

Educational Aims

A survey of miscellaneous literature yielded the following aims of a general education:

- Introduce the “core” disciplines
- Improve problem-solving skills
- Explore “key” concepts
- Provide mastery of “the basics”
- Keep the US economically competitive
- Raise standardized test scores
- Prepare students for democratic citizenship
- Meet student needs
- Instill a love of learning
- Build self-esteem
- Teach teamwork skills
- Instill tolerance
- Encourage creativity
- Explore “eternal questions”
- Create informed consumers
- Develop character
- Explore broad themes
- Transmit societal values
- Expand knowledge of self
- Promote inter-cultural understanding
- Instill virtue
- Prepare students for college
- Prepare students for careers
- Meet world-class standards
- Promote love of country
- Address social problems
- Encourage a reflective approach to life

Marion Brady’s homepage:
<http://www.marionbrady.com/>

Most of these aims are laudable, and a good curriculum can contribute to their realization. However, because the effective pursuit of a particular aim calls for the use of *particular* instructional materials, *particular* teaching methods, and *particular* measures of performance, an optimally effective general education program must have a *single, overarching aim*.

That aim must be understood by and acceptable to all stakeholders, including students, must be comprehensive enough to subsume all other legitimate aims, and precise enough to provide direction for *every* instructional activity.

The simplest, most precise, useful, and philosophically defensible aim of a general education is to *expand student ability to make sense of experience*. This ability is prerequisite to the achievement of all other legitimate aims.