

3 Things That I Think Are Important

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I am really happy to be given this opportunity to speak in front of you today. This summer, I went to the United States to join a summer session at Phillips Academy. I had an amazing time and I learned a lot of things through this program. So, today, I would like to share with you three of them that I think are important.

First seeing is believing. Recently, I studied a lot about American culture in Japan before I went to the US, and I thought I knew almost all the differences between their culture and ours here in Japan. However, let me tell you that I came across a lot of surprises there. And the most surprising thing was the way students behaved in class. In Japan, it is traditionally thought that keeping quiet in class is good behavior. On the other hand, students are actually required to speak up in the US. At first, I didn't express my opinions so often because I wasn't used to such an atmosphere. But after a couple of weeks, I was able to express myself little by little without hesitation. So that was certainly one example of finding something unexpected that you thought you already knew, but realized by being in the actual situation.

Secondly, I realized how important new opportunities are to finding new meaning in our lives. This summer I made a lot of friends from around the world. In particular, I got along well with three girls, one from China, one from Spain, and another from the US. We were able to learn a lot about each country and that made me want to go there. I hadn't really cared about what was going on in other countries before. However, due to my wonderful friends, I began to have interest in their countries, and now I want to know a lot more about them. I came to understand how everything has its own meaning; that is, how one thing leads to another and then to yet another. So it is important to create the situations in which these opportunities can occur.

And thirdly, challenging yourself is important. I made Japanese friends there as well. It would have been more comfortable for me if I had just hung out with Japanese friends there. I was a little bit afraid to make mistakes in English because other students spoke English very fluently. But one day, my teacher said in class, “you can make as many mistakes as you want. You cannot improve your English skills without making mistakes. You are here to make mistakes.” I tried to take her advice and spend more time with foreign friends and, in so doing, began to feel more at ease in speaking English. I now think that this is true not only for learning English, but for everything. Don’t be afraid to make mistakes. Just do it. Challenge yourself.

And so, I’ve talked about three things that had an important influence on me: seeing is believing, creating opportunities, and challenging yourself. Through my experience, I realized the importance of each of them and how they changed me. I am very glad to be able to tell you about them today. I will never forget what I experienced this summer. I really appreciate my parents and teachers for giving me an opportunity to spend a wonderful summer.