

Summary:

On May 6th and 7th, AMA hosted two separate 3-hour mentoring luncheons for our BA recipients at the Đồng Khánh Hotel in District 5 of Ho Chi Minh City. We introduced Miss Đặng Thị Thu Thảo as our keynote speaker this year, who is the founder and principal of the non-profit primary school “Phước Thiện” in District 7. Miss Thảo gave an emotional and inspirational speech (see the English excerpt on the next page), discussing her love for teaching and working with young and underprivileged students in her community. She also gave practical advice to our university recipients on teaching methodology, urging them to approach their future students with empathy, patience and love. She treats her students like they are her family members, while using effective discipline to handle specific situations at times.

We also invited our MA/PhD scholarship recipients to act as mentors at the luncheon this year, since they are older and already work as lecturers/teachers at the university. It was a great way for us to create cross-synergies in our work, in terms of involving these lecturers and Miss Thao for the mentoring work. It turned out to be very successful as these lecturers have walked down the same path as BA students themselves 5-10 years ago, so they have many concrete and practical advice to offer to our younger recipients. In total, seven mentors were deployed over 2 days (8 mentors when including Miss Thao), and AMA is proud of their enthusiastic participation and care for the younger students. For example, a lecturer named Miss Hoa discussed her path to becoming a teacher and gave a passionate speech about the importance of effective communication when teaching her students. Our BA recipients learned a lot and were appreciative (see their comments in one of the following pages).



Miss Thảo was our keynote speaker and told a moving story about her school and teaching career (see next page for excerpt of her speech).



Our PhD candidate / lecturer Manh Thanh (in blue shirt) was a fantastic mentor to our younger students. He advised with passion and care, showing up at our function even when sick with a painful sore throat.



Miss Hoa (right side) inspired our students with her speech and hosted a table filled with our class of 2014 BA recipients. AMA thanks her for doing a great job!

Excerpt of the speech by Miss Thảo of Phước Thiện School

“I always had a dream and that dream was to wear a white Ao Dai dress going to school every day, just like every other school girl. And I think everyone deserves a chance like that. When I knew that I couldn't make it to school myself, I thought about helping others to achieve that dream one day.

As I always have the compassion for children, I started Phuoc Thien school to teach the children in my neighbourhood who cannot afford a proper education. I myself did not have it when I was a kid, so I understand how important it is.

I pass on my dream and love to my students and hope that one day they will be decent people, being able to continue with their education. I still remember the visit of one of my first student back in the 1990s. She came back to see me in a white Ao Dai dress, informing me that she has officially become a student of a public school. I was crying and laughing at the same time when I heard that news because it was my dream coming true, accomplished by one of my students. I carried her on my back running around my classroom to celebrate the news. Nothing could describe my happy feelings. Back in those days, we didn't have a mobile phone nor a camera to take photos of her, but everything is still fresh in my mind today.

It is my destiny to teach children. I love my job. I know the feeling of lack of love, especially the love from a mother. I didn't live with my mother when I was a child, and I want to be there for those children who are like me. There was one time when Mr. Tuan (one of the teachers) was really angry with 2 students (they're sisters) because they refused to write an essay to describe their mother. I asked them why and they said: "What is mother? I don't have one. I don't know one. We never call anyone mother. We can't do this exercise." I totally understood their situation and told them to describe the person who loves them and really cares for them. They finished it in less than 20 minutes, describing their cousin. My point is to be able to teach your students, you have to be their friend first. Listen and understand them. Teach them to care for one another as they're a family. Treat everyone with the same attitude and love them all with all your heart.

Maybe other teachers have different ways of handling bad-behaved or disobedient students, but based on my experience, I do the following: Firstly, I explain what they did wrong and why they shouldn't do such things. If they still disobey after I have been patient with them for 2-3 days, I will ignore them. I will act like nothing has happened. I will continue to teach and communicate with everyone else, but not with him/her. Even the toughest kid will change his attitude for the better after being neglected by his/her teacher. It is at this point that I have a small talk with them, asking how they feel and if they understand why I had to do this.

Finally, I'd like to say thanks to AMA for your invitation to this event and for your support as well. The kids now can have lunch at school and I can get more facilities and services for the school.

I hope that what I've shared what can help you a little with your teaching career and thank you for your listening. I would like to express my most sincere gratefulness to the school and AMA. I wish all of you happiness and success.”

A Story of Will

One of our BA recipients from the class of 2014 suffered a stroke recently and shared her dramatic and inspirational story with us. After an exam one day, she went home to rest in bed. She woke up and went to the bathroom, only to be terrified by what she saw in the mirror: her lips were stretched close to her ears and her right arm could not move at all. Her father took her to the hospital immediately, but the doctor said it was too late to be able to do anything about it. She was told that she could be debilitated for the rest of her life given such a severe stroke, and was sent home by the hospital after a short stay. She and her father did not want to give up, so they went on to seek out traditional acupuncture treatment. After a few months, she miraculously recovered on a gradual basis! She was told not to expose herself to any more stress, as a second stroke may kill her this time around. However, she wanted to finish her college degree, so she decided to return to her university. She is able to function normally now, pursuing her interest in writing. She loves writing and sometimes gets paid by publishers for her short stories to be posted on blogs. She maintains a strong will, but she also fears being paralyzed for life if she gets struck again by another stroke. She has been told not to be emotional as that can trigger stress, but her tears were rolling down her face as she told us this story over lunch. It was an emotional moment for us all at the table, and her fellow students and teachers offered her words of advice and encouragement to help her carry on with her education. She still feels depressed and lonely at times because few people are aware of or understand her struggles, but she tries to find ways to de-stress herself. She is fighting to finish her degree at the risk of suffering another stroke, and we are 100% behind her.

Feedback / Comments on the Luncheon

1. Bảo Trân (class of 2013): “Everyone was friendly and sociable. The luncheon was great. I’m not talkative, so thank you for talking to me. And please tell chú (uncle) Peter that we are really grateful for what he’s done for us, as he always cares for students like us...Thanks to him and thanks to everyone.”
2. Thanh Thảo (class of 2014): “Firstly, I want to thank to everyone for giving us a chance to meet and exchange knowledge through a warm and cozy luncheon like this. Honestly, I felt very happy because I was invited to a formal lunch like this (I could also bring some food home), and I had an opportunity to learn a lot from the previous generation. To me, the luncheon today was really practical and helpful. Hopefully, we will be able to attend more luncheons like this in the next coming year.”
3. Ngọc Thúy (PhD - class of 2014): “The luncheon was warm and cozy. Once again, thanks to Chau and to AMA. I only have one suggestion: if possible, AMA should have a forum or a page for AMA scholars to share, exchange stories or knowledge, or to motivate and encourage each other through hard times. Sometimes, the students are shy and teachers can engage them first, and then help them if they need. I wish Chau and AMA lots of luck along the way of helping Vietnamese education.”

Notes from our AMA member Vy



Vy and new AMA member Alex had lively discussions at their table. Alex is a teaching professional in HMC City.



Miss Ngoc Thuy (center) was advising our students. She teaches some of them at the university.

“This year, the 2nd year students were more comfortable to join in the discussions and share their stories. As second year students, they care more about the skills required for managing classes, i.e. how to remember the names of all their students, especially if they have one or two classes per week; how to encourage students to participate in the class discussion; how to treat “special students”; how to deal with difficult questions from the students. Thanks to Alex, an experienced teacher and new AMA member, all the questions were well answered. I think the students really enjoyed the conversations. Some students had classes in the afternoon, but they did not want to leave and stayed there much longer. The students were extremely focused on the discussions, and they were also willing to ask questions and to share their difficulties and concerns with us. Below are some interesting topics in the discussion:

- **Teenage Violence:** A student has a cousin who joined a bad gang and commits to many fights at the school. He asked how he can help his cousin stay away from these fights and raised a question on how to deal with intense violence in schools nowadays.
- **General Learning:** How important will “general learning” be in their actual jobs in the future? Some students are confused about what they have learnt at university, especially general subjects in their first and second year. They think the scope of learning is too general and sometimes they get lost.
- **Materials:** the reference materials are not always available to the students. They have difficulties in learning new terms and the internet sometimes does not help.
- **Resume preparation and interview skills:** students want to learn how to write a good CV and how to prepare/present themselves in job interviews.”

“Our second group with 1st year students was fun. It was great to learn that many of them earned excellent grades in their 1st semester. They were shy at first and were afraid to talk, but eventually got comfortable with sharing. Below were some interesting questions:

- **Teamwork:** why do they have to work on a team when they can work better themselves? Is teamwork important? Several students had problems with teamwork and questioned the efficiency of the team model.
- **Learning English:** How do they improve English skills, especially speaking and listening skills? All students have problems with learning English and they all want to improve.
- **Confidence:** how do they build up confidence at a young age?
- **Struggles in Life:** how do they overcome struggles in life?
- **Part Time Job:** Most students take up part time jobs such as tutoring or waiter. One student shared her experience in working with Lotte’s chain of restaurants. She received VND10K per hour (less than USD 0.50), much lower than the rate of tutoring, but she is willing to do it because (1) working time is flexible, (2) she can earn extra money on holidays (rate is double) and (iii) she can learn new things outside of school.”

Selective Photos



Alex (left) dedicated his time and energy to AMA as our new member, sharing his many words of wisdom with our recipients based on his own teaching experience. AMA is grateful for his contributions and Alex has pledged more support going forward.



Our 2 BA recipients looked after one another well during the luncheon. The blind recipient Thi Thao (left) has become a major chess champion in Vietnam, despite starting chess late in life. She competes against blind and non-blind chess players, and has represented Vietnam in international competitions.



Peter, our two PhD recipients, and AMA coordinator Kim Chau. AMA thanks Chau for another job well done and all the lecturers for their time and energy!



Two proud recipients of AMA said goodbye to us after the luncheon. They enjoyed themselves and were appreciative of our efforts.



AMA thanks Anh Tuan (center) for joining our lunch as a mentor. He is a well-renowned architect and good friend who also wants to help others in need. We also thank another Anh Tuan and Tom who were present.



Our 2 PhD lecturers (center right) generously spent their time advising another group of BA recipients. AMA is starting to build a sense of community, which we are happy to witness on this day.