**////Title: The Importance of Compassion and Compromise in Healthy Societies**

**////Standfirst**

In a recent paper, Professor John P Miller discusses the importance of mutual accommodation and compassion in preserving democracies and ensuring we can tackle some of our biggest global problems. He highlights the way in which Canada has become a more tolerant, cooperative, inclusive society by emphasising the role of compromise and compassion. Using examples from education, he shows how we can nurture these qualities in children and young adults.

**////Main text:**

What are the key components of healthy societies? How can we ensure that we are equipped to address the challenges of today’s world? Professor John P Miller argues that compassion and mutual accommodation are fundamental, yet underappreciated, tools for preserving democracies and ensuring that nations can respond to our toughest global problems.

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In his recent paper, Professor Miller begins by citing William MacDonald’s work, which argues that society rests on four central pillars: science and technology, freedom, compassion, and mutual accommodation. Here, mutual accommodation encompasses compromise, cooperation, and inclusion. Simply put, it is an approach that allows each party to achieve their goals by understanding and making room for others.

Professor Miller states that, in the Western World, freedom, science, and technology have dominated, while the importance of compassion and mutual accommodation is undervalued. While this has enabled impressive post-Renaissance cultural achievements, it may have also led to the populism we see today. For nations to thrive and to address our biggest challenges, such as climate change and inequality, we need to champion the role of compassion and mutual accommodation.

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To highlight this point, Professor Miller cites Canada as an exemplar of compassion and mutual accommodation. He discusses the implications this has for Canadian society and politics.

In contrast to the United States, Canada has a history of pragmatism and compromise in lieu of nationalism and ethnic, religious and class division. For example, mutual accommodation was crucial in working with Quebec to keep it part of Canada and mitigate the conflicts associated with separatism. While Professor Miller acknowledges more needs to be done to address Canada’s historical treatment of Indigenous people, it also has a relatively stable and productive political environment.

Unlike in the USA, supreme court appointments are rarely politicised, and federal and provincial governments are able to successfully work together to tackle national problems, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Canada’s popular culture also has a history of celebrating diversity. Today, Toronto, a large city with a diverse population, exhibits little ethnic tension and has a relatively low crime rate. Professor Miller and MacDonald also argue that Canada is one of the only Western nations without severely problematic immigration policies.

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Professor Miller argues that an important aspect of fostering mutual accommodation and compassion is to incorporate it into schooling and education. To explore this, he discusses a range of alternative pedagogical movements from around the world.

One of these movements is Holistic Education, which seeks to move beyond simply developing children’s intellectual capacities and preparing them for employment, aspiring to ‘reach the head, hands and heart of the student’. This approach avoids breaking education down into discrete subjects and courses, instead highlighting the world’s connectedness and interdependence. It often harnesses cooperative learning, in which students are encouraged to work together to learn and develop ideas.

Alternative pedagogical tools, which draw on Indigenous practices, are also utilised, such as Circles of Learning and Restorative Justice. These tools facilitate community building and more effectively and sustainably address negative issues and behaviours in classroom environments. Ultimately, Holistic Education aims to nurture a sense of purpose, empathy and physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing which is key to mutual accommodation and compassion.

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Professor Miller also discusses specific schools which aim to teach children compassion and cooperation. One of these, Ojiya School in Japan, encourages children to recognise and develop their connection to nature. Here, the children help to look after farmyard animals, conduct nature surveys, plant trees, and create poetry about their natural forest environment. Showing kindness and understanding to animals is thought to help them to develop a strong sense of empathy and compassion. This led to a School Forest Movement in Korea, inspired by Ojiya’s principal. There are now 762 School Forests in Korea.

Similar trends have been seen in North America, where there have been pushes to develop school gardens and to teach children to grow their own food in urban environments. Professor Miller also cites examples of adult education that emphasise compassion, connection, and empathy.

At Claremont Graduate School in California, Lourdes Arguelles led a course in Service Learning. Her curriculum required students to visit grassroots, marginalised communities and to integrate themselves into the community. By sharing meals, taking part in casual conversation, and helping with manual labour, the students fostered informal, non-deliberate ways of knowing, which she terms ‘slow mind’. This allowed her students to build reciprocal bonds with their host community and encouraged them to see the community as partner rather than subject. It may also nurture compassion by highlighting that we are interconnected to others and their suffering.

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Finally, Professor Miller discusses two examples of schools in Canada that engage with alternative pedagogical methods to foster compassion and mutual accommodation. The first of these is The Equinox Holistic Alternative School, which Professor Miller has been involved with since he helped to establish an advisory board for parents and teachers who wanted to open the institution. At the school, meditation and mindfulness activities are practiced and the curriculum is partly based on Professor Miller’s book, *The Holistic Curriculum*. Upon interviewing teachers, Professor Miller found that the school fostered a strong sense of community, mutual care, empathy, and compassion

The second institution, The School at Ronald McDonald House Charities Toronto, is a school for children with serious illnesses that they are able to attend whilst receiving treatment at nearby hospitals. This school also facilitates mindfulness practices, learning circles and community building activities and methods. From student accounts reported in a front-page article for the *Globe and Mail*, the school makes a huge impact on the lives of its children by providing a safe, engaging, and supportive environment for ill children, their siblings, and their parents.

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So, what are the key components of healthy societies? Professor Miller warns of the dangers of overemphasising freedom, science, and technology to the detriment of compassion and mutual accommodation. The pedagogical practices and schools he discusses are great examples of how we can nurture these values in educational settings. For him, it is no coincidence that these schools were founded in Canada, a country in which mutual accommodation and compassion are deeply culturally embedded.

This SciPod is a summary of the paper ‘Educating for compassion and mutual accommodation’, in *International Journal of Educational Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2021.101847>

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