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When you begin to consider the qualities that characterize a great teacher, inevitably one recollects the experiences of being a student and of the various people who have taught you. It becomes apparent that teaching is not an isolated instance but a long inheritance of great teachers and teaching methods. Looking back to the teachers who have had the biggest impact in my own experience, I find that the outstanding quality of a great teacher is characterized not by the desire to teach, but the desire to learn. The few clarifying moments from my own education, when the excitement I felt for my newly chosen discipline was at its height are all moments where I distinctly felt that no one, not the teacher nor the other students had any idea of where we were heading. In looking back it was in these rare experiences of finding myself put in a position to peer into unknown territory that ultimately filled me with immense desire to be an architect.

As a teacher now, I believe that teaching is not simply about the transfer of knowledge, but the ability to create conditions in which students acquire their own knowledge and hence the personal desire for knowledge. In this sense the classroom as a teaching environment is limited and should be supplemented with engagement in the world at large. Though the classroom is essential as an incubator of ideas, ultimately ideas must be tested within the complexity of the real world. It is in the ability to engage unprecedented and complex problems that determines the difference between merely possessing knowledge and lifelong learning. If we define the goal of teaching by these standards, it can fundamentally challenge the teacher-student relationship, which may be hierarchical in the classroom, but contemporaneous in the real world. In this newly defined role, the teacher is instigator, provocateur, a critic and him/herself equally a student.

Often the problems we face in the real world are not ones that students have already encountered in the classroom setting. More importantly, they do not have pre-existing solutions. It becomes far more important to teach students how to engage and define the problems before seeking solutions. We can't simply assume that we know beforehand what the problems are. This is especially true for a community of people. In our projects designing schools or bridges for rural communities, it often takes a much longer process to engage the community in which we are working and to understand the complexity of their situation before we begin to make proposals or pose answers. This aspect of working with a community of people is what distinguishes experiential learning from professional experience and cannot be simulated either in the classroom or in the professional world. In this sense I would argue that experiential learning occupies a vital position between the classroom and the profession.