



# Aims-based curriculum

Daryn Egan-Simon

## What's the idea?

An aims-based curriculum focuses on the needs and wants of students, equipping them to lead 'personally flourishing' lives and to help others to do so too (Reiss and White, 2013, p. 1).

## What does it mean?

Reiss and White (2013) outline three interlinked and broad aims at the heart of an aims-based curriculum:

» 'Equipping every child to lead a personally flourishing life'. (p. 5)

This is achieved by ensuring that schools prepare students for an autonomous life, giving them an awareness of their basic needs and how to fulfil them and developing pupils' personal qualities, such as self-regulation and self-determination.

» 'Equipping every child to help others to lead a personally fulfilling life'. (p. 7)

This involves developing good character traits and virtue in children, teaching them about their civic rights and responsibilities, and helping them to understand the world of work and how they might pursue a particular vocation.

» 'Helping every student to form a broad background of understanding'. (p. 11)

This requires students to develop an understanding of human nature (biologically and culturally), including human history, evolution, geology and geography, astronomical knowledge, religious and non-religious beliefs about the beginning of the universe and what a 'good life' looks like. This broad background of understanding plays a role in enabling the pursuit of a worthwhile and meaningful life.

While helping students to form a broad background of understanding is a key aim, this doesn't necessarily need to be achieved through a traditional subject-based approach. Within an aims-based curriculum, students may have greater autonomy over what they learn and schools may want to consider which subjects (and disciplinary strands) are compulsory and/or optional.

While knowledge is important within an aims-based curriculum, it is more important for schools to 'encourage students to connect knowledge [and] to see parts in relation to wholes', rather than in silos (Reiss and White, 2013, p. 42).

## What are the implications for teachers?

» An aims-based curriculum involves re-evaluating what, why and how students learn. This may very well require a seismic shift in how the curriculum is constructed and implemented. Can you re-envisage what the curriculum would look like in your classroom if you deliberately placed human flourishing at the heart of what you teach?

» How do the aims identified by the authors align with current educational policy and practice? Is this approach compatible with the National Curriculum? Does what you teach currently comply with your own aims for teaching? Do you know the students' aims in their learning, and does this matter?

» What would change if you had to build your curriculum around what you and your students agreed was most important in education?

» In your classroom, how could students have greater autonomy over what they learn?

## WANT TO KNOW MORE?

- » Deng Z (2018) Bringing knowledge back in: Perspectives from liberal education. *Cambridge Journal of Education* 48 (3): 335–351.
- » Reiss MJ and White J (2013) *An Aims-based Curriculum: The Significance of Human Flourishing for Schools*. Bedford Way Papers. IOE Press: London.
- » Reiss MJ and White J (2014) An aims-based curriculum illustrated by the teaching of science in schools. *Curriculum Journal* 25(1): 76–89.