

Cain, K. (2007). Deriving word meanings from context: Does explanation facilitate contextual analysis? *Journal of Research in Reading*, 30 (4), 347–359.

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Summary: Forty-five 7-8 year-old students, divided into three groups, were studied in an effort to determine if explanation facilitates contextual analysis. All three groups had improved performance by using the story context to derive meaning for novel words. Children in the two explanatory groups made more gains in defining words accurately than the feedback only group.

Assumption:

- One source of new vocabulary acquisition is written text.
- Students can learn word meanings from external clues in written context.
- A facilitatory role of explanation can help children's strategies in acquiring word meaning.

Results:

- Feedback and/or explanation improved students' ability to derive accurate word meaning in all three groups.
- Greater gains were seen in students who had definitions explained, either by themselves or by the experimenter, than those who were simply given "correct" or "incorrect" responses as feedback from the experimenter.
- All three groups were more likely to reference the text as a source of information to derive word meaning after the intervention. However, the groups that were provided with explanations referenced the text more often for word meanings.

Conclusions:

- Greatest gains were seen in students who had to explain their own definitions even if their explanations were incorrect.
- Explanation can be used to analyze text for comprehension questions and developing language and literacy.
- Simply giving feedback without explanation, or just practicing, can improve performance but at a slower rate than by explanation.

Suggestions for Teachers:

- By providing explanation, or even just feedback, students are more likely to reference the text for word meaning.
- Helping students reflect on word meaning and its relation to the context can provide benefits to the student.
- Repeated lessons of this nature will improve the use of context skills.

Suggestions for Literacy Leaders:

- Teachers should be encouraged to have the students explain novel words or explain them themselves.
- Teachers can be trained in different ways to provide explanation for the students when novel words are encountered.
- Teachers should give more explanation rather than simply providing correct or incorrect responses to the students.