

## Packing Up the Big Tent: Que(e)rying and Decolonizing SoTL

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### ABSTRACT

Our reflection begins with our presentation at the 2013 Banff Symposium on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning where we undertook a critique of the “big tent” metaphor that had thus far characterized much of SoTL’s thinking about its inherent diversity. We acknowledged that as proposed by its originators, Huber and Hutchings (2005), the “big tent” of SoTL was intended as a capacious space, with room for all who wished to enter. Reflecting on this presentation, we argue that the celebratory big tent with its focus on better teaching and learning may have helped SoTL become a more respectable academic enterprise. However, this success has entailed ignoring approaches that often bring into view the challenges of teaching “difficult knowledge” as well as students’ desires to remain ignorant of such knowledge. Now, in Canada at least, we argue the big tent must be packed away to focus on the messier aspects of teaching and learning. We offer some thoughts on what a decolonizing SoTL might look like.

*Keywords:* decolonization, queer theory, approaches to SoTL, critical SoTL

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At the 2013 Banff Symposium on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, we advocated for SoTL approaches wherein student voices could be embodied and differentiated.<sup>1</sup> To ground this call, we undertook a critique of the “big tent” metaphor that had thus far characterized SoTL (Easton & Hewson, 2013). We acknowledged that the representation of SoTL as a big tent was initially a unifying move. As proposed by its originators, Huber and Hutchings (2005), the “big tent” of SoTL was intended as a capacious space, with room for all who wished to enter. Inclusive, the big tent was tolerant of differences—differences in disciplines, epistemologies, and methodologies, in its pursuit of the study of teaching and learning.

However, we were skeptical about the outcomes of the entire enterprise for two reasons: 1) because metaphors and how readers come to understandings of them are inherently indeterminate, and access to them is socially, culturally, and linguistically dependent; and 2) from our postmodern SoTL framework (Miller-Young & Yeo, 2015), we recognize that searches for unity often come at a price paid by Others. Our presentation proved quite generative, and by the session’s end, we had hardly begun to unpack the big tent, never mind offer possible alternatives to it. To that end, we are appreciative of the space this special issue provides us to finish the unpacking begun in 2013. In this paper, we reflect on shifts and absences in the field of SoTL and emphasize several significant contributions to it; we also begin to consider the potentials of SoTL practices to respond to those persistent voices—embedded in commission findings, protesting on campuses, and labouring on social media—which call for a decolonizing of the academy.<sup>2</sup>

As we attempted to demonstrate to our audience in 2013, the associations that readers make when encountering metaphors can neither be predicted nor entirely controlled. While the tendency in SoTL had been to focus on the positive, unifying aspects of the big tent, there were, we pointed out, less desirable qualities that could be attributed to it and thereby transferred to the concept the tent was representing. Our (unscientific) sample taken from the 2013 Banff Symposium provided some keen examples of the latter move. For instance, when we asked our lively audience what came to their minds when they imagined a big tent, they offered us “circuses” and “revival meetings.” Accompanying circus tents were unflattering associations

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<sup>1</sup> Both authors live, work, and create on the traditional territories of the Niitsitapi from the Blackfoot Confederacy, including the Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai Nations; the Iyârhe Nakoda of the Chiniki, Bears paw, and Wesley Nations; and the Dene of the Tsuut’ina Nation.

<sup>2</sup> An outcome of the Indian Residential School Survivors Agreement, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in Canada was established in June 2008. Its aim was to document the impacts of the Indian Residential School system on survivors and their families through public and private testimonies, and to educate/confront the state, its actors, and its citizens about what constitutes cultural genocide. In December 2015, the TRC released its final six-volume report, including 94 calls to action, and it was received by the federal government shortly thereafter. The full report as well as a summary of its findings can be accessed via the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation’s website, [nctr.ca](http://nctr.ca). The voices of Black, Indigenous, and minority students raised in universities in South Africa, England, Australia, and North America in 2016, calling for the decolonizing of the academy, are also in our ears as we write this.

with “dog and pony shows,” “hucksters,” and the slogan “there’s a sucker born every minute.” Such associations, we recognized, raised critical questions for SoTL practitioners: How many of us had been the recipients of comments of a similar tenor about our SoTL work—that it was either overblown in its importance and/or a cheapening of “real” academic work? Certainly, this lack of assuredness was a hallmark of SoTL then. As far back as 2006, Kathleen McKinney observed that the ambiguities about SoTL meant there were anxieties about the validity of the field, its reach, and its applicability (pp. 44–46).

One audience member raised the notion of “jumping on the bandwagon” in our big tent discussion. We wondered then if SoTL, as it had been instituted, promoted, and organized, was entirely successful at avoiding associations with faddishness. Our participants mentioned two other circus acts, both mirroring many of our audience’s professional identity crises as SoTL practitioners: juggling and tightrope walking, and the efforts of balance required by each.

Evangelical fervour, speaking in tongues, “casting the net,” and conversion were among the connotations the audience attributed to the tents of “revival meetings.” The next level of transfer—between such tents and SoTL—was strikingly embodied by one of the audience members, who excused herself from the session by announcing she was “off to testify.” Where was she going? To prepare herself to deliver the symposium’s final keynote. Her topic was how SoTL transformed her identity and teaching practices. A general round of laughter ensued, all of us “in” on the joke of the “missionary zeal” suffusing the discourse around and about scholarship-of-teaching-and-learning work. This is where we left off in 2013.

Many of the associations we heard in 2013 we still recognize as symptoms of the underlying problems in our less-than-nimble halls of learning of the privileging of discipline-specific work over SoTL work, which did not necessarily, or easily, fit into tenure and promotion systems. However, from our location in Canada, we notice that teaching-focused universities, such as Mount Royal University in Alberta, have integrated SoTL into their organizational structures as have some research-intensive institutions. The University of Calgary, for instance, created a prestigious University Chair for Teaching and Learning and filled it with a SoTL scholar. In Hamilton, Ontario, McMaster University has created the Paul T. MacPherson Institute that, among other initiatives, hosts a SoTL Scholars Network<sup>3</sup> to foster interest in and support for SoTL work there. As for the balancing act our participants in Banff mentioned, that remains to be levelled out, with recent research indicating our SoTL professional identities are best conceptualized as liminal (i.e., in between spaces) (Simmons et al., 2013).

As we returned to this reflective piece after an eight-year hiatus, we quickly discovered that SoTL’s “big tent” metaphor and discussions of it persist (Chick, 2014; McKinney, 2014; Simmons & Marquis, 2017; Ostrowski, 2018). In her brief piece in *The SoTL Advocate*, for example, McKinney (2014) acknowledges the big

<sup>3</sup> For more information on the SoTL Scholars Network, see <https://mi.mcmaster.ca/sotl-scholars-network/>

tent problem inherent in appealing to the most people—the problem, that is, of either standing for nothing or for everything. Nevertheless, she still endorses the image as “wonderful,” with the following qualifier: “We need a big SoTL tent but we need one whose span of fabric is not stretched so far that it collapses. We need a tent with flaps that open and close freely but still offer some differentiation or protection from the outside weather” (para. 4). McKinney’s focus on fabric and flaps underscores a question that is (still?) not much asked or answered in SoTL. While Nancy Chick (2014) has contended that the big tent has no walls (p. 1), we remain puzzled: What exactly is the architecture of this big tent? Is it an open-air canopy, as Chick implies? McKinney’s camping tent? Or does it remain, as our participants suggested in 2013, a version of the Big Top?

But something—perhaps something uncanny—redirected our thinking. We began to wonder why we hadn’t ourselves more closely examined the underside of the circus, that side typifying a space and place to run to—away from “civilized” society—to work and live on the margins, so to speak, with non-normative others. Batson et al. (2018) note that “the queer—always already the exceptional, the odd, the outsider, the outcast—lies at the heart of circus practices and meaning” (p. 164). Those writing about SoTL often reference the field’s outsider status, the sense of it not entirely belonging, its oddity—as if there was something not quite right about a field for which the frame of conventional educational research does not quite fit. And yet, although such concerns are often the focus of queer theory, the queer is not a presence in SoTL research. To illustrate this, a quick ERIC search linking “scholarship of teaching and learning” and “queer” yielded exactly zero hits. Even the arguably more general search of the terms “scholarship of teaching and learning” and “sexuality” elicited no results.<sup>4</sup> Why had we, as practitioners of a postmodern form of SoTL, not noticed the queer aspects of the big tent?

We turn to Rebecca Bennett et al. (2016) whose work gets close to remedying that absence. Positioning themselves in their Australian context as Academic Language and Learning (ALL) educators and SoTL practitioners, they suggest the “in-between nature of ALL and, thus, SoTL work, situated as it is outside of the dominant institutional paradigm, leads to an unusual and, as yet, un-named academic identity” (p. 219). Turning to “monstrous theory,” which invites them to evoke the fluid third spaces where those who don’t fit neat categories exist, Bennett et al. adopt the metaphor of the chimaera, a monster of Greek mythology that is part lion, part goat, and part eagle. As they explain, the multi-headed chimaera captures the multiple demands they felt in their multiple identities as “a generalist teacher of academic literacies, a disciplinary researcher (and possibly disciplinary teacher) and a SoTL researcher (based on the methodological frameworks that are familiar to educational research)” (p. 219). The chimaera served two other purposes. First, it offered them a way to convey both the similarities of their respective narratives as well as the differences of writing styles and genres that frequently arise in SoTL

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<sup>4</sup> A different search revealed one scholar had found the notion of “failure” as theorized by Jack Halberstam (2012) useful although that concept’s roots in queer theory appear to be elided.

collaborations (p. 222). Second, writing as chimaeras meant that they need “not present the heads as simple, mutually exclusive identity markers; rather, identity was formed through clashes and negotiations between the heads” (p. 223). These negotiations and the resulting work gave this group “hope for academic staff who slip between the usual disciplinary paradigms” (p. 226). The chimaera identity helped them find community, connection, and a shared sense of possibilities.

Nevertheless, while Bennett et al. (2016) indicate their work “challenges and remakes what it is to be ‘normal’ university staff” (p. 226), they seem hesitant to embrace the queer possibilities of the chimaera to become “normal” university staff (albeit somewhat refashioned). While they write about their marginality, liminality, and at times abject position in the university and their disciplines, they situate their monstrous myth within the confines of postcolonial (Bhaba) and psychoanalytic (Kristeva; Winnicott) theories. They do not turn to queer theorists whose insights into such feelings and concerns could prove fruitful.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps this lack of engagement, as Rasmussen and Allen (2014) attest, is because queer concepts are primarily perceived as relevant to gender and sexuality studies only.

We want to suggest that Bennett et al.’s (2016) article is symptomatic of the larger SoTL “big tent” project; the reticence to explore their work’s queer possibilities is rooted in SoTL’s normalizing impulses. The kind of circus SoTL’s big tent metaphor elicited in our audience is equivalent, we venture, to Cirque du Soleil, whose theatrical performances epitomize a “family-friendly” Las Vegas and whose Big Top shows—dispensing with the unsavoury elements of circus and domesticating even the disruptive clown—attract respectable middle-class spectators. SoTL, too, has worked to become a respected (and respectable) “academic-friendly” enterprise. And the rewards are evident: clearer academic career paths, esteemed SoTL journals in which to publish peer-reviewed findings, Canadian Research Chairs, and institutional grants to support SoTL research. In short, the desire to be normal university staff makes it even less likely that SoTL researchers will pursue a queer lens through which to view their teaching and learning when queer theory itself is viewed as peripheral to education.

There are all kinds of practical reasons for SoTL having arrived here. After all, it is not as if it could pitch its big tent outside the academy or run away from it altogether. However, rather than take up the radical, liberatory, and relational possibilities of queerness—its resistance to state-sanctioned definitions of identities, desires, and communities—SoTL appears to have adopted the strategies the LGBT community deployed to argue for queer civil rights in the 1990s. Lisa Duggan (1992) labelled these various strategies the “new homonormativity,” which focused on accentuating how gays and lesbians and many heterosexuals want the same things: to have a family, own a home, and enjoy a place at the (heterosexual) family table. This new homonormativity relegated thorny political issues such as sexuality to the private domain to foster the sense of LGBT people as respectable

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<sup>5</sup> To name but two examples, Halberstam (2011) and Pinar (2013).



folk just like heterosexuals. The SoTL big tent works in a similar way, emphasizing SoTL's unifying goals—its allegiance to public (whose public?) good, and to better teaching and learning—ignoring or at least marginalizing queer questions about the entanglements of education with bodies and their desires.

Had we acknowledged the underside of the big tent—its queerness—might SoTL have been quicker to discern what we could call the underside of education—that is, its assimilatory imperatives? Or as Deborah Britzman (1998) declares, its inherent violence? Her admonition reverberates here as we settlers reckon with the Indian Residential School system's role in erasing Indigenous knowledges, languages, and identities: in short, its role in committing cultural genocide.

Chng and Looker (2013) address SoTL discourse from another of its margins. They do not specify what kind of tent SoTL scholars are practising in or under, but they do detail the big tent's design flaws. They remind us that SoTL's "big tent" is of Western construction and is neither as big nor inclusive as North American scholars might think. While the tent is nomadic, it is so to a limited extent. Inside are those from the Global North; on the outside are those from Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia.<sup>6</sup> Some of us get to cross the threshold, our entry to the tent conferred, our accents heard, simply because of sameness—of rank, or discipline, or institutional affiliation, or place of origin, or connections. Others of us experience the exercise of sovereignty over the big tent. We may be strangers: contract employees or employees working at a community college or in academic development, from outside the inner circle, less plugged-in. Hierarchies emerge. Some of us belong; some of us do not. The centre wants to hold.

In assessing SoTL through a postcolonial lens, Chng and Looker (2013) reveal the field's blindness to its social formation. The SoTL tent is of white construction, and the ground upon which the tent is pitched, in our part of the world, at any rate, if not uncaded, is occupied. With the latter term, we deliberately highlight SoTL's collusion in white settler colonialism.<sup>7</sup>

What kind of decentred space, we ask, could SoTL create that would *not* rely on exclusion of others' belonging and that we could all, if that is even possible, be

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<sup>6</sup> As its strategic plan indicates, ISSOTL's board, two of its 17 directors representing Asia Pacific, recognizes that the bulk of its members are from North America and Europe and that significant outreach is required to broaden ISSOTL's base. SoTL is now in the south, and in the journal's inaugural issue, Brenda Leibowitz addresses SoTL and the north/south binary, among other things. (This is not the place to rehearse the metaphoric associations that have regrettably attached themselves to the north as the "centre" and the south as the "periphery").

<sup>7</sup> Without effacing the varied mechanisms of settler colonialism globally, we have tried—with assistance from a long line of thinkers—to arrive at a definition of settler colonialism. We understand it as a continuous political, social, cultural, economic formation, premised on white supremacy, centrally focused on the elimination of Indigenous peoples from their lands and resources (see Battiste, 2011; Barker, 2009; Kauanui, 2016; Morgensen, 2011; Simpson, 2011; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Vowel, 2020; Wolfe, 2006; Woolford & Benvenuto, 2015). In Treaty 6, 7, 8 territories, upon which Alberta sits, commercial penetration and resource extraction—along with forced assimilation through the Indian Residential Schools, and the concomitant intergenerational trauma inflicted upon and suffered by First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples because of this and other racist policies—are specific features of this region's colonial structures.

at home in? The “commons”—yet another attempt at a metaphor to represent SoTL—with its privileging of similarity and unity is, according to Chng and Looker (2013), not suitable. In its place, they offer SoTL an alternative assemblage, one described by Young in 1990: “a being together of strangers in openness to group differences” (as cited in Chng & Looker, 2013, p. 141). Here, in our view, is an effort to conceptualize a meaningful, ethical hospitality: a communion that acknowledges and is revived by the differential of difference as opposed to its flattening or erasure.

Nancy Chick’s (2013) article “Difference, Power, and Privilege: The Value of Humanities SoTL” caught our attention because of its introduction of politics into the “neutral” discourse of SoTL—one of the very things we ourselves were in the process of working through.<sup>8</sup> Creating what we visualized as a spectrum of SoTL activities, Chick adopts Peter McLaren’s model of multiculturalism and organizes SoTL approaches into the following groupings: conservative, liberal, left-liberal, and critical. She also reinforces and encourages another metaphor, first promoted by Huber and Morreale (2002), which represents SoTL as “a borderland” in which scholars from different disciplinary cultures come to “trade their wares” (pp. 2–3). Chick is provoked by the idea of the borderlands and links Huber and Morreale’s use of this term to another metaphor, the borderlands at the heart of Gloria Anzaldúa’s influential work, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*.

We attest that Chick’s return to Anzaldúa via Huber and Morreale to inform SoTL is crucial. Anzaldúa is making an intricate case for something that is often elided in SoTL discourses—the complexities of identities. From a racialized and gendered social location—Chicana, lesbian, feminist, mestiza—Anzaldúa writes through those complexities, and in so doing, emphasizes the ethical importance of making distinctions and valuing specificities, the very things Chng and Looker are asking SoTL to do. The SoTL frame in 2013 typically structured and viewed the teacher/student body as unmarked, singular, and unified. With Chick’s addition of the category of “critical” to the SoTL spectrum, she at least began the work of attending to the teacher’s subject position. And the proliferation of other undifferentiated agents—academic developers, directors of institutes—under the seemingly benign largesse of the SoTL tent has, we venture, since abated.

From our re-encounter with Anzaldúa, we discovered much to address some of our concerns about SoTL’s formation. The variety of accents in which Anzaldúa speaks and the diverse modes of expression she employs demonstrate a spectrum of ways of knowing that exceeds Western epistemologies. Using Spanish when English has reached its limits, shifting among narrative, essay, argument, autohistoria, and poetry, Anzaldúa’s multilingual, richly textured style embodies the very psychic hybridity she advocates and writes from, for Anzaldúa undoes the construct of a single tongue, genre, or border. A variety of SoTL publications demonstrate in their styles and structures an awareness of such multiplicity and its

<sup>8</sup> To specify, our “Notes towards a Radical SoTL” presentation in Hamilton, Ontario, in 2012 was met with this trenchant comment from a colleague: “Never mind radical, we [in the SoTL field] haven’t even gotten to critical yet.”

political effects.<sup>9</sup>

Rather than rendering Anzaldúa divided, these mingled borders are part of her hybrid identity, an identity that in her instance she advocated for Chicanas, an identity achieved precisely by their being *held together by differences*. Note how Young's descriptor of SoTL—as quoted by Chng and Looker—echoes this concept. Likewise, the chimaera with “her multiheadedness, her hybridity and disturbing visibility/invisibility” provides Bennett et al. (2016) a formation that allows for their different (and differently shared) identities (p. 220). Notwithstanding the enormous pedagogical impact of Anzaldúa and her borderlands consciousness metaphor, we are not proposing its adoption for SoTL.<sup>10</sup> In fact, our questioning of SoTL's search for a binding metaphor leads us in 2021 to suggest that the quest be abandoned altogether if we want to move towards a decolonizing form of SoTL, at least as we see it from the northern part of Turtle Island/North America.

In their seminal article, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012) also argue against metaphor; more precisely, they declare that “decolonization is not a metaphor” (p. 1). If decolonization is not a metaphor, it cannot be substituted for, subsumed by, or associated with, say, a tent to gather under, or a bandwagon to jump on. It is a material process. As settler states and our educational institutions finally begin to reckon with the long-known fact of our complicity in upholding and benefiting from colonial structures—as we write, yet another mass grave of Indigenous children has been unearthed on the grounds of a residential school—we, settler scholars and those in the SoTL field alike, should be wary of largely symbolic and shallow responses to the urgent calls to Indigenize and decolonize our scholarly and teacherly selves and our institutions.

For Tuck and Yang (2012), decolonization is and only is about repatriation. However, for the many of us implicated in settler colonialism, tenured to its institutions of higher learning, who do not expect exoneration, who are nevertheless committed to the recovery of respectful relations between ourselves and Indigenous peoples, perhaps a way forward, however modest, is to continue to think deeply about what Marie Battiste (2005) calls “cognitive imperialism”—ours, our students', our institutions' (slide 17). “We have all,” she writes, “been marinated in Eurocentrism” (slide 16).

Thinking deeply—and reckoning with our complicity in settler nation-building is only one aspect of that—is what SoTL insists upon: a critical reflexivity about and a process of engagement with our theories and practices in the contexts in which we find ourselves. The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning is about change, not just for change's sake, but for a mindful, studied purpose. Collaboration is at its core and not just with those near us. Cross-disciplinary, inter-epistemic work and the breadth and depth it asks of us positions us well as we confront the

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<sup>9</sup> For instance, see Attas et al. (2021).

<sup>10</sup> Anzaldúa's work is alive, controversial, and compelling, studied in elementary, middle, and high schools as well as in colleges and universities throughout the US and in post-secondary schools in some regions of Mexico.



colonial present and disrupt the “violence of innocence” (Britzman, 1998) that inheres in our pedagogical and curricular practices. We have the resources and the sources. Consider, for instance, SoTL’s contribution of faculty learning communities (FLCs) to the academy. Note specifically the careful, collaborative work that emerged from an FLC on Indigenizing the academy (see Yeo et al. 2019; Yeo, n.d.).<sup>11</sup> We have among us Indigenous and non-Indigenous faculty and educators who have long been committed to decolonizing pedagogies; let us read, think through, and reference their work.<sup>12</sup> And once begun, may we continue the process of reflecting on, reconsidering, and reconfiguring our teaching and scholarly practices in their light.

As Zinga and Styres (2011) acknowledge, engaging in disruptive pedagogies, whether they be feminist, critical, anti-oppressive, anti-colonial, or decolonizing, will most certainly result in resistances from those differentiated student bodies in a diversity of classroom spaces. SoTL, we attest, has a crucial role to play in helping us pinpoint those resistances and thereby creating strategies to counter them. A focus on Pitt and Britzman’s (2003) elaboration of the concept of “difficult knowledge”—“the representation of social trauma and the individuals’ encounter with [it] in pedagogy”—could assist SoTL in this role (p. 755). Such a focus might allow us to identify, if not quantify, some of “the affective and epistemological challenges in teaching and learning about/from social and historical traumas” (Zembylas, 2014, p. 391), and therein shape our ongoing pedagogical and personal processes of engagement.

Our joint encounter with difficult knowledge emerged through a SoTL study that enabled us to substantiate what was an intuition: that most student viewers in our team-taught film class (in Canada) were pushing problematic issues—in particular, representations of racialized conflicts—across the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel and labelling them “American” (Easton & Hewson, 2013). What difficult knowledge did films such as Paul Haggis’s *Crash*, D. W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation*, and Courtney Hunt’s *Frozen River* raise for students that made them disavow racism in Canada and displace it south of the border? To answer this question, we undertook further SoTL studies and determined that a good number of students from a variety of social, political, and sexual locations were under the spell of a neoliberal, “everything-is-beautiful,” difference-erasing Canadian multiculturalism. From this perspective, we better understood how the films’ representations of anti-Black, anti-Asian, and anti-Indigenous racism provoked knowledge that for some students, according to Roger Simon, (2011), “was disturbingly foreign or inconceivable to [them], bringing [them] up against the limits of what [they were] willing and capable of understanding” (p. 433). Data gathered in further film classes led us to understand

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<sup>11</sup> Lee participated in a Faculty Learning Community focused on Indigenization. His participation led, eventually, to work on the “Disrupting Interview,” a repurposing of the interview technique used in *Decoding the Disciplines* (see Easton et al., 2019). This interview focuses on creating an ethical space where Indigenous and settler epistemologies come into view for critical interrogation.

<sup>12</sup> SoTL practitioners in South Africa, Aotearoa, and Australia, while not to homogenize our specific settler colonialist locations, have much to offer those of us working on decolonizing initiatives in Canada. See, for one, Manathunga’s (2018) work on decolonizing the curriculum.

specific students' deployment of what we came to call "The Canadian Shield"—a version of Canadian exceptionalism that functioned to deflect against anything as "difficult" as acknowledging this country's racist colonial structures. From there, we reshaped our teaching practices to see if this Canadian Shield appeared in other classes—in Easton's instance, an undergraduate writing course in visual culture with a unit on nationalist superheroes—and if so, how we could dismantle it (Easton & Hewson, 2021). What these findings revealed to us was that students *can* navigate the difficult knowledge that Canada's racism and colonialism are not in the past. And while we hesitate to push this outcome too far, given our small sample, a majority took the ethical leaps required to re-imagine a nation for their created superhero/ine that was *not* premised on the disavowal of Black racism or the elimination of Indigenous people.

As you have probably guessed, we would like to send the big tent packing once and for all. It has fulfilled its function in what was an emergent field, designed then to evoke a convivial coming together of practitioners and our diverse theories and methods, connected by our common interests in improving our teaching and student learning. In fact, participating in SoTL conferences, with intellectual attentions turned to scholarly teachers, students, and distinct engagements with the hard work of the microprocesses of classrooms, courses, and sometimes programs, remains a mostly celebratory affair. The desire to cooperate, collaborate, and advocate on behalf of SoTL is and continues to be a significant element of its atmosphere (see Ostrowski, 2018).

In our Canadian context, we believe these impulses can productively be brought to bear on the perilous but necessary work not only of teaching but of learning, for our settler selves, the "difficult knowledge" of the destruction that colonialism wreaks on diverse and complex First Nations. This is not to encourage the enlistment of Indigenous faculty and administrators, already overburdened by the unrealistic demands placed on them institutionally, as our educators. Nor is it to suggest that SoTL's co-operative, collaborative energies continue unchecked. In our enthusiasms to Indigenize and decolonize, we would do well to keep top of mind the mantra used by minoritarian groups—"nothing about us without us"—so that our research enterprises do not reinstate extractive practices and the outcomes of those enterprises are founded on active, equitable involvement and knowledge sharing.<sup>13</sup>

We attest a decolonizing SoTL will necessarily be connected to the queer—if only because "both colonial control and Native resistance were shaped by struggle over gender and sexuality, in the establishment on the colonial frontier of modern methods for the colonial education of desire" (Morgensen, 2010, p. 113). The Indian Residential Schools played a devastating role in erasing Indigenous

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<sup>13</sup> We consider Kauteri Behari-Leak's (2020) brilliantly theorized and remarkably comprehensive article required reading. Illustrative of a decolonizing practice in action is Robin Attas's (2019) thoughtful work on decolonizing pedagogies in a music course. Easton et al.'s (2019) article on uncovering complicit knowledge in the decoding interview is an excellent example of collaborative decolonizing work.

conceptions of sexual subjects while imposing and enforcing Eurocentric models of gender sexuality (Easton & Gannon, 2019). Work by Indigiqueer theorists can guide SoTL as it undergoes its decolonizing processes.<sup>14</sup>

With the big tent sent packing, with what is SoTL left? Without the metaphor of a big tent to contain its many differences, what remains is an array of disciplines, methodologies, and epistemologies that sit alongside each other. Do they require cover? We think not. We ask SoTL to move beyond metaphor, which supplants and substitutes, and acknowledge our diverse approaches, questions, and findings as adjacent, contiguous, and relational. As we undertake what settler-activist Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox (2014) calls “the messy process” of decolonization, this conception of SoTL would be a good place from which to come to grips with the difficult knowledge of the damage education has done, but with the hope of the good it may yet do.

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<sup>14</sup> Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Joshua Whitehead, and Billy-Ray Belcourt are Indigenous writers, theorists, and thinkers we are learning from, the complexities of whose works are uniquely theirs, but who embody the psychic hybridity, the polyvocal styles, and textural, conceptual richness of Anzaldúa’s work.

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