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49.1 Brief History of Métissage

“Métissage” comes from the Latin “mixtus” meaning “mixed,” describing a cloth woven from two different fibres (Worley, 2006). It suggests, according to Chambers et al., (2008) “the ability to transform and, through its properties of mixing, opposes transparency and has the power to undo logic and the clarity of concepts” (p. 141). Through analyzing the geo-cultural and linguistic hybridity of Caribbean identity, Glissant (1989) created a type of Métis sage, by exploring concepts of individual and mixed identities, group consciousness, language, and place. In education research, Zuss (1997) used métissage as a research praxis to analyze autobiographical or ‘life-writings’ texts to explore identities, emphasizing heterogeneity and cross-cultural, cross-referential, balanced relations of knowing and being.

In these earlier practices, métissage was used by solo researchers or writers as a construct and method to weave together suppressed or lost wisdoms, traditions, histories, and languages of cultures local to the researcher or writer, often with autobiographical material shared through stories and oral tradition (Lionnet, 1989; Zuss, 1997).

49.2 The Methodology of Métissage

Métissage has emerged as both a theory and a praxis, a political praxis that resists both the fear of mixing and desire for a pure form of research (Zuss, 1997), and

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as a writing praxis (Lionnet, 1989). Métissage as a process is iterative and multifaceted, involving writing, discussing, braiding, re-writing, and reflection that brings out differences and complexities and encourages challenges of assumptions (Cox et al., 2017). The methodology allows researchers “to imagine and create plural selves and communities that thrive on ambiguity and multiplicity” (Chambers et al., 2008, p. 142), affirming differences rather than polarizing them. It resists conventions of discrete or divided disciplines and their traditions for conducting research, while paying deference to individual and collective contexts and the interrelatedness of traditions (Chambers et al., 2008; Donald, 2009, 2012; Lowan, 2009; Lowan-Trudeau, 2012, 2015). Researchers Chambers (2004) and Donald (2009) have used métissage in this fashion when working alone; however, have also juxtaposed their texts when working collectively to show differences and affinities that resonate in areas of culture, history, politics, language, and social backgrounds and experiences. Métissage is interdisciplinary, committed to blurring lines between textual types, identities, and genres (Donald, 2009). Use of métissage signals a commitment to negotiate and reach beyond racial and binary categories of difference that essentialize and segregate identities (Donald, 2009).

Used in post-structural, post-colonial and curriculum research and teaching contexts, métissage, is a counternarrative to the grand narratives of our times, a site for writing and surviving in the interval between different cultures and languages ... [and] mixes binaries such as colonized with colonizer, local with global, East with West, particular with universal, feminine with masculine ... and theory with practice. (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009, p. 9).

Métissage invites engagement and exchanges between researchers and participants to discover threads of relationality, traced through multiple and mixed identities from sharing of stories, histories, perspectives and understandings, written or oral (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009). It involves a braiding together of histories and stories in a collaborative practice with multiple researchers, or for the individual researcher, an interpretative research approach to examining and weaving together written and oral materials and ideas.

Primary textual materials that are autobiographical and particular to locales called ‘life writing’ (Hasebe-Ludt & Jordan, 2010) have been used in métissage by curriculum researchers to promote “emancipatory projects of learning and teaching by attending to the ways that life writing constantly explores, contests, and negotiates the imaginative possibilities of knowing and being in the world” (p. 2), providing an ongoing dialogue between the researcher, text, readers/listeners and world. Further, Hasebe-Ludt and Jordan (2010) contended that using auto/biographical, life writing inquiry which draws from “literary, poetic, artistic, Indigenous, feminist, spiritual, and other related epistemological and wisdom traditions” (p. 1) has potential to lead researchers to new levels of personal wisdom.

49.3 Related Methods to Métissage

Donald (2009) developed Indigenous Métissage as a “interpretive sensibility” (p. 23) using it as a framework for his dissertation, mixing and juxtaposing assorted stories in relation to each other to braid new stories about relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada through improved curriculum delivery in K-12 and post-secondary classrooms.

Burke and Robinson (2019), as Métis scholars, used métissage as an Indigenous research praxis because it offers a “framework for creating an Indigenous research design that enables each researcher to explore and then centre their personal and community values and beliefs” (p. 152). Similarly, Lowan-Trudeau (2012, 2015), a Métis researcher and educator, used métissage as an interpretive Indigenous approach to environmental education research, bringing together Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators as study participants.

49.4 What Can Métissage Be Used to Study?

It is important to note that métissage is not exclusively an Indigenous research methodology, although it has been taken up by some Indigenous researchers. It can be used by researchers who aim to “interweave different, even contradictory, realities and lived experiences and to explore and challenge dualistic notions” (Burke & Robinson, 2019, p. 152) and is open to use by scholars and researchers in fields and disciplines beyond education, such as anthropology, literary studies, fine arts, and interdisciplinary fields such as Indigenous Studies and Women’s Studies (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009).

49.5 Why Use Métissage?

Métissage is a strategy for our precarious times, particularly in colonial spaces (Glissant, 1989; Lionnet, 1989), an approach that explores and honours tensions (Burke & Robinson, 2019). Lowan-Trudeau (2012, 2015) argued for the use of métissage as a theoretical paradigm as it has space to blend knowledge, identities, and ways of knowing and thinking, wherein different understandings of areas of interest can be researched in a way that produces relevance for many people; this way of approaching research also discussed by Kincheloe and Steinberg (2008), Kovach (2010), and Smith (1999).

Donald (2012) argued the use of métissage can support more complex understandings of human relationality “that traverse deeply learned divides of the past and present by demonstrating that perceived civilizational frontiers are actually permeable and that perspectives on history, memory, and experience are connected and interreferential” (p. 534). Hasebe-Ludt and Jordan (2010) suggested métissage has the power to “get us a heart of wisdom” (p. 2).

49.6 Processes of Métissage

A researcher begins using various methods to gather data in written form which may be from history books or entries, archives, interviews, institutional documents, curricula, diaries, biographies, autobiographies, drawings, photos and oral forms such as narratives, histories and interviews (Burke & Robinson, 2019; Donald, 2009; Lowan-Trudeau, 2015). The researcher's next steps include weaving a new story, largely dependent on the individual's choice of methods and guiding concepts, or symbols.

In curriculum inquiry, multiple researchers may craft autobiographical writing to research and garner new insights (Hasebe-Ludt & Leggo, 2018). Lead researchers in the collective, braid the strands to retain the distinctiveness of individual voices and alongside, create a new text, one that "illuminates the braided, polysemic and relational character of our lives, experiences, and memories, as well as the interconnections among the personal and public realm" (Chambers et al., 2008, p. 142). The braiding may be guided by initial themes identified by the researchers and then adjusted and adapted as other themes are illuminated by the process (Hasebe-Ludt & Jordan, 2010). Editing the final product is collective work with drafts exchanged in person or electronically. The results highlight the differences and create a new, nodding to the past while looking to new relationships and harmonies. Braiding becomes a narrative interpretation as well as an individual and collective effort of representing, and then reporting the research (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009).

Final emerging products may be individual autobiographical writing and reflections on the process, along with individual writing combined to form a script for reading, live performance, audio, video, with creation or additions of photographs, drawings, paintings, sketches with the text. Literary genres created might be narratives, poetry, memoirs, postcard essays or combinations of these (Chambers et al., 2008).

49.7 Strengths and Limitations of Métissage

In the tradition of Lionnet (1989), métissage allows researchers to come to new understandings of themselves and others in meaningful and hopeful ways, and as Hasebe-Ludt and Jordan (2010) saw it, invite fresh insights so needed in our current times. The seeking of new stories through empathetic inquiry works toward reconciliation and retribution, especially between histories and identities of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada (Hasebe-Ludt & Leggo, 2018). Métissage's current use is focused on curriculum theorizing, primarily in Canada; however, beyond this work, there has been limited research and awareness by scholars and academics of the methodology to date (Burke & Robinson, 2019).

Engagement Activities

1. In qualitative research, researchers are the instruments of the research; however, in métissage, the researchers may also be the *site* of the research. What complexities does ‘researcher as researched’ introduce into a study?
2. In what ways could generalizability be generated with a study using métissage methodology?
3. Investigate the practice and process of reflexivity and consider why it would be a vital part of using métissage as a methodology.

49.8 Scenario

Three education scholars with differing research interests—ecojustice, Indigenous languages and decolonizing teacher training, decide to undertake a study using métissage to explore their thoughts on unsettling traditional research methods, decolonization, and race. How might they decide on their framing questions? Once they have talked and written about their responses, how might they weave the results together? What do you anticipate they might learn about in the process of using métissage as a research methodology? To view results of a similar scenario, see: Thomas, C., Benson, N., & Lemon, M. J. (2020). (Be) Coming together: Making kin through stories of language and literacy. Using métissage as a research praxis. *Language and Literacy*, 22(1), 39–58. <https://journals.library.ualberta.ca/langandlit/index.php/langandlit/article/view/29515>

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For Further Reading

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Online Resources

Textiles and Tapestries. Narrative Métissage—a sample study https://equitypress.org/textiles_tapestries_self_study/narrative_metissage

Narrative Inquiry Research—video; key points to employ with métissage methodology https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-cjp_-JbSOU



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