

Kyuyo High School

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A New Version of You

Last year, I studied abroad in Ohio, United States for ten months and it was one of the greatest opportunities I have ever had. Studying abroad is much more than just learning a foreign language. Every single time you step outside, you find yourself on an adventure that you could never have expected. In my opinion, the most invaluable thing you can experience is to realize what it feels like to be a representative of your own country.

During my exchange, I kept telling myself that I could be the first person who comes to mind of people I met when they think about Japan, Okinawa or even Asia! For some, it is natural to judge other countries based on one person. There are some people who have stereotypes based on your country and race. I was afraid of being a spokesperson for my entire nation and giving it a bad name during my first couple of weeks. Then I started thinking that I could use my situation to learn how I should behave as an internationally-minded person.

So, what does it mean to be internationally-minded?

Let's have a look at a definition of this term from the International Baccalaureate Organization.

“International-mindedness means the ability to see an opportunity in every encounter; to both share life with a unique individual and a fellow human being. It is the key to having a better understanding and appreciation of one another.”

To me, this does seem like something lacking in today's society. Not only on an international level, but on a day to day basis. Although we all know that this world is becoming more and more diversified every day, discrimination still exists everywhere, such as discrimination based on skin color, race and ethnicity, age, disabilities, religion, sexual orientation, and even gender. We, people living in the 21st century, do not like what is not

considered “normal.” We still fear what we do not know or what we think we cannot understand. We believe our way is the right way: we believe our path toward contentment has only one way of being reached. So, instead of attempting to understand others, we try to pretend like they do not exist, or try to force people onto our path, shoving aside their beliefs to showcase why we are right and why they are wrong.

In an ideal world, everybody should be able to live their life fully and equally. To make the world more inclusive for everyone, I have two suggestions.

First, remember to accept and respect others when you do not understand them. We can learn from each other because we are all different in many ways. I learned from my experience abroad that people talk differently, live differently, think differently. We believe different things and that is okay because that is what makes this world fun and amazing place.

Second, do not let society determine what you think. Having the opportunity to be in a foreign country has allowed me to realize that Japanese people tend to conform to others' ideas without thinking for ourselves. Remember that the world is a big place. Before going abroad, I felt that I did not belong anywhere because I was different, but from my experience in a different country, I learned to be proud of who I am. To become a more enriched individual, it is key to understand and appreciate one another by practicing international-mindedness.

What I would like to say is do not forget that everyone has the right to be treated equally without exceptions. Classification of people based on gender, origin, or race and so on, should not happen. We are all humans. We do not have to like everybody, but we do not need to discriminate people just because they are different from what society considers to be “normal.” Now is the time for you to change; to discover “a new version of you” by becoming aware of different lenses.