A Few Words From This Year’s Winners...

Professor Phoon Kok Kwang
Dept of Civil & Environmental Engineering, ATEA winner

Make a Difference!

You would surely encounter advertisements which proudly proclaim that “Teachers make a difference.” Some may dismiss this as a banal platitude, especially to a sizeable group of us who have taught tirelessly in the day-to-day trenches of our NUS existence for years too numerous to count. On a really bad day, one wonders if anyone is even listening. It is therefore understandable to feel less than enamoured with such proclamations.

I have had the privilege of staying in touch with a handful of students years after they have graduated from NUS. Many are working just as conscientiously and courageously in the day-to-day trenches of their adult existence. Some have mentioned that their NUS experience did make a difference in their careers and sometimes, their lives. Some would also continue to thank me, when we meet once in a blue moon, for an incidental act that has somehow influenced them in a positive way. Their kind words touched me and have encouraged me in no small measure. Honestly, I do not recall most of these incidents, but there is little doubt that most of us have at least served as role models of lifelong learning for our students. This has been ingrained into us as researchers and we cannot help but impart our exceedingly useful learning skills to our graduates. Some of us may even inspire them to think beyond simply wanting and achieving. Ultimately, if we have indeed succeeded in our mission, they would have learnt that the true value of an education is to grant them the freedom to think for themselves and to blaze their own path.

I do not mean to sound immodest by sharing this personal experience of mine, but I sincerely believe that our role as an educator is worthy. It may be another banal platitude, but true nonetheless.