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Collective Wisdom and Folly By: Paul Born

John Ott is a co-author of the brilliant new book, and soon to be movement (my prediction), supported by the visionaries of the [Fetzer Institute](#). This book is required reading for anyone interesting in collaborative social change. Based on nine years of research, *The Power of Collective Wisdom* shows how we can reliably tap into the extraordinary co-creative potential that exists whenever human beings gather together.



The book is practical and gives us not only the concepts and benefits of collective thinking but also shares with us methods that increase the likelihood of collective wisdom emerging when a group is gathered together. These methods include:

- *Deep Listening* – inviting us to be curious about what is really going on inside the person, the group, or the larger collective. It is an act of truly being present with others.
- *Suspension of Certainty* – watching for something new and often unexpected in and through the group enables our knowing together to be collective
- *Seeing Whole Systems/Seeking Diverse Perspectives* – shifting our attention from the individual to the group
- *Respect for Others/Group Discernment* – recognizing dissent as an avenue for new learning. Discernment is a capacity in groups for differentiation, permitting the emergence of new thinking and new images of what is possible.
- *Welcoming All That Is Arising* – bringing conscious attention to how gracefully we treat each other – recognizing different needs, respecting differences and celebrating our common identity.

Beautiful thinking for
February
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- *Trust in the Transcendent* – appreciating an underlying and critical element that takes into account the spiritual dimension or natural order we tap into collectively. It is our ability - even expectation that we can be surprised.

The authors write,

"Collective wisdom refers to knowledge and insight gained through group and community interaction. At a deeper level, however, it is about our living connection to each other and the interdependence we share in our neighborhoods, organizations, and world community."

If you are interested in deepening your understanding of the conditions that allow wisdom to emerge within groups and the common characteristics that underlie many successful group methodologies, you will want to be sure to read this book.

Related Links:

- Visit the [Collective Wisdom Initiative](#) website
- Join John Ott at Tamarack's [Communities Collaborating Institute](#)
- Buy *The Power of Collective Wisdom* at [amazon.ca](#)
- Comment on [this Article!](#)

Understanding and Addressing Low Literacy By: Judith Maxwell with Sylvia Cheuy

An estimated nine million working age Canadians – including one in three people aged 26 to 35 and over 40 percent of people aged 36 to 45 - have low literacy skills. Someone with low literacy may not be completely illiterate, but he or she lacks the reading, writing and numeracy skills to deal with the challenges of daily life in a modern economy: keeping safe in the workplace; managing one's own health; helping the children be successful in school; making appropriate financial decisions; and, qualifying for a good, steady job.



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Willie Thomas

Who are these men and women with low literacy skills? The majority were born and educated in Canada. Most have a high school certificate but not the Level 3 literacy skills that should go with it. 70% are employed, but 60% earn less than \$25,000 a year. They live in poor neighbourhoods in our cities, as well as rural areas and First Nations reserves. There are more immigrants and Aboriginals than you would expect given their presence in the population. (The immigrants may have strong literacy in their first language but have trouble coping with English or French.)

Many of these adults face personal barriers. A school or college can be an intimidating place; and to enter a literacy program is to "admit you're stupid." They also have trouble navigating the complexities of the education system (web sites present pages of dense text). And then there are the barriers of cost and family responsibilities.

While the economic and social costs of low literacy are already high, they are expected to accelerate in the next decade when Canada's labour force growth will decelerate; selected labour shortages will stall economic growth; and, growing inequality in incomes and employment will magnify social exclusion and promote an underclass.

The [Canadian Council on Learning](#) has forecast that Canada's rate of low-literacy in 2031 will remain virtually unchanged since our 1994 levels. Several factors are contributing to keeping us "stuck in a rut" when addressing low literacy in Canada. These include:

- About 25 percent of the high school students graduating each year will not have adequate literacy skills
- Another 10 percent of high school students, on average, will not graduate
- The influx of immigrants who were educated in another language means there is a growing population with literacy limitations in English or French
- Adults tend to lose their literacy skills if they are not being used regularly

Our adult education system was rated as "inadequate" by the OECD in 2006. It reaches less than 10% of people with low literacy skills, and 30% of those who enrol drop out, partly because of financial problems and partly because the programs don't respond to their needs.

The notion that community economic and social development will be the primary lever to strengthen the literacy system is becoming more widely recognized. Community programs are better able to engage people on what matters to them; open their eyes to their own capacity to learn; and, help them gain the self-confidence they need to be able to consider a more formal learning program. Informal learning activities organized locally in response to local needs are therefore the foundational infrastructure for a literacy system. When literacy and social services organizations work together, they can create a powerful lever for local economic and social development.

But the community networks that underpin informal learning have been eroded. A combination of tenuous financing and growing management complexity has driven many community organizations delivering these much needed literacy programs to the edge and left their staff and volunteers suffering burnout.

Three critical steps are required to "reboot" education for Canadians with low-literacy skills and establish a robust literacy policy in Canada. These are:

1. *Address Personal Barriers to Literacy Education* – by strengthening community-based and workplace programs. In this transition to learning, literacy programs need to partner with local social and economic development initiatives. Governments need to show that they value the contribution of community organizations by improving funding arrangements and becoming more creative about social development.
2. *Create a Coherent Infrastructure for Adult Learning* – with better assessment tools, credits for prior learning, stronger professional development programs, and a curriculum framework for credit recognition. Every province likely does some of these functions well, but no province has mastered the whole package. It is astonishing to think that, in this day and age, the basics for good adult education are not yet in place.
3. *Set Ambitious Goals* – How could anyone believe that serving 10% of the need with 30% dropping out is good enough? Several provinces are trying to come to grips with the problem.

The good news is that many provinces are now in the process of enhancing their literacy programs. Alberta has just set an ambitious goal: to raise the share of Albertans with Level 3 skills or higher by 10 percentage points to 70 percent by 2020. The Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training also released a literacy plan in the fall of 2009; Manitoba and New Brunswick are working on a strategy; and Ontario is redesigning its curriculum.

The federal government is largely silent on literacy. The Office of Literacy and Essential Skills limits its role to providing tools and supports to employers, practitioners and trainers. This is not enough. After all, the federal government has a clear responsibility for economic recovery and renewal. It must also take much more responsibility for the fate of both Aboriginal and immigrant Canadians, since Ottawa has direct responsibility for Aboriginal education and for immigration and settlement.

The problem of low literacy skills is large and it is not going to disappear unless we reboot the learning system for adults with low literacy skills. These people face serious personal barriers to learning – stigma, fear, inability to navigate the system and poverty.

However the reasons to take action are compelling. Canadian society and the economy would be much better off if literacy skills were higher. Improving literacy would also make a significant positive impact on efforts to reduce poverty and inequality and improve the productivity and economic vitality of communities and regions across our nation.

Related Links:

- Read Judith Maxwell's paper, *It's Time to Reboot Education for Adults with Low Literacy Skills*
- Visit the [Canadian Council on Learning](#) website
- More resources on the [Canadian Policy Research Network](#) website
- Comment on [this Article!](#)

Ideas we're following...

Engaging Communities to Design Out Crime By: [Steve Woolrich](#)

Can we design out crime and reduce criminal activity in our communities? Absolutely. The solution is called Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED). The origins of CPTED date back to the 1960s and have been constantly evolving. Today, it is used globally and embraced by many community planners, architects and police agencies.

The International CPTED Association (ICA) defines it as a multi-disciplinary approach to deterring criminal behaviour through environmental design. CPTED strategies rely upon the ability to influence offender decisions that precede criminal acts by affecting the built, social and administrative environment.

There are (3) primary principles used in CPTED and they include: Natural Surveillance, Natural Access Control and Territorial Reinforcement. Ideally, they are supported further by the elements of maintenance and activity support. Practitioners who are “certified” generally provide this expertise for optimal results. 2nd Generation CPTED and the *Safe Growth* model have improved these methodologies and support social development elements.

In Red Deer, Alberta, the primary principles of CPTED have been adopted into the city's Land Use Bylaws. An Incentive Program for downtown businesses was also developed and matches funding up to \$2500 for implementing CPTED techniques. “All communities can use these CPTED principles to help reduce crime,” said Dean Scott, Crime Prevention Coordinator for The City of Red Deer.

Many municipalities are experiencing the benefits of CPTED and creating much safer communities. As “active” citizens we must seek out best practices such as CPTED and Safe Growth initiatives. It’s “proactive” and although it’s not a panacea for crime and disorder it’s a well-balanced alternative.

Superintendent Brian Simpson, Officer in Charge of Red Deer’s Municipal Police Service says, “when dealing with crime issues, there are often strong emotions involved, demanding an immediate response/solution. Through the Crime Prevention process, involving police and stakeholders, we have been able to demonstrate the value in getting the correct solution. These responses sometimes take a little more time, but the value of the process through CPTED demonstrates the benefit of getting it right.”

Community residents play a vitall role in this process. Last year, Marlo Ruttan of Red Deer was instrumental in mobilizing his community to take action after a shooting occurred near his home. A CPTED assessment was completed and a community consultation process began. “Crime Prevention is a community effort”, says Ruttan.

Related Links:

- Subscribe to Steve's Blog, [Target Crime](#) for more on CPTED
- Visit the [International CPTED Association](#) website
- Learn more about [CPTED in Red Deer](#)

Working Together for Creative Community Change

By: Garry Loewen

All communities – neighborhoods, small towns, medium-sized and large metropolitan regions – face a wide array of complex challenges. To address these challenges, more innovative and inclusive approaches to community problem-solving are needed.

Most people care about their communities and would like to make a difference. Many would like the chance to work with others in productive ways. Yet, it can be difficult to know where to begin and how to make progress. Often, when communities try to work together on a public problem, communication and trust break down between people and groups from different backgrounds and sectors. People have different perspectives and experiences, and so they see the issues differently. The solutions that make sense for one person or group may not meet the needs of others. And, there are usually lots of people on the sidelines, not invited into problem solving, or not knowing how to take part.

Many communities have used community-wide study circle programs to capture the diversity of community input. These large-scale programs are designed to help all kinds of people work through the issues with each other and solve public problems through more productive ways of working together.

The basic principles of study circle programs are that:

- People care about the communities they live in, and want to make them better.
- Complex problems call for many kinds of solutions.
- People from all backgrounds and all segments of society have something to contribute.
- When everybody is included in public life, everybody benefits.
- When all kinds of people develop trust and relationships through face-to-face dialogue, new ideas and approaches emerge.

- When people consider different points of view on a complex issue, they uncover common ground and find better solutions.
- When people have a voice in the public conversation, they are more likely to take part in creating and carrying out ideas for community change.
- The more people that are involved, the bigger the impact.
- Community change is more likely to last and deepen when individual and collective actions are tied together.

A study circle:

- is a small, diverse group, usually 8 to 12 participants;
- meets regularly over a period of weeks to address a critical public issue in a democratic and collaborative way;
- sets its own ground rules for a respectful, productive discussion;
- is led by a facilitator who is impartial, who helps manage the deliberation process, but is not an "expert" or "teacher" in the traditional sense;
- looks at an issue from many points of view;
- does not require consensus, but uncovers areas of agreement and common concern;
- progresses from a session on personal experience of the issue, to sessions providing multiple viewpoints, to a session that looks at strategies for action.

Many leaders and citizens are drawn to community-wide study circle programs because they provide what is usually missing in community life - a process for meaningful, face-to-face give-and-take between people from different backgrounds and views. The community-wide scope of study circle programs and the ways they link dialogue to change help ensure that many people from across a community will come to the table, and that their participation will make a difference.

Related Links:

- Visit the [Everyday Democracy](#) website for community study circle resources
- Find [Discussion Guides](#) on a wide range of specific community issues

Social Change and the Dynamics of Power and Love

By: Liz Weaver

Adam Kahane is a leading organizer, designer and facilitator of processes through which business, government, and civil society leaders work together to address their toughest challenges. He has worked in more than fifty countries, in every part of the world, with executives and politicians, generals and guerillas, civil servants and trade unionists, community activists and United Nations officials, clergy and artists.

Adam's intriguing new book explores the dual nature of power and love and makes the case that communities must to employ both power and love to deal with complex problems. Kahane uses theologian and philosopher Paul Tillich's definition of *power* as 'the drive of everything living to realize itself, with increasing intensity and extensity' and *love* as 'the drive towards the unity of the separated'.

Kahane further delineates that both power and love have both a positive and shadow side. Community and individual processes break apart when power is used to dominate and/or love is used to smother. Alternatively, social change can occur when individuals and groups are empowered, understand all things are joined together in a causal relationship and focus on the action of change.

Using stories from his own experience with scenario and collaborative planning processes throughout the world, Kahane illustrates how to use both power and love to engage community leaders. He shares both his successes and failures and describes these as falling and stumbling. *"We fall down painfully when, like a scarecrow or marionette, our two legs become disconnected from each other. We fall down when our power and love become polarized: when our power is without love and our love is without power. We fall down when, intentionally or unintentionally, we make the elementary and common error of treating the relationship between power and love, which is a dilemma, as if it was a choice."*

Continuing his use of this metaphor, Kahane describes walking as *"engaging both power and love in balance, knowing that both legs have to be in rhythm to move forward."* He provides examples of social change efforts where the individuals effectively balance both love for each other and shared power. There can still be disagreement and contention in these processes, but a common agenda grows when the group or community walks together.

Related Links:

- Read Adam Kahane's [Introduction to Power and Love: A Theory and Practice of Social Change](#)
- Watch Adam's recent waterloo [lecture on Social Innovation](#)

Heart Warming Gypsy Soup

By: Paul Born

In the heart of winter I often feel cold inside and out. Yes I am standing up to counted; I am one of those people who never quite understood the appeal of winter. Maybe it is the fact I grew up in British Columbia where snow and cold were seldom and never stayed long.

So now, as an adopted Ontarian, I need to find strategies for getting over winter. My favourite is to gather my friends and cook up a wonderful warming meal. The good food and conversation heat my inner being, making me believe that all is well in the world (despite it being minus 15 degrees outside).

Here is a new favourite for me and my friends. Yup! It is vegetarian. The Born Epp household is trying to do our part to get healthy and use less of the world's resources. It is also so simple to make and uses sweet potatoes as a base making it ultra healthy. See my note about pureeing it before you add the peppers and chickpeas giving it an amazing taste. Oh and by the way tamari is soy sauce – well not really but good enough – use low sodium as it tastes just as good and does not take away from the health of this dish.

Access Paul's Heart Warming [Gypsy Soup recipe!](#)

Related Links:

- Access more [Tamarack recipes](#)
- More recipes from [Moosewood Restaurant](#)

Engage!
to create vibrant communities

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