

Virtue, compassion, altruism

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March 2024

Half of global adults will vote in 2024 - Taiwan, Pakistan and Iran were among the first out of the blocks - but democracy is not just about elections. What do people in any society wish for themselves, their families and their fellow citizens?

Democracy's guardrails

People want to be safe and secure in everyday life; they want clean water and access to nourishing food; reasonable housing, healthcare, and support services when needed; education, leisure and sports opportunities; and the essential condition of a free society, respect for human rights.

Those guardrails of democracy are arguably under threat in some countries which have the ballot box, yet available and flourishing in parts of the world which don't yet call themselves fully democratic. And this in an era when millions of people crave freedom from authoritarian rule yet doubt that democracy is the best alternative.

We live in a restless and confusing world, made ever more restless by the fact that when an armed man in a clown-mask robs a store in Queensland, or crowds throw snowballs at police in Russia (to cite two recent trivial events), social media report them instantly across the globe - and the conspiracy mill kicks into gear.

This year in the UK we too shall enjoy the opportunity to exercise the vote. Pundits are already warning us to beware of fake news. Just wait until the autumn when election fever will really take hold here and in the USA!

Our election will doubtless pivot on 'time for a change' and 'cost of living', though one never knows until polling day itself just what might occur in the weeks running up to it. Political historians like to quote Mrs Thatcher's election victory in 1983 having been decided by the outcome of the Falklands War.

I am confident that the British election result in 2024 will *not* hinge on what parties say about education. Tony Blair's mantra 'education, education, education' was a successful exception. But if education *were* to be a defining issue, what would we want to hear from politicians?

Goals towards which a child might grow

In Ian McEwan's novel *The Children's Act* - a novel anyone working with children should read - a judge has to make a life and death decision about a young person. In deciding whether the life-support machine should be turned off or not (no spoilers here), she lists some goals towards which a child might grow. She includes the following ingredients:

Economic and moral freedom, virtue, compassion and altruism, satisfying work through engagement with demanding tasks, a flourishing network of personal relationships, earning the esteem of others, pursuing larger meanings to one's existence, and having at the centre of one's life one or a small number of significant relations defined above all by love.

Novelist McEwan captures brilliantly here what it is to be human - and to my way of thinking what the goals of a great education should be.

Each campaigning political party will rightly argue that it is going to deliver the following: well funded schools; great early years provision to ensure children have the best running start; excellent conditions of service for teachers and leaders; necessary investment in school buildings; closing the achievement gap; addressing the issues of the era - special needs, attendance, pupil behaviours.

All well and good - and predictable.

Head and heart

Author Philip Pullman once observed: *'Thou shalt not' might reach the head but it takes 'Once upon a time' to reach the heart.*

To my mind, to reach the hearts of the electorate - to reach parents and families, young people, and the older generation who are invested in their grand-children - politicians need to talk equally about what it is we want future generations to create and live in by way of a flourishing democracy.

So over the coming months, seek out the local and national politicians who talk keenly about moral freedom, virtue, compassion and altruism. They'll be the ones worth voting for. And they might just make education their priority in office.

Roy Blatchford's latest book is [The A - Z of Great Classrooms](#), and he can be found [here](#).

This column featured as a BIG EDUCATION BLOG, in a series for 2024 titled: 'Who will get your vote on education?'

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If you are interested in writing for this series, please contact royb88@gmail.com