

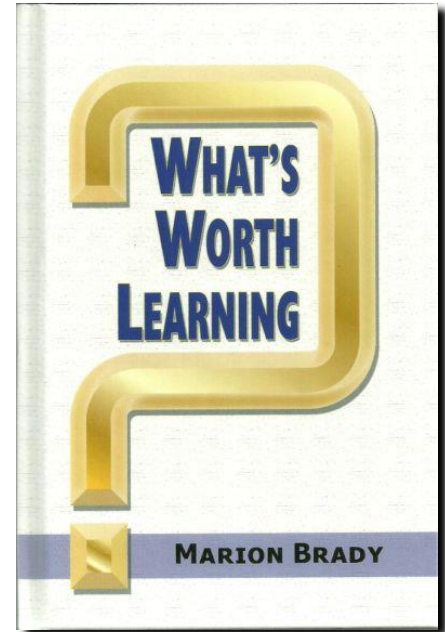
Review:

The earlier version of *What's Worth Learning?*, titled *What's Worth Teaching?*, was published in 1989 by the State University of New York Press. Below is the pre-publication review of that book by Dr. Philip L. Smith, Editor of SUNY Press's Philosophy of Education Series:¹

What follows is my evaluation of Marion Brady's *What's Worth Teaching?* Let me begin by saying that I liked this manuscript very much. Before I studied it I did not expect that I would. It appeared to be rather pedestrian, even simple minded. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is actually a well thought out, beautifully presented defense of humanistic general education. It is an important manuscript both for what it aspires to and how it accomplishes its goals.

It is easy to see why you might have some concerns about this work. The manner of presentation is, to say the least, unusual for academic purposes. But given that "there is a wonderfully interesting idea contained in the text" (and I agree [with you] that there is), the manner of presentation has, minimally, two advantages: it is not pompous, and it has the potential to appeal to people who, because of temperament or lack of training, are not receptive to traditional forms of academic exposition. What this means is that if you publish this manuscript it might need to be marketed in an unconventional way. Nonetheless, I think that the audience for the work could be immense. And so could its impact.

I see the audience going well beyond professors of education or students of curriculum. I think it could be read by primary and secondary school teachers, by administrators, school-board members, and the general public. Many of these people want more from their schools than specialized academic preparation or narrow vocational training. Brady gives them something more. He provides a serious, concrete proposal for civic education and development of the human



¹ Now Emeritus Professor, The Ohio State University

spirit. To my knowledge there is nothing now available in print that is even of mediocre quality to compete with this manuscript.

The point of the manuscript is that education is not worth much unless it represents a study of “human systems” (or roughly, “cultures”). Essentially this is general education. Brady’s unique twist on this thesis is to argue that human systems should not only be the object of study, but the form of the curriculum. The generic features of human systems—Patterns of Action, Premises, Members, Milieu, and Systemic Relationships—are used to structure a course of study. Traditional subjects, like history and the natural sciences, are interpreted and presented within this scheme.

The way the argument is presented is partly what makes it so compelling. I find no display of arrogance, contradiction, or impracticality. One might wonder whether humanistic general education is what our society really wants to provide. But one cannot maintain with justification that Brady is naïve or simple-minded. He is committed to a version of participatory democracy and demonstrates the sort of “experienced-triggered imagination” (his phrase), that he describes for education itself.

If the manuscript appears unusual one reason might be that it is written more as commentary than as information per se. The manuscript is not so much the product of research as the result of normative reflection. It is an essay that, while focusing on curriculum issues, embodies a vision of goodness for both the individual and society. If you were to publish this manuscript, as I hope you do, it would be important to advertise it as more than a technical proposal for increasing teaching effectiveness. It should be promoted as a manifesto that incorporates a working strategy for making education more than the development of instrumental reason. Serious-minded educators who begin to read this manuscript are very likely to finish it, and to be influenced by it for the better. Those who are not serious-minded, if there is any hope for them at all, might start to be serious-minded if somehow you can get this manuscript into their hands.

Download link (free), *What’s Worth Learning?*:

<https://www.marionbrady.com/documents/WWL.pdf>