

MY TEACHING PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT

H. (CLOUD) HENG

<https://www.cloudhheng.com>

Having grown up in a low-income family with a high number of dependents, I experienced notable financial stress during my teenager years, which further challenged myself to bring a better life to my family. However, I had a below-average academic performance at the early stage of my secondary school, which made myself feel doubt on my abilities to succeed in school and life. Moreover, like many people who were not born with privileges in wealth or social status, I intended to give up pursuing education considering my family was financially unstable. Fortunately, my life came to a turning point just because of a few high-school educators who showed attentive care for my future. As they went extra miles, their creativity and enthusiasm helped me discover my strength in science and math of which I was not aware before. Understanding my interest in science, I gained a higher level of motivation and managed to pass my secondary school national exam with high distinctions, which then allowed me to continue my post-secondary education in Mechanical Engineering with a full scholarship. Obtaining a full scholarship for an engineering degree was a significant transition in my life considering the fact that I grew up in a family without a professional scientific background. This transition allowed me to realize how important quality education and passionate educators are in helping vulnerable groups and their families to escape from poverty. I envision educators as candles who consume themselves to light the way for others, and I also aspire to be a candle that will light up more people under the positive influence of education like how I was transformed. Ever since, I built my interest in deriving effective teaching approaches that can benefit the general public. Emerging from my past life experiences as a vulnerable student and learning from my previous well-respected educators, I identify my four core principles in teaching, which retain my motivation in providing engineering education to my students, as follows:

1) Passion

Teaching is not just a profession; it is a passion! Engineering is commonly known as a complex field of study, sometimes with a high dropout rate, so I believe students need to be highly motivated. From my [microteaching](#) training, I discovered my strength as a passionate educator, and I aim to utilize my enthusiasm to progressively build a strong interest among my students in engineering studies. I believe if my students can be influenced to be as passionate as me, they will learn to embrace any potential challenges encountered instead of finding ways to avoid them. For this reason, I usually take extra steps to introduce certain topics that can cultivate their interest in engineering, even though the topics are beyond students' syllabi, such as the social impacts of engineering in their personal lives, software skills in simplifying engineering solutions, or engineering career prospects. Students are expected to learn their syllabi faster when they appreciate engineering studies better. Hence, including these additional topics of interest will not waste the lecture time unnecessarily. On the contrary, it is an investment of time to help students learn faster through identifying more meaningful purposes of engineering learning.

2) Vulnerability

It is common to assume that university students should know a great deal of basic knowledge, especially for those at their senior years. On the other hand, I believe that students appreciate educators who expect them to be vulnerable. For this reason, before introducing a complex concept, it is necessary for me to introduce some associated fundamental principles or general backgrounds without assuming my students have already known the basic. Moreover, I also value the vulnerability of students through my regular teaching practices such as speaking at a slower pace, using body languages, utilizing visual aids, and encouraging questions. The understanding of vulnerability is also crucial in classroom settings that involve a significant portion of young-aged students because young people sometimes are tagged as "the least experienced group". I strike to empower vulnerable young students in my classrooms and help them discover their full potential such as their abilities to view things from different angles, introduce fresh ideas, foster innovation, and incorporate creativity. With this empowerment, students are able to see themselves as valuable assets in their future organizations. As an educator, I believe that it is also important to demonstrate my personal vulnerability to students by seeking their opinions, learning from them, and acknowledging things that are outside of my expertise.

3) Diversity

It is recognized that students come from different backgrounds and carry unique characteristics, so there is no single method that is sufficiently effective for everyone. Understanding that each person is unique, instead of imposing a single study guide for all students, I spend time to research my students' individual characteristics and advise the most effective learning strategies for different students based on their distinct personalities. Understanding that learning preferences of students vary, it is also crucial for me to diversify my teaching strategies and create lesson plans that include a wide range of teaching methods to accommodate various learning preferences. For example, I aim to use well-balanced spoken and written instructions while explaining engineering concepts to benefit both visual and auditory learners. I also usually discuss problem sets that are associated to the theories taught to help students appreciate what they learn. In laboratory courses, I design experiential instructions to accommodate kinesthetic learners by demonstrating relevant lab equipment. Because of my apprenticeship teaching perspective, I also take opportunities to include some participatory learning activities (e.g. case studies, think-pair-share) in my classrooms as I realize engineering theories are closely related to daily life applications. These activities not only illustrate the relevance of classroom content in our life, but also allow students to learn through interactive discussions. A variety of instructions and diversification of classroom activities can lead to effective classroom engagement. Strong classroom engagement enhances teacher-student and student-student communication, and helps me receive more ideas openly from students, which further promotes my flexibility and diversification in teaching.

4) Improvements

Teaching is a continuous process, so it is my commitment to seek feedback and act accordingly. I envision evaluation as a key element to measure my teaching effectiveness and my students' learning success, so it is my practice to encourage students to participate in evaluations to support my continuous improvement goals. While [end-of-term evaluation](#) is helpful to examine my teaching performance, it is also necessary for me to conduct routine mini-evaluations throughout the term so that early actions can be taken to fix any identified problems before the end of the term. I also embrace teaching reflections that encourage transformation. For instance, one of my teaching reflections has changed my perception on academic assessment from differentiating students' performances to providing learning opportunities for students. Therefore, I started to adopt some formative assessments that allowed me to focus more on providing constructive feedback instead of penalizing students' mistakes. I also value continuing education, so regular enrollments in [professional development courses](#) are crucial to support my lifelong learning goals and enhance my credibility as an educator. For example, I enrolled in a full-year course [Philosophy and Practice of University Teaching](#) and a [Graduate Professional Skills Certification](#) program. These courses are also platforms to connect myself with more educators who share a similar passion in teaching, so I can gain more opportunities to engage in constructive discussions to guide my next action plans and exchange ideas about more successful teaching and learning strategies.

Closing Remark

I believe successful people do not just focus on personal success; they help others succeed too. My life will be more meaningful if I can serve like a candle to light up hope for more people who are in hunger of knowledge. **It is my vision that education is treated as a human right instead of a privilege**, where everyone can be given basic education regardless of nationality, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability status, or socioeconomic status. If a person is well educated, his/her life will be changed; if many people are educated, the world will be transformed. People who have been transformed through the power of education can also spread the light to other people and contribute to their societies and countries. With this inspiring "chain reaction", changing the world to a better place to live under the shadow of quality education, aligned with the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4](#), is certainly be possible!