

AFTA shares language expertise to migrants



By Dr. Reynaldo B. Garnace

“We offer the ESL program to these migrants for them to speak English fluently and give them the opportunity to find a job and study here in New York.”

Thus stressed by Rev. Fr. Julian Jagudilla, O.F.M., the Director of the Migrant Center of the St. Francis of Assisi Church, during the orientation sometime in April 2023 with the officers and volunteers of the Association of Filipino-American Teachers of America, (AFTA) Inc. as partner in the offering of the English as a Second Language program among the immigrants and refugees.

In an interview with Nick Miraflores, one of the AFTA founders and the Teacher-Coordinator of the ESL program, both teachers and students share the same goals - a better life for migrants, so they courageously face the perils of immigrating to the land that would offer them the opportunity to give meaning to their lives and be productive members of society.

“The goal of the ESL program is to support newly arrived immigrants and refugees with limited or no English language skills as they navigate through their living conditions in New York City,” added Rena Pedaria, the President of AFTA, Inc.

The classes were grouped into three levels, and each class has a total of 40

accumulated class hours. Classes are conducted every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday to about forty (40) students coming from Venezuela, Columbia, Peru, Mexico, etc.

The teacher-volunteers include the following: Miraflores, a retired NYCDOE ESL expert; Garnace, Tracy Post Teixeira, and Nancy Lewandowski, NYCDOE ELA/ESL teachers, and Ms. Sui. Teacher assistants are: Pedaria, Doreen Cabillan, AFTA Assistant Secretary; Juliet Culajao, AFTA honorary member; Genevieve Cullen, and Ruthella Torres.

A simple language test was conducted to place participants in appropriate learning groups. “I tested about 45 participants, and they were divided into four learning groups from zero to intermediate levels,” Miraflores cited.

Miraflores stressed that teachers went through a professional development before kicking off with the classes. A variety of controlled and scaffolded exercises were used by the teachers to experience step-by-step techniques and strategies to learn a totally unfamiliar language among the students.

In an interview, Miraflores gleamed “It is interesting to see the glimmer of hope in the students’ eyes. Despite their difficulty in learning English, they show persistence and tenacity in coming to class regularly and doing the activities with enthusiasm.” *(Continued on page 3)*

The Board's WALL

'Onward we move, many good things are up ahead...'

Why Do We Teach?

By Johjoh Demol Jenae

Teaching is far more than just a profession; it is a vocation, a calling, a noble pursuit that requires dedication, compassion, and a genuine love for learning. Those who choose to become teachers are not just seeking a job, but rather a way of life that involves shaping young minds, guiding them on their journey of discovery, and helping them develop into responsible, thoughtful, and productive members of society.

So why do we teach? The answer is simple: we teach because we want to make a difference in the lives of our students. We want to inspire them to think critically, to question assumptions, and to seek out knowledge and truth. We want to instill in them a lifelong love of learning that will serve them well throughout their lives, no matter what path they choose.

Teaching is a challenging and demanding profession that requires a tremendous amount of skill, patience, and dedication. It is not a job that can be done half-heartedly or without passion. But for those who are truly called to teach, it is one of the most rewarding and fulfilling careers out there.

One of the unique aspects of teaching is the opportunity it provides for personal growth and development. As a teacher, you are constantly learning and evolving, honing your skills, and discovering new and innovative ways to engage your students and help them learn. You are challenged to think creatively, to adapt to changing circumstances, and to stay up-to-date with the latest educational research and best practices.

Teaching is also a profession that offers a high level of job satisfaction. There is nothing quite like the feeling of seeing a student's face light up when they finally understand a difficult concept or accomplish a task they once thought was impossible. It is these small moments of triumph that make all the hard work and effort worthwhile.

Of course, teaching is not without its challenges. There are times when you will feel frustrated, overwhelmed, or exhausted. But it is during these difficult moments that you will draw upon your inner strength, resilience, and commitment to your students and their education.

Needless to say that teaching is not just a profession, it is a vocation. It requires a deep commitment to the education and well-being of our students, and a genuine love for learning. It is a challenging, yet incredibly rewarding career that offers personal growth, job satisfaction, and the opportunity to make a positive difference in the lives of others. So if you are considering a career in teaching, know that you are choosing a noble path, one that will enrich your life and the lives of your students for years to come.

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Thriving and Soaring to New Heights!

ASSOCIATION OF FIL-AM TEACHERS OF AMERICA, INC.

With its vision that all teachers will have the opportunity to achieve their fullest potential and be of service to their community, AFTA has consistently implemented its projects and programs for over three decades in the Philippines and the United States and is committed to continue to reach out to the Filipino diaspora and the marginalized communities at large.

FLAGSHIP PROJECTS & PROGRAMS

- Balikuro Program (since 1993)**
BALIKURO, which literally translates to "Return to Teach" is a missionary project of AFTA which brings US based Filipino teachers to the Philippines to share and exchange valuable information, knowledge, experiences, and latest development in different areas of teaching.
- Paaralan sa Konsulado (since 1998)**
In partnership with the Philippine Consulate General in New York, Paaralan sa Konsulado is an annual summer workshop for Filipino-American children between the ages of 6 to 16 which aims to provide those born and raised in the USA opportunities to learn about their culture and heritage and offer a better understanding of their roots.
- Adopt-a-School Project (since 2012)**
Every year, AFTA identifies an area in the Philippines where school children need the most support for educational supplies and materials. These are then distributed during summer when the AFTA teacher-volunteers conduct their BALIKURO program.

OTHER PROJECTS & PROGRAMS

Professional Development • Books for the Philippines • Tuklas Talino • Adopt-a-Scholar • Gawad Teknolohiya • Pagdiriwang ng Kulturang Pilipino • Lakbay AFTA • International Educators' Convention • AFTATalks • AFTAShare • Kaisang Palad

RECOGNITIONS & AWARDS

Donia Teodora Alonzo Award • Ultrang Guro Award • Crystal Apple Service Award • Bangal ng Lahi Award • Tanglaw Award
LEADS Award • PERLAS Award

RECOGNITIONS & AWARDS received by AFTA:

Lingkod sa Kapwa Philippine Presidential Award (2018) • The Assembly State of New York Proclamation as an Outstanding Organization (01/09) • Phil. Heritage Center Recognition for Service (2019) • Maharlika Award for Outstanding Organization by Team United Maharlika Foundation, Inc. (2020)
Alab ng Lahi Award for Outstanding Fil-Am Organization (2022)

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AFTA singers bring Pinoy Music to America

By Dr. Reynaldo B. Garnace

AFTA's Panumbalik, a concert for a cause for AFTA's scholars in the Philippines was held on May 28, 2023 at D'Haven, New York!

Fourteen AFTA singers composed of the following: Joy Amaro, Chris Bejar, Maya Borja, Jhun Buensuceso, Johjoh Demol-Jenae, Melvin Domaolao, Jason Gabinez, Rey Garnace, Cheruby Inot, Fe Mentarde, Rena Pedaria, Elijim Cuyacot, Rose Aireen Hortelano and Emmylou Rosario. All of them are teachers from various parts of the United States.



"This is an opportunity for us to showcase our talents, and at the same time generate funds for our less fortunate students in the Philippines," Demol-Jenae said.

Special guests included renowned singers in America such as The Werners represented by Joy Amaro and Morris Montilla.

"I am honored to be part of this event, and share my talent for the AFTA scholars," Montilla shared.

The repertoire is composed of songs of

love and rekindling relationships in Tagalog, English OPM, and fast beat Pinoy music.

According to the AFTA president, Rena Pedaria, "Proceeds of the concert shall be accorded to very deserving college education students, our future teachers, who need financial assistance in order to complete their degrees."

AFTA hopes to have a rerun of this concert come December to continue not only to raise funds for its project but to feel the spirit of Christmas with music and camaraderie.



AFTA shares... (from page 1)

Asked why he studies ESL, Richard Lecuna says "I am here because I have always liked English and I want to study here at school and university, and that is why I want to learn.

Cristofer Villarreal expects to learn, understand, and pronounce the language correctly, and create a beautiful friendship with teachers and students. Asked about the best experience in ESL classes, Maria said she learned how to pronounce English.

Meanwhile, Sheila Pimentel has learned to understand English a little more since she did not know anything. "I thank you very much for your collaboration," she added.

"I totally enjoy English classes every moment because I learn English through karaoke songs and Bingo socials, and I meet wonderful people; the teachers are incredibly spectacular,

and give food and prizes," commented Mario Rivero.

"I would like to encourage our students to take advantage of this opportunity that is offered from the generous hearts of our AFTA teachers. Learning English is essential in surviving life in the USA. I want to imagine that looking back years later, your students will recall with a smile that you did not only welcome them, you were also instrumental in their survival here in the USA," emphasized by Fr. Julian.



"Truly, the students' traumatic experience of feeling unwelcome in the U.S has become their pillar of strength. Learning the language allows them to confidently apply for jobs, go to school, or earn a degree," Miraflores beamed.

"The teachers want to see the students learn English to reach their goals and fulfill their dreams and aspirations," Miraflores stressed. Indeed, they try their best to provide a welcoming and supportive environment to make the students feel comfortable, accepted, and supported.

Fr. Julian expressed that "Gratitude goes to AFTA for answering my call for help. You have proven yourselves to be a valuable resource to the community especially to the newly arrived immigrant community. You also have demonstrated AFTA's ability to be inclusive! Please imagine your impact on your students - you are their first English teachers in this country they now call home!"

A Journey of Dedication and Resilience: Tita Sally's Story in the United States

By Johjoh Demol Jenae



Rizalina C. Labanda's (Tita Sally), Vice President for Teaching and Research of the Association of Fil-Am Teachers in America (AFTA), story is a remarkable account of resilience and inspiration that deserves to be in the limelight. Her teaching journey in the United States is a testament to her unwavering determination and unwavering spirit.

In the summer of 1986, Tita Sally embarked on a journey to the United States with the hope of providing a better future for her children. Little did she know that her teaching career in the US would span 38 summers, filled with challenges, rewards, and profound impact. This feature story explores the experiences, aspirations, and accomplishments of a dedicated Filipino teacher who left a lasting imprint on the American education system.

Thirty-eight summers ago, in the year 1986, Sally embarked on a life-changing journey to the United States. Armed with an H1-B visa, she ventured to Orange, New Jersey, joining St. John Grammar School as a teacher under the Diocese of Newark. However, her expectations of fruit-laden orange trees lining the streets were shattered upon her arrival. Instead, she was greeted by a nation plagued with drug issues and street gangs, far from the idyllic vision she had imagined.

Nevertheless, Tita Sally's spirit remained undeterred. Embracing the challenges that lay ahead, she found solace in the warm reception of the Sisters of Charity, who served as both administrators and employers. With an apartment just a short five-minute walk away from the school, the convenience of her living arrangements eliminated the need for long commutes or driving to work. Despite the stark contrast between her expectations and the reality she encountered, her excitement and enthusiasm never wavered as she embarked on her teaching journey in this unfamiliar land.

Tita Sally's determination to create a better future for her children propelled her forward as she embarked on her teaching journey in the United States. With a clear vision of providing opportunities for her family, she dedicated herself to ensuring their success. Her daughter's achievement as a nurse and her son's pursuit of a doctoral degree in physics at Northwestern University stand as testaments to her unwavering commitment.

Having witnessed her children's dreams come to fruition, she found herself at a new crossroad. With her family's future secured, she shifted her focus to her own aspirations. She set her sights on saving enough to establish a school in the Philippines, envisioning a legacy that would benefit her future grandchildren and generations to come. Determined to see her plans through, she extended her stay in the United States, patiently waiting for her US veteran father to join her and solidify the foundation of their family.

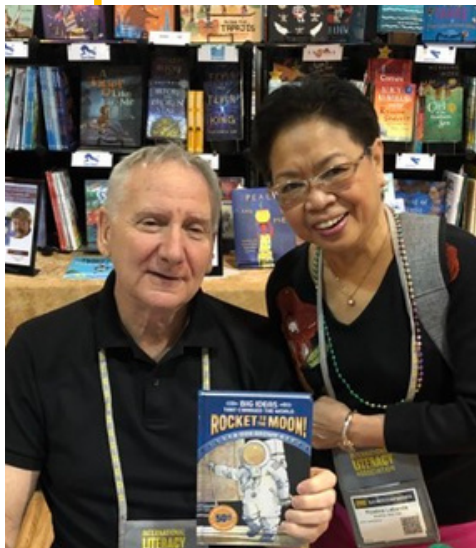
Sally's formative experiences in the Philippines laid the groundwork for her resilience and honed her teaching skills, positioning her for success in her new endeavor in the United States. Having taught in Catholic schools, Blessed Sacrament Catholic Academy in Brooklyn as one of them, and serving as a reading consultant, she developed a deep understanding of effective educational practices and a wealth of knowledge in her field. Armed with this experience, she was ready to make a meaningful impact in the lives of her students.



A Journey... (continued)

While there were some differences to navigate between the education systems of the Philippines and the US, her adaptability and determination allowed her to overcome any challenges that arose. She seamlessly integrated her passion for teaching into her new environment, finding innovative ways to engage her students and create a nurturing learning environment. Drawing from her diverse background, she brought a unique perspective to the classroom, enriching her students' educational experiences and fostering a love for learning.

In the US, Tita Sally discovered the importance of motivation and extrinsic rewards for American students, as opposed to the intrinsic motivation she had witnessed in Filipino children. She approached her middle school English Language Arts (ELA) classes with love and discipline, instilling work habits and fostering a love for reading. Drawing on her experiences, she created a classroom environment enriched with authentic books and captivating stories, earning the respect and appreciation of her students.



Adapting to life in the US came naturally for Sally. With a strong Catholic community and a significant Filipino presence, she found comfort in her surroundings. While working two additional jobs to supplement her income, she immersed herself in the peaceful and multicultural environment. Her positive attitude, language skills, and strong faith in God helped her overcome any language or cultural barriers she encountered.



AFTA and Tita Sally

- *Became board member, Auditor and VP for Teaching and Research*
- *Conducted 8 Balikturo on the Science of Reading to date*
- *TANGLAW awardee come June 17th in SAGA 2023*

Throughout her teaching career, Tita Sally experienced numerous rewarding moments. She witnessed her students graduate, appreciating their academic growth. Her bulletin boards were admired by the principal, and she had the opportunity to attend seminars and workshops. With retirement in 2021, she reflected on the impact she had made, both in the US and within prestigious educational organizations. Her journey had come full circle, from being trusted and appreciated by parents and colleagues to becoming an influential figure in the Filipino teaching community.

Tita Sally's story is one that embodies dedication, resilience, and an unwavering faith in the power of education. Having achieved her goals of providing opportunities for her children and solidifying her family's foundation, she continues to make a profound impact on the education landscape. Armed with the knowledge and experiences she gained throughout her teaching career, she has embraced a new mission: promoting the Science of Reading and uplifting Filipino educators.

Driven by her passion for education, Tita Sally recognizes the transformative potential it holds for individuals and communities. With unwavering determination, she advocates for evidence-based reading instruction and empowers educators with the tools and strategies needed to foster literacy development. Her commitment to this cause is fueled by her belief in the power of education to shape lives and create a brighter future for the Philippines.

Tita Sally's journey serves as a testament to the profound impact that one person can have on the lives of others. Through her dedication and resilience, she has left an indelible mark on her students, her community, and fellow educators. Her story reminds us of the power of education to change lives and inspires us to embrace our own potential to make a difference in the world.



By The Door

By Johjoh Demol Jenae

Teaching in New York City presented me with a unique challenge each day, and it was undoubtedly the most daunting battle I've ever faced. The grandiose idea of the "American Dream" quickly dissipated as I found myself struggling to stay afloat in the whirlwind of cultural shock that greeted me on my first day. The diversity of the city, although exciting, posed a significant challenge that required me to adapt and adjust quickly.

Despite the challenges, I decided to embrace the unusual metaphor of the door. For me, it became a place where I could set aside my self-pride each day. It was where I began my journey, and it ultimately became the place where I was reborn, rising from the ashes like the mythical phoenix.

I have always believed that a smile could cost you nothing and win you a lot - a natural adage that I still hold onto until today. However, on my first day of work in an all-girls-school in uptown Manhattan, some eighteen years ago, even this belief was not enough. Despite coming in with the brightest plan and the widest grin, I only managed to disappoint my first period class.

Seated at the back of the classroom, a girl asked me in a sharp tone, "Where are you from? Can you even speak English? Why don't you just go back to your own country?" Her words pierced through me, and I felt my confidence crumbling. As I stood frozen, time seemed to slow down, and I could hear the ticking of the clock in the background, like a drumbeat signaling my defeat.

On that fateful day, I felt as



though I had died. Although my mind was in shambles, my heart remained steadfast. Summoning my inner strength, I spoke with conviction, "If there is anyone who doesn't understand what I'm saying, you can politely leave and inform administration that you can't comprehend my speech." With that, I broke the silence, and allowed myself the opportunity to collect the shattered fragments of my self-worth.

I began to adopt the practice of leaving my self-pride at the door of my home, which allowed me to approach my students with more humility and understanding.

It took me some time to grasp the power dynamics in the classroom, realizing that no amount of confrontation could lead to victory.

Understanding that many of my students came from dysfunctional families and that my care and attention was their only source of refuge, was the turning point in building better relationships. I came to believe that meeting these needs required removing self-pride from the equation.

I began to adopt the practice of leaving my self-pride at the door of my home, which allowed me to approach my students with more humility and understanding. By doing so, I was able to empathize with my students' struggles and provide them with the support they needed to succeed. Of course, my classroom is not without its flaws, and I still encounter challenges that require my attention, but I have learned how to manage them to some degree.

Now, I can shift my attention to other challenges that my profession demands. One such challenge that I took upon myself was creating a tool that many teachers in my current school now use to aid the language development of first-time immigrant students in New York City. It was a labor of love that required my time and effort, but it was worth it knowing that it has helped countless students.

Adversity, one of my greatest enemies in the battleground of life, can only be as strong as my self-pride. But every day, I leave my self-pride at the door and pick it up again when I return home, ready to face any challenge with humility and determination. I am grateful for the lessons I've learned, and I continue to be inspired by the resilience of my students.



AFTA's Turf

Links...

- AFTA Inc. Facebook Group
<https://www.facebook.com/group/s/1477951355755363>
- AFTA Inc. Facebook Page
<https://www.facebook.com/AssociationOfFilAmTeachersOfAmericaafta>
- Kasikas Issues
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1yUJRbSYOHcaexwCFE9r_FfTdH0u2G2h-

Shoutouts...

- Balikturo 2023 frontrunners: Rizalina Labanda, Kris Ramir and Jovani Tablezo
- Migrants' ESL classes prime movers: Fr. Julian Jagudilla, Nick Miraflores, Rey Garnace, Gerry Francisco, Rena Pedaria, Doreen Cabillan, Juliet Culajao and Evie Cullen
- Panumbalik 2023 working committees: Rena Pedaria, Dara Valconcha, Rey Garnace, Johjoh Demol Jena, Helen Howard, Melvin Damaolao, Marcelo Inot, Cheruby Inot, Josette Ticzon, Ramil Buenaventura, Jovani Tablezo, Ivy Sacay, Doreen Cabillan, Ann Wilson, Jojo Reynes, Rizalina Labanda, Josefina Badana, Kathy Cordial, Aurora Samson-Reyna, Jhun Buensuceso and Kris Ramir

Panumbalik 2023: A memorabilia

