

## EXPERT EFL TEACHERS' SUPPORT FOR CHINESE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' LEARNING OF WORD MEANINGS THROUGH BLOGS

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### Abstract

Xi'an Wuhua High School in China has invested substantially in a program to introduce students to blog-based vocabulary learning and integrate technology into existing curriculum.

Vocabulary learning in Xi'an Wuhua High School includes learning pronunciation, spelling and the meaning and usage of words. The purpose of the present study is to investigate Chinese High School Expert EFL teacher's support. This covers teacher-student interaction and the teacher's direction for the development of student's learning, focusing on word meanings through blogs. There are two research techniques applied in this study.

**Teacher-student interaction and teacher's direction;** Investigated through the collection and analysis of the content of teacher's blogs.

**Teacher support for students learning of word meanings;** Investigated through in-depth semi-structured interviews.

The findings of this study are that expert EFL teachers supported students for the development of the student's understanding of the meaning of words through blogs by means of teacher-student interaction:

- 1) Providing comprehensible questions through blog posts;
- 2) Giving teacher's feedback through comments in the form of writings and emoticons;
- 3) Keeping diaries through blog posts and teacher's direction;
- 4) Providing different tasks;
- 5) Organizing discussions and presentations.

**Keywords:** Expert EFL Teachers, Teacher Support, Student Learning, Word Meanings, Blogs.

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## Introduction

Computer technology has long been used in the area of education, (Braul, 2006). Pemberton, Borrego and Cohen, (2006) stated that the integration of computer technology and education not only stimulated and maintained student's interest but also made them active in learning.

It is true that when the phenomenon where English as a Second Language, (ESL), is taught, the practice of teachers applying CALL, (Computer Assisted Language Learning), has become more and more common. Specifically, in terms of using computers for vocabulary learning, Allum (2004), Ellis (1995), and Tozcu & Coady (2004), have successfully bridged the gap between computer-assisted language learning, (CALL), and L2 vocabulary acquisition.

Currently, blogs can be used in vocabulary and writing classrooms among both native speakers, (Barrios, 2003), and second language learners, (Campbell, 2003; Pinkman, 2005). However, some teachers wonder how computer technologies are successfully applied to support a student's language learning, (Zou, 2013). It is believed that teacher support with teacher-student interaction (asking and answering questions between teacher and student and teacher's feedback), and teacher's direction, (organizing activities like discussion and presentation), has positive impacts on computer assisted language learning, (Zou, 2013).

There are a number of studies indicating that teachers play a significant role in language learning, (Dörnyei, 2001; Sugita, 2006; Tudor, 1993; Voller & Benson, 1997; Warschauer & Kern, 2000), and there are many studies arguing that teacher support positively affects student development of language learning through computer programs, (Barr, 2008; Chun & Plass, 1996; Fellner & Apple, 2006; Li, 2010; Ma & Kelly, 2006; Yoshii, 2006). In addition, there are a number studies showing that blogs can be used in student's vocabulary learning, especially in student's learning of word meanings. (Nation, 2001). Teacher support: Teacher-student interaction and teacher's direction, could promote student's learning of word meanings through blogs, (Godwin-Jones, 2006). However, there are insufficient studies carried out to investigate expert EFL teachers' providing support for high school EFL student's learning of word meanings through blogs in the literature.

There are few previous research studies focusing on Chinese high school teachers, (Zhang, 2011). According to Zou (2013), many studies have not considered expert teacher's support and have not involved various contexts of language teaching. Therefore, future studies should focus on a variety of language teaching contexts by adding more examples of teacher-student interaction and teacher's direction. In China, more studies on teacher

support in using computer programs for learning the meaning of words should be carried out, for traditional teacher support such as explanation for vocabulary learning “is not enough for Chinese high school students to learn the meaning of words well” (Ma, 2004, p. 1). In addition, Godwin-Jones (2006) suggested that teacher-student interaction and teacher’s direction through blogs should be studied to improve student’s learning of word meanings.

In 2009, Xi’an Wuhua High School, a local high school in Xi’an, Shaanxi Province of China, invested substantially and introduced computer-based language materials into an existing English curriculum. Some English teachers used a class blog to promote student learning of word meanings. Some experienced teacher did, in fact, share best practices with other teachers in terms of teaching the meaning of words. These teachers are considered experts in the use of blogs to teach meaning of words. This became the basis for this study.

The present study thus aims to investigate Chinese high school expert EFL English teacher’s providing teacher support: teacher-student interaction and teacher’s direction for the development of student’s learning of the meaning of words through blogs.

The following research questions guided the current study:

- 1). How does an expert EFL teacher interact with students for the learning of the meaning of words through blogs?
- 2). How does an expert EFL teacher direct students for the learning of the meaning of words through blogs?

### **Methodology**

The research carried out in Xi’an Wuhua High School, located in the southern part of Xi’an, China, Merriam (1998), suggested that purposeful sampling was the most appropriate sampling method to use in a case study. Yin (1994) noted that purposeful sampling was used to select cases that were likely to provide in-depth information for a case study. Therefore, the researchers used purposeful sampling to select teacher participants from Xi’an Wuhua High School. The selection criteria needed:

- 1) The teacher participants to have more than three years of experience teaching meaning of words through blogs in or after class;
- 2) The teacher participants to have been awarded the title; “Teaching Master” in the field of blog-based vocabulary teaching, (a title for those teachers who are experts in blog-based vocabulary teaching);
- 3) The teacher participants to often use blogs to teach meaning of words;
- 4) The teacher participants to be willing to participate in the present study.

For this study, there were two expert EFL teacher participants, Na and Zhi.

A case study design was applied to this investigation to explore teacher-student interaction and teacher's direction for the development of student's learning of the meaning of words through blogs. In the present study, the unit of analysis was two expert EFL teachers and their interaction with students and direction for the development of student's learning of meaning of words.

Data was collected from online documents, namely blog posts and comments and individual, in-depth, semi-structured interviews throughout semester 2 of session 2013-2014. Data collection was conducted in the following steps. Two expert EFL teacher's class blogs were supported by SinaBlog. As each class blog was only accessible by students of a class, the researchers registered in SinaBlog and were added as a member of each class blog. The researchers then had access to every post, comment, image and hyperlink etc. Blog data was collected and categorized under a few categories:

- 1) Topic: expert EFL teacher's teaching of meaning of words;
- 2) Format: written posts, comments and images;
- 3) Time of blog entries: semester 2 of session 2013-2014.

There were three parts to the interview guide in this study. Part A was to obtain interviewee's background information. Part B focused on teacher-student interaction for student's learning of the meaning of words through blogs and Part C was to investigate teacher's direction for student's learning of the meaning of words through blogs. The interview lasted at most 2 hours each and was administrated in a quiet, comfortable and private place, the teacher's office, which ensured all responses in the interview were preserved for analysis (Merriam, 1998). The medium of communication was Mandarin to make the interviewee's feel comfortable. During the process of interview, a digital recorder was used in order to obtain an accurate record of the conversation. Meanwhile, brief note-taking was necessary in case the recorder malfunctioned. The researcher followed the guidelines yet was flexible enough to follow the conversation of the interviewee's. The researchers assured the interviewee's that data provided were private and confidential.

The class blogs were examined to analyze teacher-student interaction and teacher's direction. Other than posts and comments by two expert EFL teachers, functions including multimodality like hyperlinks, colors and images were also analyzed. The semi-structured interview recordings were transcribed to provide more in-depth views of teacher-student interaction and teacher's direction, adding depth to the online documents examination. The text data were translated into English word for word and cross checked by the interviewee's to see whether the translations were consistent with the opinions of interviewee's, because the conversations in the interviews were developed in Mandarin. The researchers then read the transcriptions word for word and marked them line by line, trying to get a sense of the data as a whole before classifying them into categories. The transcriptions were then read carefully again to begin the process of coding. All data was then organized by codes with a table of source. The researchers organized them systematically and thoroughly to ensure dependability of the study (Guba, 1981).

All data were divided into two segments:

- 1) Teacher-student interaction
  - a) providing comprehensible questions,
  - b) giving teacher's feedback and
  - c) offering other ways of teacher-student interaction;
- 2) Teacher's direction:
  - a) providing vocabulary tasks,
  - b) organizing activities.

At the same time, the researchers developed themes to accurately and logically describe the meaning of the text segments and codes. Finally, a detailed description and development of themes from the data was presented to answer the research questions and form an in-depth understanding of teacher-student interaction and teacher's direction for student's learning of word meanings through blogs.

### **Findings**

The result of the study is that expert EFL teachers supported students for the development of student's learning of meaning of words through blogs by means of teacher-student interaction:

- a) providing comprehensible questions through blog posts;
  - b) giving teacher's feedback through comments in forms of writings and emoticons;
  - c) keeping diaries through blog posts;
- and teacher's direction:
- a) providing different tasks;
  - b) organizing discussions and presentations.

### **Background of two expert EFL teachers**

Na is an expert EFL teacher with a Master's degree from the Department of English Language Education of Xianyang Normal University, Xianyang City, Shaanxi Province of China in July, 2000. She began her English teaching career in September 2000. Considering her major, she was selected to teach English vocabulary.

In her first year of teaching from 2000 to 2001, Na found that she had difficulties in interacting with every student and asking all the students to take part in the classroom activities with the purpose of helping students learn meaning of words in traditional face-to-face classrooms. Worse still, there was no computer in her working environment. With the development of computer technologies in education area's, Na considered that blogs might be used in her teaching and a class blog might help her solve the problems she met in traditional face-to-face classroom. Na registered for a class blog on SinaBlog, added all her students as members in this class blog and used blog posts to continue her teaching of meaning of words after school hours. To her surprise, Na found that students were more active in the class blog than in the face-to-face classrooms. For example, silent students in the classroom were willing to interact with her in the blogosphere and students with low

English level who had trouble in learning the meaning of words were motivated to learn vocabulary.

These findings encouraged Na to help students who had difficulties in learning meaning of words to make progress in a new way. She made use of blogging features such as blog posts, comments, emoticons and hyperlinks to help students learn meaning of words through asking questions, delivering teacher's feedback, providing tasks and organizing activities. She used blogs in teaching the meaning of words almost everyday and it often lasted two hours in her office at noon or at home in the evening. Most significantly, Na made great achievements in blog-based teaching. In 2012, Na won the first prize in a blog-based vocabulary teaching competition held by the local education department. She then published three articles on blog-based vocabulary teaching in local educational magazines. In 2014, Na was awarded the title "Teaching Master" in the field of blog-based vocabulary teaching. (This title was given by the local education department to teachers who had at least three-year experience in blog-based vocabulary teaching, helped students make great progress in vocabulary learning, won the first prize for blog-based vocabulary teaching competition held by the local education department, and had published at least one article in the local educational magazines or journals).

Through examining the online documents in terms of teaching the meaning of words that were published from February 17<sup>th</sup> to May 31<sup>st</sup> in semester 2 of session 2013-2014, there were altogether 196 blog posts and 341 comments in Na's class blogs. Her posts included writings, emoticons, images and videos through links. A sample of Na' class blogs is shown in Figure 1 below.



Figure 4.1 A sample of Na's class blogs

Zhi is the second expert EFL teacher, who also graduated from the Department of English Language Education of Shaanxi Normal University, Xi'an, Shaanxi Province of China in 1996 and started his teaching career in the same year. He is a middle-aged man and taught English in a rural school setting from 1996 to 2000. At the end of 2000, he left his teaching position to pursue his Master's degree in Educational Technology from Shaanxi Normal University and began his new teaching career in 2003.

Given a new working environment, he managed to overcome many difficulties in an urban school setting and made every effort to combine computer technologies and English vocabulary teaching. Zhi started his class blog in 2004 on SinaBlog. However, there was no computer technology applied to teaching in schools at that time. Therefore, he used his laptop to post regularly after classes. In the year 2009, computer technologies were applied to English teaching in the research site. Zhi continued his blog-based English teaching to help his students not only to develop vocabulary but also improve their grammar out of classrooms. He used blogs for vocabulary teaching three or four times a week and his blog-based vocabulary teaching usually lasted one and a half hours in his office or at home in the evening.

Currently, he has eleven-years experience in blog-based vocabulary teaching, especially in terms of designing meaning-based tasks and organizing meaning-based activities in the blogosphere. From 2010 to 2013 Zhi published two articles related to how to direct students to learn vocabulary through designing vocabulary tasks and organizing activities in the blogosphere in local educational journals and won the first prize for the competition of teaching vocabulary in the blogosphere. He was also awarded the title “Teaching Master” in the field of blog-based vocabulary teaching in the year of 2011.

Through examining the online documents in terms of the teaching of meaning of words that were published from February 17<sup>th</sup> to May 31<sup>st</sup> in semester 2 of session 2013-2014, there were altogether 173 blog posts posted and 394 comments made by Zhi. His posts also included writings, emoticons, images and videos through hyperlinks. A sample of Zhi’s class blogs is shown in Figure 2 below.



Figure 2. A sample of Zhi’s class blogs

## Teacher-student interaction

### Na's comprehensible questions

Among Na's blog posts, it was found that there were 16 blog posts related to providing comprehensible questions for students learning of word meanings. In Table 1, there are yes-no questions for the teaching of meaning of 16 character adjectives: *ambitious, cheerful, easygoing, generous, hardworking, impatient, lazy, moody, optimistic, reliable, reserved, sensitive, shy, sociable, talkative, and untidy*. Na mentioned that she had two principles when providing yes-no questions for students of low English language proficiency.

Firstly, Na stated that meaning of words should be expressed with English words which students had learned. These words could bridge students knowledge learned and knowledge to be learned. For example, students should be asked a question like: "*Do you give presents at your friends' birthday party?*", when learning the meaning of *generous*. Na found that it was quite easy for students to answer a question like this and students understanding of meaning of words was promoted. Secondly, Na asserted that meaning of words should be based on a theme and students might learn more words if learning is based on a theme. Just as Na's example shown above, these 16 adjectives shared one theme: "What sort of person are you?" Na added that questions like, "*Can you match 16 words to their meanings with the help of an online dictionary if necessary?*" should be asked to students at the end of the teaching process. This was because it was not only beneficial to consolidating what words students had learned, but also motivating students to learn the meaning of new words.

Table 1. Yes-no questions provided by Na for students' learning the meaning of 16 adjectives

- Are you often smiling and happy? (cheerful)
- Do you enjoy the company of other people? (sociable)
- Do you find it difficult to meet new people? (shy)
- Is it important for you to succeed in your career? (ambitious)
- Does your mood change suddenly for no reason? (moody)
- Do you notice other people's feelings? (sensitive)
- Do you think the future will be good? (optimistic)
- Can your friends depend on you? (reliable)
- Is your room often in a mess? (untidy)
- Do you get annoyed if you have to waiting for anyone for a long time? (impatient)
- Do you put off what you can do now until tomorrow? (lazy)
- Do you work hard? (hardworking)
- Do you keep your feelings and ideas to yourself? (reserved)
- Do you give presents at your friends' birthday party? (generous)
- Do you talk a lot in your daily life? (talkative)
- Are you usually calm and not worried by things? (easy-going)

**Can you match 16 words to their meanings with the help of an online dictionary?**



(Posted by Na at 12:31 on March. 15<sup>th</sup>, 2014)

*I prefer to provide yes-no questions for students to learn meaning of words rather than translate meaning of words into Chinese. This is because students are stimulated to understand meaning of words more profoundly in the process of teacher-student interaction through blog posts. I have two principles when providing questions for students' learning meaning of words through blog posts: 1) meaning of words is expressed by using English words students have learned; 2) meaning of words is based on a theme. At the end of teaching process, my students were asked to match words to their meanings in order to consolidate what they have learned and motivate them.*

(Interview Na, November. 28<sup>th</sup>, 2014)

### Zhi's comprehensible questions

Among Zhi's blog posts, there were 30 blog posts concerned with providing comprehensible questions for students learning of word meanings. In Table 2 below, Zhi provided questions for his students to learn the meaning of these words: *ankle*, *bandage*, *blister*, *scissors*, *squeeze*, and *temporary*.

Zhi emphasized that learning the meaning of a sentence was more useful than learning the meaning of a word and learning the meaning of a paragraph was more significant than learning the meaning of a sentence. Interestingly, Zhi considered that the meaning of a word was to the meaning of a paragraph what a drop of water was to an ocean. Consequently, students' learning meaning of words could not be separated from a paragraph, especially in the blogosphere, Zhi concluded.

Table 2. Questions provided by Zhi for students' learning the meaning of words: "ankle", "bandage", "blister", "scissors", "squeeze", "temporary".

	<u>A short passage</u>	<u>Questions</u>
Meaning	Emma had a mild accident, so that she could not walk. She burned her <b><i>ankle</i></b> when She knocked some hot liquid over herself. At first the pain was unbearable, but fortunately, Tony knew what to do. He Immediately provided some <b><i>temporary</i></b> treatment before sending her to hospital. He used some cloths, wetted them, <b><i>squeezed</i></b> out cold water and placed them over	Can you guess the meaning of words in bold and italics? Why cannot Emma walk? What is the ankle of the body? What is part of speech of the word <i>temporary</i> ? Why did Tony treat Emma at home? first? What is part of speech of the word <i>squeeze</i> ? How can you take out the water from a piece of wet towel? When someone's right hand is burnt

her ankle. He did this over and over again until the pain disappeared. Then he dried the ankle gently to prevent **blisters** from forming. Finally, he took a pair of **scissors** and cut a **bandage** to the right length.

by hot water seriously, what will happen to his or her right hand?  
What will you use when you want to cut a piece of cloth?  
When a long cloth is used to cover the wound, what is the long cloth called?

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**(Posted by Zhi at 19:40 on March. 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2014)**

In the interview, Zhi stated his views with an example of providing comprehensible questions for students learning the meanings of words through blog posts. In detail, first of all, students with intermediate and high English levels had abilities to learn meanings of words by referring to dictionaries or online resources. However, they often preferred Chinese translations to English explanations. As a result, offering students a short passage as a context which contained the new words to be learned was better for developing students ability of guessing meanings of new words. Second, providing questions for students was helpful for checking their understanding. For example, when teaching the meaning of *ankle* in the passage, Zhi found that most students guessed that it was part of a human body according to the context, but they did not know its exact meaning. Then Zhi offered his help by asking a question: *Why cannot Emma walk?* Zhi thought that this question helped students a lot to understand the meaning of *ankle* and questions like this could develop students' comprehension of meanings of new words.

*Whether in face-to-face vocabulary classrooms or in the blogosphere, I always help students to guess meaning of words in a context by providing questions. In my opinion, the meaning of a sentence is easier to remember than the meaning of a word. Similarly, the meaning of a paragraph often leaves us more profound impression than the meaning of a sentence does. As a result, learning a word's meaning in a paragraph is very meaningful. First of all, a paragraph provides a context for students, where students can guess the meaning of a new words. Then, providing questions to students can help them check their understanding of new words' meaning.*

**(Interview, Zhi. December. 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2014)**












### **Na's teacher feedback**

There were 321 items of feedback given by Na in her blog, including 217 written items and 88 emoticons. Teacher feedback was given by making comments on students answers to questions and performance in vocabulary tasks, discussions, presentations and other activities. Moreover, teacher's feedback was given by Na frequently and there were three types of feedback in written form given by Na: statement feedback, imperative feedback and question feedback, among which, statement feedback and imperative feedback were given

more than question feedback. From Na's point of view, compared to question feedback, the statement feedback and imperative feedback had more positive effects on her students improvement of vocabulary learning, especially imperative feedback. Na argued that statement feedback allowed her students to know whether they performed well or not and imperative feedback allowed her students to understand how to promote their vocabulary performance, whilst question feedback often made them confused.

Na also gave teacher's feedback in emoticons. A smiling face stood for teacher's positive feedback, a face with a mask stood for neutral feedback and a crying face stood for negative feedback. Na considered that giving feedback in emoticons from time to time was to promote teacher-student interaction in the process of students vocabulary learning through blogs. Examples of feedback given by Na were shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Examples of feedback given by Na

	Statement	Imperative	
Written feedback	OK, You succeed. You don't write the second meaning of this word.	Keep it up. Work on the second meaning of this word.	
	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Emoticons	     		   

*I give teacher's feedback for students answers to questions and their performance in terms of meaning of words. Due to my students English level, I prefer giving students statement feedback and imperative feedback to giving question feedback. I think statement feedback and imperative feedback usually make my students know how to effectively improve their performance. It is very interesting to give students feedback in emoticons. This is because those emoticons are cute and an emoticon can take the place of my written feedback for students' answers to questions and their performance. Generally speaking, my feedback in emoticons has three types: positive feedback, neutral feedback and negative feedback.*

**(Interview Na, November. 28<sup>th</sup>, 2014)**













### Zhi's teacher feedback

From Zhi's class blog, there were 394 items of feedback, including 303 written items and 70 emoticons. There were three ways to give teacher's feedback. First, Zhi gave teacher's feedback through making comments in written form on students' performance. Second, Zhi used emoticons to give teacher's feedback. His feedback was frequently given and his written feedback was also categorized into three types: statement feedback, imperative feedback and

question feedback. The number of question feedback given by Zhi was much more than that of statement feedback and imperative feedback.

Although Zhi admitted the positive effects of statement and imperative feedbacks on students vocabulary performance, Zhi found that question feedback could develop students comprehension rather than confuse students. Zhi sometimes gave teacher's feedback in emoticons. According to Zhi, when students performed well, Zhi sometimes gave a smile face, a grin, a rose or a thumbs up to encourage his students to keep it up and make greater progress in the future. An apple or a cup of tea referred to an award for students, which indicated that students performed excellently. When students made a few mistakes in their performance, Zhi used a face with glasses, which meant that the teacher kept silent when facing students mistakes at first, and then guided and inspired their students to find and correct their mistakes. When students failed in performance, Zhi might give a sad face to remind students of their failure in performance. Zhi emphasized that students who failed in performance should be constantly encouraged and offered detailed instructions until they improved their vocabulary performance. Table 4 shows examples of feedback given by Zhi.

Table 4. Examples of feedback given by Zhi

	Statement	Imperative	Question
Written feedback	It is an adjective.	Pay attention to its	What is the speech of
	Its meaning is negative not positive.	speech.	this word?
		Refer to a dictionary.	What can we say that someone is not patient?
	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Emoticons	  		  
	  		 

*I give teacher's feedback for students' answers to questions and students' performance in tasks and activities in terms of meaning of words. My statement and imperative feedback encourage students to make progress in their process of vocabulary learning. My question feedback doesn't make students puzzled but develop students' thinking skills. I use emoticons to give teacher's feedback because they are vivid and they accurately replace my written comments on students' answers to questions and their performance. It is very interesting and it can promote teacher-student interaction in the blogosphere. I can classify the emoticons I use into three categories. When I think highly of students' performance, I can use a smiling face, thumbsup or a cup of tea. When I found that there are some mistakes students made in their performance, I can use a face with mask. When students fail in the performance, I use an angry face or a crying face.*

**(Interview, Zhi. December. 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2014)**

### Keeping diary entries through blogposts

“Keeping Diaries” in the present study means Na’s publishing short passages about vocabulary learning experience through blog posts in her class blogs. She published a diary entry about once a day through a blog post in semester 2 of session 2013-2014. Specifically, after examining her class blog, it was found that there were 99 diary entries published by Na about vocabulary learning experience. The contents were mainly concerned with the experience of teaching the meaning of words.

In the interview, Na took one example of keeping diary entries to interact with students for the development of their vocabulary learning through blog posts. Na showed the researcher a story about the differences between *hard* and *hardly*. Na argued that interacting with students by offering a true story about vocabulary learning through blog posts could get students to learn from others mistakes to effectively avoid making the same mistakes in the future. Na argued that students could be supported to know that the word *hardly* is totally different from the word *hard* in meaning and usage and students would make progress in learning *hardly* and *hard* through reading the blog post below.

*I still remember it was a romantic rainy day, a student came to my office to ask questions. All of a sudden, she said that it was raining hardly. I smiled and said, “No, you are wrong. You should say it is raining hard.” But she shook her head, saying, “Mrs, you are absolutely wrong. ‘Rain’ here is a verb, so it must be modified by an adverb. ‘Hardly’ is an adverb. You should say it is raining hardly.” I smiled, referring to a dictionary to show her who was right. When she found ‘hard’ has two speeches and ‘hardly’ is not proper in the sentence, I could feel the blood rush to her face.*

**(Posted by Na, at 21: 05 on March. 12th, 2014)**

*Keeping diaries is one of my habits in my vocabulary teaching. In the blogosphere, I also publish my diaries to interact with my students. The contents of my diaries were mainly concerned learning experience in terms of meaning words. My aim of keeping diaries through blog posts is to share my students with experience of learning meaning of words.*

**(Interview, Na. November. 28<sup>th</sup>, 2014)**

### **Teacher’s direction**

#### **Na’s providing tasks**

Through 4 blog posts, Na provided one type of task for students’ to learn meanings of words: matching words with their meanings given and matching the meanings of a polysemous word with the word used in different sentences. It was called “Match Task” by Na. Table 5 below gives an example of “Match Task”.

Table 5. An example of “Match Task” given by Na

Match Task One	Match Task Two
Match the words with their meanings given.	Match the meanings of <i>belong</i> with different sentences
Words: compete, admit, athlete, replace, motto, responsibility, gymnasium standard	A. to be the property of; B. to be a part of; C. to be a member of
1. level of ability;	1. Do you <b>belong</b> to the UN peace-keeping force?
2. duty to be in charge;	2. Which computer does this mouse <b>belong</b> to?
3. special hall for physical exercise;	3. This strange vegetable <b>belongs</b> to the potato family.
4. to take part in a sports event	4. I don't doubt that the gold ring <b>belongs</b> to her.
5. to allow to enter a course or sports;	
6. short sentence or phrase expressing beliefs;	
7. someone who takes parts in a sports meeting;	
8. to take the place of	

**(Posted by Na at 20:30 on March. 19<sup>th</sup>, 2014)**

In the interview, Na provided an example of “Match Task” and explained that “Match Task” was especially designed for students of low English level. First of all, “Match Task” which provided words and their meanings for students could well motivate students interest in doing the task and help students review meanings of words learned when blogging. Second, providing sentences in the tasks could improve students understanding of meanings of words, especially for learning a polysemous word. Taking “Match Task Two” for example, Na put it that students successfully learned more meanings of the word *belong* after completing this task. Moreover, to Na’s delight, students were able to make sentences with different meanings of the word *belong*.

*“Match Task” is designed by me. Considering my students’ English level, I cannot make trouble to my students. I try my best to provide them simple and practical tasks to direct them to learn meaning of words. To my comfort, this task is indeed helpful for their learning words’ meaning.*

**(Interview, Na. November. 28<sup>th</sup>, 2014)**

## Zhi's providing tasks

From Zhi's class blog, the researcher found that there were 6 blog posts related to meaning-based tasks, including two types:

- 1) using words given to complete a passage and
- 2) deciding the new word's meaning through seeing movies online.

An example of meaning-based tasks provided by Zhi is shown in Table 6.

Table 6. An example of "Meaning-based Task" given by Zhi

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Meaning-based Tasks
<p>Task One: Use the words given to complete the passage.</p> <p>Words given: <b>belief, celebration, Christians, custom, origin. Religious</b></p> <p>Passage:</p> <p>Many people think that Christmas is a western _____, but in fact it is really a worldwide holiday. Christmas actually started as a _____ festival celebrated by _____ around the world. Its _____ is around the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, when the _____ of remembering Jesus' birth on December 25<sup>th</sup> first started. Today, of course, many people celebrate Christmas as though it were just a holiday to have fun with family, rather a holiday about a _____.</p>
<p>Task Two: Decide the meaning of new words through seeing a movie online.</p> <p>Open the link, see the movie and decide the meaning of <b>wander, permit, fault, spot, passage, seek, embassy and patience.</b></p> <p><a href="http://v.baidu.com/kan/KdsI/Kds3?fr=v.hao123.com/search&amp;page=videoMultiNeed">http://v.baidu.com/kan/KdsI/Kds3?fr=v.hao123.com/search&amp;page=videoMultiNeed</a></p>

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**(Posted by Zhi at 20:30 on April. 9<sup>th</sup>, 2014)**

Zhi remarked in the interview that the goal of meaning-based tasks was to help students understand meanings of words comprehensively. Importantly, Zhi repeated that meaning of words should be understood in a certain context, like a short passage, a movie and so on. According to Zhi, there was a danger that students would learn meanings of words out of context because it usually affected students learning negatively. Students enthusiasm of learning would also be dampened. On the contrary, learning word meanings in different contexts does not only reinforce students understanding of word meanings, but also the

meaning of a passage or a story.

Taking the two tasks in Table 6 for example, Zhi thought that the meaning of *belief, celebration, Christians, custom, origin, and religious* could be well learned in a passage about Christmas and the meanings of *wander, permit, fault, spot, passage, seek, embassy* and *patience* could be learned from a movie. The tasks provided could bridge what students had learned and what students were to learn. Simultaneously, Zhi believed that students were motivated to learn meanings of words and students would complete the tasks actively.

*Meaning-based tasks are often provided in two different contexts. One is reading passages and the other is online movies. The reason why I provide students with a certain context to understand meanings of words is because learning meanings of words out of contexts usually make students' learning efficiency impaired. Quite the other way, putting words into a certain context can help students improve their understanding of words' meanings. In different contexts, students are directed to guess and learn meanings of new words and review the meanings of words learned.*

**(Interview, Zhi. December. 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2014)**

### **Na's organizing discussions and presentations**

Through analyzing Na's class blog, the researcher found that Na organized discussions and presentations through 10 blog posts. The following Table 7 shows examples of discussions and presentations organized by Na. According to Na, the goals of organizing discussions and presentations were: 1) to enhance students' collaborative learning skills in an academic environment; 2) to practice students writing skills when students were presenting their findings through blog posts and 3) to further promote students' comprehension of word meanings.

To Na's mind, activities like discussions and presentations functioned positively in terms of students vocabulary learning through blogs. To begin with, discussions could enhance students collaborative learning and presentations could stimulate students to make good use of abundant online resources concerned with topics. Simultaneously, students writing skills could be fully developed in the blogosphere when they were discussing in groups and presenting their findings. Finally, discussions and presentations could give students a better understanding of words' meanings and usages. For instance, faced with different meanings of the word *expose* and synonyms *depend, protect* and *guard*, Na said, students had tended to turn to their teacher for help before. However, group discussions could make students manage to exchange their opinions for collecting various ways to recognize different meanings of the words based on the sentences given. Additionally, presentations could help students consolidate what they discussed.



Table 7. Examples of discussions and presentations organized by Na

	Discussion	Presentation
Meaning	<p>Discuss the meaning of <b>expose</b> in each sentence.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. When he lifted his shirt he <b>exposed</b> his strong athletic chest.</li> <li>2. Li Hui was <b>exposed</b> to cholera but luckily she did not become ill.</li> <li>3. You cannot <b>expose</b> undeveloped film to light.</li> <li>4. I was afraid to <b>expose</b> my true feelings in case he laughed at me.</li> <li>5. The human rights lawyer spent his career <b>exposing</b> injustice in society.</li> <li>6. I was never <b>exposed</b> to ballet until I was sixteen.</li> </ol>	<p>Each of you make different sentences by using different meanings of <b>expose</b> in your Blog posts.</p>

**(Posted by Na at 12: 45 on May. 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2014)**

*Besides providing tasks, I also direct my students to learn meaning of words by means of organizing discussions and presentations. Activities like discussions and presentations in the blogosphere are especially beneficial to students who are shy and silent in face-to-face vocabulary classrooms. All the students are encouraged to take part in discussions and presentations.*

**(Interview, Na. November. 28<sup>th</sup>, 2014)**

### Discussions and conclusion

The present study aims to investigate Chinese high school expert EFL teachers' teacher support by looking at teacher-student interaction and teacher's direction for the development of students' learning the meaning of words through blogs.

Through answering two research questions: "How does an expert EFL teacher interact with students for the learning of word meanings through blogs?" and "How does an expert EFL teacher direct students for the learning of word meanings through blogs?", the present study revealed that:

1) Both expert EFL teachers teacher-students interaction for students learning of meaning of words through blogs was achieved by means of providing comprehensible yes-no questions and wh-questions, giving teacher's written feedback in statements, imperatives and questions, and emoticons. And the first expert EFL teacher also interacted with students by means of keeping diary entries through blog posts;

2) Both expert EFL teachers direction for the development of students learning of word meanings through blogs was given by providing different tasks and organizing discussions and presentations. The results above indicated that the two expert EFL teachers, Na and Zhi, provided various types of teacher-student interaction and teacher' direction for students' learning of word meanings through blogs.

Faced with students of low English language proficiency, Na often provided more comprehensible yes-no questions through blog posts. While considering students of intermediate and high English proficiency levels, Zhi provided more comprehensible wh-questions through blog posts. This finding showed that Na and Zhi fully considered their students' current English levels before providing questions through blog posts, which is supported by Zou's (2013) argument that teachers' providing different types of questions for students of different English levels can make students' language learning easier. Questions provided by Na were often based on themes while questions provided by Zhi were usually based on different contexts. This finding showed that questions based on themes might improve students' understanding of word meanings in the blogosphere and indicated that questions based on contexts might help students to learn meaning of words in the blogosphere.

In order to make comments on students answers to questions and students' performance in the blogosphere, Na gave teacher's feedback in the form of 217 written items and 88 emoticons through comments and links, and Zhi gave teacher's feedback in the form of 303 written items and 70 emotions through comments and links. This is supported by Sugita's (2006) argument that teachers' evaluation and comments on students' performance is a way to students' successful language learning and the key to the way is to give feedback to the students. Teacher's written feedback was categorized into three types: statement feedback, imperative feedback and question feedback (Sugita, 2006). Na preferred to give her students imperative feedback. This finding is reflected by Sugita's (2006) argument that teacher's imperative feedback has the most powerful effects on students' learning and revision. However, Zhi preferred to give his students question feedback. As far as Zhi was concerned, question feedback could develop students' thinking skills. Na and Zhi thought that teacher's feedback in emoticons made students interested in learning meaning of words and made teacher-student interaction develop better. Findings indicated that giving teacher's feedback in emoticons might motivate students in learning meanings of words and develop teacher-student interaction in the blogosphere.

Na kept and published a diary entry through blog posts about once a day to interact with her students. Through publishing her diary entries in the blogosphere, Na mainly offered students experience of learning the meaning of words. This finding suggested that Na capitalized on blogging features such as blog posts to share with students experience in learning meaning of words, help students learn from others' mistakes, promote the ability of learning meaning of words and improve learning interest.

Na provided tasks through 13 blog posts and Zhi provided tasks through 17 blog posts. Tasks provided by the two expert EFL teachers were concerned with learning the meaning of words. When providing tasks, Na tended to provide tasks for her students of low English level while Zhi preferred to provide various tasks for his students of intermediate and high English levels. This finding is consistent with Egbert's (2005) argument that teachers should try their best to provide useful tasks to make the content accessible to students with any English level to enhance their language learning when using software or online materials.

Na organized discussions (in written form) and presentations (in written form) three times a month on average through 10 blog posts. Discussions and presentations organized by Na were related to students learning the meaning of words. According to Na, discussions and presentations organized in the blogosphere could improve students team spirit, stimulate students interest and improve students writing skills at the same time. This finding is also consistent with Zou's (2013) suggestion that teachers should design and develop class or online discussions and presentations to help all kinds of EFL or ESL learners to improve their language learning and enhance students' motivation and effect of work through computer programs.

Findings of this study demonstrated that there were many ways of teacher-student interaction and teacher's direction provided by the two expert EFL teachers for the development of students learning of word meanings through blogs. The present study on two expert EFL teachers' support for the development of students learning of word meanings through blogs supported and further developed the results from the literature and added more detailed and practical examples of teacher support in a CALL environment. The findings of this study might enrich CALL research and better develop Zou's (2013) principles of teacher support in a CALL environment.

Some pedagogical suggestions were also made for teachers, high schools and educational governments. In order to support students learning of word meanings through blogs, EFL teachers should be carefully trained to make themselves familiar with using blogs or other software in or out of classrooms. High schools should inspire inexperienced EFL teachers to learn from experienced EFL teachers on how to provide teacher support to improve teachers' teaching ability and enhance students' learning efficiency. Local educational governments should be aware of high schools' insufficient education equipment and resources; they should take measures to balance the number of experienced EFL teachers among high schools and strengthen frequent exchanges and cooperation on teacher support in a CALL environment among high school English teachers.

Teacher support is an ongoing issue (Zou, 2013). The present study was carried out in one high school by means of collecting, analyzing two class blogs and interviewing two expert teacher participants. The findings of this study only represented a fraction of teacher support for the development of students learning of word meanings through blogs. Future studies should be carried out among more expert English teacher participants from different high schools to investigate more ways of teacher support for the development of students'

learning of word meanings through blogs. Besides, in terms of selecting participants, both teacher and student participants could be taken into consideration to continue exploring the issue from different aspects, such as contrasting the differences of teacher support in the blogosphere and face-to-face classrooms, and investigating how much progress students could make in learning the meaning of words through blogs with the help of teacher support. In addition, future studies should collect more data from class blogs to further investigate effects of teacher support on the development of students' learning of word meanings through blogs.

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