

## **The Wisdom of Crowds**

Anthropologists have never found a society without art. Humans actually have an innate aesthetic sense, which is biologically determined. Using this sense leads us to create works of art, which symbolise our own social meanings and values. These help to give the community its sense of identity, and they also contribute enormously to its self-respect.

Making art is how we express and identify who we are as human beings – but it is so important that we realise we can all be a part of art, that it is not exclusive and that we have to go and look for it as well as expect it to just arrive in our lives and paths. So we all need to believe and engage and we must accept that it makes us better as people. Everyone needs to join in.

History also shows that those who collaborate are the ones that survive and thrive. A common belief is that shared visions and common goals are needed for people to work together collectively.

A decade ago, I read a book called “The Wisdom of Crowds” by James Surowiecki, the American writer and journalist. The book is all about the aggregation of information in groups which result in decisions- he argues- that are often better than could have been made by any single member of the group. James contends that groups of people can be collectively more effective at solving problems, undertaking innovation and decision making than individuals or elite groups. He also argues that learning from the distributed intelligence and knowledge of large groups represents a more powerful way to learn than in isolation within rigid and hierarchical relationships. I absolutely agree with that.

That set me out on a journey to build a network (NEATEN) in the north east of England, which brought together art educators to showcase and share good practice, to keep us informed, to challenge complacency and to link us with artists, galleries, museums, FE and HE. Eight years later and we are thriving. This also led me to being one of the small group who took the first initial steps into using social media platforms to promote NSEAD (National Society for Education Through Art and Design) and to create a space where art educators across the countries can also share.

The world wide web is an amazing place for networking, The explosion of blogs, of interactive, computer to computer communication sets up a new system of global, horizontal communication Networks. So, for the first time in history, people have the ability and freedom to communicate with each other without going through the channels set up by the institutions of society for socialised communication. It's bottom up, not top down.

This is why the current community of art practitioners and educators who flourish on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, and through blogs and other online spaces have been able to identify new areas to address. Thus the whole idea of Photo Pedagogy

was born. This builds on our other collaborative projects such as those which developed around the national Drawing CPD programme (TEA, Thinking, Expression and Action) and which see teachers working together for a common purpose. To share good practice is common sense and good practice. Those that live in their silos and little bubbles will never move forward. They will only stagnate.

This new informal way of learning is both supportive and non judgmental. It's also there whenever people want to take advantage of it. Its there to ask questions and to answer them and to empower people to sometimes seek out their own answers. It's also driven by an intrinsic desire to be creative and innovative within a community of practice. The NSEAD Art educator survey of 2014 concluded that "significant numbers of specialists in post rarely or never receive professional development". Well, we now have the ability and the shared desire to make our own and we shall. Through NSEAD, through regional networks, through online forums, through social media platforms, through whatever method we desire. Our community, our collaboration, our networks- they all give us opportunities to promote and to defend art craft and design education. And we should do it because it is something that is important to use- not careers or jobs- but the other reason that we get out of bed in the morning.....because we are artists as well as teachers. We need to create. We shall create.

I see NSEAD like the mother ship in a big wide galaxy, which now has all these other planets floating around it and with constant traffic between all of them. We have our main Facebook group and our satellite of more specialists ones. And, we now have Photo Pedagogy, which is there to help the many teachers who are taking new steps into the world of Photography as a tool for thinking, generating and making art. Exciting times for all of us. Thank you Jon and Chris, for driving this forward so enthusiastically.

Just recently I watched a viral video online, where a group of people all ran together to lift a bus up and release a cyclist trapped underneath it. A symbolic moment, which shows what working together can really do.

"All things appear and disappear because of the concurrence of causes and conditions. Nothing ever exists entirely alone; everything is in relation to everything else."

The Buddha (Gautama Siddharta, the founder of Buddhism, 563-483 B.C.)

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