences, and cultural practices without assuming or judging.

3 Deep listening

Listening beyond words—attending to tone, body language, silence, and emotional cues

4 Perspective-taking

Trying to understand how someone from another background might interpret a situation differently.

5 Self-awareness

Recognizing one's own cultural assumptions, communication habits, and possible biases.

6 Flexibility and adaptation

Being willing to adjust communication styles when interacting across differences.

7 Managing ambiguity

Staying open and patient when things feel unfamiliar, unclear, or uncomfortable.

8 Interpreting cultural cues

Noticing and interpreting gestures, tone, formality, or silence across cultural contexts.

9 Repairing misunderstandings

Clarifying, checking in, restating, or asking questions when communication breaks down.

In short, ICC helps learners use language meaningfully in real-world, cross-cultural settings, not just to communicate, but to connect.

The Developmental Nature of Intercultural Competence (IC)

Intercultural competence is not something a person either has or does not have. It develops over time, through lived experience, reflection, and relational learning. Like language acquisition, it is a process rather than a final product—shaped by context, history, and relationship.

Learners do not enter the classroom as empty vessels. Nor do instructors enter as neutral or culture-free guides. All participants bring with them histories, values, identities, and ways of making sense of the world. Many learners already possess well-developed intercultural capacities—such as curiosity, noticing, adaptability, empathy, or perspective-taking—even if they do not name these skills as “intercultural competence.”

For many newcomers, intercultural learning has not been abstract or theoretical. It has been lived. Learners may have navigated multiple cultural contexts, survived displacement, crossed borders, raised families across languages, or learned to move between social systems that carry unequal power. These experiences often cultivate deep intercultural awareness long before learners encounter formal IC frameworks.

Education level or English proficiency does not determine intercultural competence. In fact, dominant educational systems sometimes fail to recognize or value the intercultural knowledge learners already carry—particularly when that knowledge has been developed outside Western academic contexts. This resource intentionally resists deficit-based assumptions that equate language proficiency with cultural or intellectual readiness.

Intercultural learning is developmental and non-linear. Learners (and instructors) move through shifting stages of awareness—from noticing surface-level cultural differences to engaging more deeply with questions of identity, power, belonging, and positionality. Some enter with openness and curiosity; others with discomfort, uncertainty, or resistance shaped by prior experiences. All of these entry points are valid. What matters is not where someone begins, but how we create conditions for growth—through trust, dialogue, and opportunities to engage difference with care.

This resource embraces the understanding that everyone is on their own intercultural learning journey. There is no expectation of perfection, neutrality, or "getting it right." Instead, intercultural growth often involves movement from:

assumption to inquiry	*reaction to reflection*	*stereotype to complexity*	*judgment to curiosity*

In EAL classrooms, this means creating spaces where learners and instructors can take risks, make mistakes, ask questions, share stories, and examine how language, culture, power, and identity shape our interactions. Intercultural competence develops not through mastery, but through ongoing, relational engagement with others—and with ourselves.

Understanding Intercultural Competence from Indigenous Worldviews

When considered from the lens of Indigenous worldviews, intercultural competence a set of skills that are practiced in relationships rooted in accountability, humility, ethical responsibility, and story. This view places less emphasis on “understanding other cultures” and more on how we listen, how we show up, and how we remain responsible to one another across difference.

Intercultural competence, from many Indigenous perspectives, is the ongoing practice of entering relationships with humility, ethical responsibility, and deep listening. It asks us to recognize how our histories position us in relation to one another; to create ethical spaces where multiple ways of knowing can stand together; to honour story as a source of wisdom; and to be accountable to the people, lands, and relationships that shape our shared world.

Indigenous perspectives emphasize the following interconnected principles:

1 Ethical Relationality

(After Dwayne Donald)

Intercultural encounters are shaped by the histories, responsibilities, and worldviews each person carries. Ethical relationality invites us to see ourselves as historic beings, positioned in relation to others, and responsible for how we enter and sustain those relationships.

2 Creating Ethical Space

(After Willie Ermine)

Intercultural engagement requires a shared space where multiple worldviews can meet without domination. Ethical space asks us to pause, suspend judgment, and hold open a zone of respect, humility, and mutual responsibility.

3 Story as Foundation

(After Elder Albert Marshall; Jo-ann Archibald; Margaret Kovach

Story is a primary mode of teaching, learning, and relationship. Deep listening to story — not to respond or fix, but to understand — forms the ethical basis for intercultural engagement. Through story, we learn to see the world through more than one lens.

4 Relational Accountability

(After Shawn Wilson)

Knowledge is relational. We are accountable not only to the people we interact with, but also to land, community, ancestors, language, and the more-than-human world. Intercultural competence means honouring these relationships and acting with integrity toward them.

5 Humility and Non-Closure

Intercultural learning does not seek to eliminate tension or difference. Instead, it asks us to be comfortable with ambiguity, complexity, and non-closure. Humility means accepting that understanding unfolds over time, and that relationships cannot be reduced to fixed categories.

6 Grounding in Place

(After Battiste, Simpson, Kimmerer)

Intercultural relationships happen somewhere. Competence includes recognizing the histories, treaties, languages, and responsibilities tied to the land we stand on, and understanding how place shapes our lives, stories, and obligations.

Ethical Relationality

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Ethical Space

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Two-Eyed Seeing & Story

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Story as Pedagogy

Archibald, J. (2008). *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the heart, mind, body, and spirit.* UBC Press.
Kovach, M. (2009). *Indigenous Methodologies.* University of Toronto Press.

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Land, Responsibility, and Relationality

Battiste, M. (2013). *Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the learning spirit.* Purich Publishing.
Simpson, L. B. (2011). *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back.* Arbeiter Ring Publishing.
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The Role of Narrative in Building Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence is rooted in relationship, ethical engagement, and the ability to see and honour perspectives other than our own. Story, especially personal story, is one of the most powerful tools we have for cultivating these capacities.

When learners share their stories, they are not only practicing language; they are making visible the values, memories, identities, and experiences that shape how they understand the world. When we listen to others' stories, we practice empathy, humility, and presence. Through this process, narrative becomes a bridge between lived experience and intercultural understanding.

In EAL classrooms, narrative allows us to:

Practice deep listening

Receiving a story fully without interrupting, correcting, or anticipating

Strengthen noticing

Attending to emotion, experience, values, and difference with care and curiosity

Foster curiosity

Asking respectful questions that open up, rather than close down, meaning

Develop reflective awareness

Noticing our own responses, assumptions, and emotional reactions

expand or shift perspectives

seeing how another person's story challenges or widens our own understanding

explore identity and belonging

in meaningful, authentic ways

build trust and relational safety across difference

invite learners to speak from who they are

surface cultural norms, communication styles, and assumptions

without stereotyping or essentializing

Narrative métissage extends this work further by weaving stories together—placing voices side by side so that patterns, contradictions, tensions, and connections can emerge. Learners not only encounter other perspectives; they actively interpret and braid them together.

Through this weaving, intercultural learning becomes felt, embodied, and relational, not only what is cognitively understood. Story opens the door to seeing each other more fully—and to practicing intercultural competence not as an abstract theory, but as a lived, shared, relational practice.

Intercultural Competence Skills Strengthened Through Narrative Métissage

A quick-reference guide for instructors

IC Skill	What It Looks Like in Narrative Métissage	Why It Matters
Deep Listening	Listening without interrupting, correcting, or preparing a response; staying present through stillness and silence; letting the story settle before speaking.	Builds empathy, patience, and respect; supports ethical relationality and decolonial forms of engagement.
Noticing	Attending to emotion, values, tone, themes, and contrasts in stories; noticing difference and similarity without judgement.	Strengthens awareness of cultural patterns, assumptions, and the complexity of lived experience.
Curiosity	Asking open, respectful questions ("Can you tell me more about…?"); wondering with, not interrogating.	Encourages intercultural openness and humility; avoids stereotype-based assumptions.
Perspective-Taking	Seeing how another person's experience challenges or widens one's own worldview; holding multiple truths at once.	Supports Two-Eyed Seeing, ethical relationality, and the capacity to live with complexity and non-closure.

IC Skill	What It Looks Like in Narrative Métissage	Why It Matters
Reflection	Noticing one's own emotional responses; considering why something resonates, surprises, or unsettles; connecting story to self.	Fosters self-awareness, critical thinking, and intercultural understanding grounded in relationship.
Relational Accountability	Recognizing that stories create responsibility: to listen well, respond with care, and honour boundaries and consent.	Aligns with Indigenous worldviews of respect, reciprocity, and ethical relationship-making.
Humility	Accepting that we do not know everything; suspending judgment; letting ourselves be changed by what we learn.	Counters colonial patterns of certainty and control; opens space for ethical engagement.
Comfort with Ambiguity	Sitting with differences, tensions, and unanswered questions without rushing to fix or resolve them.	Builds the capacity to navigate intercultural encounters with patience and relational care.

Instructor Tip

Narrative métissage strengthens intercultural competence by using cultural stories and facts to practice the dispositions, relational ethics, and reflective habits that make intercultural engagement meaningful.

Linking Intercultural Competence to Anti-Racism and Decolonization

Intercultural competence is sometimes framed as the ability to communicate respectfully across cultural difference. While respect matters, this framing is incomplete. In justice-oriented education, intercultural learning can be expanded beyond politeness or surface-level "cultural awareness." In EAL contexts—where learners are often navigating systemic barriers associated with race, language, and migration status beyond the classroom—intercultural competence is closely connected to questions of anti-racism and decolonization.

Anti-racism focuses attention on the systems and structures that advantage some groups while marginalizing others. Decolonization invites critical reflection on how colonial histories and logics continue to shape whose knowledge, language, and ways of being are centered—and whose are overlooked, erased, or treated as deficits. Both perspectives shift the focus from individual intention to broader patterns of power, positioning, and responsibility within learning environments.

When intercultural competence is approached in relation to anti-racism and decolonization, it can involve practices such as:

- examining how power, privilege, and racialization influence communication and classroom dynamics
- recognizing racism and colonization as ongoing conditions rather than solely historical events
- creating space for learners' lived experiences without placing expectations on them to educate others
- valuing Indigenous, migrant, and global knowledge systems alongside English language instruction
- supporting learners as they navigate—and, at times, question—the norms of dominant culture, rather than framing adaptation as the sole goal

From this perspective, intercultural competence becomes less about helping learners "fit in" and more about developing awareness of how difference, power, and belonging operate in everyday interactions. It offers a way to notice inequity as it arises, to respond with care, and to consider how learning spaces might be shaped differently.

When grounded in humility, relationship, and reflection, intercultural competence can serve as an entry point into anti-racist and decolonizing practice. It provides educators and learners with shared language and orientation for examining power, engaging difference, and imagining more equitable ways of teaching, relating, and learning together.


4
Reflections
On Narrative
Métissage

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.