

## Foundations of peace and harmony in families and communities: Insights from a TRUST, LEARN and CARE (TLC) framework

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### Abstract

*In a world riven by conflict, violent extremism and sectarian animosities, peace is in short supply. Promoting peace is, however, central to the great traditions of faith, including Islam. Contrary to their core precepts, fear, hatred and envy drive an evil mis-construal of the core tenets of these religions; the antithesis of their fundamental commitment to the promotion of tolerance, care and compassion. Contemporary events defy comprehension and highlight the urgent need to find ways, especially within families and the communities in which they live, to counter radicalisation. Families, after all, ought to be key contexts for promoting dialogue, understanding and peace, consistent with the precepts of the Abrahamic religious traditions, and the Qur'anic focus on families that sees them as the forum for fulfilling the basic Islamic foundations of peace. Strong families build capable, caring and compassionate communities. The present paper briefly outlines a three-element model that might be usefully applied to better understand the processes of development of prosocial attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that are so vital for peaceful, constructive and compassionate co-existence; attributes that are so vitally needed in an increasingly multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-faith world. The elements are encapsulated in three conceptually linked acronyms: TRUST; LEARN; CARE or TLC. The trust, learn, care (TLC) framework has been developed from key principles in the new discipline of family studies. Global changes present many challenges for families and communities. This article concludes that a peaceful and harmonious future will be built on the foundations for dialogue and understanding that start in families and communities. Trust and tolerance, learning and teaching, caring and compassion are at the heart of acceptance of diversity, growth of understanding and promotion of respect for cultures, religions and beliefs.*

**Keywords:** Trust, Learn, Care, Peace, Harmony, Family.

## A. Introduction

Islam and World Peace is such a timely theme for this edition of the Journal. In the words of the Holy Qur'an: "He made so many tribes and races and cultures among you so that you might recognize one another" (Al-Qur'an 49:13). Islam, in common with other great world religions, including the other Abrahamic faiths, holds peace at its heart<sup>1</sup>. That said, religions are all too often caricatured in ways that bear little resemblance to their key precepts. Fear often fuels bigoted, stereotypical distortions of religions. Islamophobia is endemic even in countries where Muslims have peacefully co-existed with other faiths for centuries. Similarly, persecution of Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs, or minorities such as the Uyghurs, Rohingya or Yazidis, among many others, has often been justified on religious grounds.

These quasi-religious justifications for persecution, however, bear little resemblance to the religions to which they are inappropriately attributed. Fundamentalism, bigotry, zealotry, extremism, radicalism, and dogmatism are distortions of religion that are the antithesis of piety, tolerance, reason and compassion<sup>2</sup>. These distortions reflect the human psychological propensities to stereotype and stigmatise. They can, however, be countered by inter-faith and inter-cultural dialogue, personal relationships, mutual respect and rational recognition of the prominence of our shared humanity and fundamental values.

Like other historical eras, we live in a world that is marked by stereotyping, stigmatisation and sectarianism. Populism, while by no means new, is again on the ascendance as political events in a number of countries show<sup>3</sup>. Global migration, social change and economic disruption intersect to breed a climate of fear of "the other", "the newcomer," "the minority", "the excluded". Together, these provide

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<sup>1</sup> Hilal, W., Raihanah, A., & Lee, C. (2015). An Islamic perspective in managing religious diversity. *Religions*, 6(2), 642-656.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Judis, J. B. (2016). Rethinking populism. *Dissent*, 63(4), 116-122.

fertile soil for the populist. They also fuel fundamentalism and radicalisation that can take the form of white supremacy and, in the case of the Abrahamic tradition, Christian, Islamic or Zionist fundamentalism, depending on the historical time and place.

In January of this year, I had the privilege of visiting Surabaya for the QS Subject Summit on Medicine - Advancing the Medical and Allied Health Sciences. It showcased some of the cutting-edge developments, across nations, in medicine and public health that are positively transforming the lives of so many. As such, it reflected the wonderful humanity, altruism and commitment of so many who work to provide care, compassion and comfort to improve the quality of the lives of others.

For all that was so affirming, however, I could not help but reflect on the events of three days in May 2018 in that same city, Surabaya. Three families perpetrated terrorist attacks, with the parents involving their children, many of whom died in the events that resulted from their parents' radicalism. Notably, it was the first time that Indonesian mothers had been suicide bombers.

As a family researcher, these events defied comprehension and highlighted the need for progressing ways to counter revenge-fuelled radicalisation, especially within families and the communities in which they live. Such behaviour reflects the darkest sides of humanity and our capacity to inflict needless pain upon each other. To reiterate, it stands in stark contrast to the foundations of piety, peace and respect that are common to the World's great religions.

The Christchurch mosque shootings at Friday Prayers on 15 March this year sent shockwaves around the Globe. The senseless killing of 51 people and injury of a further 49 was such an evil act of white supremacist inhumanity, hatred and insanity. As an Australian, I felt ashamed and profoundly saddened that one of my compatriots could perpetrate such a heinous crime against humanity.

Eight years earlier, the bombings and mass shootings in Norway, had similarly defied comprehension when 77 innocent young people and adults lost their lives in an irrational, hatred-fuelled series of attacks. Even more difficult to comprehend is the fact that these events inspired the Christchurch killer's senseless act of cowardice.

That the “alt-right”, white supremacists can embrace and celebrate such evil speaks to the deep flaws in our human make-up.

Likewise, the Easter Sunday attacks in Sri Lanka that claimed over 300 lives of innocent worshipers, left more than 500 injured and represented senseless acts of retaliation for what had happened in Christchurch. The history of revenge-fuelled radicalisation must be countered if we are to promote and achieve world peace.

Rising populism, prejudice and radicalisation are fuelled by the current impacts of global migration, social change and economic disruption. These are not new. Sadly, times of disruption have all too often fuelled extreme violent reactions throughout history. In what is now the United Kingdom, lengthy periods of suppression and violence against the Scots and Irish minorities were promulgated by the dominant Anglo-Saxons. In the US, the decades following the American Civil War were marked by several racially motivated massacres that have tended to be whitewashed from history. These included events in Colfax Louisiana in 1873; Wilmington, North Carolina, in 1898; East St Louis, Missouri; and Tulsa Oklahoma, in 1921<sup>4</sup>.

More recently, white nationalism drove the events that occurred during the ‘Unite the Right’ rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August 2017. And most recently, El Paso Texas continued this tragic trend; along with a recent attempted attack on a mosque on the eve of Eid al-Ahda, in Oslo, Norway. Both of these appear to have been inspired by the acts committed in Christchurch. Beyond the Anglophone countries, too many other nations continue to experience racially, religiously and/or ethnically driven violence.

The thesis of the present paper is that families and communities can play a vital role in promoting peace in children and young people.

Consistent with the overall theme of this special edition, *Islam and World Peace*, this paper explores ways in which families can provide the foundations for socializing their members, consistent with their core beliefs, values and attitudes, while building capacities

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<sup>4</sup> Gismondi, M. (Writer). (2019). America's Other Civil War [Radio]. In M. Gismondi & G. Kelly (Producer), *Ideas*. Canada: CBC.

and attributes that progress tolerance, understanding, reciprocity, compassion and empathy.

The English word 'familiarity' highlights the fact that so much that is familiar, for good and ill, is learned in the family<sup>5</sup>. The focus of this article is on the ways in which families shape and mould the attitudes, values and behaviours of their members and, most especially, their children. Along with teachers in schools, parents also play a great role in imparting ethical, moral and values' education to their children<sup>6</sup>.

The present paper briefly outlines a three-element model that might be usefully applied to better understand the processes of development of prosocial attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that are so vital for peaceful, constructive and compassionate co-existence; attributes that are so vitally needed in an increasingly multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-faith world. The elements are encapsulated in three conceptually linked acronyms: *TRUST*; *LEARN*; *CARE* or *TLC*.

The first acronym, *TRUST*, stands for *Tolerance*, *Respect*, *Understanding*, *Sensitivity*; and *Time*. The second, *LEARN*, encapsulates *Language*, *Education*, *Attitudes*, *Relationships*, and *Nurturing*. The third, *CARE*, comprises *Compassion*, *Action*, *Reconciliation* and *Empathy*. All have social, cognitive and affective dimensions.

## B. *TRUST*

Trust has been defined as “an expectation or belief that one can rely on another person’s actions *and* words and that the person has good intentions to carry out their promises”<sup>7</sup>. Situations erode trust when one party is, or feels, at risk or vulnerable to the actions of others.

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<sup>5</sup> Skynner, A. R., & Cleese, J. (1993). Families and how to survive them. In. Random House.

<sup>6</sup> Kaur, S. (2015). Moral values in education. *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science*, 20(3), 21-26.

<sup>7</sup> Bligh, M. C. (2017). Leadership and trust. In J. Marques & S. Dhiman (Eds.), *Leadership Today. Springer Texts in Business and Economics* (pp. 21-42). Springer, Cham.

In September last year, Antonio Guterres, in an address to the UN General Assembly, stated that “the world is suffering from a bad case of trust deficit disorder”. He went on to say, “Trust is at a breaking point. Trust in national institutions. Trust among states. Trust in rules-based global order. Within countries, people are losing faith in political establishments, polarization is on the rise, and populism on the march”<sup>8</sup>.

Loss of trust in the major institutions, including in politics and politicians, is occurring in many countries<sup>9</sup>. Bäck and Kestilä-Kekkonen<sup>10</sup> investigated the relationship between interpersonal trust and political trust, and Bäck, Söderland, Sipinen and Kestilä-Kekkonen<sup>11</sup> highlighted the impact of political alienation and mistrust on negative perceptions of migrants and migration.

Apart from the focus on political alienation, research on trust has also focused on the factors that influence the propensity to trust, and its relationships to perceptions of trustworthiness in relationships<sup>12</sup>, including those between employers and employees<sup>13</sup>. Power imbalances can affect the sense of trust and trustworthiness<sup>14</sup>. This is particularly relevant in circumstances where people feel marginalised, alienated or stigmatised. The level of trust “varies as a function of how much power individuals gain (or lose) over time”<sup>15</sup>. As such, power imbalances and dynamics drive levels of trust.

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<sup>8</sup> Guterres, A. (2018). Address to the General Assembly. *United Nations Secretary General*, 25.

<sup>9</sup> Below, B. (2018). *Is there still time to save our trust in government?* OECD

<sup>10</sup> Bäck, M., & Kestilä, E. (2009). Social capital and political trust in Finland: an individual-level assessment. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 32(2), 171-194.

<sup>11</sup> Bäck, M., Soderlund, P., Sipinen, J., & Kestila-Kekkonen, E. (2018). *Political alienation, generalized trust and anti-immigrant perceptions: A multi-level assessment*. Paper presented at the ECPR General Conference, Hamburg, Germany.

<sup>12</sup> Alarcon, G. M., Lyons, J. B., & Christensen, J. C. (2016). The effect of propensity to trust and familiarity on perceptions of trustworthiness over time. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 94, 309-315.

<sup>13</sup> Heyns, M., & Rothmann, S. (2018). Volitional trust, autonomy satisfaction, and engagement at work. *Psychological reports*, 121(1), 112-134.

<sup>14</sup> Brion, S., Mo, R., & Lount Jr, R. B. (2019). Dynamic influences of power on trust: Changes in power affect trust in others. *Journal of Trust Research*, 9(1), 6-27.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

Trust is in the eye of the beholder, as shown by a study of the development of trust in children<sup>16</sup>. Using a game format with 5- and 10-year olds, the authors explored the relationship between children's perception of the trustworthiness of faces and their trust behaviour. They showed that children based their sense of trust on their sophisticated social cognition of the trustworthiness of faces. This capability was shown to develop early, within the first five years of life. As such, this is likely to be driven by early experiences including those within their families. Adults are also likely to moderate the experiences that lead to the development of children's sense of trust, trustworthiness and untrustworthiness.

Trust while necessary, is not sufficient. Other dimensions underpin and drive attitudes and values especially related to the processes that drive the development of the prosocial attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that are so vital for peaceful, constructive and compassionate co-existence.

## Tolerance

While multi-cultural societies highlight peaceful co-existence and tolerance of cultural diversity, inter-cultural societies show a greater level of active interaction, with and for one another, across ethnic, cultural and religious groups<sup>17</sup>. As Campani<sup>18</sup> states: "Interculturality is indeed a perspective of action, of reciprocal exchange between cultures and groups for the enrichment of social experience and strengthening of democracy." Multi- and inter-cultural societies need to prioritise the development of attitudes, values and behaviours that promote peaceful coexistence, collaboration and tolerance of individual, community and cultural diversity.

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<sup>16</sup> Ewing, L., Caulfield, F., Read, A., & Rhodes, G. (2015). Appearance-based trust behaviour is reduced in children with autism spectrum disorder. *Autism*, 19(8), 1002-1009.

<sup>17</sup> Todorović, D. (2019). Tolerance, Multiculturalism and Interculturalism in the Balkans. *Facta Universitatis, Series: Philosophy, Sociology, Psychology and History*, 001-014.

<sup>18</sup> Campani, G. (2019). 7 Theory, language and socio-political perspectives. *Intercultural education: theories, policies, and practice*, 77.

Indonesia is an example of a nation with values and a philosophical foundation that strives to achieve intercultural tolerance and harmony. Founded on an explicit philosophical framework, the *Pancasila*, or “five principles”, the young nation proclaimed independence on 17 August 1945; struggled to overcome colonial shackles; and became the united Republic of Indonesia five years later, to the day of the proclamation. While the five principles have evolved, they ground the nation as *religiously inclusive, just and civilized, unified, democratically governed, and committed to social justice for all*. Given its ethnic, cultural and religious melange, melding the ethnic and linguistic diversity of its population has been a major accomplishment. Adoption of the national language, Bahasa Indonesia, has been one of the platforms for unity and cohesion.

Similarly, a striving for tolerance and constructive collaboration also is part of the national character. Tolerance, for example, is one of 18 national character values promoted by the Indonesian Ministry of National Education<sup>19</sup>. It is framed as follows: “Tolerance [involves] attitudes and behaviors that reflect respect for different religions, schools of belief, ethnicity, customs, language, race, ethnicity, opinions, and other things that are different from each other consciously and openly, and can live peacefully amid the diversity”<sup>20</sup>.

Given that migration is one of the forces that shapes nations, many other countries seek to embrace inter-cultural tolerance, harmony and collaboration. My own country, Australia, prides itself on being a multicultural nation that aspires to achieve interculturality. That said, while essentially harmonious, Australia has also experienced times of tension between ethnic, cultural and religious groups. Each wave of immigration has further woven the multicultural tapestry of the nation, though it has also brought challenges to tolerance and harmony as new arrivals are, at least for a time, seen as “foreigners”, the “others”, and “the excluded”.

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<sup>19</sup> Wijayanti, K. D., & Sulaksono, D. (2019). *Character Building for Early Childhood Learners Through the Shadow Puppet-Based Javanese Language Manners*. Paper presented at the Third International Conference of Arts, Language and Culture (ICALC 2018).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.



## Respect

There is a complex interplay between life experiences, attitudes and behaviours. These contribute to children's propensity to respect others and are typically learned first in families.

In contrast to respect, human aggressive behaviour is most evident early in life and at its peak during the toddler years. By 17 months of age, the large majority of children are physically aggressive toward siblings, peers, and adults<sup>21</sup>. Canadian longitudinal research shows that those children at the highest risk of having difficulty learning to regulate their aggressive behavior in early childhood have mothers who engaged in antisocial behaviour in their own school years; became pregnant during adolescence; smoked during pregnancy; and were growing up in families with low income and where serious parental relational problems were evident<sup>22</sup>. The risk of physical and mental health problems both for the children and their victims is elevated when children experience and also show aggressive behaviour in childhood. Aggressive children are also at higher risk of substance abuse, accidental injuries, criminality, mental ill-health, family violence, and child abuse and neglect. But risk is not destiny<sup>23,24</sup>. Tremblay et al<sup>25</sup>. showed that children are typically socialized out of violence. Again, family circumstances have a major impact on children's aggression.

Those who have been, or perceive themselves to be, victims may be at higher risk of becoming victimisers or offenders later in

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<sup>21</sup> Tremblay, R. E. (2004). The development of human physical aggression: How important is early childhood? In L. Leavitt & D. Hall (Eds.), *Social and moral development: Emerging evidence on the toddler years* (pp. 221 - 238). New Brunswick, NJ: Johnson and Johnson Pediatric Institute.

<sup>22</sup> Tremblay, R. E., & Nagin, D. S. (2005). The developmental origins of physical aggression in humans. In RE Hartup, WW Hartup, & J. Archer (Eds.), *Developmental origins of aggression* (pp. 83 - 106). New York: The Guilford Press.

<sup>23</sup> Hayes, A. (2007). Why early in life is not enough: Timing and sustainability in prevention and early intervention. In A. France & R. Homel (Eds.), *Pathways and crime prevention: Theory, policy and practice* (pp. 202 - 225). Uffculme, UK: Willan Publishing.

<sup>24</sup> Hayes, A., & Jean, C. (2012). *A Two-edged sword? The place of the media in a child friendly society*. Macquarie University, Institute of Early Childhood

<sup>25</sup> Tremblay, R. E., Nagin, D. S., Séguin, J. R., Zoccolillo, M., Zelazo, P. D., Boivin, M., . . . Japel, C. (2004). Physical aggression during early childhood: Trajectories and predictors. *Pediatrics*, 114(1), e43-e50.

life<sup>26,27</sup>. The cycle of violence can, as a result, cross generations. It may lead to antisocial attitudes and sadistic behaviour patterns that represent a loss of fundamental respect for others. For example, Jewkes, et al.<sup>28</sup>, in an extensive review of the literature, observed that: “Boys who are exposed to abuse in early childhood become prone to aggression, impulsivity, and an absence of empathy and remorse, and are more likely to perpetrate violence”<sup>29</sup>. Similarly, Mallory<sup>30</sup> reviewed the literature on the relationship between boys’ history of sexual assault in early life and their risk of going on to offend.

For some time, it has been observed that there are gender differences in attitudes and behaviour including of the acceptability of aggression and violent behaviour<sup>31</sup>. The prevalence of such behaviour varies across societies and reflects the values, roles and behaviours that a society attributes to men and women<sup>32</sup>. Power differentials may lead the dissociated, contradictory belief in perpetrators that they both instigated the victim's behaviour and that the victim had agency to avoid being victimised<sup>33</sup>. This dissociation among people asserting power is one factor that leads to victim blaming with its denial of responsibility<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Jewkes, R., Flood, M., & Lang, J. (2015). From work with men and boys to changes of social norms and reduction of inequities in gender relations: a conceptual shift in prevention of violence against women and girls. *The Lancet*, 385(9977), 1580-1589.

<sup>27</sup> Mallory, S. B. (2014). *Factors Associated with Peer Aggression and Peer Victimization Among Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders, Children with Other Disabilities, and Children Without a Disability [Doctoral dissertation]*. Columbia University.

<sup>28</sup> Jewkes, R., Flood, M., & Lang, J. (2015). From work with men and boys to changes of social norms and reduction of inequities in gender relations: a conceptual shift in prevention of violence against women and girls. *The Lancet*, 385(9977), 1580-1589.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Mallory, S. B. (2014). *Factors Associated with Peer Aggression and Peer Victimization Among Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders, Children with Other Disabilities, and Children Without a Disability [Doctoral dissertation]*. Columbia University.

<sup>31</sup> Jewkes, R., Flood, M., & Lang, J. (2015). From work with men and boys to changes of social norms and reduction of inequities in gender relations: a conceptual shift in prevention of violence against women and girls. *The Lancet*, 385(9977), 1580-1589.

<sup>32</sup> Connell, R. W. (2013). *Gender and power: Society, the person and sexual politics*: John Wiley & Sons.

<sup>33</sup> Bohns, V. K., & Newark, D. A. (2019). Power and perceived influence: I caused your behavior, but I'm not responsible for it. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 13(1), e12427.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

Respect and recognising responsibility for one's actions are central to recent Australian approaches to reduction of violence especially against women and children. The Australian approach to protecting children and reducing violence against women and their children are framed by the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*<sup>35</sup>; and the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*<sup>36</sup>, respectively. At the heart of both the Framework and the National Plan is prevention and early intervention to build respect and promote respectful and safe relationships.

Notwithstanding the prime importance of gender relationships, respect and respectful relationships also have a broader focus. For example, respect and understanding among members of ethnic and religious groups are essential underpinnings of inter-cultural societies.

## Understanding

Understanding others and, in turn, feeling understood by them are keys to respectful relationships, including those with people from other backgrounds and cultures. People strive to be understood and these are foundations of wellbeing and social harmony<sup>37</sup>. The feeling that one is understood helps build a sense of liking by others which, in turn, leads to positive relationships that are open, build trust, and create the climate of cooperativeness that is so important in inter-cultural relations<sup>38</sup>. To paraphrase Hilal, Raihanah, & Lee<sup>39</sup>, conflict between the followers of different religions and faiths is not the product of religions or cultures. Culture, religion, and the diversity of

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<sup>35</sup> Council of Australian Governments. (2009). *Protecting children is everyone's business: National framework for protecting Australia's children 2009-2020*. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra

<sup>36</sup> Council of Australian Governments. (2010). *National plan to reduce violence against women and their children 2010-2022*. Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra

<sup>37</sup> Reis, H. T., Lemay Jr, E. P., & Finkenauer, C. (2017). Toward understanding understanding: The importance of feeling understood in relationships. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 11(3), e12308.

<sup>38</sup> Livingstone, A. (2019). A multi-experiment, meta-analytic test of the effect of felt understanding in intergroup relations [Preprint]. doi:10.31234/osf.io/uhqnd

<sup>39</sup> Hilal, W., Raihanah, A., & Lee, C. (2015). An Islamic perspective in managing religious diversity. *Religions*, 6(2), 642-656.

humanity undergird better understanding between human beings, enabling us to better understand and respect one another<sup>40</sup>.

Throughout history, ethnic, cultural and religious diversity has been a reality and is increasingly visible across the globe. Media coverage of extremist violence can drive negative views that stereotype all members of an ethnic group, culture or faith. In the case of religious vilification in Western countries, those who do not have strong religious affiliations are often most vocal in criticising the beliefs of others<sup>41</sup>.

While there are universals in the ways people develop, cultural contexts shape our understandings, attitudes and values. Experience is also highly individual and leads to extensive variation among people<sup>42</sup>. To paraphrase Murray and Kluckhohn<sup>43</sup>, each human being is like all others; like some others; and like no other. This decades-old observation highlights our three states of being— as members of a species; of cultural, community and family groups; and as an inherently unique individual.

An Irish study investigated the ways in which children's understanding of their national identity and of other ethnic groups was influenced by the attitudes and beliefs of their parents and family members<sup>44</sup>. The self-report research involved 34 families including 76 children and 46 parents. Parental continuity and strength of national identity influenced children's attitudes to other national groups and their openness to exploring other cultures and the factors that define them<sup>45</sup>. As such, this illustrates the powerful influence that parents have on the development of children's openness to explore other

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Stringer, M. D. (2016). *Discourses on religious diversity: explorations in an urban ecology*. Routledge.

<sup>42</sup> Lomas, T. (2015). Positive cross-cultural psychology: Exploring similarity and difference in constructions and experiences of wellbeing. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 5(4).

<sup>43</sup> Murray, H. A., & Kluckhohn, C. (1948). Outline of a conception of personality. In C. Kluckhohn & H. A. Murray (Eds.), *Personality in nature, society, and culture*. Oxford, England: Alfred A. Knopf.

<sup>44</sup> Muldoon, O. T., O'Donnell, A. T., & Minescu, A. (2017). Parents' and children's understanding of their own and others' national identity: The importance of including the family in the national group. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 27(5), 347-357.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

ethnic, cultural, religious and national groups, which are the foundations of respect that foster the sensitivity required to establish and maintain intercultural relations.

### Sensitivity

Openness to the richness of other cultural, ethnic and religious groups requires sensitivity. And sensitivity has dimensions of human intelligence and cognition, including emotional cognition<sup>46</sup>. Emotional intelligence and cultural sensitivity are positive capacities that build social capital, cohesion and shared understanding.

In contrast, bigotry, contempt and vilification tend to blind people to the richness of other cultures and replaces it with simplifying stereotypes that diminish the diversity, achievements and fundamental humanity of other cultures. In the worst cases, these negative propensities denigrate and de-humanise those considered to be “others”.

Historical revisionism can lead to distorted views of the character, contributions and inherent worth of cultures and their peoples. Such myopia is evident in the lack of sensitivity that is often a legacy of colonisation. It leads to what Geisler<sup>47</sup> labels “cultural reductionism” which “hints at primitivism, backwards cultures, and racial inferiority”<sup>48</sup>. This has origins in the Roman legal principle of *res nullius*, “a thing without owner”. Across the centuries it morphed into *terra nullius*, “nobody’s land”<sup>49</sup>. With the colonisation of the New World, the principle of *terra nullius* was invoked by colonial powers in the Americas, throughout Africa and in Australia.

Since the colonisation of the continent, in 1788, Australian Aboriginal culture has been portrayed as primitive and the first nations of the land seen as backward and inferior. These perceptions are not only culturally reductionist, but also take on the character of self-fulfilling prophecies. As such, they are prime examples of

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<sup>46</sup> Root, S. (2019). *The Relationship Between Language, Emotional Intelligence, and Cultural Sensitivity [Honors Thesis]*. Dominican University of California.

<sup>47</sup> Geisler, C. (2012). New Terra Nullius Narratives and the Gentrification of Africa's "Empty Lands". *Journal of World-Systems Research*, 18(1), 15-29.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

historical revisionism. It is only recently that the extent of the revision of history, and the scale of its errors, have been powerfully illustrated.

A recent analysis of the historical and archaeological evidence exposed erroneous historical narratives. The richness of culture, economy and adaptive innovation of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders belied the belittling, reductionist, revisionist stereotypes. These are aptly documented in Bruce Pascoe's book, *Dark Emu*<sup>50</sup>. In terms of revisionism, it uses the observations of the colonists to reveal that they were actually aware of the first people's knowledge of the agricultural, economic and scientific insights into cultivation, aquaculture and land management, among other areas that evidenced their intelligence, adaptability and innovative abilities. However, these were whitewashed from the dominant historical perspectives, to be replaced by a narrative of cultural incompetence and racial inferiority.

Just as for other parts of the New World, the Australian continent was regarded by the British colonists as land belonging to no-one; or no-one of any worth. Given that the Australian Aboriginal inhabitants belong to the oldest continuously surviving culture on the planet, the colonial denial of the presence and ownership of the continent is a breathtaking example of cultural insensitivity, reductionism and de-humanisation.

But this is not simply a matter of history. The basic cognitive errors that lead to cultural insensitivity remain evident in the contemporary world. These fuel the stereotypes, bigotry and inaccurate historical narratives of the achievements of cultures across the globe. Like the colonial majority cultures discussed above, "in groups" perpetuate simplified, derogatory narratives that ignore the historical record of the "out groups", or those vilified as "the others". These narratives fuel humiliating, demeaning and belittling perspectives and prejudices, resulting in the further propagation of cultural insensitivity.

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<sup>50</sup> Pascoe, B. (2014). *Dark emu black seeds: Agriculture or accident?* Magabala Books.

## Time

Time is a key element of the development of trust, respect, understanding and sensitivity.

Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model emphasises the joint influence "of the characteristics of both the person and of the environment over the course of that person's life"<sup>51</sup>. This model of development has had a profound and longstanding influence on research and practice in a wide range of fields<sup>52</sup>.

For the present discussion, two additions to the model are relevant. The first is the concept of *ecological niches*. These are specific contexts that may be "especially favourable or unfavourable to the development of individuals with particular personal characteristics"<sup>53</sup>. The properties of any niche determine its developmental impacts. In terms of families and communities and their impacts on the development of children, the key consideration is to determine "where are people thriving and how can this be understood"<sup>54</sup>.

The second concept is the *chronosystem*. This highlights the importance of the dimension of time<sup>55</sup>. Change cannot occur without the passage of time and development is inherently bound by time. It takes time to get to know peoples as opposed to the tourist brochure caricatures of them, their countries, and cultures. The changes that result from familiarity, experience and learning are also time-bound.

## C. LEARN

Learning takes many forms and involves the ability to collect and use information from a wide variety of sources. It can be formal

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<sup>51</sup> Bronfenbrenner, U. (2005). *Making human beings human: Bioecological perspectives on human development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

<sup>52</sup> Grace, R., Hayes, A., & Wise, S. (2017). Child development in context. In R. Grace, K. Hodge, & C. McMahon (Eds.), *Children, Families and Communities* (5 ed., pp. 3 - 25). Sydney, Australia: Oxford University Press.

<sup>53</sup> Bronfenbrenner, U. (2005). *Making human beings human: Bioecological perspectives on human development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Bronfenbrenner, U., & Crouter, A. C. (1983). Evolution of environmental models in developmental research. In P. H. Mussen (Ed.), *Handbook of child psychology: formerly Carmichael's Manual of child psychology*. New York: Wiley, c1983.

or informal and both may occur simultaneously<sup>56,57</sup>. Learning can also be self-directed, or incidental, as occurs during socialisation processes<sup>58</sup>. Social or cultural norms are frequently learned at home, at school or in the community through processes of implicit learning<sup>59</sup>. Much learning also occurs through incidental means and the extent of this is often underestimated by individuals<sup>60,61</sup> because it is difficult to isolate incidental from intentional learning<sup>62</sup>.

## Language

While not restricted to our species, communication is a fundamental human characteristic that drives so much of our social development<sup>63</sup>. Much of my early research focused on the origins and development of communication. Communication begins well before children are able to speak. In the pre-verbal period of infancy, however, the communication of mothers and infants already has many features that are similar to “conversational”, turn-taking exchanges<sup>64</sup>.

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<sup>56</sup> Colley, H., Hodkinson, P., & Malcolm, J. (2002). *Non-formal learning: mapping the conceptual terrain, a consultation report [Monograph]*. University of Leeds, Leeds.

<sup>57</sup> Marsick, V. J., & Watkins, K. E. (2001). Informal and incidental learning. *New directions for adult and continuing education, 2001*(89), 25-34.

<sup>58</sup> Schugurensky, D. (2006). “This is our school of citizenship”: Informal learning in local democracy. In Z. Bekerman, N. Burbules, C., & D. Silberman-Keller (Eds.), *Learning in places: The informal education reader* (pp. 163 - 182). New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc.

<sup>59</sup> Marsick, V. J., & Watkins, K. E. (2001). Informal and incidental learning. *New directions for adult and continuing education, 2001*(89), 25-34.

<sup>60</sup> Eraut, M. (2000). Non-formal learning, implicit learning and tacit knowledge in professional work. In F. Coffield (Ed.), *The necessity of informal learning* (Vol. 4, pp. 12-31). Bristol UK: The Policy Press.

<sup>61</sup> Livingstone, D. W. (2006). Informal learning: Conceptual distinctions and preliminary findings. In Z. Bekerman, N. Burbules, C., & D. Silberman-Keller (Eds.), *Learning in places; The informal education reader* (pp. 203-228). New York Peter Lang Publishing Inc.

<sup>62</sup> Erdelez, S. (2004). Investigation of information encountering in the controlled research environment. *Information Processing and Management, 40*, 1013 - 1025.

<sup>63</sup> Hayes, A. (1984). Interaction, engagement and the origins and growth of communication: Some constructive concerns. In L. Feagan, C. Garvey, & R. Golinkoff (Eds.), *The origins and growth of communication* (pp. 136-161). Norwood NJ: Ablex Publishing Corp.

<sup>64</sup> Elias, G., Broerse, J., Hayes, A., & Jackson, K. (1984). Comments on the use of conversational features in studies of the vocalization behaviours of mothers and infants. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 7*(2), 177-191.



Language, communication and dialogue are fundamental human capabilities. An exchange in the play *Endgame* involves one of the characters, Clov, asking the existential question, "What is there to keep us here?" to which the other (Hamm) simply replies, "The dialogue"<sup>65</sup>. According to Wahhyudi<sup>66</sup>, "the Qur'an invites people of diverse faiths to come to a *kalimatın sawa* 'in (common word) to establish mutual understanding through critical dialogue and enable all people to work together to build peace and harmony"<sup>67</sup>.

The capacity to establish dialogue is one of the fundamental means by which we get to know each other and establish meaningful relationships, especially in gaining a deeper understanding of others, including those from backgrounds and cultures different to our own. As is the case for cultural sensitivity, meaningful dialogue and the relationships that flow from it are underpinned by cognition and emotional intelligence<sup>68</sup>.

Successful communication is evident when the message and its meaning are understood by the receiver. That said however, communication can never be completely error-free.

Failures of communication, or miscommunications, are caused by barriers to communication<sup>69</sup>. Like learning, communication involves explicit modes, such as spoken or written language, but also has implicit dimensions, such as non-verbal modalities including eye contact, gesture and intonation.

As such, language is a code that we learn from birth, and cultures and their languages have richly diverse codes. It is difficult for second language speakers to think in their non-native tongue, and this both impedes communication and may engender anxiety<sup>70</sup>. In

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<sup>65</sup> Beckett, S. (2012). *Endgame*. Faber & Faber.

<sup>66</sup> Wahhyudi, J. (2015). *Ahlul-Kitab: A Qur'anic Approach to Religious Pluralism*. Paper presented at the Paper presented to the Joint International Conference and Short Course on Islam, Plural Societies, and Legal Pluralism, Gottingen.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Root, S. (2019). *The Relationship Between Language, Emotional Intelligence, and Cultural Sensitivity [Honors Thesis]*. Dominican University of California.

<sup>69</sup> Mittal, S. (2018). Barriers to communication. *International Journal of Advanced Research and Development*, 3(1), 243 - 245.

<sup>70</sup> Aichhorn, N., & Puck, J. (2017). "I just don't feel comfortable speaking English": Foreign language anxiety as a catalyst for spoken-language barriers in MNCs. *International Business Review*, 26, 749 - 763.

addition to their impact on interpersonal interactions, communicative behaviours can affect both the content and quality of relationships.

Language barriers also limit the depth and subtlety of understanding of other cultures, and feed simplified perceptions of cultures, races and religions. In the worst case, these fuel inaccurate stereotypes and characterisations of those defined as the “others”.

In place of culturally sensitive understandings of the richness and diversity within other cultures, races and religions, language can also be reduced to inappropriate and insensitive vilifying, humiliating, labels. In the simplest instances, the language is pejorative, humiliating and propagandised. As Doerr<sup>71</sup> argues, digital and social media can utilise visual images to overcome language barriers. This is a technique increasingly deployed by the far right to vilify immigrants and members of minority groups. Such simplified images can also remove communication barriers, with visual images becoming an effective means for spreading hateful caricatures of the group perceived as the common enemy.

There is an ever-increasing abundance of material presented via the media or other sources of influence with salient and useful information presented in a variety of forms. It is a rich resource for tacit learning processes<sup>72,73,74</sup>. Through incidental learning, individuals acquire values, attitudes, behaviours and skills. This is frequently achieved by observing others, including family members, peers and community members.

## Education

Education has fundamentally social dimensions. Well before children get to formal educational setting, such as preschools and schools, parents, along with siblings and extended family members,

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<sup>71</sup> Doerr, N. (2017). Bridging language barriers, bonding against immigrants: A visual case study of transnational network publics created by far-right activists in Europe. *Discourse & Society*, 28(1), 3-23.

<sup>72</sup> Jarvis, P., Holford, J., & Griffin, C. (1998). *The Theory and Practice of Learning*. London: Kogan Page.

<sup>73</sup> Marsick, V. J., & Watkins, K. E. (2001). Informal and incidental learning. *New directions for adult and continuing education*, 2001(89), 25-34.

<sup>74</sup> Smith, M. K. (1999, 2008). 'Informal learning', the encyclopaedia of informal education. Retrieved from [www.infed.org/biblio/inf-lrn.htm](http://www.infed.org/biblio/inf-lrn.htm)

are key contributors to the education of children. As such, they are the first educators of children<sup>75</sup>. The roles of family members are especially salient in early and middle childhood, but to some extent their influences continue across life<sup>76</sup>. Programs such as *Parents as Teachers* recognise the power of parents to work in partnership with other educators to facilitate learning<sup>77</sup>. Much of this education is incidental and takes place as a result of processes of social learning, via modelling, observation and imitation<sup>78</sup>. Vygotsky's concept of the *Zone of Proximal Development* also captures a fundamental aspect of education<sup>79</sup>. It highlights the manner in which the learning of novices is scaffolded by those who have greater competence<sup>80</sup>. Such scaffolding, however, requires sensitivity on the part of the person with greater competence, and awareness of the current level of the competence of the novice that is required to support their acquisition of knowledge, skills and competencies at the next, higher level.

Bowlby and Ainsworth's theory of attachment has stimulated a considerable body of research that provides insights into the social developmental processes by which parents scaffold children's opportunities to explore, experience and learn about their worlds<sup>81</sup>. The communication that occurs, first non-verbally and then via their rapidly developing language capacity, enables children to accumulate a rich store of representations that are internalised as working models of their worlds<sup>82</sup>.

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<sup>75</sup> Vartuli, S., & Winter, M. (1989). Parents as first teachers. In *The second handbook on parent education* (pp. 99-117). Elsevier.

<sup>76</sup> Grace, R., Cashmore, J., Scott, D., & Hayes, A. (2017). Effective policy to support children, families and communities. In *Children, families and communities* (pp. 358-382). Sydney: Oxford University Press.

<sup>77</sup> Bowes, J., Grace, R., & Hodge, K. (2012). *Children, families and communities: Contexts and consequences*: Oxford University Press.

<sup>78</sup> Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

<sup>79</sup> Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in Society: the development of higher mental processes*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

<sup>80</sup> Gebhard, S. (2008). Vygotsky and the Zone of Proximal Development. In *Encyclopedia of Information Technology Curriculum Integration* (pp. 948-950). IGI Global.

<sup>81</sup> Bretherton, I. (1992). The origins of attachment theory: John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth. *Developmental psychology*, 28(5).

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

The key dimension of these educational relationships is their quality and consistency, and this reflects the nature of the contexts in which learning occurs. Safe, secure and stable environments, where parents and other educators consistently display, demonstrate and model positive behaviours, attitudes and values, are likely to engender similarly pro-social attributes in children and young people. Chaotic, conflicted and aversive learning contexts are likely to have the contrary effect. To quote Nelson Mandela, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world”, but the nature of the change, whether it is positive or negative depends on the quality of the educational context.

### Attitudes

In an increasingly multi-and inter-cultural world, it is a pressing priority to ensure that children and young people develop attitudes, values, norms and beliefs that contribute to peaceful coexistence, tolerance, understanding, compassion and caring<sup>83</sup>. These are such important underpinnings for the development of positive and pro-social behaviours. Among the key attitudes that are foundations for peace are valuing integrity; interacting in caring ways; respecting and valuing differences; commitment to meaningful service; charity; and belief in the fundamental goodness of people<sup>84</sup>.

Children develop their attitudes and values through the scaffolding that attachment to their parents and significant others provides<sup>85</sup>. Again, the quality and the security of attachment relationships with their parents influences the extent to which children acquire pro-social attitudes and values<sup>86</sup>. The language and labels that adults use about others, including those from other cultural, ethnic or religious groups, and the narratives they convey to

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<sup>83</sup> Swick, K. J. (2006). Families and educators together: Raising caring and peaceable children. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 33(4), 279-287.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Bretherton, I., Golby, B., & Cho, E. (1997). Attachment and the transmission of values. In J. E. Grusec & L. Kuczynski (Eds.), *Parenting and children's internalization of values: A handbook of contemporary theory* (pp. 103 - 134). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons Inc.

<sup>86</sup> Bretherton, I. (1992). The origins of attachment theory: John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth. *Developmental psychology*, 28(5).

children and young people can significantly influence the meanings, attitudes and values that are internalised<sup>87</sup> <sup>88</sup>. Internalisation of values, norms, beliefs and attitudes shapes both intentions and behaviours<sup>89</sup>. Again, however, whether these are negative or positive is a function of the context in which they are acquired.

## Relationships

Parental relationships have dimensions that promote socialization and build children's capacity to form and maintain relations, across life. Through safe and strong parental relationships, children develop the capacities to monitor and control their behaviour; to benefit from scaffolded social learning; and to benefit from observing the skills required to participate positively in groups. Parental relationships therefore provide protection, foster reciprocity, develop control of emotions, guide learning and impart skills for participation in groups<sup>90</sup>. Positive relationships mitigate risk and are a significant protective factor in children's lives.

Beyond childhood, relationships in adult life can reduce the impact of adverse behaviour patterns and experiences evident in childhood and adolescence. In part, this explains the fact that only a small minority of juvenile offenders go on to a life of crime. Together, partnering, having children and the routines and regularities of work are significant protective factors that can change life trajectories for those whose earlier life experiences had placed them at serious risk<sup>91</sup>. As such, while interventions early in life are

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<sup>87</sup> Grusec, J. E. (2019). *Principles of Effective Parenting: How Socialization Works*. Guilford Press.

<sup>88</sup> Zebregs, S., van den Putte, B., Neijens, P., & de Graaf, A. (2015). The differential impact of statistical and narrative evidence on beliefs, attitude, and intention: A meta-analysis. *Health communication, 30*(3), 282-289.

<sup>89</sup> Chung, A., & Rimal, R. N. (2016). Social norms: A review. *Review of Communication Research, 4*, 1-28.

<sup>90</sup> Grusec, J. E. (2019). *Principles of Effective Parenting: How Socialization Works*. Guilford Press.

<sup>91</sup> Hayes, A. (2014). Social science and family law: From fallacies and fads to the facts of the matter. In A. Hayes & D. J. Higgins (Eds.), *Families, policy and the law: Selected essays on contemporary issues for Australia*. Melbourne, Australia: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

important, there are opportunities for change, across life. Again, social supports are a key ingredient in altering life trajectories.

That said, however, adverse experiences that affect the relationships of other family members, especially parents, can also have impacts that change developmental circumstances and possibly cross generations. For example, parental separation and divorce are associated with a greater likelihood of experiencing disadvantage. Previous research has consistently shown that the likelihood of separation in adulthood is greater for adults whose own parents have separated<sup>92,93,94</sup>, and Amato and Cheadle<sup>95</sup> reported higher rates of marital discord among grandchildren associated with divorce among their grandparents.

In addition, those living in lone-parent families are more likely to experience disadvantage. In Australia, for example, 618,900 one-parent families with dependants were headed by a single mother<sup>96</sup>, and children in lone-parent families are more than 3 times as likely to be in poverty as children in two-parent families (41% vs 13%)<sup>97</sup>. International evidence shows that single-parent households have higher rates of poverty than households headed by two parents<sup>98</sup>. Children living in households where fathers are absent tend, as adults, to move downward in the income distribution<sup>99</sup>. Those in

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<sup>92</sup> D'Onofrio, B. M., Turkheimer, E., Emery, R. E., Harden, K. P., Slutske, W. S., Heath, A. C., . . . Martin, N. G. (2007). A genetically informed study of the intergenerational transmission of marital instability. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 69(3), 793-809.

<sup>93</sup> Wolfinger, N. H. (2005). *Understanding the divorce cycle: The children of divorce in their own marriages*. Cambridge University Press.

<sup>94</sup> Wolfinger, N. H. (2011). More evidence for trends in the intergenerational transmission of divorce: A completed cohort approach using data from the general social survey. *Demography*, 48(2), 581-592.

<sup>95</sup> Amato, P. R., & Cheadle, J. (2005). The long reach of divorce: Divorce and child well-being across three generations. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67(1), 191-206.

<sup>96</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2017). *Main features - one parent families*. Canberra, Australia

<sup>97</sup> Australian Council of Social Services. (2016). *Poverty in Australia 2016*. Strawberry Hills, Australia: Social Policy Research Centre

<sup>98</sup> Corcoran, M. E., & Chaudry, A. (1997). The dynamics of childhood poverty. *The future of children*, 40-54.

<sup>99</sup> Hancock, K., Edwards, B., & Zubrick, S. (2013). Echoes of disadvantage across generations? The influence of unemployment and separation of grandparents on their grandchildren. In *Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC)* (pp. 43-58). Australian Institute of Family Studies.

disadvantaged circumstances are more likely to experience multiple adverse life events and fewer protective influences than those in more affluent circumstances<sup>100</sup>.

In summary, toxic relationships marked by discord and violence elevate the risk of a range of negative outcomes including higher risk of intergenerational transmission of poverty and persistent disadvantage<sup>101</sup>; homelessness<sup>102,103,104</sup>; negative impacts on children's educational performance; and poor child mental health<sup>105</sup>.

## Nurturing

As Grusec<sup>106</sup> observes: "It is in the family context that children are prepared to enter and become successful members of the larger social community where they will spend the rest of their lives...parents are of particular importance because they have greater control over their children, as well as longer and more sustained periods of access to them"<sup>107</sup>. Again, as discussed above, attachment quality is a key dimension of parenting that drives a wide range of development outcomes. While nature, or the genetic code, cannot be overlooked, nurture is equally important, and currently more readily amenable to intervention<sup>108</sup>.

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<sup>100</sup> Baxter, J., Qu, L., Weston, R., Moloney, L., & Hayes, A. (2012). Experiences and effects of life events: Evidence from two Australian longitudinal studies. *Family Matters*(90), 6.

<sup>101</sup> Bird, K., & Shinyekwa, I. (2005). Even the 'rich' are vulnerable: multiple shocks and downward mobility in rural Uganda. *Development Policy Review*, 23(1), 55-85.

<sup>102</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2016). *Clients who have experienced domestic and family violence*. Canberra, Australia

<sup>103</sup> Johnson, G., Gronda, H., & Coutts, S. (2008). *On the outside: Pathways in and out of homelessness*. Melbourne, Vic: Australian Scholarly Publishing.

<sup>104</sup> Spinney, A. (2012). *Home and Safe?: Policy and Practice Innovations to Prevent Women and Children who Have Experienced Domestic and Family Violence from Becoming Homeless*. Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute.

<sup>105</sup> Aldaz-Carroll, E., & Morán, R. (2001). Escaping the poverty trap in Latin America: the role of family factors. *Cuadernos de economía*, 38(114), 155-190.

<sup>106</sup> Grusec, J. E. (2019). *Principles of Effective Parenting: How Socialization Works*. Guilford Press.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Hayes, A. (2014). Social science and family law: From fallacies and fads to the facts of the matter. In A. Hayes & D. J. Higgins (Eds.), *Families, policy and the law: Selected essays on contemporary issues for Australia*. Melbourne, Australia: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Quality parenting and nurturing also have important impacts on the life outcomes of children<sup>109</sup>. Persistent poverty, exclusion and disadvantage, however, may increase the stresses and strains on caregivers and reduce the resources that they need to nurture child development. Disadvantage, however, is not destiny. Provided that parents and caregivers have sufficient education, time and support to promote the development, health and wellbeing of children, disadvantage does not necessarily diminish the quality of parenting<sup>110, 111</sup>.

#### **D. CARE**

To reiterate, the Abrahamic religions, along with other religious traditions, share a common ethos of compassion, humanity and care. These are demonstrated in their active commitment to social support and contribution to the wellbeing of others.

#### **Compassion**

Compassion is an area of increasing interest within diverse fields of clinical, developmental and neuropsychology, given its relationship to improved social, mental and emotional wellbeing. *Compassion* can be conceptualized as a prosocial motivation reflecting a deep care and commitment towards the wellbeing of others. Gilbert<sup>112</sup> defines compassion as a “sensitivity to suffering in self and others, with a commitment to try to alleviate and prevent it”, involving both affective components, for example being empathically attuned to pain or suffering; and a corresponding motivation or drive to alleviate it<sup>113</sup>.

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<sup>109</sup> Hayes, A., & Hacker, A. (2017). Persistent disadvantage in Australia: Extent, complexity and some key implications. *Australia's Welfare 2017*.

<sup>110</sup> Engle, P. L., Menon, P., & Haddad, L. (1999). Care and nutrition: concepts and measurement. *World Development*, 27(8), 1309-1337.

<sup>111</sup> Harper, C. (2004). *Breaking poverty cycles: the importance of action in childhood*. Chronic Poverty Research Centre.

<sup>112</sup> Gilbert, P. (2014). The origins and nature of compassion focused therapy. *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 53(1), 6-41.

<sup>113</sup> Goetz, J. L., Keltner, D., & Simon-Thomas, E. (2010). Compassion: an evolutionary analysis and empirical review. *Psychological bulletin*, 136(3), 351.



Underlying compassion is the notion of *self-compassion*, which refers to maintaining a kind and understanding attitude towards oneself; recognising our common humanity; and having courage to identify and work with one's flaws or failures in a kind, loving, encouraging and understanding way, without overidentifying with those negative self-evaluations<sup>114,115</sup>. Self-compassion reduces self-judgement and criticism, which are often linked with the affective state of shame.

In a parenting context, self-compassion can act as a buffer against the negative effects of parental shame and stress and reduce the use of harsh and negative parenting practices<sup>116</sup>. Parental shame may be driven by negative perceptions of the self (internal shame), or a negative perception of how others view the parent (external shame). Often though, reflected shame can occur, referring to shame felt personally due to the actions of a child or close other, a phenomenon that may be stronger in a highly evaluative social context<sup>117</sup> or in some cultural groups<sup>118</sup>.

Parenting can become a highly threat-dominated activity in today's ever-competitive social structures, characterized in many nations by large, disconnected groups and influenced by our internal working models representing the surrounding cultural, social and behavioural norms and expectations. Indeed, many parents report feeling a sense of failure, self-criticism, shame or guilt, and these

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<sup>114</sup> Bluth, K., & Neff, K. D. (2018). New frontiers in understanding the benefits of self-compassion. *Self and Identity*, 17(6), 605-608.

<sup>115</sup> Neff, K. D., Long, P., Knox, M. C., Davidson, O., Kuchar, A., Costigan, A., . . . Breines, J. G. Ibid. The forest and the trees: Examining the association of self-compassion and its positive and negative components with psychological functioning. 627-645.

<sup>116</sup> Miller, J. G., Kahle, S., Lopez, M., & Hastings, P. D. (2015). Compassionate love buffers stress-reactive mothers from fight-or-flight parenting. *Developmental psychology*, 51(1), 36.

<sup>117</sup> Scarnier, M., Schmader, T., & Lickel, B. (2009). Parental shame and guilt: Distinguishing emotional responses to a child's wrongdoings. *Personal Relationships*, 16(2), 205-220.

<sup>118</sup> Gilbert, P., Bhundia, R., Mitra, R., McEwan, K., Irons, C., & Sanghera, J. (2007). Cultural differences in shame-focused attitudes towards mental health problems in Asian and non-Asian student women. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 10(2), 127-141.

responses can become powerful motivators underlying the use of negative or coercive parenting practices<sup>119</sup>.

Prosocial behaviour in children, including the development of compassionate and empathic behaviour, is closely linked with the development of self-regulatory capabilities, including emotion regulation and effortful control<sup>120</sup>. Again, many of these capabilities develop through social learning and observing the behavioural patterns of others, particularly the child's parents or caregivers; and are further supported by the quality of the attachment relationship. For example, in a secure caregiver-child attachment relationship, prosocial behaviour is more readily taught and picked up by children<sup>121</sup>. Thus, the quality of early attachment relationships is pivotal for guiding children towards more positive social behaviours. These effects can be intergenerational, with research showing that mothers who reported poorer attachment relationships with their own parents had less self-compassion and higher parenting stress, and their children had worse quality of life<sup>122</sup>.

## Action

Compassion requires action, and personal growth, mental health and wellbeing flow from processes of active participation. Evidence from neuroscience and rigorous meta-analyses<sup>e.g.,123,124</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Kirby, J. N., Sampson, H., Day, J., Hayes, A., & Gilbert, P. (2019). Human evolution and culture in relationship to shame in the parenting role: Implications for psychology and psychotherapy. *Psychology and Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice*, 92(2), 238-260.

<sup>120</sup> Jones, S. M., Bailey, R., Barnes, S., & Partee, A. (2016). Executive function mapping project: Untangling the terms and skills related to executive function and self-regulation in early childhood. OPRE Report 2016-88, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

<sup>121</sup> Gross, J. T., Stern, J. A., Brett, B. E., & Cassidy, J. (2017). The multifaceted nature of prosocial behavior in children: Links with attachment theory and research. *Social Development*, 26(4), 661-678.

<sup>122</sup> Moreira, H., Gouveia, M. J., Carona, C., Silva, N., & Canavarro, M. C. (2015). Maternal attachment and children's quality of life: The mediating role of self-compassion and parenting stress. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 24(8), 2332-2344.

<sup>123</sup> Davidson, R. J., & McEwen, B. S. (2012). Social influences on neuroplasticity: stress and interventions to promote well-being. *Nature Neuroscience*, 15(5), 689 - 695.

<sup>124</sup> Eberth, J., & Sedlmeier, P. (2012). The effects of mindfulness meditation: a meta-analysis. *Mindfulness*, 3(3), 174-189.

shows that mindfulness and meditation practices, where attention is focused on the breath, or thoughts are observed in a non-judgemental, non-suppressive manner, are practical skills that can reduce stress and anxiety and increase wellbeing, and can lead to more prosocial behaviour.

However, compassion refers not only to an empathic awareness of suffering in the self and others; but a desire to alleviate that suffering and a motivational state that spurs someone to action. Cultivating compassion within parents and families therefore has significant potential to improve community wellbeing. Pro-social attitudes are more easily socialised in children when there are secure parent-child attachments<sup>125</sup>, which in turn increases children's capacity for self-regulation, empathic understanding and compassion.

To achieve harmony, peace and understanding across cultural, ethnic and religious groups requires commitment to inclusion and to utilise diversity as a resource<sup>126</sup>. It starts with a recognition that people in all their richly individual differences and diversity can contribute as valuable members of their communities and societies. That said, however, actively achieving inclusion can often be difficult and create inter-group tensions and disharmony<sup>127</sup>.

A compassionate and caring approach to inclusion builds on the fundamental human desire for belonging. As Allen<sup>128</sup> puts it: "belonging comes from a perception of quality meaning and satisfaction with social connections". The sense of belonging is, however, uniquely subjective and often coloured by less than accurate perceptions of self, others, situations and contexts. These misperceptions are often fuelled by emotional inaccuracies and powerful negative feelings of fear, anger, alienation and hate. Adolescents are particularly sensitive to ostracism, rejection and

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<sup>125</sup> Gross, J. T., Stern, J. A., Brett, B. E., & Cassidy, J. (2017). The multifaceted nature of prosocial behavior in children: Links with attachment theory and research. *Social Development, 26*(4), 661-678.

<sup>126</sup> Ferdman, B. M. (2017). Paradoxes of inclusion: Understanding and managing the tensions of diversity and multiculturalism. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 53*(2), 235-263.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Allen, K. (2019). Making sense of belonging. *InPsych, the Bulletin of the Australian Psychological Society, 41*(3), 8 - 13.

bullying and may suffer emotional impacts that are turned internally on themselves, and may negatively affect their identity, relationships and transition to adulthood<sup>129</sup>.

## Reconciliation

Conflict, especially after longstanding oppression of cultural, ethnic and/or religious minorities, leaves a legacy of entrenched hatred, resentment and bitterness. Oppressors often resist facing the truth of their brutal acts and atrocities; and victims may suffer a legacy of trauma that crosses generations<sup>130</sup>. While it is only natural to focus on the survivors, those who perpetrate oppression also suffer damage<sup>131</sup>. A climate of secrets, lies and historical revisionism is not uncommon. In these circumstances, secrets, untruths and blaming make reconciliation difficult. Forgiveness, healing and willingness to move beyond the painful past may be difficult to achieve<sup>132</sup>.

In several countries, Truth and Reconciliation Commission processes have sought to enable communities to face the past, and move forward with a focus on restorative justice<sup>133</sup>. To break the generational impacts, in Canada the Truth and Reconciliation Commission encouraged the culturally and developmentally appropriate communication of messages about reconciliation via availability of books targeted to a wide range of ages<sup>134</sup>. Australia has a focus on Reconciliation Action Plans, an initiative championed by Reconciliation Australia, that typically focuses on organisations, agencies and businesses. These have now been extended, and

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Eisenberg, A. (2018). The challenges of structural injustice to reconciliation: truth and reconciliation in Canada. *Ethics & Global Politics*, 11(1), 22-30.

<sup>131</sup> Niezen, R. (2016). Templates and exclusions: victim centrism in Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Indian residential schools. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 22(4), 920-938.

<sup>132</sup> Espinosa, A., Páez, D., Velázquez, T., Cueto, R. M., Seminario, E., Sandoval, S., . . . Jave, I. (2017). Between remembering and forgetting the years of political violence: Psychosocial impact of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Peru. *Political psychology*, 38(5), 849-866.

<sup>133</sup> Richards, K., & Wilson, R. A. (2018). Truth and Reconciliation Commissions. *The international encyclopedia of anthropology*, 1-8.

<sup>134</sup> Campbell, S., Maria, T., & Quaiattini, A. (2018). Canadian Children's Books Through the Lens of Truth and Reconciliation. doi:<https://doi.org/10.7939/R3BG2HR70>

preschools and schools are encouraged to complete developmentally appropriate plans in partnership with children and young people<sup>135</sup>.

Despite these efforts, negative indicators of the cross-generational impacts of oppression and trauma are seen in stubbornly high rates of juvenile offending by children and young people from Indigenous, “first nations” backgrounds, when compared to their peers from non-indigenous groups<sup>136</sup>. Re-thinking child protection policies and practices to make them culturally-sensitive, trauma-informed and reconciliation-focused, may be required<sup>137</sup>. In South Africa, the approach to reconciliation has tended to view religion as a part of the problem, often stereotyping religion an instigator of violence and overlooking the role it can play to reconcile differences, promote peace and build bridges between groups<sup>138</sup>.

## Empathy

How young children develop emotional understanding, sensitivity and cognition are keys to empathy. Empathy involves the recognition of the other, their feelings and awareness of the impacts on them of our behaviours<sup>139</sup>. There is also evidence of a developmental relationship between empathy and pro-social behaviour<sup>140</sup>.

The capacity to empathise has its origins early in life and the emotional cognition that underpins it becomes more sophisticated across development. That said, however, there is considerable

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<sup>135</sup> Duncan, A. (2017). Reconciliation action plans: Including children's voices. *Every Child*, 23(3), 6.

<sup>136</sup> de Leeuw, S., & Greenwood, M. (2017). Turning a new page: cultural safety, critical creative literary interventions, truth and reconciliation, and the crisis of child welfare. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 13(3), 142-151.

<sup>137</sup> Lindstrom, G., & Choate, P. W. (2016). Nistawatsiman: Rethinking assessment of Aboriginal parents for child welfare following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, 11(2), 45-59.

<sup>138</sup> Shore, M. (2008). Christianity and justice in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission: A case study in religious conflict resolution. *Political Theology*, 9(2), 161-178.

<sup>139</sup> Livingstone, A. (2019). A multi-experiment, meta-analytic test of the effect of felt understanding in intergroup relations [Preprint]. doi:10.31234/osf.io/uhqnd

<sup>140</sup> Van der Graaff, J., Carlo, G., Crocetti, E., Koot, H. M., & Branje, S. (2018). Prosocial behavior in adolescence: gender differences in development and links with empathy. *Journal of youth and adolescence*, 47(5), 1086-1099.

variation in the ability to understand and relate to the emotional impacts of actions on others. As such, it involves the capacity to understand the reciprocal effects that occur in interactions. Livingstone et al.<sup>141</sup> differentiate *affective empathy*, or the ability to first experience a feeling and then begin to recognise the signs of it in the behaviour of another, and *cognitive empathy*, which is the ability to de-code the feelings of another<sup>142</sup>. Understanding emotions requires the ability, therefore, to discern which emotions are being expressed<sup>143</sup>. In the early development of empathy, observational learning, imitation and modelling the behaviour of others provide opportunities for children to gain understanding of emotions<sup>144,145</sup>. Again, family and community provide the contexts and contents for the development of empathy, which has evolved as an element of parental and kinship relationships<sup>146</sup>.

Developmental deficits in empathy can lead to a range of negative, maladaptive social outcomes, and variation in empathetic behaviour may be related to the link between temperament and parenting behaviour<sup>147</sup>. In extreme cases, children who show callous-unemotional behaviours early in life are at elevated risk of developing externalizing disorders and severe behaviour problems<sup>148,149,150</sup>. They

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<sup>141</sup> Livingstone, A. (2019). A multi-experiment, meta-analytic test of the effect of felt understanding in intergroup relations [Preprint]. doi:10.31234/osf.io/uhqnd

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Stel, M. (2016). The role of mimicry in understanding the emotions of others. In U. Hess & A. Fischer (Eds.), *Emotional mimicry in social context* (pp. 27 - 43). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>144</sup> Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

<sup>145</sup> Stringer, M. D. (2016). *Discourses on religious diversity: explorations in an urban ecology*. Routledge.

<sup>146</sup> Decety, J. (2015). The neural pathways, development and functions of empathy. *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences*, 3, 1-6.

<sup>147</sup> Wagers, K. B., & Kiel, E. J. (2019). The influence of parenting and temperament on empathy development in toddlers. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 33(4), 391.

<sup>148</sup> Tremblay, R. E., & Nagin, D. S. (2005). The developmental origins of physical aggression in humans. In RE Hartup, WW Hartup, & J. Archer (Eds.), *Developmental origins of aggression* (pp. 83-106). New York: The Guilford Press.

<sup>149</sup> Vachon, D. D., & Lynam, D. R. (2016). Fixing the problem with empathy: Development and validation of the affective and cognitive measure of empathy. *Assessment*, 23(2), 135-149.

also show low emotional sensitivity in social situations; reduced ability to recognise emotional signals; impulsivity; and reduced awareness of behavioural consequences<sup>151</sup>. Caring behaviour, including for animals, influences caring and empathy more generally, and cruelty to animals is a risk factor for a propensity for violent and abusive behaviour<sup>152</sup>. In adolescents, development of empathy is associated with social competence in adulthood<sup>153</sup>. There is also evidence of a developmental relationship between empathy and prosocial behaviour<sup>154</sup>.

## E. In Conclusion

As the Prophet said: “*Al-bait madrasatul Ula*”. “*Home is the first school of the family.*”

Families, their communities and nations have a key role to play educating each generation in ways that promote peace and harmony. Tolerance; respect; understanding; sensitivity; and time are fundamental building blocks for advancing mutual trust among diverse cultural, ethnic and religious groups. Families and communities can make invaluable contributions to promoting dialogue and language; valuing education and learning; inculcating pro-social attitudes and values; strengthening the skills that underpin respectful relationships; and nurturing each generation. All these need foundations in compassion; commitment to action; courage to achieve reconciliation and healing; and a fundamental commitment to empathy.

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<sup>150</sup> Waller, R., & Hyde, L. W. (2018). Callous-unemotional behaviors in early childhood: the development of empathy and prosociality gone awry. *Current opinion in psychology*, 20, 11-16.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Komorosky, D., & O’Neal, K. K. (2015). The development of empathy and prosocial behavior through humane education, restorative justice, and animal-assisted programs. *Contemporary Justice Review*, 18(4), 395-406.

<sup>153</sup> Allemand, M., Steiger, A. E., & Fend, H. A. (2015). Empathy development in adolescence predicts social competencies in adulthood. *Journal of Personality*, 83(2), 229-241.

<sup>154</sup> Van der Graaff, J., Carlo, G., Crocetti, E., Koot, H. M., & Branje, S. (2018). Prosocial behavior in adolescence: gender differences in development and links with empathy. *Journal of youth and adolescence*, 47(5), 1086-1099.

Embracing all of these provides the powerful foundations for countering the fear, hatred and resentment that motivate extremist cowardly acts that are mistakenly portrayed as courageous and justified by a distorted, and ultimately destructive, logic.

But families and communities also face the impacts of global forces that bring home negative impacts. These global forces undermine the capacity to influence attitudes, values and behaviours, especially of their children and youth. In a digital world the irony is that we are bombarded by communication that can socially divide rather than unite. Other global trends undermine family strengths and make relationships fragile. Smaller family sizes, while an inevitable trend globally, and increasingly fragile relationships, make for further challenges. As Jivani<sup>155</sup> recently observed, absence of fathers provides a fertile field for the promulgation of fundamentalist, extremist, and radical views to vulnerable young people.

Now, more than ever, global forces erode the capacity of communities of faith to provide positive, peace promoting perspectives that unite rather than divide. Dialogue, cooperation and respectful relationships are needed, including within and between nations, cultures and communities. For religions, inter-faith dialogue is more than ever required. To paraphrase the Roman Catholic theologian and advocate for interfaith cooperation, Hans Küng: *peace among the nations can only be achieved when there is peace and dialogue among the religions*<sup>156</sup>.

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<sup>155</sup> Jivani, J. (2018). *Why young men: Rage, race and the crisis of identity*. Toronto, Canada: Harper Collins.

<sup>156</sup> Küng, H. (1995). *Christianity: essence, history and future*. Continuum Intl Pub Group.



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