

Innovations in Thinking and Learning

Roger Martin – Impact of Integrative Thinking

ROGER: We've had some signals that are just -- they're just sort of cute signals that make us feel good about this. It's like when a grade four teacher will say that the grade three teacher who taught, like, half or a third of their students, I know exactly which students were in your class last year because of the way they behave. The kind of questions they ask, they know they were in an "I think" classroom. So those sorts of things signal to us if a teacher in a higher grade can just notice instinctively that these students are different, we know we're having an impact.

I think in the longer term, I guess I hope that we'll see our -- I think graduates coming back, having kind of successful, happy careers with fewer blow-out mistakes, if you will. I think people's careers get interrupted when they get into massive fights with their boss, or they can't deal with their co-workers and they have to leave a job and then start over at a lower level somewhere else. I'd like to believe that we'll see these, I think, students just progress more seamlessly, because they can think and work their way through those problems. Will it be Nirvana and Utopia? No. But I would like to see that as an indicator of success.

It gives us more encouragement to persevere. To be honest, MBAs are socialized by the time they get here to think that getting the right answer, advocating it to others, getting other people to agree with what you're doing -- that's true leadership. It's just a bad model, but it's the water that they swim in. So they're tough sledding to get to be more reflective. The kiddies are not, right? The kiddies take to it, from what I can tell from the teachers, kind of like ducks to water. It makes so much sense to them. They get along better with people. They get stuff done. So they're sort of saying, "Duh, this is good." So the fact that it works so well with them encourages us to persevere with the MBAs to say, if we can get them to the point of really reflecting on life and how they do things, they'll have the same positive impact.

I listen for sort of emotional things and technical things, if you will. So I listen to the enthusiasm and the degree to which they feel a sense of personal agency, the, "I can do this." Like the two girls who talked me through the money, and what's money for, and how we should revamp the entire economy as we know it. They were talking with sort of, like, "You know, we can figure this out. We can do it." It's an amazing sense of personal agency for two nine or ten-year-olds. No arrogance, not at all. It's just sort of like, "We can do this. We can work through it." So that sort of sense of personal agency, I can do it -- that's one thing I listen for. The other is sort of the technical dimensions. And the eight-year-old girl who explained to me -- with precision -- how she did math

problems using the Ladder of Inference. With precision, I must reinforce. That's cool to hear. You could tell that she's absorbed a way of thinking, and she can replicate it and she can explain it to me. And it was cute to me, too, because she was explaining it as if I didn't really know what the Ladder of Inference was, which I thought was kind of cute.

The reason that I think it's so important to teach the students that there is a better way of living your life than choosing from among the models that you've been handed is that the world is at its worst when people do that, right? I'm arguing with you over something, and I say I either have to have my side win or succumb to your side. I'll fight hard, and I will be unproductive. If instead I say, "Oh, okay, that's interesting, he sees it differently than I do. I wonder if I could understand him a lot better, maybe encourage him to understand me better, we'll come up with something better." We'll just have a better world. It's as simple as that. And I'll argue lots of what's going on in the world today is a function of people being absolutely positively sure that their job is to force a choice between two models, even if they don't like either of the models very much. That's where lots of the conflict in the world comes from. That's where a lot of extreme action comes from. So I literally think that if we had leaders who always thought that there's a better answer than the two or the three, or whatever number of models are out there floating around now, the world would be a more peaceful place, a more prosperous place, and a place in which people enjoy living more.