We all crave knowledge, especially in this Age of Information, but what is the best source of knowledge? Are we to believe Albert Camus, who stated “The place we are to get knowledge is in books”? Or are we better served by following Albert Einstein’s counsel that “The only source of knowledge is experience”? Although books have their place in one’s learning, there is no substitute for experience; indeed, it is experience that is ultimately the most important source of knowledge.

**First, let us consider the knowledge needed to undertake a profession – for example, that of a physician.** Knowledge gained from books provides the foundation of a doctor’s training: study in a medical school begins with a near-overload of reading on anatomy, physiology and maladies both rare and common. However, during this time the medical student is also learning through experience, beginning with dissecting cadavers from almost the first day of medical school. Then, the aspiring physician must complete four years of residency, consisting of actual supervised experience at a hospital in which he or she now must put into practice all of the knowledge acquired through books. It is only during the residency that one gains firsthand knowledge of dealing with patients, prescribing medications, and the joy and sadness of saving and losing patients; in other words, it is through experience that these students finally learn what it means to be a doctor.

**What about knowledge other than professional expertise – for example, knowledge about another culture?** In this realm as well, both books and real-life experience enrich and edify us. For example, Paris is perhaps the most talked-about and written-about city in the world. We could read Hemingway’s *A Moveable Feast*, in which he describes the excitement and intellectual spirit—as well as the restaurants and plentiful red wine—of Paris in the 1920’s. Or, we could travel to Paris and eat at cafes, walk across the Pont Neuf and look at the river Seine, visit the Louvre museum, and have adventures of our own. Clearly, most people would have attained more lasting and vivid knowledge by visiting Paris on their own rather than reading about it secondhand.

In summary, experience, compared to books, is more central to our quest for learning, especially with regard to professional expertise. With regard to learning about another culture, experience is also irreplaceable. Yet not everyone in the world will have the health or financial resources to carry out a trip to Paris, many people have access to a local library where they can borrow *A Moveable Feast* and, at no cost, read Hemingway’s vibrant descriptions of Paris. We cannot forget the complementary and unique knowledge afforded by books, but experience is the most precious source of knowledge. (455)