

How will they ever learn?

The Nottingham Social Action Spring School

March 21-23 2001



What were we trying to achieve?

When *The Short-sighted UFOs*, *The Private Crew*, *The Cosmic Enthusiastic Minds United*, *The Gift Of Life*, *Synthesis*, *The Matrix*, *No Workers*, *The Unknown*, *The Sleepers*, *Mission* and *Money Matters* showed up at The John Carroll Leisure Centre in Radford on March 21st, they didn't know what to expect. They hadn't even named themselves yet.

They were 60 young people from Nottingham, invited to take part in a three day event run by the Centre For Social Action and organised by the Lifelong Learning Division of Nottingham City Council and the Greater Nottingham Learning Partnership. They were there because the education system had failed them to the point where they were now unable to take full advantage of the educational or training opportunities on offer. For example, all the young people were part of the Learning Gateway. This event set out to find a way forward for the many young people in similar circumstances.

This is how we did it:

- by valuing the views and knowledge of the young people
- by recording their insights as users of educational services
- by sharing knowledge and experience amongst the group
- by finding out from them what young people need from the educative process
- by enabling young people to gain further knowledge and skills from involvement in the process at the Spring School which they can use to develop their own goals

For three days this group took part in a series of games, exercises, workshops and discussions all designed to allow them to identify problems with the education system and the learning process, to find out why these problems exist and to suggest ideas for change.

They worked out how they were going to work together: no racism or sexism, no judging, no swearing, no drugs, no taking the piss, no rumours, no violence, no dirty looks.

Then they gave themselves their names.

Then they began...





Past Learning Experiences

Do we learn at school? On training courses? Or from our parents? From books and computers? Our friends? From practice? Or from our mistakes?

The young people at the Spring School examined all these methods of learning and came up with clear guidelines for what makes a good learning experience and what makes a bad one.

Good learning requires:

- humour
- trust
- praise
- purpose
- choice
- openness
- small groups
- friends
- safety
- involvement
- variety
- trying stuff
- fun

Bad learning consists of:

- poorly trained professionals
- lack of understanding cultural needs
- put downs and humiliation
- being forced to do things
- oppression
- fear
- bullying
- disruption
- boredom



What stops us learning?

The group explored the kind of problems that created barriers for them and prevented them getting involved with learning opportunities. Some people found that early negative experiences at school had affected their self-confidence in relation to learning. Many group members received little or no support from family, friends or community and many were in difficult personal circumstances that meant that they had no money or a secure base to allow them to pursue learning opportunities. Add to these factors cost, lack of information, travel, childcare and fear of the unknown and you have a potent combination to deter learning.

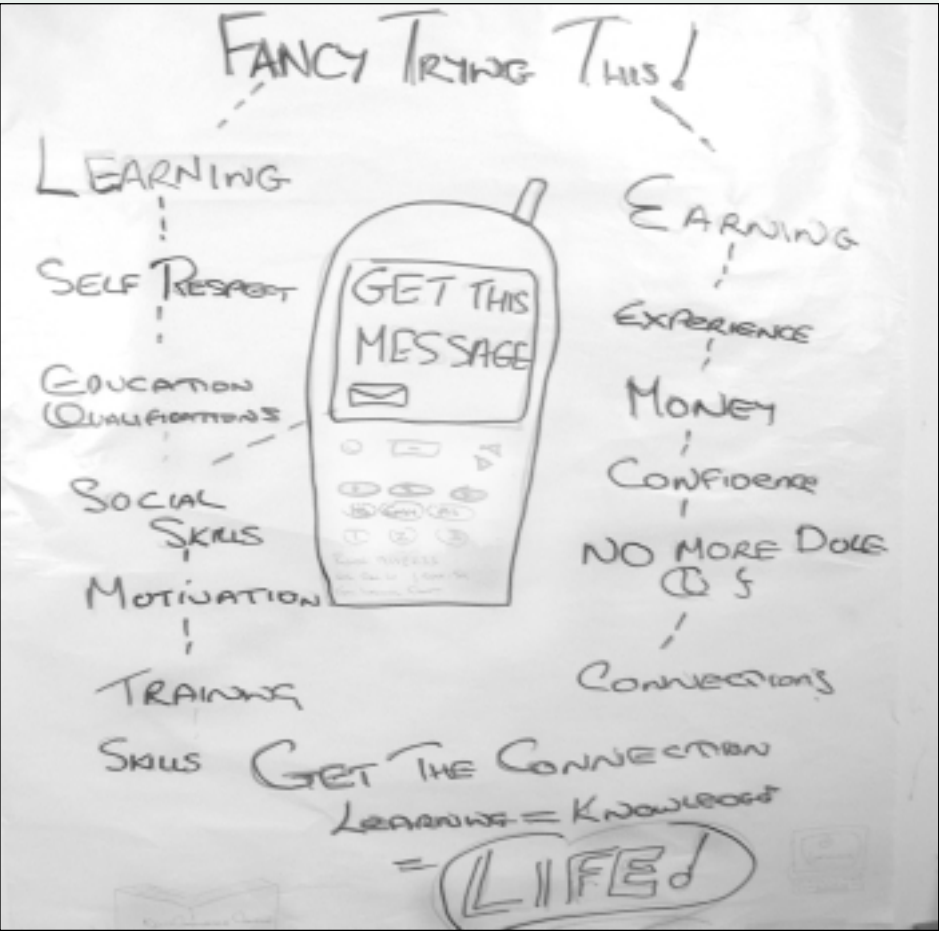
These young people felt that learning was not for them. It had passed them by for good and it didn't give them much of a chance first time round. They were too old, under-qualified, lacking in basic skills, they had no discipline, they were shy, they had too much ego. They were also single mothers or homeless or drug users or had health problems or had a criminal record.

So what can we do to help ourselves?

The groups began to work out a way forward by recognising the changes that they may have to make for themselves. There were personal qualities that they can bring to training and education that will help them. They determined to not get disheartened, to be brave and to give it their best shot. They recognised the importance of pacing themselves, not being too harsh on themselves, being realistic and to planning ahead. And they said it was ok to ask for help and seek support.



Messages Poster Here are the messages with which the group ended the Spring School

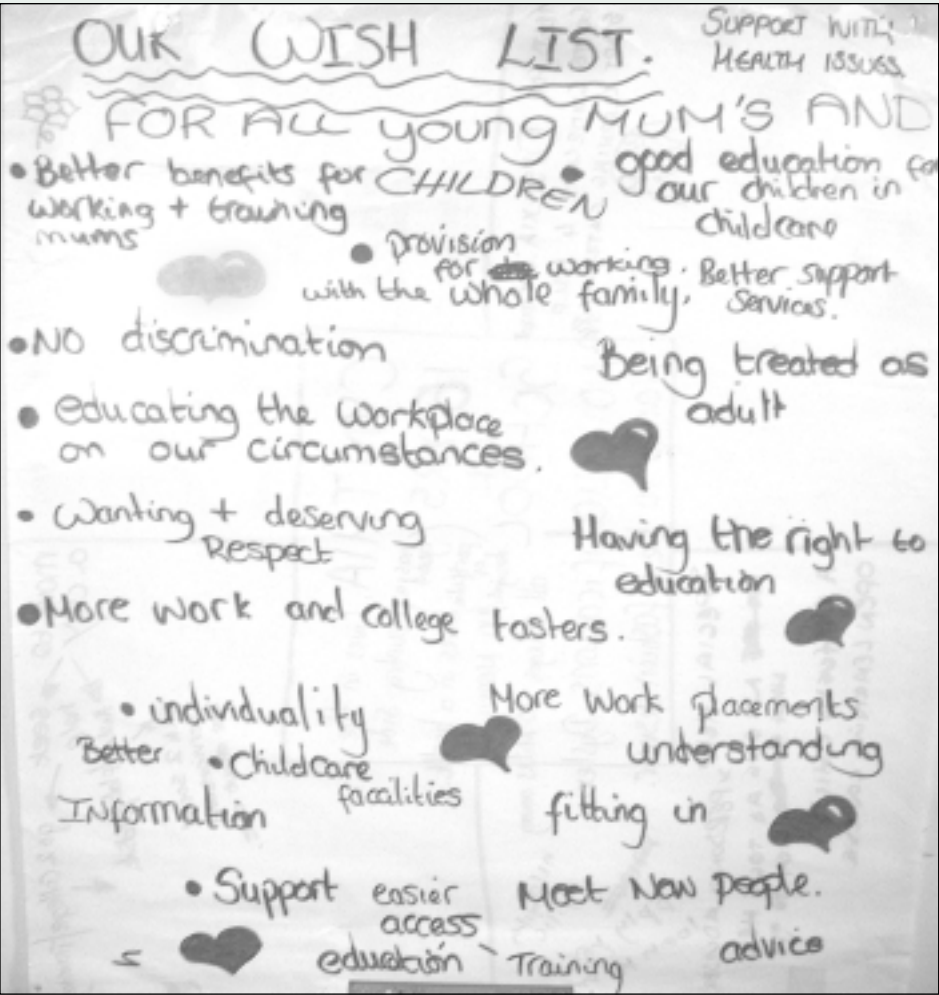


To Lifelong Learning

“Learning will contribute to a better life for us. For this to happen we need support when we go back to learning, someone to talk to about things. It would help if that support came from young people and not teachers. We would like to see more youth-led workshops, using social action methods. We want to see an end to negativity amongst teachers and trainers, from college tutors and support workers. School didn’t work for us so we want to learn in a less formal setting. We want there to be more flexibility and no talking down to us. But Lifelong Learning should help others like us when they are still in school and help them to stick it out.

We want to meet different people our own age. We want more residential events and more social events.

We want you to spend your money on us and not on yourselves.”



From young women with children: our wish list for all young mums

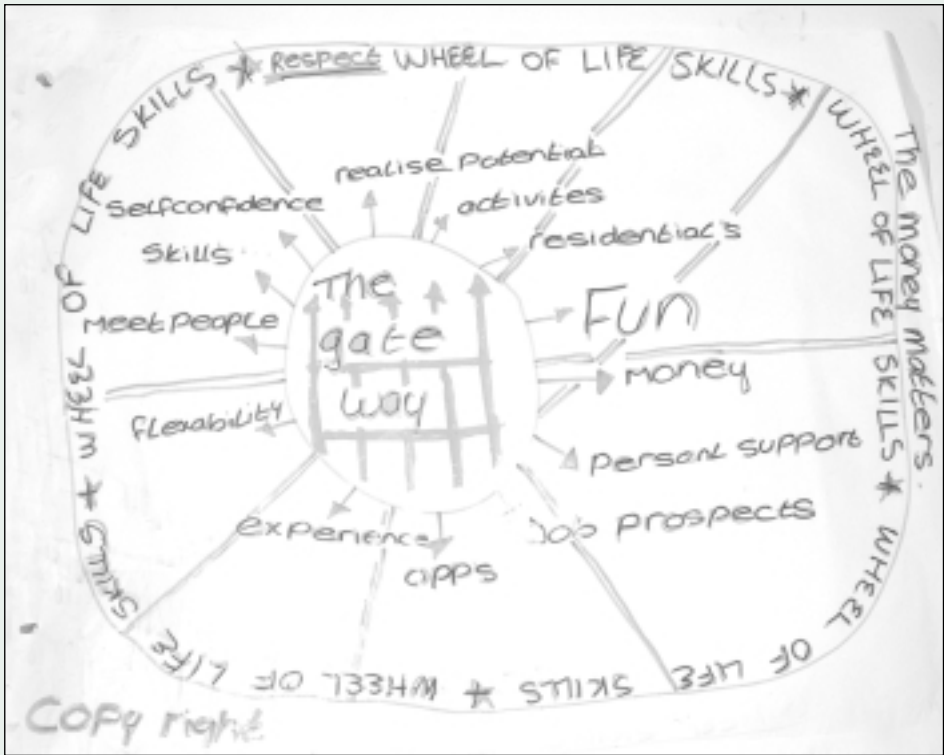
“We want an end to discrimination against us. We want and deserve to be treated with respect, as individuals and as adults.”

About work and education:

"We have a right to an education for ourselves and for our children. We want employers to understand our circumstances so they need to be educated about us. We want this to lead to work placement training that means something. We want better information and more information about education and training and more work and college tasters."

About support:
(the gateway poster)

"We need support with health issues, better childcare facilities and provision for working with the whole family."



If you want to know more about the method used contact:

Centre for Social Action,
De Montfort University,
Scraptoft Campus,
Scraptoft,
Leicester LE7 9SU

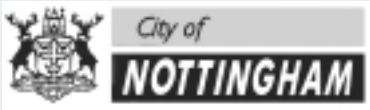
Tel: (0116) 257 7777
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Email: dmucs@dmu.ac.uk
Web: www.dmu.ac.uk/~dmucs

If you want to know more about Education and Training opportunities in Nottingham please contact:

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