

Project Description “The World of the Veggiefruities”

“The World of the Veggiefruities” is a health intervention program stimulating young children to taste and eat more fruit and vegetables. The intervention is based on a 4-year research project conducted at the University of Amsterdam and Radboud University Nijmegen. It is developed with support from the Dutch Science Foundation and will be launched online and via primary schools in 2014.

Project description

Worldwide the number of overweight children is rising dramatically. One way to prevent overweight is by creating healthy eating habits from a young age.

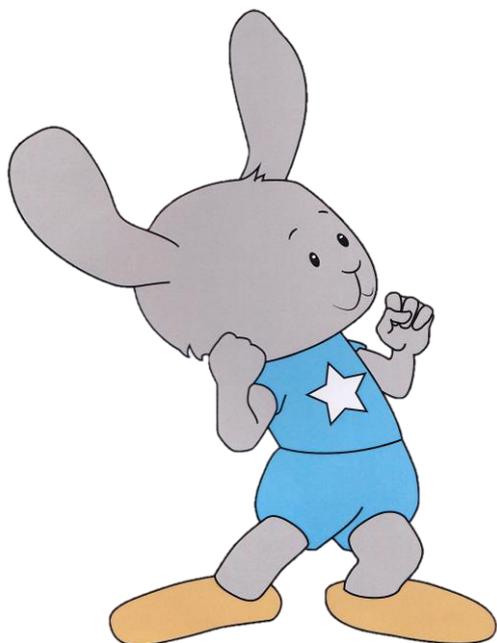
“The World of the Veggiefruities” focusses on the preschool phase (4-6 years old) when food attitudes and preferences are being developed that often last into adulthood.

Preschoolers’ motivation to eat healthy can best be stimulated by making this behavior instantly fun or appealing.

“The World of the Veggiefruities” makes fruit and vegetable consumption more appealing through storytelling methodologies. Specifically, a group of animated animal characters (the Veggiefruities) who love to eat fruit and vegetables come to life in stories via a multimedia environment (books, app, and interactive website).

Principles

The intervention is based on 5 principles:



(1) Character-product congruence

Preschoolers like fruit and vegetables more when combined with congruent characters¹. Therefore, the Veggiefruities form a conceptual fit with the fruit and vegetables they promote in the stories. For example, Rabbit promotes carrots, and Monkey promotes bananas.

(2) Character bonding

Preschoolers tend to imitate the behavior of familiar (frequently exposed) characters². Therefore, familiarity and bonding with the Veggiefruities is stimulated by exposing preschoolers to the Veggiefruities for a longer period of time via books, app, and website.

(3) Interactive shared reading

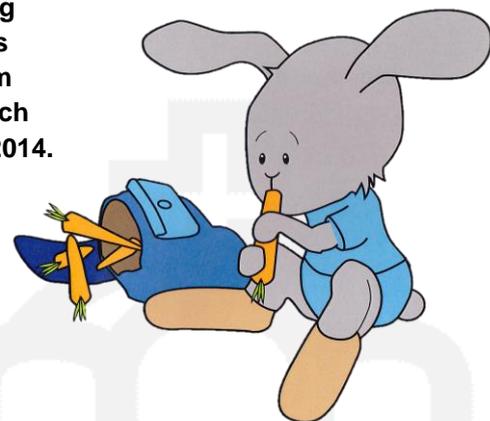
Preschoolers tend to imitate the character’s behavior when they are actively involved during storytelling³. Therefore, Veggiefruities books are provided with an interactive shared reading manual in order for teachers and parents to ask preschoolers questions about the story during the reading sessions.

(4) Message relevance

Preschoolers pay more attention to the main message in the picture book when this message is relevant to them²⁻⁴. Message relevance also increases the chance that children imitate the behavior promoted in the message⁵. Therefore, in the Veggiefruities books, the benefits of eating fruit and vegetables are linked to (super) powers that preschoolers desire to have, such as being strong or fast.

(5) Food tasting

Preschoolers may require repeated tasting to elicit fruit and vegetable liking⁶. Therefore, preschoolers taste the promoted fruit and vegetables after each reading of the Veggiefruities books.



Partners

- Dutch Science Foundation(NWO)
- Radboud University Nijmegen
- Bitescience
- Kidsvitaal & Dromenkroon
- Andre Hanegraaf, Theo Hanegraaf, Ernestien Honning (developers)
- City of Rotterdam (Lekker Fit! school program)

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References

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2. Valkenburg, P. M. (2004). *Children’s responses to the screen: A media psychological approach*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
3. De Droog, S. M., Buijzen, M., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2013). *Enhancing children’s vegetable consumption using vegetable-promoting picture books: The impact of interactive shared reading and character-product congruence*. Manuscript submitted for publication.
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