Innovations in Thinking and Learning
Roger Martin – Roger Martin and Students Reflecting on Integrative Thinking

ROGER: When you think of integrative thinking, what might be one or two of the most striking things to you that's different about the problem-solving technique that you've learned there, versus the other ones you've learned before?

STUDENT: I think the thing that makes integrative thinking unique is the fact that instead of going towards the most obvious answer, you're always forced to go towards and also look at not obvious answer. So instead of just saying, like, in math they give you a formula, and you're supposed to use it for the question in order to get an answer. Integrative thinking is nothing like it. It's basically saying, oh, why would you go the regular way when there's this whole other side of it that no one has ever looked at? Why don't you look at that and see the positives? Take out the positives and try to use them, and then collaborate them all together. So that's how I thought it was different.

ROGER: Oh, okay, Ann?

STUDENT: Something that was really great for me is, throughout high school and throughout all of my education, it was really celebrate to have the right answer and to have the answer that you can memorize out of a textbook. And something that was really rewarding for me in my integrative thinking process was celebrating other people's ideas and accepting the fact that I didn't always have the right idea.

ROGER: And maybe that leads, in some sense, to another thing that I was wondering, is if you think about what's the biggest thing could you think of as having changed about you, your personality, your world view, how you are, if you compared before to after you've taken integrative thinking, what would you say?

STUDENT: Personally, I think I'm a lot more patient. And I'm a lot more open. I want to hear other people's ideas, and I am really excited to hear other people's ideas and opinions and their views.

ROGER: Okay.

STUDENT: For me, I feel as if I became a lot less ignorant than I was before. So instead of just dismissing an idea just because it doesn't sound as smart as the other ones, I stop myself. I tend to think twice, and hopefully get a good side of that idea, and hopefully just move on with it. That's kind of how.
ROGER: For me, I think it's that I change my definition of smartness, right? I used to think that being smart was on my own coming up with an answer that other people would say, "Yaay, Roger, that was a great answer." And that's the definition of smartness, if I can do that more rather than less, and get more applause for my great answer. I thought that tells you how smart you are. And now, I really think of smartness as a joint thing, that you measure smartness of a person by how well they leverage other ideas and other people and other thoughts to build a better answer. So I still want to kind of be smart, or be part of producing smart answers. But if you will, the production process, or the way that smartness comes about is much more collaborative. And for what it's worth, it makes me happier, because I feel more connected. Because I'm a bit of an introvert. I'm an introvert and an extravert -- at an extravert's job. But I would retreat to my own office to be smart. And that's fine. But as what you guys said, you're not as smart as with other people. But if you're in, hey, if you've got a decent amount of intelligence in your work, you can come up with something good. But it's a lonely process, and it's only so good. And now I think of smartness as a group process, and the answers are better, and it's so much more fun. For me at least, it's so much more fun.

STUDENT: Right.

ROGER: Even though I'm sort of introverted, that, the exercise of getting smart answers with other people is more rewarding.

STUDENT: Did you ever think you'd end up where you are right now? Where you are today?

ROGER: No. No, I don't --

STUDENT: How come?

ROGER: Well, I mean, part of it is, I guess, where I came from. I came from a small town of 50 people in the middle of nowhere. My parents hadn't gone to university -- or my mother went to university and graduated a year before me. No, a year after me. She went back, back to university. So no, being in quite an academic world would have not been my guess. And one of the things that I try and encourage every young person that I meet, it is just be as open-minded as you can possibly be about what you might accomplish. I don't try to say to everyone -- because it's sort of trite to say, "Aim super high," because part of it might be you'll aim for one particular thing, and I think that will then close you off to something else that's actually better for you, and more wonderful. Because my career was not what I expected, and you sort of have to let it come to you,
a little bit. Just try to do the right things, try to make the world a better place. And good things will happen to you. Just don't ever thing that there's a route closed to you because of where you come from, or how old you are, or who your parents were, any of those things that people often think about. "I'm a girl, and girls can do this versus that," or, "I'm a guy, so guys have to do this or that." Just try to put all of those things out of your mind, and rather, think about how can I work hard? How can I make the world a better place, my being in it?" And a lot of the rest will take care of itself.