Teaching under the Taliban by Roya Shirzay, Level 7

When I was in eighth grade, a wild group called the Taliban, captured Kabul and many provinces of Afghanistan. As they came, the doors of schools were closed to girls. Females couldn’t go to work outside of the home. The Taliban ordered girls and women to stay at home. There was no work or school for girls and women. The Taliban said education was contrary to the religion of Islam. They also prohibited television and banned certain music, too. There was just one radio channel that broadcasted news and songs without lyrics.

My three sisters and I couldn’t go to school for five years. My older sister got married. My two younger sisters and I missed school. It was a pitiable situation for all the people of Afghanistan, especially for girls and women. I busied myself with storybooks and listened to music that was recorded on tape recorders on low volume. After a few months, one of our neighbors asked me if I could teach her daughters. They were about six and eight years old at the time. I accepted with pleasure and began to teach. The number of students began increasing day by day. I taught reading, writing, math, Holy Quran, and English to more than sixty students six days a week, with the exception of Friday, at first. I was only sixteen, but I was known as a teacher and was respected in our residential complex. I had busy and sweet days with my cute students.

I was also scared about what to do if the Taliban found out about my teaching. If someone didn’t obey them, they hit people and put them in jail. My cute students always told me, “If somebody asks us about it, we will say we are just learning Holy Quran.” There were many centers for girls where only the Quran was taught, and the Taliban agreed to them. The Taliban government continued for five years. Two months after the tragic incidents of September 11th, the American army rushed and helped clean Kabul of the Taliban and destroyed the Taliban government. When the Taliban left Kabul, a new season began in the history of Afghanistan. Many television stations resumed their activity. Girls and women restarted their lives outside the house. Everything got better. I finished school. My teaching experience and adorable memories of that time determined my career. I finished university in the literature and language field and got a job as a teacher. I taught until I had my second child, then I quit to raise my family.

Director’s Corner by Marcia D’Arcangelo

Every year, the world around us is different and seemingly more complex. This year has been especially so. Yet, the students and teachers at New Neighbors remain steadfast in our mission to welcome newcomers to our community and share our many gifts in the spirit of unity. We cherish the chance to learn together -- not only how to communicate in English, but also how to understand our many differences and similarities. Although our students come from 31 different countries and speak more than 15 different languages, as we come to know one another we find that our similarities outweigh our differences. We share such characteristics as strength of conviction, generosity of spirit toward others, courage and resilience, love of family and friends, honesty, and a willingness to adapt to new situations. We are grateful to Christ Church for providing us with a beautiful, safe space in which to study and to learn these important life lessons.
Life Changing Experiences from students in Level 6.

“An accident I had when I was three years old changed my life. The family TV fell on me when I was trying to pick up a toy on top of it. My family took me to the emergency room because my condition was so bad. The emergency room transferred me to the ICU. I was unconscious for five days. It affected my right side face muscles and nerves. I got better in a month. Since then, I have continuously followed up with my doctor. When I was in Middle School, I had surgery to repair nerves, muscles and reconstruct my face, but it did not work. So, they transferred me to John Hopkins Hospital in the U.S.A. Since 2011, I have had three plastic surgeries and three eye surgeries. Also, I have one more surgery scheduled for April 5. While it has been difficult, good has come from it. My family and I got great opportunities to learn English in America. Also, two of my brothers got scholarships to study in the US.” --- Rayah Al Masad, Saudia Arabia.

“My first trip to Washington D.C. was the fall of 2014. I was really lucky because the ticket was very cheap, but obviously it was not a direct flight, I had to stop in Philadelphia. The night before I couldn’t sleep because I had to wake up at 4 a.m to be ready at 6 a.m. to go out. My husband and my son Yago told me what I needed to do in Philadelphia, but they also said, “Be careful!”, because the airports in the U.S. are very big. You sometimes must run to make your connections; you pick up your baggage and pass through immigration control after leaving the bag for Washington D.C. When I arrived in Philadelphia, I ran like “Usain Bolt,” but the problem was that I didn’t know where I had to leave the bag. I saw a big, Afro American policeman and I asked him; “Do you speak English?” (My sister, who has visited N.Y. several times, said to me that there are a lot of people who speak Spanish.) The policeman looked at me surprised and I quickly answered, “Of course, do you speak Spanish?” “No ma’am,” he said to me. My children are still laughing. Finally, I took the airplane and I saw the most beautiful view of Washington, D.C.” --- Marian Reig, Spain.

“A memorial experience I have had was giving birth to my second daughter in the USA. It was very different from when I had my other daughter. In the first place, it was in Dubai and I had 24 hours of labor before giving birth. I was in a lot of pain. That is why I waited for four years to have another child. Also, the experience I had with the doctors and nurses was very bad. But, for my second daughter things were totally different. The hospital, the doctors, the nurses, the environment were amazing and my labor was only 15 minutes. I got good care and amazing service [in the USA]!” --- Nadia Mohammed, Ethiopia.

Milestones:

Eslam Khalifa, Level 2, and Aziza Amimer, Level 7 got their Driver’s License!
Congratulations, Eslam and Aziza!

Islam Sidahmed, Level 5, has started her own catering business. Best Wishes, Islam!

Miguel Gomez, Level 3, became a citizen in November! He passed his citizenship test after borrowing the Civics flash cards from our Citizenship Kit.

Tibor Traksler, Level 2, also became a citizen this year. Sally Brierre, his New Neighbors teacher, and Bill Blair, a volunteer at New Neighbors, attended the ceremony. Traksler was born and raised in Rakhiv, Ukraine. He attended the National University in Uzhgorod, and later managed a nature-appreciation program for young people there. He came to the United States seven years ago.
*This year New Neighbors offered elective Citizenship classes in response to student requests.

The entire New Neighbors family congratulates these students for their hard work and perseverance and welcomes them as new citizens!!
Around the Neighborhood….

- Our class, **Intro A-2**, is discussing time, seasons and foods. Farmers and gardeners plant seeds in the spring to grow fruit, grains and vegetables. Summer and fall (autumn) are seasons when we can harvest or pick the foods that we grow. The members of our class have a variety of favorite foods: Asma likes vegetables and turkey; Ayesha likes oranges and rice; Barchin likes cake and apples; Belen likes sandwiches; Lula likes apples “and everything;” Gurcan likes beef; Nazifa likes oranges and chicken, and Maryam likes apples. Maryam’s husband makes pizza at home with tomato sauce and cheese. We packed a re-useable grocery bag with these foods. *Submitted by Laurie Tracy, teacher*

- In **Intro B**, we discussed the students’ goals for their new lives in the US. Three are currently working on getting their drivers’ licenses. Magda passed the written test and proudly brought in the signed certificate saying she had passed. Sima wanted to find a job to help take care of her family of five children. She recently took a full-time job packing food containers for airlines. She is proud that she can speak enough English to be able to get such a good job. Tamana wants to improve her reading skills so that she can be a good mother to her new daughter. Sitara wants to go to beauty school so that she can save money for college for her children. This is wonderful progress for young women who have only been in the US. for two years or so. *Submitted by Mary and Don Schlichtmann, teachers.*

- **Level Seven** considered Wisdom sayings from the students’ home cultures. Here are three from Colombia, *submitted by Nhora Osorio*, “A tree that’s grown crooked will never get straight,” which means a child who has bad habits will not be an exemplary person. “If you get under a good tree you will have good shelter,” which means if associate myself with a winner, I’ll succeed. “A friend in adversity is a true friend,” which means a true friend stays around even when things are tough.

- During an in class discussion, **Level 3**, was asked the following question: How can I learn better English? They answered, “You must practice 8 out of 24 hours every day. You must write in English and learn vocabulary. You can listen to music, watch movies with subtitles, read your children books in English, and text in English. You can speak with your teacher and others in English. You can practice English with your family. In our opinion, you can listen to the news and learn about what is happening in the world and learn English too.”

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**A THOUGHT FOR TODAY**

“Darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that.”

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

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**“Table Talks”** with community agencies introduce students to available services.

“**No matter where you are from, we are glad you’re our neighbor.”**
Meet One of Our New Neighbors! by Joby Dupuis, Teacher

I first met Pablo Lemus two years ago when I taught Level 4. Knowing some of his story, I asked Pablo if he would be willing to sit down and be interviewed for our newsletter. He graciously agreed.

Me: Pablo, how long have you been studying English here at New Neighbors?
Pablo: I have been here for four years. I started in Level 3 and now am in Level 6.
Me: And, how long have you been in the United States? You are from Honduras, right?
Pablo: Yes, I am from Honduras. I have been in the U.S. for 17 years. I am now a citizen.
Me: That is great! I know that you go back to Honduras every year for a month. Is that to see family?
Pablo: Yes, at first, I went back to see my son and the rest of my family. Now my son is here in the United States, and will soon become a citizen himself. So, now, I go back to visit my Mom. I love her cooking!
Me: Tell me about your son.
Pablo: He will be 19 in May. He goes to T.C. Williams and has a part time job at restaurant called the Lost Dog. He wants to be a doctor! I am very glad he is here now. My wife is here too.

Me: Why did you come to the United States?
Pablo: For better life opportunities, and to be safe. In Honduras, it is not safe to walk on the streets at night. I chose Washington DC because I had friends here.
Me: What do you miss about Honduras?
Pablo: My family and the traditional food!
Me: My next question is why did you come to New Neighbors?
Pablo: I am glad to have morning classes because I can work. My manager lets me have off so that I can come to class. I work at the Four Seasons in Washington DC. I always get very high marks in my reviews, except for one thing – communicating with the guests. So, I continue to work on my English. I like my job. I have good benefits.
Me: I know you work hard at English because you were in my class a few years ago! We had fun in that class. I remember you brought your guitar to class and you played while we sang together! And, that you loved learning the song, “Could I Have This Dance” by Anne Murray when we studied conditionals! Your English continues to get better and better! Thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed, for being a part of our school and for being such a good new neighbor!

Cool Project by Beth Cruz, Level 7

We have had some cool projects in Level 7, and coolest of all was reading Riding With the Wind: Three Generations of My Family in China by Fay Hoh Yin. The story is about Fay’s own family’s saga beginning in the early nineteen hundreds. They were a Chinese family who broke many traditions and were definitely ahead of their time. Fay’s mother challenged having her feet bound, pursued higher education, and came to America for college. Her father also had a formal education in the United States and ended up studying physical education. At that time, the discipline didn’t even exist in their country. Fay’s parents also broke the rule of arranged marriages. Can you imagine all this at the beginning of the last century in China?

Because the author is a friend our teacher, Sara Daugherty-Jones, we have been able to read a few chapters before the book’s publication and talk with Fay by Skype. The best part is coming. The book is going to be published in May, and Fay will inscribe a copy for each of us. How cool is that?

New Neighbors students can learn how to manage money and navigate the finance industry in our Financial Skills class.
Job Skills and More! by Julie Kehrli, Teacher

Shahin joined the Job Skills class last year as a Level 3 student. She has been an eager student, participating enthusiastically in every class. Imagine my delight when I recently walked into Talbots in Old Town Alexandria and was greeted by Shahin, who now has a job there!! Shahin demonstrated her skills by helping me find everything I was looking for and setting up my dressing room. I felt very well looked after -- Shahin definitely helped ensure a sale! It makes it all worthwhile when you see that our efforts through the New-Neighbors ELL program can and do help improve students’ lives and prospects.

Editor’s Note: One of the benefits of learning English is being able to become employed. Many of our students have jobs in the Alexandria area. Continued improvement brings more employment opportunities and promotions. Many students are employed locally, at places like Chipotle, Old Town Cupcakes, Fish Market Restaurant, Murphy’s Pub, Los Tios Restaurant, MacDonald’s, IHop, U.S. Institute of Peace, Macy’s, Talbots and the Four Seasons Hotel. Some students have started their own businesses, catering, baking, sewing, or cleaning. Others are in training programs to learn skills necessary for employment. Our elective Job Skills class helps students develop job search and resume writing skills.

My Philosophy of Life by Luis Leon, Level 7

During my years of experience, I have built my own philosophy of life. There are some natural laws that govern the norms of universal coexistence by which I must understand the following concepts:

- Everything that happens in the universe must happen, and it is for good.
- Nothing has happened that has not been necessary.
- The reality is to learn from it not to change it.
- Everyone does what he does with the sole purpose of achieving happiness.
- Neither I nor anyone else makes mistakes with the intention of committing them.
- If I live with the mistakes of the people around me, they have the purpose of teaching me something. It was I who chose to have them in my life. What I feel about them is my responsibility, and it is not anyone’s fault.
- If others live with the mistakes I make, I am not guilty of what they feel, and it was they who chose to live with them. Everyone has what it takes.
- We all have what is necessary for our growth and happiness.

I accept and respect everything that happens in my life and that of others. I am willing to always give the best of me: my understanding, service, acceptance, support, valuation, respect, freedom of thought, word, and work. I will refrain from imposing upon, prohibiting, mistreating, attacking, pressing or criticizing others. I think the harmony of the universe gives us the principles and tools necessary to achieve happiness. It all depends on us.

Our students received welcome donations of new hats, mittens, and scarves from the children of Grace Episcopal School. Others’ donations of books, toys, and games brighten the children’s days.

Left: Marcia D’Arcangelo, Director of New Neighbors ELL and Family Literacy Program
Middle: Grace Episcopal School Students
Right: Patti Culbreth, Grace Episcopal School, Head of School
Celebrating the New Year submitted by Level 4 students

I’m from Afghanistan and we have four seasons in a year in our country: spring, summer, fall and winter. Each season lasts four months. The first day of spring is a traditional day for our people, it is the first day of the new year and we celebrate it gloriously. Before that day, people clean their home and buy new clothes, new shoes. Some people buy new dishes and new furniture. Also people make special food for this day. For example, Seven Fruits is a special dish for new year’s day. People put seven types of dry fruits like raisins, almonds, pistachios and four more in clean water, and serve them in big dishes. It is so delicious. Samanak is another special food that we make from wheat and it tastes so good. But now we are in the U.S. and we miss this special day.

Fakhera Fekrat (Afghanistan)

In the Mexican culture, we do a lot of things to celebrate the new year. We begin on December 31 preparing food all day. Usually we cook the food we like to eat. The tradition is to prepare a turkey with different spices and then put it in the oven. We also use romeritos, a Mexican herb. The taste is very good. We also prepare rice, salad, and ponche. This is a hot drink; it contains cinnamon, sugar cane and different fruits like guavas, apples, tamarind. These are all mixed together with a little shot of tequila (optional). It tastes great! Before midnight, we have to eat twelve grapes, one for each wish. Also, we have to use colorful underwear depending on what you want for the next year. If you want love, you use red; if you want money, you use yellow. Another tradition is to stay up all night, talking, laughing with family and friends. The first person to go to bed has to pay for the party the next day. Well, we have a lot of fun on that day, but the most important is to stay together in harmony, celebrate another year in your life, and give thanks.

Veronica Dominguez (Mexico)

Don’t forget to register for Fall Classes

Fall Semester 2017

Online registration is available starting August 1

https://campagnacenter.schoolforms.org/newneighbors

In Person: August 30 and September 6, 9:30 -11:30 a.m.,

at Christ Church, Alexandria

(New students must take a pretest)

Fall Classes Start on September 11. Don’t wait to register!
Classes and child care spots fill quickly!