

The centrality of communally-constituted conception of selfhood for interdisciplinary scholarship and practice: A Canadian child welfare example

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Introduction

For decades, advocates and critical scholars concerned with the well-being of children and families have called on academia and social services practitioners to engage in interdisciplinary collaborations to improve and generate change in social institutional practices. In the Canadian context, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report (2015), stands out as a recent formal document that urges researchers and stakeholders from multiple disciplines to work together toward decolonization and mitigation of the grievous legacy of the Residential School system and Sixties Scoop—government programs that ran from 1876 to 1996 and forcibly removed over 170,000 Indigenous children from their families, either for “education” or adoption into white families, where children experienced physical, emotional, and sexual abuse and profound disconnection from their families, communities, culture, and Indigenous identity. The historical and intergenerational trauma associated with these programs is largely expressed in child welfare, justice, education, welfare, and healthcare systems, which over represent Indigenous peoples. Although there is acknowledgement that interdisciplinary partnerships are necessary to address the wide impact of colonization and assimilation, initiatives remain timid and localized. This paper submits that wide interdisciplinary scholarship and practice hinge on the replacement of Western mainstream, so-called individualistic, theoretical commitments of selfhood with situated communally constituted understanding of selves the benefits

of this Communal Self, based on the scholarship of socio-cultural and hermeneutic theorists (Cushman, 1995; Martin & McLellan, 2013; Rose, 1998; Sugarman, 2013) and consistent with Indigenous Self-in-Relation views of selfhood (Hart, 2009), are made evident by a Canadian child protection intervention, wherein communal perspectives of selfhood broadened the lens of analysis and intervention to encompass families and communities; successfully reunified families; created a space where interdisciplinary epistemological and methodological tools and perspectives could exist in harmony and benefit from one another; and safeguarded the well-being of individuals, families, and communities.

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