**Purposes of education: Exploring a vocational teaching resource for young people with severe learning difficulties - 'A stepping stone to…' what?**

*Alison Black andHazel Lawson*

**Abstract**

This article explores the purposes of education, with a focus on vocational education for young people with severe learning difficulties. The topic is examined through a specific case, presenting some of the key findings of an evaluation of the first year of 'The Greenside Studio', a special school's vocational teaching resource for young people with severe learning difficulties. Data analysis from staff questionnaires(n=27) and interviews with various stakeholders (n=17) leads to a conceptualisation of different 'sides' to the Studio. These sides are then further discussed in relation to the purposes of education for these learners in which the viewof vocational learning as a stepping stone to paid employment is presented as problematic. With a broader interpretation of vocational education this stepping stone is reconfigured as a bridge to life after school, whatever form that takes.However, it is argued that the nature of this life should be viewed aspirationally.

**Introduction**

> 'For any young person, assistance with how to live one's life, in which the sort of job one does plays such a significant part, is the most important of all educational experiences' (Pring, 2004, p.59).

This article explores the purposes of education, with a focus on vocational education for young people with severe learning difficulties[1]. We examine the topic through a specific case, presentingsome of the key findings of an evaluation of the first year of 'The Greenside Studio', a special school's vocational teaching resource for young people with severe learning difficulties (Lawson and Black, 2013).

This examination is a timely one, as the UK government has recently clarified policy in England regarding young people with special educational needs (SEN) (DfE/DoH, 2014). One of thestatedaims underpinning these policy revisions was to 'give young people who are disabled or who have SEN the best opportunities and support so that as far as possible they can succeed in education and their careers, live as independently and healthily as they are able to, and be active members of their communities' (DfE, 2012, p.50).

---

[1] Severe learning difficulties is an educational category in England which describes children and young people who 'are likely to need support in all areas of the curriculum and [have] associated difficulties with mobility and communication' (DfE/DoH, 2014, Section 6.30). Internationally, the terminology is severe intellectual disabilities.

Theproposalssoughtto provide 'access to better quality vocational and work-related learning options to enable young people to progress in their learning post-16' and to provide 'good opportunities and support in order to get and keep a job' (p.50). These ambitions are reflected in the revisedSpecial Educational Needs and Disability(SEND) Code of Practice (DfE/DoH, 2014): the principles of the code are designed to support a number of outcomes including 'successful preparation for adulthood, including independent living and employment' (DfE/DoH, 2014, p.19) and statutory requirementsare set out for local authorities to publish a local offer, which mustinclude information on preparing for and finding employment.

The article commences with a brief description of the Studio context. Different educational paths, functions and purpose of learning are then considered in order to examine purposes of education for children and young people with severe learning difficulties. The evaluation research is described and data analysed, presented and discussed in relation to different 'sides' of the Studio and purposes of education.

**Context of the Studio**

The Greenside Studio is viewed by the special school to which it is connected as a 'specialist, vocational teaching resource, based within the heart of the school's local community' (Greenside School, 2014).It is a physical place and space in a shopping precinct local to the school. The space incorporates: an 'old fashioned' sweet shop with shelves of sweets in jars; a classroom/ceramics area with tables and chairs; a small storage area and an accessible toilet; a kitchen diner/work area with hob, microwaves and a sink on one side and two computers and the CCTV camera screen for the shop entrance on the other side; a kiln room containing a large electric kiln and clay drying area; and a storage room for ceramic bisques.

The school is an all age school (3-19 years) for young people with severe learning difficulties and profound and multiple learning difficulties, although the Studio is mainly a resource for the post 16 age group. It is described by the school as follows:

> 'A 'living classroom', this local shop premises provides young people who have severe or profound learning difficulties with exceptional opportunities to undertake work related learning, including vocational courses designed to develop communication, social-interaction and independence skills' (Greenside School, 2014).

Thus, the Studio is seen at a school policy level to be related to vocational work-related learning and the development of functional skills, all based within the community.

**Educational paths, functions and purposes**

In any evaluation of educational provision and its associated outcomes, Biesta (2009) suggests that evaluators should consider the question of purpose (effective for *what*) and audience (effective for *whom*).In this section of the article we therefore describe and discussdifferent conceptualisations of the purpose/s of education in order to consider the purpose/s of education for children and young people with severe learning difficulties. These conceptualisations are:

- different *educational paths* (liberal, vocational, academic, functionaland social);
- Biesta's (2009) different *educational functions* (qualification, subjectification and citizenship); and
- Dee, Devecchi and Florian's (2006) different *purposes of learning* for people with learning difficulties (being, having and doing).

From a synthesis of these we outline three main categories of*purposes of education*: those related to person-becoming; those related to later life/vocation; and those purposes related to citizenship/society.We then discuss these in relation to the education of children and young people with severe learning difficulties.

*Educational paths*

A number of commentators have identified differenteducational paths, which are often positioned as opposing binaries:liberal education or vocational education (Pring, 2004; Stonier, 2013; Williams, 1994); functional education or academic education (Bouck, 2012); a functional approach or a social approach (Dee, 2006).These different paths are further explicated in table 1.Being placed in opposition to each other, alternative paths are frequently regarded as discrete and separate and there is accompanying debate over which educational path should be privileged for different groups of young people. For example, Bouck (2012), in the US context, refers to an academic curriculum in the sense of the general curriculum most students receive, as opposed to a specific functional skills curriculum provided for children designated as having special educational needs. A similar perceived divide between academic and vocational paths has been the focus of much research and political review in the UK (Robinson, 1997; Wolf, 2011; Hancock, 2014) and is seen as 'a persistent and deep' divide (Young, 2011, p.271).

| Educational | Explication |
|---|---|

| path | |
|------|---|
| Liberal | - learning for learning's sake, with an emphasis upon the learners' enrichment as persons (Williams, 1994)<br>- chief aim is to improve the capacity to think, understand and to 'appreciate what is worthy of appreciation' (Pring, 2004, p.50)<br>- not viewed as a means to an end<br>- requires an expert to pass on a body of knowledge to a 'novice' (Pring, 2004) |
| Vocational<br><br>(task-specific for a specific purpose) | - aim to enhance 'competence' at the tasks adults have to perform, for example, work (Pring,2004)<br>- develop the skills to do specific tasks (Pring, 2004; Williams, 1994)<br>- 'applicable' knowledge (Williams, 1994)<br>- 'useful learning', a means to an end (Pring, 2004)<br>- engagement in the 'real world' of work (Pring, 2004) |
| Academic<br><br>(accreditation in specific subjects) | - theoretical (Williams, 1994)<br>- a smallnumber of curricular domains, particularly language, science and mathematics (Biesta, 2009)<br>- associated with written exams, a focus on content, stressing abstract and theoretical knowledge (Goodson, 1987; McCulloch, 2008)<br>- high status (McCulloch, 2008) |
| Functional<br><br>(general skills for adult life) | - doing rather than thinking, acquisition of skills rather than knowledge (Pring, 2004)<br>- 'teaching students the necessary skills to function in adult life' (Bouck, 2012, p.1176)<br>- improving numeracy and literacy skills (Dee, 2006)<br>- 'life skills' (Bouck, 2012)<br>- 'seeksto prepare students for their subsequent environments' (Bouck, 2012, p.1176) |
| Social<br><br>(for the social good) | - recognising the social nature of learning and fostering citizenship (Dee, 2006)<br>- reference to the greater social good to which the person contributes (Pring, 2004)<br>- 'awareness of the social and economic context in which one acts or lives' (Pring,2004, p.79) |

Table 1: Types of educational path

The assumeddistinctiveness of these different educational paths, however, can be questioned. For example,Pring (2004) challenges the perceived dichotomy between liberal education and functional education, Bouck (2012) notes how a functional curriculum may contain academic and vocational elements, and the terms liberal education and academic education are often conflated. Further, Pring (2004) posits that the liberal ideal of education has become vocationalised by government policy drives and accountability standards

andStonier (2013, p.249) suggests that liberal education is a thing of the past, noting that 'the further education sector may have dispensed with education for enjoyment and the capacity to engage people in education for its own sake'. Indeed, Williams (1994, p.98) argues for a reconciliation between liberal and vocational education, that they 'need not be conceived as mutually exclusive activities'.

*Educational functions of education and purposes of learning*
Biesta (2009) proposes three major *functions of education*: subjectification, qualification, and citizenship. Dee et al.(2006) suggest relatedcategorieswith regard to the *purposes of learning* for adults with learning difficulties: being, having and doing.

Biesta's (2009) *subjectification* function relates to a purpose of education in supporting the student in becoming a particular kind of person.It can be observed in the curriculum aims of schools in England: legislation states that the curriculum of state-funded schools must be one that 'promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school' (Education Act 2002, Section 78; DfE, 2014a, Section 2.1). 'Development' indicates that there will be a change in the person, as they become an individual, or a 'subject' (Biesta, 2009). This connects to some extent with Dee et al's (2006, p.2) *being* purpose of learning: 'developing a sense of and belief in one's own identity and who we want to become'. There would appear to be some difference, however, in relation to what drives the intended change in the person, whether this is a societally defined or personally motivated development.Nevertheless, we call this 'person-becoming'.

The*qualification* function, here,does not refer to accredited qualifications, such as GCSEs or A levels in the English school system, but to providing young people with the knowledge, understanding and skills to 'do something' (Biesta, 2009, p.40).This could relate to specific training in a skill or technique, or to the introduction of a general topic, such as an introduction to modern culture (Biesta, 2009). This relates to Dee et al's (2006, p.2) *having* purpose of learningof 'acquiring new skills, knowledge and understanding'. As this concerns the provision of skills for later life, we call this the 'later-life/vocation' purpose of education. Again, this purpose can be observed within curriculum aims: the curriculum in state-funded schools in England must'prepare pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life' (Education Act 2002, Section 78; DfE, 2014a, Section 2.1).

These curriculum aims also relate to a final purpose of preparing a young person for their role in society, their citizenship. For Biesta (2009), this is the *socialisation* function, inserting individuals into existing ways of doing, becoming members of and part of society. For Dee et

al. (2006) this is the *doing* purpose of learning, the student becoming empowered and enabled to participate in society. This purpose we label the 'citizenship' purpose of education.

Pring (2004: 59) asserts that the most important educational experience is assistance with how to live one's life, which flows through these different purposes. This assistance takes the form of a process: helping the young person clarify the style of life judged 'worth living' (person-becoming); identifying the training and work that will enable one to live that life (the later life/vocation purpose); questioning the ends and values embodied within it (the citizenship purpose); and acquiring the necessary skills and competences (the later life/vocation purpose).

| Educational paths (Pring, 2004; Bouck, 2012; Williams, 1994; Dee, 2006) | Functions of education (Biesta, 2009) | Purposes of learning for adults with learning difficulties (Dee et al., 2006) | Purposes of education |
|---|---|---|---|
| Liberal | Subjectification | Being | Person-becoming |
| Vocational | Qualification | Having | Later life/vocation |
| Academic | | | |
| Functional | | | |
| Social | Socialisation | Doing | Citizenship |

Table 2: Educational paths, functions and purposes

Table 2 illustrates approximate and tentative links between the different typologies explored which will now be examined in relation to the education of learners with severe learning difficulties.

**Purposes of education for learners with severe learning difficulties**

The distinctions made between different educational paths, functions and purposesare particularly poignant and complex for young people with severe learning difficulties who, by the very nature of their special educational need, are unlikely to attain typical academic qualifications (DfE, 2014b), frequently do not gain employment as adults (DWP, 2013), and until 1970 were classified as 'ineducable' (Education (Handicapped Children) Act 1970 Act).

An historical overview of school curricula for learners with severe learning difficultiesillustrates different broad emphases over time (Byers and Lawson, 2015): curricula

based on checklists of 'normal' early developmental skills in areas such as 'cognitive development' and 'perceptual-motor skills' in the 1970s;a focus in the 1980s on functional 'skills for life' curricula involving aspects such as dressing and undressing, pouring drinks, shopping and making simple meals; subject content-based curricula centred on the national curriculum during the 1990s; and an integrated personalised curricula approach in the 2000s,with a balance between shared content and individualised needs. These different curricula emphases portray apparentlydifferentpurposes of education for this particular group of learners.At times the purposes for this group seem very separate from the purposes for typically-developing learners (for example, in a focus on functional skills for life) and, at other times, the purposes seem more similar (for example, accessing and developing knowledge and understanding inherent within different subjects).

Distinctions made between theperson-becoming, later life/vocation and citizenship purposes of education described in the previous section seem to particularly blur and overlap when considering children and young people with severe learning difficulties. All of the purposes relate to preparations for adult life and this 'preparation for adulthood' hasa specific emphasis in recent SEN policy reforms in England:it is the focus of a whole chapter, for example, in the SEND Code of Practice (DfE/DoH, 2014) and there is a dedicated Department for Education funded programme entitled*Preparing for Adulthood* (Preparing for Adulthood, 2011). Notions of adulthood, however, are potentially problematic for people with learning difficulties as adulthood is typically denoted by a number of culturally determined markers which may be difficult to interpret and/or attain for people with learning difficulties. These markers includefinancial independence, non-dependent family roles, personal autonomy, making independent decisions and having full responsibility for one's own life (Dee 2006; Konstam, 2015).

A later life/vocation perspective for most young people involves some kind of paid employment aspirations, thus preparation for the world of work is a key aspect. The situation for young people with disabilities, and particularly for learners with severe learning difficulties, is rather different. Research shows that young people with disabilities have lower rates of employment than the rest of the population (DWP, 2011; Durkin,Fraser and Conti-Ramsden, 2012; OfSTED, 2011). In addition, although many people with learning difficulties aspire to having a job, opportunities for achieving paid employment are particularly scarce (Lundy, Bryne and McKeown, 2012). Anational indicator report (HSCIC, 2012) found that only 6.6% of adults known to social services with moderate to severe learning difficulties were in paid employment at the time and another report noted that 79% of people with

severe learning disabilities[2] have never worked (DWP, 2013). Durkin et al. (2012) acknowledge that over the past few decades in the UK, professionals, policy makers and researchers have sought to improve transition from school to employment for young people with disabilities. They add, however, that experiences and outcomes vary according to nature of disability and need and that research and policy often neglects to explore provision for young people with severe learning difficulties.

One exception is Waite, Lawson and Robertson's (2006) research which examined the 14-16 curriculum and vocational learning, askingspecial school teachers for their descriptions of 'vocational learning' for young people with severe and profound learning difficulties. From 125 questionnaire returns the following groups of themes were developed:

- preparation for future life;
- life skills for independence;
- careers education about what different jobs might entail;
- work experience;
- development of autonomy and responsibility for self and own learning;
- development of opportunities for choice and personal preference;
- learning beyond the classroom and increased community links;
- experiential learning.

These themes portray a broad understanding of the meaning and operationalisation of 'vocational learning' for young people with severe learning difficulties, spanning the purposes of education discussed earlier. The clearest link is to notions of later life/vocation, with a focus on preparation for future life, life skills for independence, careers education and work experience. There are also elements of the person-becoming purpose – the development of autonomy and responsibility for the self, with opportunities for choice and personal preference. Finally there are links to the citizenship purpose, evidenced particularly in the increased community links.

It is recognised that in order for young people with learning difficulties to make the transition to paid employment they need to receive careers planning and undergo work experience while still at school or in full-time education (Lundy et al., 2012). For some learners, however, according to the teachers' perspectives expressed in Lawson, Waite & Robertson (2006), vocational learning more explicitly incorporates the person-becoming and citizenship purposes of education.

---

[2] Learning disabilities is frequently the terminology used with adults, while learning difficulties is a school-based term.

*'Vocational learning is preparing for post-school [and] varies for individual pupils. Some caninclude careers/work experience (either in school, sheltered or independent), [for] others it's dailyliving and recreational and leisure skills'*(questionnaire response)

*'Preparing for adult life, developing personal qualities, recognising skills and achievements, dealing with changing relationships, developing ability to make choices and deal with change, learning about the community and money.'* (questionnaire response)

(Lawson et al., 2005, p.15)

So what purposes of education does the Studio, depicted by the school as a vocational teaching resource, offer to the young people with severe learning difficulties who engage with it?Are its purposes purely vocational or do they span the other purposes? We now turn to the evaluation of the Studio, starting with a description of the research project itself.

**Research project**

The overall aim of the research project was to evaluate the first year of the Greenside Studio's operation.The questions we sought to answer were:

- How do staff and other stakeholders understand the purpose of the Greenside Studio?
- How is the facility used and how do staff and other stakeholders think it is used?
- How do these understandings of the purpose and use of the Studio relate to its stated aims?

Two main data collection tools were used, within a survey methodology (Fink, 2003). The first was an online staff questionnaire; the second involved semi-structured interviews with various stakeholders. These were supplemented by an examination of school documentation about the Studio's use and purpose.

A 10 question online questionnairewas constructed based on the research questions. The majority of the questions were open ended and required qualitative responses. A draft version of the questionnaire was sent to the headteacher and the post-16 coordinator responsible for the Studio and minor adaptations were made based on their thoughts. The

questionnaire asked about respondents' knowledge and use of the Studio, their views about its purpose and value, about student learning and about its potential. The link to the online questionnaire was forwarded electronically to school staff – to all teaching staff in the school and to teachers, tutors and teaching assistants (TAs) in the Post-16 Department (approximately 40 people). It was also sent to the shop manager. Staff were informed about the questionnaire in a staff briefing and the link was live for two weeks; teachers were given time in a staff meeting to complete the questionnaire and TAs were given time during the school day.There were 27 responses to the online questionnaire (18 teachers, four TAs, three members of the senior management team, the shop manager and a student who was on work experience at the school and had spent time in the Studio), a response rate of 68%.

Open coding was carried out across the responses, broken down by role (for example, teacher, TA). Each question was then examined separately, open codes were grouped with similar codes and given category titles. Some categories were broken down into sub-categories, for example, in response to the question 'what do you think is the purpose of/ rationale behind the Greenside Studio?' a category name was 'to provide…' which was then broken down into sub-categories according to what was provided, such as 'opportunities', 'an environment' and 'curriculum'. A rating scale was also used for one question where participants were asked to select a description of their level of knowledge of 'what goes on at the Greenside Studio'.

The semi-structured interviews took the form of interview-conversations with various 'stakeholders'. In the majority of cases this was carried out by the second author over the telephone and audio-recorded. One person chose to respond to the questions via email. Two students were interviewed; these were two of the four students who most regularly used the Studio facilities. They were asked questions by a TA they were familiar with and the TA recorded their answers in writing. The prepared interview questions were based on themes arising from the questionnaire findings, along with the research questions, and were shared with the senior management team. Students' questions were devised by the post-16 coordinator based on her knowledge of the students and the research focus.

21 people (in addition to the two students) were approached to participate and a convenient time was arranged for them to be contacted and interviewed – 15 interviews were subsequently carried out, making a total of 17 interviews including the two student interviews. The length of the interviews ranged from 7 to 32 minutes with an average length of 17 minutes. Table 1 details the role of the interview participants.

| Participant | Number | Code |
|---|---|---|
| Students (facilitated and scribed by TA) | 2 | S1-2 |
| Parents of post-16 students who use the Studio | 2 | P1-2 |
| A school governor | 1 | G |
| Headteacher | 1 | H |
| Deputy headteacher | 1 | DH |
| Post-16 coordinator and vocational lead in Greenside Studio, assistant headteacher | 1 | AH |
| Teachers/tutors who lead groups at the Studio | 4 | T1-4 |
| Teaching assistants who have worked alongside post-16 students in the Studio | 3 | TA1-3 |
| Creative partner who leads the pottery/ceramic sessions for the school at the Studio | 1 | CP |
| Shop manager | 1 | SM |
| **Total** | **17** | |

Table 1: Role of interview participants

Initial analysis took the form of the two researchers separately listening to the same four interview recordings and examining them for key themes. A meeting was held between the researchers to discuss their findings and the emerging themes (investigator triangulation, Patton, 1990). Several themes were selected, defined and agreed on and these were then applied to the remaining interviews with each researcher listening to a different set of interviews. Any new emerging themes were also noted, and shared between the researchers. The themes were also applied to the emailed version received from one participant.

The project met the ethical guidelines set out by British Educational Research Association (2011). The school and all participants were provided with information about the project and gave their verbal consent. Most participants are anonymised within this report and effort has been made to ensure that students, parents, teachers/tutors and TAs are not easily identifiable. It was indicated to interview participants who are in a very specific role that they may be identifiable (for example, headteacher, shop manager, creative partner). Students were informed about the project through verbal description and those who participated in interviews gave verbal consent.

The findings presented here relate to the participants' views about the purposes of the Studio and how success can be recognised. These then form part of a discussion about the purposes of the Studio with regard to the purposes of education.

**Purposes of the Studio– the 'Sides' of the Studio**

A number of purposes of the Studio were identified through the interviews and questionnaires. These included: providing a real life work environment; developing students' life and community skills; extending learning; and increasing the profile of the school. For some participants the purpose of the Studio was regarded as a bridge, a 'stepping stone', to to wider forms of employment, to the next stage of life (for example, college, residential setting) and/or to the 'real world'.The perception and use of The Studio is mediated through the environment it is seen to provide, and the affordances of this environment. It may be regarded, for example, as a sweet shop and ceramic studio, a real life work environment, a classroom, a creative space, and/or a base within the community.

One way of expressing and perhaps visualising the multiple purposes of the Studio is the notion of 'sides', a term used by the assistant headteacher. Different sides to The Studio's operation can be identified (see figure 1):

- the educational side - ensuring the school is getting the best out of the shop as far as education is concerned;
- the creative side–having a clay and kiln facility, enabling 'art skills, thinking creatively … the sensory element' of playing with and shaping clay (CP);
- the business side - running the shop, getting customers in, financial imperatives;
- the vocational side - providing relevant work experience, 'primarily a work experience programme for some of the students of Greenside school' (SM);
- the community side – being positioned in, being part of and being used by the community and also having a role in 'educating' the community;
- the personal development side -'the shop, the actual selling of the sweets is not…a priority; the priority is what the students are getting out of it'(TA1).
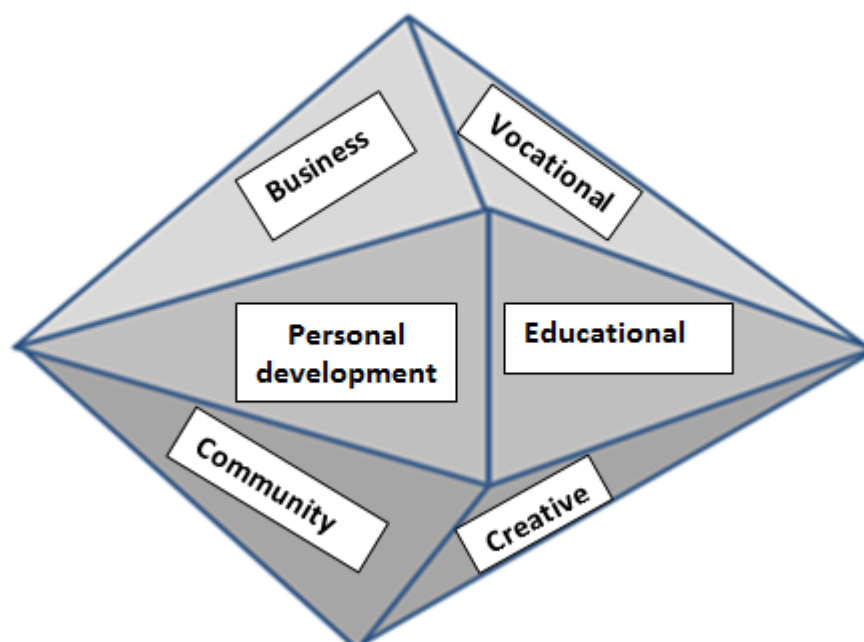
Figure 1: The 'sides' of the Studio

Although described in school policy documentation as a vocational teaching resource, the policy documentation (Greenside School, 2012) outlines a range of different purposes related to the 'sides' identified through the interviews. This documentation states that the Studio aspires to enable young people with learning difficulties to:

- Learn skills to enable them to gain some form of employment, suited to their interests, skills and experience – this relates to the vocational, personal development and educational side.
- Develop interpersonal and communication skills through working with members of the public; they will gain greater confidence and further their self-esteem – this aim relates to the personal development and educational side.
- Gain accredited qualifications in vocational skills – this relates specifically to the vocational side.
- Transform expectations, their own, those of their family and those of the general public – this reflects the personal development and the community side.
- Provide opportunities for progression to pursue employment that reflects their interests, skills and ambitions – this aim relates to the personal development, the vocational and the educational sides.

It thus incorporates four of the six sides identified through the interviews; it does not include the business or creative side.

The Studio, its purpose, use and potential, seem to be regarded differently by different types of stakeholder. For example, the school senior managers and the shop manager emphasise work experience, teachers and tutors focus on curriculum and, parents express greater interest in the personal and social aspects, and TAs are often focussed on the day-to-day activity level. Perhaps this is to be expected, as people are working at different levels (for example, strategic and operational) and have different expectations, roles and experiences - a comparison between the TAs' and the senior management teams' questionnaire responses indicates that the TA view is not different, but tends to reflect only partof the SMT's vision. An interesting observation is that TAs are frequently residents of the local community and, therefore, seem to emphasise mixing with the public and the community.

With regard to community inclusion, an interesting aspect of the community side of the Studio is its two-sidedness. As reported above the students have the chance to interact and mix with the public, giving them the opportunity and experience of interacting with this local

community. In addition to this, however, is the stated aim of transforming the expectations of the general public. This has begun to be achieved, as evidenced in the questionnaires where it was noted that the Studio enabled interaction with public and the building of community-school relations. This acted on a range of levels – it achieved 'the presence of people with disabilities within the local community' (teacher), allowing the community to 'see the difficulties [young people with disabilities] face' (teacher) and to raise awareness of the abilities and capabilities of the students, causing them to 'understand and appreciate' (teacher) students from the school. It leads to a 'public understanding of [the] school and ethos' (TA) and 'an open dialogue with the local community' (teacher).

**Success of the Studio**

Interpretations of success also seem to be linked to the different 'sides' and to the different type of stakeholder. Interview participants were asked about the success of the Studio and how it could be measured. Three main aspects of success and areas for evaluation were mentioned: student learning/progress; community participation; and profit.

Participants reported that success is indicated because students have developed in terms of independence. They have learned, achieved and progressed: 'if students continue to make progress it's a successful project' (P2). TA3 commented that, in the area of life skills, the students 'can do things they could not do before', for example, making tea.Success is also indicated in more personal, socialand emotional ways because the students are happyand enjoy themselves andthere is a differencein theirbehaviour.A parent recounted that, in being given greater responsibility and being able to be 'more his own person', her son's behaviour had changed substantially over the year such that the class teacher had told the parent, 'I know a different person now'(P1).It was noted thatsome such aspects of success,for example,'trust, confidence, self-esteem'(H) are difficult to quantify. These notions of success in terms of student learning and progress are related to both the educational and the personal development sides of the Studio. There may also be aspects of this development that link to the vocational side, although this is not as explicit.

The degree and quality of community use of, interest in and involvement with the Studio was also suggested as an indicator of success, that the Studio was valued within the community, involved members of the public, and was used by local people. This clearly relates to the community side of the Studio. The shop manager stated that there were'constantly people showing interest in involving us with different community projects' and he also noted that there was 'a lot of positive feedback through our website and Facebook page from people who have visited us' (SM). One of the TAs interviewed lives in the locality and mentioned the

atmosphere in the Studio – 'kids in the street love it –they go in there and chat and everything...the community enjoy it and think it's a good idea' (TA2). Community interest was also mentioned in relation to public awareness about the school and about young people with learning difficulties. 'If people know about the shop and when they talk about the shop, they talk about the school, they talk about the types of kids that it services, then I think it will have had a good social role in creating links with the local community and raising the status of kids with learning difficulties in Stevenage' (CP).

The final indicator of success was related to the business side in terms ofthe shop being profitable.This was reflected in the questionnaire responses: when asked 'what is the possible long term potential of Greenside Studio?' responses included'fundraising/ profit making'(teacher), 'to be a profitable independent shop' (TA), and the assistant headteacher mentioned sustainability and replicability, 'that it is sustainable as a business in its own right…part of a chain of similar outlets in different community areas.'This was also reflected in the interviews with the shop manager and the assistant head both discussing footfall and finance.

**Discussion**

The article began with an examination of the purposes of education.The subsequent analysis reveals that many of the purposes of education can be seen to be being met through the different identified sides of the provision being evaluated. For example: the later life/vocation purpose of education is highlighted in the vocational side of the Studio, as well as the educational side; the personal development side, and perhaps the creative side, relates to the person-becoming purpose of education; the citizenship purpose of education is reflected in the community side of the Studio. The business side seems to sit outside the purposes of education, but perhaps enables the other sides to occur.

The view of the Studio is mediated by the position of the respondent. Dee (2006) suggests that, through such professional positioning, professionals' viewpoints are mediated through their perceptions of young people's needs, their interpretation of policies and procedures, and their own personal agendas. It can be illustrated by imagining the view of figure 1 from different perspectives. For example, the shop-keeper would look at the business side and this may fill their vision, although there may be some awareness of the other sides of the Studio. The creative practitioner would look at it from another position with the creative side at the forefront. Thus, in evaluating success or otherwise of any enterprise there should be awareness of the multi-faceted nature of the 'object' being evaluated, and the importance of

gaining a range of stakeholder perspectives so success across all aspects can be recognised.

Whilst different stakeholder perspectives and different purposes of education can be identified in the Studio's working, the prioritisationand possible competition between different purposes, and different sides, is interesting to consider. For example, the creative side seems to be regarded as a minor aspect of the Studio, not even mentioned by some participants; and the rapid development of the business side may mitigate against greater student independence, as there may sometimes be insufficient time for students to undertake tasks independently. Additionally, it is interesting to reflect on where thebalanceshould lie between a focus on learning for later life/vocation (basic functional skills, numeracy, literacy, travel, lunch preparation, practical work skills), person-becoming learning (self-esteem, behaviour, overcoming shyness, being out of one's comfort zone,) and learning for citizenship (having the opportunity to prove oneself, modifying behaviour in front of others so as not to stand out, interaction with the community)? The Post-16 Prospectus (Greenside School, 2012, p.10) highlights the development of 'softer' skills, for example, 'interpersonal and communication skills through working with members of the public'and the importance of supporting students in gaining 'greater confidence and further[ing] their self-esteem'. The staff interviews, however, revealed that these aspects are less planned and assessed than the 'harder' functional skills.This perhaps, then, indicates a tendency to focus on the more measurable practical skills at the expense of the less tangible, a problem that Biesta (2009) argues is endemic of current educational practice. His qualification function is the one that can be most easily quantified and compared across pupils, cohorts and countries, whereas the person-becoming and social/citizenship elements cannot be so easily measured.

The school policy documentation positions the Studio as a vocational teaching resource with an emphasis on work-related and vocational learning (Greenside School, 2014). The provision is regarded as 'a stepping stone' and a 'bridge'. However, it is not entirely clear what it is seen as a stepping stone or bridge to. Is it intended to be a bridge between school and employment? An emphasis on preparing for paid employment is a policy imperative with perceived economic as well as personal and social benefits. The National Audit Office (2011) report *Oversight of special education for young people aged 16-25* estimates that supporting one person with a learning disability into employment could, in addition to improving their independence and self-esteem, increase that person's income by between 55 and 95 per cent. The LA local offer referred to earlier must include the provision of services for children and young people with SEN to support them in finding employment. A

range of 'imaginative approaches' (DfE/DoH, 2014, p.130) is encouraged including taster opportunities, work experience and supported internships (DfE, 2014c).The Studio seems to provide one such imaginative approach. As noted earlier in this article, however, the prospect of paid employment for people with severe learning difficulties is unlikely and the choices for people with learning difficulties who require a supportive working environment are frequently limited to a few models of provision scattered unevenly throughout the country (Gosling and Cotterill, 2000).

Preparing for work often incorporates indirect employability skills 'such as communication and social skills, using assistive technology, and independent travel training' (DfE/DoH, 2014, p.132). These can be identified in the Studio provision too.Questionnaire responses mention the development of social and communication skillsand school timetable documentation shows that the Studio is most frequently used as a base for travel training, followed by workexperience and thirdly as a base for students to plan, shop and prepare for lunch.Some commentators argue that '*education towards employment* is worthwhile even if it does not ultimately lead to paid, open employment' (Baynes and Dyson, 1994, p.145, original emphasis) as it positions people with learning difficulties 'in the same social arena as people in paid employment' (p.145).However, Stonier (2013) expresses concern that students with severe learning difficulties move from one vocational course to another, gaining qualifications and skills that they will not be given the opportunity to use. He argues some young people may not be able to demonstrate progress and gain employment, which then negates the need for a vocational curriculum.

**Concluding comments**

The study of the Studio has highlighted the importance of viewing and appreciating different sides when planning and evaluating an initiative – the different sides of the Studio presented here illustrate a range of, sometimes conflicting, perspectives each of which may need to be acknowledged. These sides also reflect different purposes of education for learners with severe learning difficulties. The distinctions noted earlier, for example, between liberal and academic paths, or vocational and functional paths, are particularly unclear for this group of young people, where the later life/vocation, person-becoming and citizenship purposes are difficult to disentangle.

With narrower vocational purposes, in terms of preparing for paid employment, being problematic, vocational learning is interpreted in broader terms and thusencompasses all of the purposes.This study of the Studio revealed evidence of all of the themes that Waite et al's research (2006) identified around vocational learning for students with severe learning

difficulties, themes which incorporate wider purposes of education. The SEND Code of Practice (DfE/DoH, 2014, p.77) also seems to recognise that paid employment is not necessarily a realistic aspiration or possibility for some people with learning difficulties,mentioning the provision of advice and support with regard to 'meaningful occupation', independent living and active participation in local communities in addition to paid employment. So is the Studio a stepping stone or bridge to life after school whatever form that life may take?For example, the Studio may provide greater opportunitiesfor choice, control and community inclusion, considered important for equal life chances in adulthood(Preparing for Adulthood, 2011) andthe creative side of the Studio would seem to offer the possibility for liberal educational pursuits which Stonier (2013) proposes as inherently valuable activities in themselves.Returning to Pring's (2004, p. 59) assertion that the most important educational experience is assistance with how to live one's life, the issue here would seem to be the nature of this life 'worth living' and how education can support young people (with severe learning difficulties) to determine their own aspirations for this life worth living.

**Acknowledgements**

**References**

Baynes, A. and Dyson, A. (1994) Education towards employment: a project for people with learning difficulties. *British Journal of Special Education*, *21*(4), 142-146.

Biesta, G. (2009) Good education in an age of measurement: on the need to reconnect with the question of purpose in education. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*, 21(1), 33-46.

Bouck, E. (2012) Secondary students with moderate/severe intellectual disability: considerations of curriculum and post-school outcomes from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research,* 56(12), 1175-1186.

British Educational Research Association (2011) *Ethical guidelines for ethical research*. London: BERA.

Byers, R. and Lawson, H. (2015, in press) Priorities, products and process – developments in providing a curriculum for young people with severe and profound learning difficulties.In P. Lacey, R. Ashdown, P. Jones, H. Lawson and M. Pipe (eds) *The Routledge companion to severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties*. London: Routledge.

Dee, L. (2006) *Improving transition planning for young people with special educational needs.*Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Dee, L., Devecchi, C. and Florian, L. (2006) *Being, having and doing: Theories of learning and adults with learning difficulties*. LSRC research report. London: Learning and Skills Network. Available at: http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED508507.pdf

Department for Education (DfE) (2012)*Support and aspiration: A new approach to special educational needs and disability - progress and next steps*.[online]. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/180836/DFE-00046-2012.pdf

Department for Education (DfE) (2014a) *National curriculum in England: Framework for key stages 1 to 4*. [online]. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4/the-national-curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4

Department for Education (DfE) (2014b) *Children with special educational needs 2014: An analysis*. [online]. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/350129/SFR31_2014.pdf

Department for Education (DfE) (2014c) *Supported internships*. [online]. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/316676/Supported_internships.pdf

Department for Education and Department of Health (DfE/DoH) (2014) *Special educational needs and disability code of practice 0-25*. [online]. Available at; https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/342440/SEND_Code_of_Practice_approved_by_Parliament_29.07.14.pdf

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) (2011) *Getting in, staying in and getting on: Disability employment support fit for the future.*Norwich: The Stationery Office.

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) (2013) *Fulfilling potential: Building a deeper understanding of disability in the UK today.* Norwich: The Stationery Office.

Durkin, K., Fraser, J. and Conti-Ramsden, G. (2012) School-age prework experiences of young people with a history of specific language impairment. *Journal of Special Education*, 45(4), 242-255.

Fink, A. (2003)*The survey handbook.* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Goodson, I. (1987) *School subjects and curriculum change: studies in curriculum history. (*Revised edn.). London: Falmer.

Greenside School (2012) *Greenside School post-16 prospectus 2012-13*.[online]. Available from: http://www.greenside.herts.sch.uk/information/Greenside%20%20Prospectus%20post%2016.pdf [Accessed 14th November 2013]

Greenside School (2014) *Introducing the Greenside Studio* [online] Available from: http://www.greenside.herts.sch.uk/Greenside%20Studio/Greenside%20Studio.html [Accessed 14th November 2014]

Gosling, V. and Cotterill, L. (2000). An employment project as a route to social inclusion for people with learning difficulties?*Disability & Society*, *15*(7), 1001-1018.

Hancock, M. (2014) *Bridging the divide between academic and vocational education*. Speech delivered at Royal Opera House, London on 9 July 2014. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/bridging-the-divide-between-academic-and-vocational-education

Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC) (2012) *Social care and mental health indicators from the national indicator set - 2010-11 – final release*. [online]. Available at: http://www.hscic.gov.uk/catalogue/PUB05270/soci-care-ment-heal-indi-fina-10-11-rep.pdf

Konstam, V. (2015) *Emerging and young adulthood: Multiple perspectives, diverse narratives*. (2nd edn.). Switzerland: Springer.

Lawson, H. and Black, A. (2013) *The Greenside Studio: A classroom in the community.* Research Project Report. Available at: http://www.greenside.herts.sch.uk/Greenside%20Studio/Greenside%20project%20report%20FINAL%2015-9-13.pdf

Lawson, H., Waite, S. and Robertson, C. (2005) Distinctiveness of curriculum provision at 14-16 for students with learning difficulties: opportunities and challenges. *British Journal of Special Education*,32(1), 12-20.

Lundy,L., Bryne, B. and McKeown, P. (2012) *Review of transitions to adult services for young people with learning disabilities.*Belfast: Northern Ireland Commissioner for children and young people.

McCulloch, G. (2008) Subjects. In G. McCulloch andD. Crook (eds)*The Routledge international encyclopaedia of education.*Abingdon: Routledge.

National Audit Office (2011) *Oversight of special education for young people aged 16-25*. Norwich: The Stationery Office.

Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED) (2011) *Progression post-16 for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities*. Manchester: OfSTED.

Patton, M. (1990)*Qualitative evaluation and research methods.* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park: Sage.

Preparing for Adulthood (2011) *Preparing for adulthood*. [online]. Available at: http://www.preparingforadulthood.org.uk/who-we-are [Accessed 21st November 2014].

Pring, R. (2004) *Philosophy of education: aims, theory, common sense and research.*London: Continuum.

Robinson, P. (1997)*The myth of parity of esteem: earnings and qualifications.*Discussion paper 354. London: Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics.

Stonier, K. (2013) Learning for progression and employability or learning for learning's sake? *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 41(4), 249-255.

Waite, S., Lawson, H. and Robertson, C. (2006) Work-related learning for students with significant learning difficulties: relevance and reality. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, *36*(4), 579-595.

Williams, K. (1994) Vocationalism and liberal education: exploring the tensions. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 28(1), 89-100.

Wolf, A. (2011) *Review of vocational education – the Wolf report.* London: Department for Education.

Young, M. (2011) The return to subjects: a sociological perspective on the UK coalition government's approach to the 14–19 curriculum. *Curriculum Journal, 22*(2), 265-278.