

Words are my superpower!

Building word knowledge through morphology

What is a morpheme?

A morpheme is the smallest unit of a word that carries meaning. For example: the word 'cat' has one morpheme. The word 'cats' has two morphemes – 'cat' + 's'. The 's' means more than one. Morphemes help us to decode and learn new words because morphemes are always spelled the same way and they always have the same meaning.

Morphological awareness

Understanding how morphemes work is important for reading and spelling. English spelling is based on a morphophonemic orthography, consisting of phonology (sounds in words), orthography (letters in written words), and morphology (base words and affixes) (Bahr, Silliman, Berninger, & Dow, 2012). Morphological awareness includes the implicit and explicit understanding of spoken and written morphemes, how affixes change the meaning of base words, the rules for adding affixes to base words, and how groups of words are semantically related through sharing the same base word (Apel, 2014).

The research

Completing word study activities and providing explicit instruction in the understanding of morphemes allows students to make meaning of words and importantly, helps grow vocabulary knowledge. Nunes, Bryant, and Olson (2003), Nunes and Bryant (2006), and Henry (1989) provided evidence that morphological instruction improves word reading and spelling in taught and untaught words.

The resource

The Words are my superpower resource incorporates evidence-based features of vocabulary and morphological instruction and is designed to:

- develop knowledge of common prefixes and suffixes;
- engage students in active processing tasks which emphasises problem solving of word structure cues; and
- encourage students to discover spelling-meaning connections in interesting activities.

It can be used as a differentiated or focused support and may be adapted to engage students from Year 3 and above.

Next steps

The resource can be downloaded from the Queensland Government learning@home website under the Reading tab. Contact your school or regional speech language pathologist to support evidence-based implementation.