

NUS Teaching Academy Annual Dinner and Distinguished Lecture 2017

Opening Remarks by Guest of Honour,
Professor Tan Eng Chye, Provost, NUS

17 May 2017, 6 pm
University Hall Auditorium

Distinguished Speaker, Dr Steve Wheeler

Fellows of the NUS Teaching Academy,

Colleagues and Friends,

The Teaching Academy has been established for some eight years now, during which it has made many contributions to enhancing the educational landscape at NUS. Through dialogue sessions with educators, the Teaching Academy has surfaced several important issues and made recommendations to the university on important aspects of education such as assessment, student feedback and peer review. Amongst other things, the Teaching Academy is now looking at how millennials and Generation Z learn. It is vital that NUS continue to engage with the changing educational landscape, be it in the student cohort, new pedagogies or new technologies. The Teaching Academy serves a valuable function by providing an authentic and contextual voice on these matters as Academy members are the very educators who are experiencing and shaping these changes.

This evening, I am delighted to join you at the second Annual Dinner of the Teaching Academy. It is a wonderful occasion that brings together present and past Fellows and provides an opportunity for us to engage with world leaders in higher education. The theme of last year's Distinguished Lecture was lifelong learning, the importance of which is being echoed in universities and Governments around the world as we enter the Fourth Industrial Revolution. We are in an era where change is constant and it is critical for students to learn how to learn, unlearn and relearn. The workforce of today is made to continuously to acquire new skills and expertise. Anticipating these trends, NUS has strategically reoriented its

teaching and learning landscape to advance these new priorities. Two significant recent initiatives are the School for Continuing and Lifelong Education (SCALE) and the Institute for Application of Learning Science and Educational Technology (ALSET).

Technology has redefined the world we live in, and higher education in the digital age is undergoing a metamorphosis. But what do we mean when we talk about higher education in the digital age? It is not merely tech-enhanced education; that has been around for a very long time. All universities today have an online presence, have some form of virtual learning environment and deploy various new gadgets to enhance teaching and learning. We have over time, gone from chalk and blackboard to PowerPoint and white screen. But beyond how content is delivered, technology can facilitate, stimulate and transform teaching and learning in far deeper ways.

The introduction of MOOCS and blended learning heralded a new wave of online learning that has had some impact on pedagogy and content. However, these initiatives have not been uniformly successful. This is not surprising as they were not always driven by educational concerns, but by economics, as universities saw these opportunities as revenue sources that could alleviate rising costs. Nonetheless, these developments have pushed the boundaries and have forced educators to think about new pedagogies for this new educational landscape.

As institutions of higher education operate in the digital age, they need to move beyond tech-enhanced education. It is important to remember that while we can control *facilitative* technology, we cannot control *disruptive* technology; and it is disruptive technology that may have an even greater impact on how students learn. This is a point eloquently made by Michael Flavin in a book published this year, entitled *Disruptive Technology Enhanced Learning*. His book “identifies misalignments between the technologies supplied by universities, often at considerable expense, and the disruptive technologies used in practice by students and lecturers.”

What are these disruptive technologies? Flavin cites Google and Wikipedia. But the list can include many forms of social media, including YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and others. We have known for a long time that social media is powerful; for many in the younger generation, they live their lives through social media. In 2006, Time Magazine published “You” as its Person of the Year, highlighting the ability of social media to empower every individual.

It is critical that we understand the role of social media in higher education. NUS is thus honoured and delighted that Dr Steve Wheeler, a renowned expert on digital education is here to deliver the Academy's Distinguished Lecture this evening, and the Distinguished Workshop on social media and higher education tomorrow morning. I look forward to his lecture tonight and I would like to wish the NUS Teaching Academy every success in its endeavours.

Thank you.