**Open Your Class With This Tomorrow**

***The Wisdom of Crowds***

**Guess the number of Skittles**

****

**Directions:** Show students the provided PowerPoint and ask each student to estimate how many Skittles are in each of the three photographs. They should write their estimates on a sheet of paper. This activity should work well because no single student is likely to be an expert in this type of activity. Once the students have made their estimates for each of the three pictures, ask them to turn in (or state) their predictions. Tabulate the student’s data and find the average of estimates for each of the three pictures as well as identifying the student who guessed the closest. It is likely that the collective group estimate will be more accurate than the estimate of any single individual.

**Discussion:** James Surowiecki, author of *The* *Wisdom of Crowds*, cites research into the collective wisdom of groups. He contends that groups should perform better than any single individual, even if that individual is an expert in a particular area. We tend to rely on perceived experts and disregard the wisdom of the group more often than we should. Surowiecki points to gambling, using money managers, and CEO’s as prime examples of our overreliance on experts. He also indicates that in large scale democracies the will of the group likely will select the candidate who is most suitable for the job.

If there was one person in class who was more accurate than the group, ask them about their strategy for guessing. Were they also more accurate on the other two trials or was this simply luck on one of the three photos? We often attribute luck to expertise when and dismiss “misses” when that same expert is not as successful of successive attempts.