Feb. 22, 2021

WordWorks Newsletter #101

Headlines

❖ Public On-Line Courses & Direct School PD with Pete

❖ Announcing my new publication (Bowers, 2021) in response to a peer-reviewed article which falsely claimed that SWI does not teach grapheme-phoneme correspondences. Also see a related new video.

❖ New orthographic resources from Lyn Anderson & Ann Whiting (Caught in the Spell of Words)

❖ Learning with the Real Spelling Tool Box 2 through scientific inquiry of the Tool Box 2 itself! (plus postscript)

❖ SWI On-Line Courses & School PD with Pete

Zoom has been key to my public workshops and direct PD with schools for years now. By pure luck, my transition to all on-line work for COVID has been smooth. Of course some aspects of my work are richer in person, but so much of what I present on my computer screen is what I do in person anyway. Whether on-line or in-person, I introduce the orthographic concepts and instructional practice of SWI by taking participants through lessons I first designed to teach students in person and virtually.

The on-line format does have one key advantage over on-site school visits or public workshops, however. Without travel for myself or participants, on-line workshops are easy to structure with time for reflection and practice between sessions. Teachers and tutors are more likely to try new ideas when they know they can ask questions right away. Having-a-go teaching lessons modelled in a workshop helps teachers/tutors identify what they don't yet understand - and thus they come to the second session with targeted questions they would not have known to ask in a one-off session.

Upcoming Public On-Line SWI Workshops

Click HERE for a document with a description of courses I currently offer. If the two upcoming courses don't suit you, email me <peterbowers1@mac.com> and let me know which course you are interested in. If you can find even one or two others interested in the same course at the same time, I can plan around your interests/schedule and advertise others to join.

☺ **General 5-session SWI Course** $200 USD, Register HERE. (Click HERE for detailed description of this course.)

North America: Thursdays March 11, 18, 25, April 1, 8
• 7:30 - 9:00 pm EST (1.5 hour sessions)

Australia: Fridays March 12, 19, 26, April 2, 9
• 11:30 am -1:00 pm (Melbourne time)

☺ **2-session course: Etymological/ Morphological families, Reading Etymonline & Constructing Matrices** $90 USD Register HERE. Flyer with more details HERE.

☺ **Full-Day Workshop co-led by Pete Bowers & Doug Harper (Etymonline Author) timed for Australia.**
Australia: Sat March 27
• 9am - 3pm Melbourne time

North America Fri March 26
• 3pm - 9pm PST; 6pm - midnight EST

Details for registration TBA. Click HERE to Email Julie Shepherd and inquire/reserve a spot

☺ **Free Weekly SWI Digital Drop In with Pete Mondays 5pm EST**
Click HERE for details and the Zoom URL. Join any session. No sign up, drop in and join the conversation or just listen.

☺ **DTI's 5th Annual Dyslexia Virtual Conference April 2-23**
Click HERE for details on this excellent annual conference and to register.

☺ **Annual Nueva SWI Institute continues on-line June 28-July 2!**
Save the date! After last year's successful move to the on-line version of this great annual event, we are preparing to continue. Details to come. Email me <peterbowers1@mac.com> to inquire.

Schools in places including Amsterdam, Frankfurt, Moscow, Ohio, Adelaide and elsewhere have organized public courses to fist their schedule. Once a group identifies a schedule and topic that works for them, I can advertise to the wider public. The benefit for a school is increased greatly when teams of teachers study together, and then try those ideas in school between visits. This is a primary goal of all my workshops with schools -- to foster a collaborative culture of teachers diving into SWI. That culture of learning can be lead by a small group of self-selected teachers who then become on-site experts who can support others who see the results in student engagement and learning.

Here are just a couple of examples of responses from participants to these courses...

> *I just had to share this with you. This was my very first SWI session with a student I have been tutoring for 2 1/2 years. She has ADHD and language learning LDs. We have struggled along in OG with very limited success and a great deal of apathy and disinterest from my student.*
>
> *I have NEVER seen her as engaged as she was today. Formulating arguments for why <cyanide> and <icicle> shared meaning with the base <cycle>, trying to come up with words in the word family herself before I could put my cards down, trying to come up with the word sum for <nonrecyclable>. Not once did she ask "can we play the game now?" or "aren't we done yet?" It was amazing!!*
>
> *I'm still on a high an hour later when I used to walk away from our tutoring sessions exhausted and frustrated.*

This one is a response to the free SWI Drop In sessions described in the next item...

> *I finally got to attend your drop in SWI group... and I just want to take a second to thank you for all of the excitement generated for me with just one session with you and the group. I am the Instructional Coach in D102 in the kindergarten building and this year I have been partially reassigned to teaching social studies and science remotely. With all that has been going on, it has been a challenge to champion our not teaching isolated phonics (I love, love, love that term) and encourage SWI exploration in our new educational setting. [See new article and video to understand this term 'isolated phonics' to which this teacher is referring.]*
>
> *Not only did that hour and half give me lesson ideas for my next month or so of content instruction (I have of course been teaching morphology through content words, how could I not!!!!), but how I can continue to promote that teaching the most common phoneme in isolation is not the way to go and encourage my teachers to teach the way they have in the past. Thank you so much for all of your dedication and desire to bring a group of thinkers together. Never in my 25 years in education have I ever been so inspired by a group of true scholars that learn and explore together.*

Any schools or organizations interested in PD for a small or large group of teachers in one of my courses email me to propose a course that suits your schedule.

Free Weekly "SWI Digital Drop In" (Click **HERE**)
I began these free 'drop in sessions' at the beginning of the pandemic to provide a free introduction to SWI and to support on-going learning in these challenging times.

These sessions have been so rich that I plan to continue indefinitely. I love hosting these sessions in which people just bring their questions for everyone to discuss. Every week we have novices and long-time experts and we each gain from the other's perspective. Sometimes an email with a rich question provides a focus for a session. On occasion students with parents lead investigations. These sessions are every Monday at 5pm EST. Click HERE for the Zoom URL to join and get more details. There is no sign up, just drop in and see what you think.

❖ **New publication on explicit instruction about grapheme-phoneme correspondences in SWI, and the larger place of SWI in the research**

Click HERE for this new article described by this abstract:

This "open letter" responds to a recent article by Buckingham (2020) which made the claim that the instructional approach known as "Structured Word Inquiry" (SWI) does not teach grapheme-phoneme correspondences (GPC). I counter this claim and provide evidence for SWI's teaching of GPCs by citing not only the publications on SWI, including the original article introducing it in 2010, but also provide many links to publicly available illustrations of GPC instruction by teachers working with SWI. A description is provided of the qualitative differences between how GPCs are taught in SWI and phonics. Unlike phonics, SWI explicitly teaches the role of morphology and etymology for making sense of grapheme choice in our morphophonemic language and provides graphic representations of orthographic structure to support this instruction. Research evidence about the effects of morphological instruction, including its positive effects on phonological learning, provide a strong basis to

motivate more explicit research attention to structured word inquiry in general and specifically as a proposal for a novel form of instruction about GPCs across a wide range of ages and abilities. The debate about whether SWI type instruction is appropriate in the earliest instruction is addressed. I highlight two tools used in SWI, the matrix and the word sum. I show why these are essential for teaching the interrelation of morphology and phonology, but have been largely ignored by the research community so far.

While this piece addresses the research community directly, I also wrote it to help educators have a clear picture of the essential role of phonological instruction in SWI and a sense of how this instruction fits in the current research. In conjunction with this article, I created this new 15-minute video (screen shot below) on the qualitative difference between how grapheme-phoneme correspondences are taught in phonics vs SWI.

SWI teaches grapheme-phoneme correspondences more explicitly than phonics does

2,223 views · Jan 27, 2021
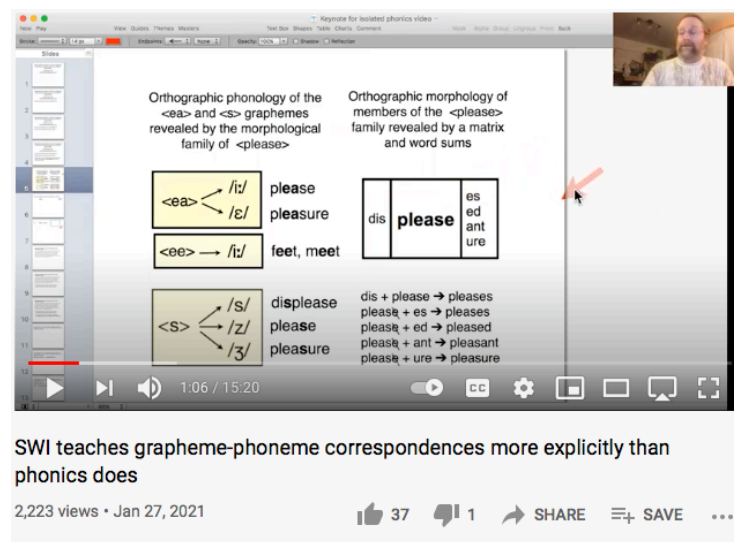
The false claim that SWI underemphasizes phonology, or that the research counters SWI practice are sadly common. I wanted to provide a detailed counter-argument with clear evidence anyone can consider critically for themselves. Many of you working with SWI will encounter colleagues and friends who have heard these claims and assume they are valid. I hope this article and video provide a helpful way to engage people with a productive conversation about the actual nature of SWI instruction, and its place in the research.

For those interested in more on the research, I highly recommend exploring and following the blog of my brother, Jeff Bowers, a researcher at the University of Bristol. We've published a number of papers together on SWI. It is his own article "Reconsidering the Evidence that Systematic Phonics is more Effective than Alternative Methods of Reading Instruction" (Bowers, J. 2020) in the major journal *Educational Psychology Review* that has garnered the most push-back. Buckingham (2020) was responding to that article by Jeff when she mischaracterized SWI as not teaching grapheme-phoneme correspondences at all. Not only did the journal that published Buckingham's paper fail to invite Jeff to review her rejoinder to his article, they also rejected our response to her analysis (now available here) or to simply publish a correction regarding the demonstrably false claim she made about SWI and grapheme-phoneme correspondences. See more background on this story in Jeff's blog HERE. There you will see the very different and appropriate way another journal dealt with a different article that challenged Jeff's phonics paper.

❖ **New orthographic resources from Lyn Anderson & Ann Whiting (Caught in the Spell of Words)**

I'm delighted to point to a brand new resource from the excellent Lyn Anderson and Ann Whiting. Ann is the only person I know who has been working with Real Spelling longer than I, and Lyn Anderson was a colleague at my school in Indonesia when I first encountered this work. The fact that these two have created this joint consultancy is a major bonus for the whole community of people doing this work.

I encourage anyone interested in SWI to click HERE to see more about these new resources, and to explore their blog in general.

A Field Guide to Words enlightening, eclectic, entertaining. These *Field Guides* are the ideal companion for teachers and logophiles.

- **Learning with the [Real Spelling Tool Box 2](#) through scientific inquiry of the Tool Box 2 itself!**

Explore the new [Tool Box 2 forum](#) on Real Spellers where users share investigations sparked from The Real Spelling Tool Box 2. See [this post](#) that grew from an email from Deb, a participant from one of my 5-session courses and a common visitor on the [Monday Drop In](#) sessions. In that post, you will read an account of her discovery of matrices in the Tool Box that included morphemes that didn't seem to work when she tested them with word sums. She shares evidence showing that she is absolutely right - the matrices were flawed.

It is so valuable to share errors found in such an authoritative reference like Real Spelling. Deb's email (shared in [post](#)) is evidence of how successfully she has learned the lessons of Real Spelling and SWI to become a critical, scientific thinker who treats authoritative references as fallible. When presented with a hypothesis, the question we need ask is not "Who said it?" but "Does it stand up to the evidence?" Deb now knows she has the understanding to identify errors in the foundational reference that sparked her orthographic learning in the first place. That confidence will motivate Deb (and hopefully others) to study Real Spelling even more carefully with an eye out for other possible errors to share with the community. And that is exactly the mindset any scientist/scholar should have when considering hypotheses and assertions from any source.

This new forum is not just about identifying potential errors, however. It can also be used to highlight places in the Tool Box with particularly rich content relevant to specific questions. For example, [see this post](#) where I highlight a Tool Box 2 Theme on the <-s> / <-es> suffix in response to a great question from some one relatively new to SWI. That post also helped me address how "inquiry" guides study in SWI.

I hope more people working with the Tool Box 2 will explore and contribute to this forum. While the contents of this reference provide an extraordinarily deep and wide understanding of English orthography, that content is based on the culmination of one persons's thinking at one point in time. Those who understand Real Spelling know not to treat it as a place to "be given answers" but instead as a launching pad for our own learning. We know we are learning the most important lessons Real Spelling has to offer when we learn enough to refine and improve on it! (See more on the Real Spelling Tool Box 2 and its foundational role in SWI [WW Newsletter 100](#).)

Additional commentary on research & new article...

It is apt to discuss this Tool Box 2 Real Spellers forum in the same newsletter that addresses the issues Jeff and I have been highlighting in the literacy research. Some who read my new article, or Jeff's Blog may see these as some sort of "personal attack" on individual researchers. But this is absolutely not the case. Researchers have a responsibility to rigorously challenge any assertion in the literacy research regardless of its popularity or its source. This new Real Spellers forum illustrates that those of us working with Real Spelling take this responsibility seriously even when talking about the original source on which SWI was built. This forum encourages users of Real Spelling to improve our understanding by identifying any evidence countering its findings.

Similarly, Jeff and I are eager to consider any challenges to his analysis of the instructional evidence for phonics instruction, or our assertions about SWI. Neither scientific understanding nor student learning benefit from criticisms in peer-reviewed articles that present deeply misleading descriptions of SWI research and practice. Unfortunately, it is our view that the central arguments made against SWI and those against Jeff's analysis of the instructional evidence for phonics do not address our actual claims. You can find links to all these articles and arguments in Jeff's blog.

It is ironic that the central criticisms about SWI is from people who fear we reduce attention to grapheme-phoneme correspondences. In fact, SWI offers the research community a new hypothesis, with supporting empirical evidence, about how we might be able improve the grapheme-phoneme correspondence instruction. Researchers *should* challenge this claim. But they should do so based on the actual research, theory and practice of SWI. The claim that we reduce or ignore instruction about grapheme-phoneme correspondences is false and distracts from what the real scientific discussion should be. Here are just a couple of findings in the research to consider that I flesh out more fully in my new article.

In Goodwin and Ahn's (2010, 2013) two meta-analyses of morphological instruction, they found that phonological outcomes showed the greatest gains - even greater than morphological outcomes. Explaining this result, they wrote:

Similar to Bowers et al. (2010), results suggest that early morphological instruction may be particularly helpful perhaps because of the synergistic relationship between phonology and morphology and the larger repertoire of root [base] and affix meanings available for use. If a reciprocal relationship exists between morphological knowledge and literacy...it makes sense to jump start this knowledge from an early age" (Goodwin & Ahn, 2013, p. 23).

Galuschka et al.'s (2020) meta-analysis of morphological instruction for spelling "did not find that phonics instruction is more effective than morphological interventions in the early years of formal literacy instruction or for more severe spelling deficits" Galuschka et al.'s (2020, p. 13). What they found instead was this: "Against our hypotheses, the efficacy of phonics interventions decreased with increasing severity [of students spelling deficits], whereas the efficacy of orthographic and morphological interventions increased with increasing severity" (Galuschka et al., 2020, p. 12).

Neither of these findings would be predicted by most who conscientiously follow common recommendations from the research. But they make perfect sense based on the best current research evidence, and the recognition that English orthography is an interrelated system.

The good news is that if you read that new article, you will see that, in fact, most of the arguments put forward in the research on SWI since 2010 are exactly in line with current arguments from researchers. In fact, except when it comes to initial literacy instruction, it seems to me that critics of SWI are actually largely in complete agreement with our arguments. I hope this new article is a force for deepening shared understanding, not increasing division.

Peter Bowers, Feb. 22, 2021