



Office of the President of the Philippines
COMMISSION ON FILIPINOS OVERSEAS

SPOTLIGHT

Bayanihan Among Pinoy Teachers in US Leads to Cultural Education of Fil-Am Community & Giving Back to Home Country Part 1 of 2

Spotlight: Association of Fil-Am Teachers of America (AFTA)



Pupils of Pining Elementary School in Butuan City posing for pictures after receiving educational materials and slippers from the AFTA's Adopt-a-School Project, which was spearheaded by Dr. Roxanne Cajigas, president of AFTA, on 5 August 2018

We may have read Benjamin Franklin as having said, "Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn"; or come across Albert Einstein quoted as saying, "Intellectual growth should commence at birth and cease only at death"; or even referenced Lao Tzu with his famous quote: "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime."

These are some of the famous thoughts from famous intellectuals that might have inspired our learning throughout our schooling and professional development. There are many more quotable quotes on learning tucked away in the compendium of human literature throughout history. But perhaps, one of the earliest mottos we might have heard in our lifetime is "Education begins at home."

And while it is true that whatever we learn at home, we take with us wherever we go, it is just as true that whatever we learn wherever we go, we also naturally want to bring back home. Such is the case of the Association of Fil-Am Teachers of America, Inc. (AFTA), which has been convening US-based Filipino teachers annually since 1994 for its *BalikTuro* program, an annual mission to provide training programs,

seminars, lectures and workshops to their counterparts in the Philippines to share the latest information, knowledge, techniques, and best practices in teaching.

The AFTA is a non-profit organization that envisions creating a sustainable environment that enables Filipino-American teachers to perform at their highest potential and be competitive as educational professionals anywhere in the world. As of 2018, its *BalikTuro* project had benefited almost 15,000 teachers, school administrators, and college students majoring in education in

"Education begins at home."

the Philippines, which won for the organization the Presidential Award for *Lingkod sa Kapwa Pilipino* in 2018.

Mandated by law, the Presidential Awards for Filipino Individuals and Organizations Overseas (PAFIOO) is a biennial search organized by the CFO in collaboration with the Philippine diplomatic posts, through which nominations are officially submitted, to honor and recognize overseas Filipinos or organizations, including foreign nationals, who promote the interests of overseas Filipino communities or contribute

to Philippine development initiatives. A distinct category of the PAFIOO is also conferred on Filipinos overseas who have demonstrated excellence in their professions.

A digital leap in knowledge transfer

Unfazed by the pandemic that hit the world for most of 2020, the AFTA once again reached out to the CFO for its annual *BalikTuro* mission, but this time, via a webinar series on 'new normal' distance teaching and learning, which was held in July. Entitled "Bridging Educational Shifts: Tools, Strategies and Approaches for the New Normal Learning", this online *BalikTuro* made headway under the

leadership of its immediate past President, Mr. Marcelo 'Mhars' Inot.

A leap in diaspora transfer of knowledge and skills in the field of education in the Philippines, the first and second parts of the online *BalikTuro* series were attended by a combined 1,673 teachers, instructors, and school administrators from 816 educational institutions all over the country, a number far greater than what might be reached through the traditional physical conduct of the project.

As the *BalikTuro* has been in operation for almost three decades now, the desire to share their wealth of talents and resources have already been ingrained at the very core of the dedicated Filipino-American teachers, who, year after year, continue to return to the Philippines not only for the fulfillment they get from teaching, but also for the sheer joy of giving back to their home country and fellowmen. This tradition of giving back has been passed on to the younger members of the organization from its pioneers. True to form, this batch of around 30 educators from New York made use of available resources to continue the mission, despite, but precisely because of, the pandemic.

During the online *BalikTuro*



Mr. Juanito C. Hingpis, VP for Development of AFTA in 2014, sharing new curriculum designs, ideas and methodologies in teaching English Language Arts and Special Education to the teachers and administrators of Dr. Celedonio A. SALVADOR Elementary School in Paco, Manila

in July, CFO Chairperson Sec. Francisco P. Acosta lauded the AFTA's innovativeness in fulfilling its commitment to deliver its annual missionary project in bringing the learning of Filipino educators abroad back to the Philippines amidst the distance and travel restraints. He urged attendees to "follow the AFTA's spirit and fortitude in moving on despite the limitations imposed by the present pandemic." The Secretary also encouraged the participants to 'pay it forward' to their respective communities by sharing the knowledge and skills they acquired from the webinar series.

Continuing community development

The conduct of the *BalikTuro* does not stop at teachers, who are the initial intended beneficiaries of the program. In 2015, AFTA launched its

Adopt a Scholar Project to fund the four-year academic scholarships of bright but underprivileged students enrolled in the BS Education program in state colleges or universities in the Philippines. They are currently supporting 14 deserving scholars who dream of becoming outstanding teachers and educators in their lifetime.

In addition to helping disadvantaged students, the AFTA also started a program called Adopt a Classroom in the Philippines. Since 2015, the organization has been donating learning supplies to public schools of several municipalities and cities nationwide. And through its *Gawad Teknolohiya* project, the organization donated audio-visual materials such as projectors, scientific calculators, and some instructional software.



AFTA members during one of their first *BalikTuro* series in the 1990's held at the Philippine School for the Deaf