

Mrs Wordsmith® | Research

Why Vocabulary Matters



And why direct vocabulary
instruction is necessary

“Words are not just words. They are the nexus—the interface—between communication and thought. When we read, it is through words that we build, refine, and modify our knowledge. What makes vocabulary valuable and important is not the words themselves so much as the understandings they afford.”

Marilyn Jager Adams (2009)

Research studies identify vocabulary as a strong predictor of future academic success



Why Vocabulary Matters

Vocabulary unlocks text comprehension

- Unknown words are one of the most significant barriers standing in the way of text comprehension. Vocabulary teaching helps children to break this barrier.
- Vocabulary comprehension helps children to read with more ease, which in turn motivates them to read increasingly difficult texts.
- By reading more complex texts with more ease, children widen their knowledge on various topics and perform better in all subjects.

Vocabulary increases the accuracy with which we express ourselves and understand others

Learning words at an early age increases children's conceptual knowledge. In other words, learning more words gives them access to a richer inventory of nuances, which in turn allows them to express themselves more aptly and to understand the language that others use more accurately (Neuman et al., 2011).

Vocabulary helps children to build word consciousness

Word consciousness is the ability to draw connections between words, understand how language works, and develop language-driven learning strategies (Wasik & Iannone-Campbell, 2012); as such, it has effects that go beyond language learning and influences cross-curricular academic achievement.

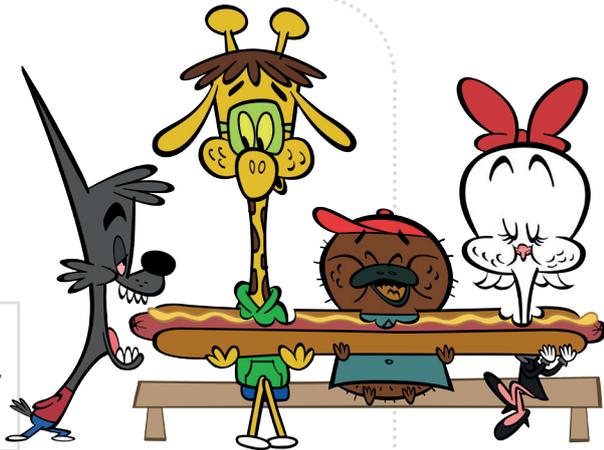
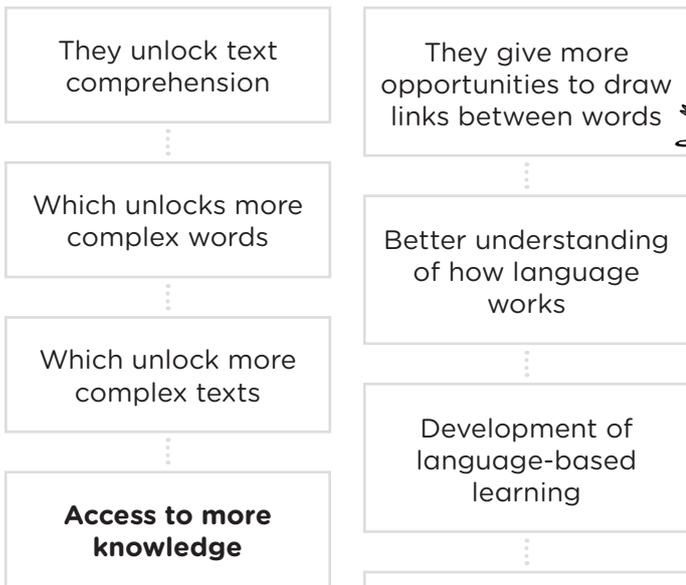
Vocabulary contributes to the development of emotional intelligence

- Acquiring labels for emotions allows us to discern more categories of emotions and, consequently, to identify our emotions with more accuracy (Barrett et al., 2007).
- Language ability seems to be a significant predictor of children's understanding of emotions (Rosnay & Harris, 2002); this is a good predictor of the quality of children's social relationships (Pons et al., 2003).
- Expressing emotions through language has been found to have a calming effect (Lieberman et al., 2017), but in order to express emotions in this way (successfully!), you need to have access to the right words.

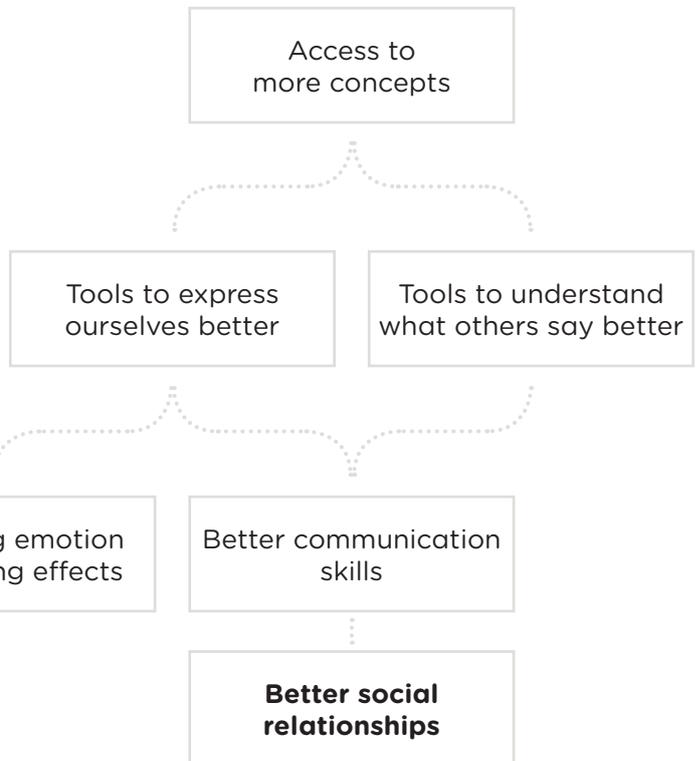


Benefits of knowing more words

Academic



Social-emotional



Since vocabulary knowledge has so many benefits, it's vital that we teach it in the most effective way



Why is direct vocabulary instruction is necessary

Converging research supports the idea that explicit vocabulary instruction yields significantly better results than reading alone does (Beck & McKeown 2007; Biemiller & Boote 2006; Coyne et al. 2010; Marulis & Neuman, 2010).

What is direct vocabulary instruction ?

- Direct vocabulary instruction is a method that provides rich content around taught words, and that requires children's active engagement with new vocabulary.
- Active participation enhances learning and memorization of new words in ways that incidental or passive word learning does not (Loftus-Rattan and Mitchell, 2016). In this method, children are given:
 - a simple definition of the word
 - the context in which the word is used
 - activities that promote deeper processing of the meaning of words

Words can then be read aloud to children in a story without the need to interrupt for explanations, because the targeted words are already familiar.

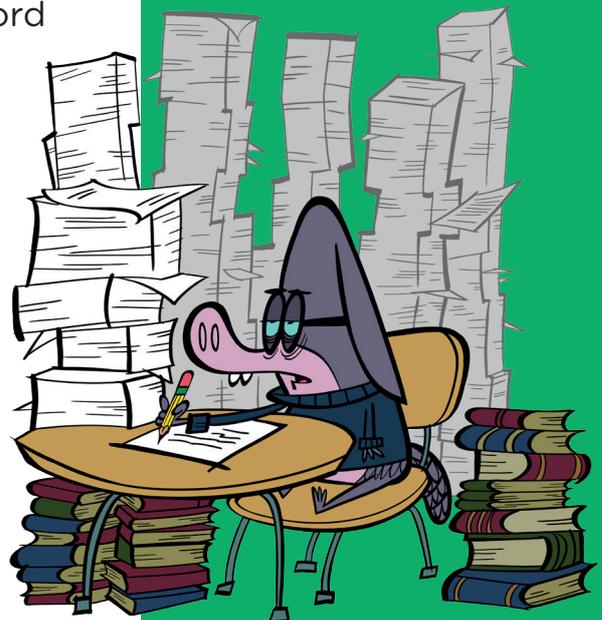
Why direct vocabulary instruction works

Reading alone is not enough to enrich children's vocabulary. Unless children have access to what a word means, they won't comprehend the text they're reading, or learn the new words that they come across.

Direct vocabulary instruction gradually increases metalinguistic awareness.

- Metalinguistic awareness helps children access and successfully employ the new words they acquire.
- When children are more aware of how language works and how they interact with it, they are more likely to infer the meaning of unknown words by themselves (Coyne et al., 2010).
- Greater metalinguistic awareness helps children consolidate, integrate, access, and demonstrate the word knowledge that they already possess (Coyne et al., 2010).

A more general explanation as to why direct instruction is more effective overall is that methods requiring higher levels of thinking and more active engagement work better for word learning (Loftus-Rattan and Mitchell, 2016).

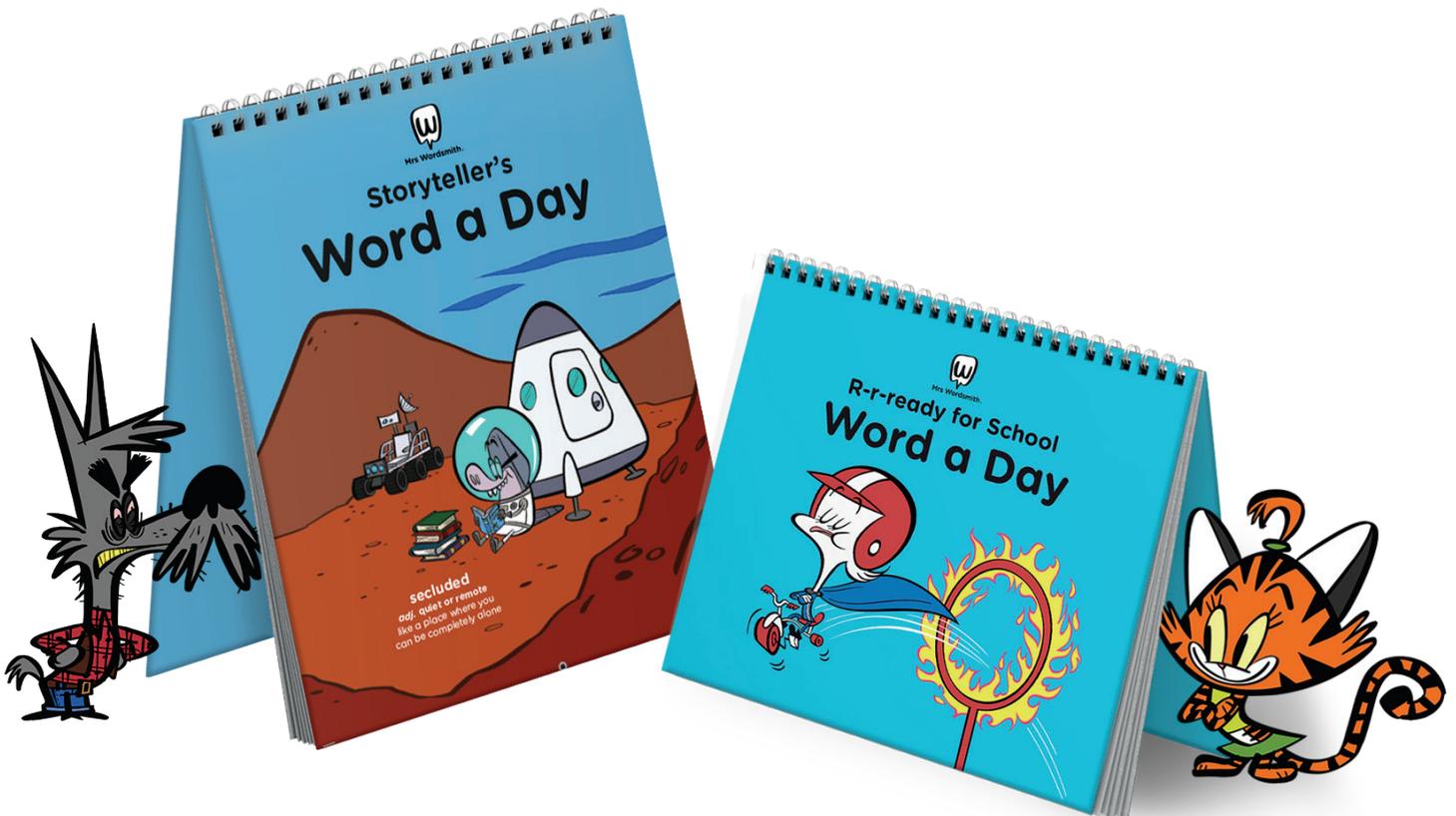


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