Chapter 7
Blended Learning Design and Teaching Strategies: Case of the Program Planning Course

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ABSTRACT
This chapter reports the findings from a study about the teaching strategies and implementation methods of a blended Program Planning course. An action research design was used to conduct the research. The chapter sought to understand the effectiveness of the teaching strategies that helped achieve the learning objectives. The study found that student’s program planning ability increased significantly after taking the course. Undergraduate, postgraduate, and part-time graduate students show significant improvement after taking this course. However, undergraduate and graduate students excel in different types of abilities. Implications are analyzed for best practices in blended learning and teaching.

BACKGROUND
Taiwan is a very small island with a length of 394 kilometers (245 mi) and a width of 144 km (89 mi). Taiwan’s quick industrialization and rapid growth from 1950 to 1990 has been called the “Taiwan Miracle” or “Taiwan Economic Miracle”. The country has developed along with Singapore, South Korea, and Hong Kong. Moreover, they are known as the “Four Asian Dragons” (or “Four Asian Tigers”). Taiwan is categorized as an advanced economy by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and as a high-income economy by the World Bank. Its advanced technology industry plays a key role in the global economy.

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The Taiwanese culture is blended with various sources, integrating elements from traditional Chinese culture, Japanese culture, traditional Confucianism beliefs, and increasingly Western values. The blended culture brings the elements of innovation in almost every aspect. For example, there are many innovative products such as Bubble tea and milk tea available in Singapore, Malaysia, Australia, Europe and North America. Taiwanese television shows are also popular in Singapore, Malaysia and other Asian countries. Furthermore, Taiwanese films have won various international awards at film festivals around the world.

The historical background of Taiwan has a common view in the country which is the human capital. As a result, Taiwanese value the role of education greatly. In that sense, people in Taiwan feel that education is the best strategy to find the way-out. Striving to get into top universities is the dream of every child of the family. Maintaining innovation in education is therefore the focus of the administrative body of all educational levels; especially, for colleges and universities. Since 2002, Taiwan has started a program called “Creative Education White Paper” in which the Government promotes the importance of creativity in the curriculum design for all school levels. Ever since the White paper was announced, students, faculties, professor, and teachers came out with various ideas to make the public schools and college courses more interesting. Kai-Fu (2006), the former vice-president of Microsoft, is one of the most prominent figures in the Chinese internet sector. He was the founding president of Google China, serving from July, 2005 through September 4th, 2009. His personal blog is widely followed by the people in China and he runs a popular website to assist young Chinese achieve careers in information technology.

He suggests that students’ interest should be the primary concern for the development of the courses. He recommends nine crucial points to the colleges in Taiwan and China. He points out that providing inspirational and creative contents are more important than excessively providing extra and useless contents. He suggests utilizing experiment methods, case study, discussions, and group interactions to enrich the tedious courses (Kai-Fu, 2006).

Kai-Fu (2006) also mentions how students should spend their four years in college by pointing out seven significant points: the discipline of self-study, understanding of basic knowledge, internship, development of good habit, motivation, time management ability, and social ability. The first thing for college students to learn is the way of self-study. Kai-Fu (2006) argues that helping student know how to self-learn is a crucial part of education. He stresses that creativity is the only key to long-term competition (Kai-Fu, 2006).

**BLENDED LEARNING IS A STEP TOWARD CREATIVE TEACHING**

The term blended learning is being used frequently in both the academy and the industry. There are various definitions of blended learning. According to Graham (2006), “blending learning systems combine face-to-face instruction with computer-mediated instruction” (p.5). There is no consensus over what items should be mixed. Examples may include different media, varying pedagogical approaches, or the mix of theoretical with practical work. In other words, blended learning is the combination of different types of learning such as online learning, online discussion, online tutorial, and face-to-face lecture.

Adopting blended learning can be for improving pedagogy (Graham, Allen & Ure, 2005), increasing access and flexibility (Bonk, Olson, Wisher, & Orvis, 2002) and increasing cost-effectiveness (Howard, 2005). In this study, the first two reasons are the main factors that inspired the use of the blended design. Our research utilizes various blended learning strategies to inspire