

“I learn because I want to get into a good school.” That would have been my answer a couple of years ago. Now, however, I realize that those words do not encapsulate the true meaning of learning. Learning goes beyond the equations in math class or the letters on the periodic table; it is a journey that we embark on, one in which we discover who we are as individuals and as a community.

To start off, imagine learning as a GPS for our lives. It helps us discover who we are, lights up our own one-of-a-kind individual paths, and guides us through that path. In my case, through learning, I developed a love for business. Being able to combine my mathematical strengths, rich experience of living abroad, and love of connecting with others, business perfectly bridges various facets of my characteristics into a single mission. Learning helped me discover who I am, and I hope that this is, in Tsuda’s words, “the beginning of further progress.”

Moving on, beyond assisting us in understanding ourselves, learning has a more fundamental function: developing togetherness. I will take the killing of George Floyd as an example. For me, watching the horrendous murder created a deep hole in my heart. This feeling, though, was not something only I felt. The whole world did. Despite all that makes us different, we all came together to rally around Floyd. This can be attributed to learning. Learning teaches us the foundations of life, one of which is equality. As Umeko Tsuda said, learning should make us “stronger in the cause of truth and justice,” and we should be “firm and courageous to the utmost” when defending this. What transpired following Floyd’s death epitomizes this. In spite of all that makes us different, learning provides us with a base that enables us to coexist and connect with one another. Learning is a powerful source that can unite us.

I see our lives as an endless puzzle. We, as individuals, constitute a single piece of this humongous puzzle. At first, our puzzle piece is shaped in such a way that it does not allow us to fit into any other piece. However, with learning, we slowly begin to shape ourselves, and our puzzle pieces, so that we can connect with others and contribute to the building of this puzzle. Umeko Tsuda mentioned how Japan can never reach its full potential until all people, women and men, are afforded the opportunity of higher education. This is because no puzzle can ever be completed unless the shape of each piece has a true purpose, or, in other words, each piece has to fit into the bigger picture.