"Innovation. Self. Voice. Community. Collaboration. Presence. Authenticity".

[Edward Harkness](), a Standard Oil heir in the pre-income-tax period of our national existence, gave a lot of money to Exeter (Phillips Exeter Academy) to pay for very large oval tables, around which students could sit, which tables were to replace the solitary student desks that schools and students, and Exeter, and Harkness himself as a student, until then had everywhere endured.

A friend showed me this morning his latest Exeter alumni bulletin, in which several people who came from Stanford's Architectural Design Program to teach in the Exeter Summer School — I'm demurely leaving their identities as "JB" and "AL"- are asked by an interviewer for the Exeter Bulletin to discuss their apparently eye-opening experience teaching using what they call the "Harkness method" or "Harkness sysem" — which is neither a method nor a system, but simply classrooms that have not individual desks for students but rather one massive table,around which students and teacher all sit. In a spirit of *non-sibi-sed-omnibus* sharing, I've excerpted a bit below:

What have been the biggest surprises?

JB: It's hard to teach at the Harkness table. It takes a lot of patience. And listening. I'm still learning. But once the students get it, you say, "Wow."

AL: It's electric when it lands. There's so much synthesis happening. There's a level of accountability and presence that's requested of them every day. It's beautiful, this

invitation to *really show up to the table*, to be aware of your peers and be present to them and to the material. It's asking a lot and the learning potential is…

JB: Astronomical.

AL: Yes, astronomical.

JB: You spend *a lot* of time talking about teaching and learning here. We do a lot at Stanford by comparison to other universities, but we've met more as faculty in the last four weeks at Exeter than we did all of last year at Stanford. And there isn't a teacher here who isn't passionate about what they do.

AL: It's gone by so fast—first thinking about what it could be, and then being here.

JB: And then changing everything once we got here. I change every week.

AL: Every day! There's a real need to be responsive to what's happening day-to-day here.

JB: I had drafted up a big Excel spreadsheet with everything we were going to cover.

AL: Have you used it?

JB: No. It became much looser, and better, in the end.

What were the challenges of adapting to the Harkness method?

JB: I thought it would be easier to switch from being a student to an instructor than it was. I've had a hard time tolerating the silences. But I found that answering questions when students have them on a need-be basis works. They've gotten used to my vague answers: "Can I do this?" "I don't know, can you?"

AL: Before coming here, I thought, "I already do that." NO. I do some of it, for sure. Harkness sounds simple but it's so complex an experience. And so subtle. The theory is one thing. Experiencing it is very transformative.

JB: The students have wildly divergent educational models. We have 13 kids and only four of them are from the United States, and even they're from all over the place: Miami, New York, South Dakota and Alaska. One of our students sits in the same chair for every subject back at home, and there's nothing on the wall in his classroom. None of them have anything close to the Harkness system.

JE: There's a big challenge here: We're teaching a subject they haven't done before, and Harkness, which is new to them.

JB: They've never been asked their opinion in the classroom.

JE: Especially in the depth we're asking. You need to get data in order to design. If you're redesigning a camera, part of the data is: What kind of pictures do you take? Why do you take them? Oh, you like to feel professional? What does that look like? How does it feel? What does it do for your family and your life? You try to get very deep questions. That's part of what they're being trained to do. And they're learning to ask each other.

If you could use another word to represent everything that we call Harkness, what would it be?

JB: Design. Respect. Participation. Democracy.

AL: Innovation. Self. Voice. Community. Collaboration. Presence. Authenticity.

JB: Invitation.