Upcoming Workshops & Conferences
(Click links for info / registration)

- **Oct. 11**: Joint presentation with Gina Cooke at the IBIDA Fall Conference, Midwest Conference Center in Northlake, Illinois.
- **Oct. 24**: Pete invited speaker at IDA national conference in Baltimore, Maryland.
- **Nov. 10-11**: IBIDA Workshop, Glen Ellyn, IL.
- **Nov. 13 - 16, 19 - 20**: Lincoln Community School Accra, Ghana
- **Jan. 19-20**: Chapters International Workshop, Dresden, Germany.
- **Jan. 21-22**: On-site workshop with Dresden International School.

Headlines for “Getting Started” Issue

- **Upcoming Workshops, Conferences & Publications**
- **Tales, Images & Resources from 2012 WW Summer Course**
  - Includes link to new document from Skot Caldwell on “Getting Started in Grade 1”
- **Real Spellers** website back on-line!
- **New video** showing how teachers and students can easily get started making matrices from word sums with Neil Ramsden’s new “Mini Matrix Maker”
- **WordWorks Down Under**: Spelling Investigations, Images and Resources from Pete’s 10-days of workshops at Wesley College in Melbourne Aug-Sept, 2012 (Slide show here.)
- **A Structured Word Inquiry**: Devotees of scientific inquiry!

Structured Word Inquiry

**featured in Ontario Ministry of Education document**

“Morphology Works” (Kirby & Bowers, 2012)

Literacy & Numeracy Secretariat publication “What Works? Research to Practice”

This article reviews the research on the effects of morphological instruction and points to the two critical tools of any morphological instruction which hopes to be driven by critical thinking and inquiry: **word sums** and **word matrices**

It also points to many resources that will be familiar to those working with WordWorks.

Click here for a short piece introducing this and another article related to structured word inquiry coming out in this fall’s IDA journal.
The Details

Workshops & Conferences
This school year has started off busier than ever. I returned from ten days of workshops in Melbourne, Australia on the day that students here in Ontario began their school year. As well as working with a number of schools this fall, I’ll be running a 2-day workshop for the Illinois Branch of the IDA and presenting at two IDA conferences.

I’m particularly excited (and a bit nervous!) about the talk I was invited to give at IDA’s Annual Conference in Baltimore for a symposium titled, “Reconciling the Common Core Standards with Reading Research.” I will be presenting along with Louisa Moats, Marilyn Adams, Susan Brady, Michael Coyne, and (fellow Canadian!) Maureen Lovett. (Download program here.)

Chapters International Workshop in Dresden, Jan. 19-20
For those in the region, click here to get information. Register for this 2-day workshop hosted by the Dresden International School by following the links at Chapters International.

On-Line Skype Workshops with WordWorks
On top of these on-site workshops and conferences, I have online Skype workshops with schools in Bahrain, Dresden, and Abu Dhabi on the go. (Email me if you’re interested in how those work. Click here for rates.)

Some technological issues
1) WordWorks website under reconstruction: For years our website was hosted on Apple’s Mobile Me, which was recently discontinued. It was supposed to be straightforward to change the hosting to a different server, but that would have been too easy! I have made most of our key pages available, but for the moment, you may find error messages when you click some links. If there is a page that you were unable to reach, please email me and let me know what you were looking for. I need to revamp, organize and streamline the whole website. Maybe this will be my excuse!

2) Real Spellers back on-line: Real Spellers was off-line due to hackers for some time. Matt Berman, a Grade 4 teacher at The NUEVA School is the host of Real Spellers and has succeeded in getting it back on-line after great effort. Many thanks to Matt for all the work he does to support my learning and that of our community.

For example, consider the discussion at Real Spellers that grew from Troy, a Grade 4/5 teacher in Australia through his question about <please>. Troy jumped in with both feet after a friend of his attended my workshop in Melbourne! Sign up at Real Spellers to add your own comments and posts.

Mini Matrix Maker: New Software & Video
This new tool from Neil Ramsden is just excellent and works on Macs or PC’s. Watch a new video on YouTube to see how it works. Click here if you and your students want to get started making your own matrices!

Now open for registration:
Three upcoming IDA Workshops/Conferences about SWI
Oct. 11: Joint presentation with Gina Cooke at the IBIDA Fall Conference, Illinois.
Oct. 24: Pete invited speaker at IDA national conference in Baltimore, Maryland.
Nov. 10-11: 2-Day Intensive IBIDA Workshop, Glen Ellyn, IL. (Download flyer here.)

2-Day Workshop with Chapters International in Dresden
Jan. 19-20: Click here for information. Click here to register (Select workshop titled: “Understanding the Meaning-Spelling Connection: Structured Word Inquiry.”)
Reviewed Publications Highlight the Matrix and the Word Sum and Structured Word Inquiry
I have two 2012 publications related to structured word inquiry that I am excited about.

1) Morphology Works (Kirby & Bowers, 2012)
This paper for the Ontario Ministry of Education’s Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat reaches every publicly funded school in Ontario. Teachers all over Ontario are about to be introduced not only to the word sum and the matrix, but to our WordWorks website, Real Spellers, the Word Searcher, Etymonline and a variety of other resources and references to support structured word inquiry.

2) Morphology and the Common Core: Building Students’ Understanding of the Written Word (Bowers & Cooke, in press)

This publication comes out in the fall 2012 edition of the IDA journal, Perspectives on Language and Literacy, in conjunction with the symposium I am speaking at their annual convention in Baltimore.

Read a short piece introducing the key ideas of these two articles and why I argue that they are important additions to the literature here.

Getting Started in Grade 1 Document from Skot Caldwell grows from 2012 WW Summer Course
The educators who gathered at the Shanti Retreat here on Wolfe Island for our latest Summer Course created a truly inspiring learning experience for all of us. The crew included our first professor from a teachers’ college, and teachers and tutors from Nashville, Beijing, Kingston and places in between.

I asked Skot Caldwell if he would be a special guest presenter at this year’s course. Skot has worked with structured word inquiry and Real Spelling for years in public schools in Kingston - first as a Grade 4/5 teacher, but now as a Grade 1 teacher for the last few years. I regularly highlight Skot’s work in Grade 4/5 and Grade 1 in my presentations at conferences and workshops around the world.

A number of email discussions among participants continued after the course, and then, just as the school year began, Skot shared an excellent piece on “Getting Started in Grade 1.” This document is just an excellent illustration of the joyous ongoing learning that comes with this work. I can’t over emphasize the value of this Skot’s perspective for those trying to get started in the younger grades.
Skot Caldwell leading a session at the 2012 WW Summer Course

I have posted a link to Skot’s “Getting Started” article here in the “Beginners Forum” of Real Spellers. I hope that posting it there encourages other teachers to pose questions and comments on Skot’s work and my response to it. You can share images from your classroom, ask questions, whatever you like.

Note that the last page of that document includes a list of links to free resources that I think will be of particular interest to those getting started with structured word inquiry and Real Spelling -- especially those teaching the younger grades.

You can see images of our crew hard at work and play at our summer course at this link. We have not yet confirmed dates for next year, but most likely we will run two courses next year July 2-3 and July 23 - 25.

The 2012 WW Summer Course Crew @ Shanti Retreat!

Email Pete if you are interested in learning more about the 2013 WW Summer courses.

Beautiful Blogs
I’ve been dying to get this Newsletter out to point everyone to some truly amazing work from classrooms around the world.

Dan Allen’s Grade 5 Blog
Those of you who followed WordWorks last year will remember how frequently I encouraged our community to visit this truly exceptional illustration of the kind of learning that can happen in classrooms guided by teachers keen to engage in inquiry-led learning right along with their students.

(Dan’s posts on non-spelling matters are just as impressive.)
Dan began working with Real Spelling and Word Works last year. This year he was itching to jump in full-on right from the start. It’s hard to imagine a more impressive introduction to learning from scientific inquiry of the written word than what you can find from Dan’s first posts at the beginning of the year.

Also check out this more recent orthographic offering that is a guest post led by two of his students, Lucas and Nicky. Their curiosity about the word *lyric* produced a hypothesis that this little word might be a complex word with a suffix. Dan didn’t need to know the answer to his students’ question in order to know how to guide them in the use of word sums and references to test their hypothesis. Check out this initial paragraph from the students’ post:

> *This morning we talked about Reader’s Writer’s workshop. Mr Allen said we could make stories, read, and lots of other things. One option was to write song lyrics. We started wondering about the word *<lyrics>*. Mr Allen said that *<ic>* was a suffix. Then Lucas and I asked, “Well what does *<lyr>* mean?” Mr Allen said, “Why don’t you guys try to discover it.”*

If, like me, you learn something from these Grade 5 students when you read this post, add your own comment to thank them!

And finally, just as I finished up this Newsletter, Dan’s “language lab” struck again. Click here for a post on a wonderful investigation of one of my favourite bound bases *<mote>* for ‘move’. (Think of *<re + mote>* and *<e + mote/+ ion>*!) This post makes excellent use of the *Mini Matrix Maker* and *etymonline*. If you follow the comments, you’ll see that Dan’s students even taught the Old Grouch at Real Spelling something new about the word *<locomotive>*!

**Anne Whiting’s Middle School Blog Post**

Anne Whiting is another name that will be familiar to many regular WordWorks and Real Spelling users. Anne was a great help for me to get started with Real Spelling when I first encountered it while teaching in Indonesia. I got to work with her class a few years ago in Kuala Lumpur, and I regularly point to the amazing work of her students.

Even so, I was barely prepared for the spectacular work offered at Ann’s *Word Nerd blog* on “forays into morphology and etymology.” You really must go there now. In case you need further enticement, watch just one of the many exceptional *YouTube videos* she has posted of one of students explaining their thinking/learning.

Wow.
I started writing this newsletter on a plane returning home after an inspiring visit to Wesley College, a progressive grand old private school in Melbourne. I had the distinct pleasure of teaching children from kindergarten (“Prep” in Aussie lingo) up to Grade 7 at all three campuses over nine days. As well, I ran two after-school workshops for the staff and two parent workshops. On the tenth day, I ran a full day workshop with 63 teachers from about 45 local schools hosted by the Wesley College Institute. Click here for a slide show of images from my visit.

The response of the children, teachers and administration was inspiring. A couple of stories to illustrate what I mean follow.

**A Grade 2 Class:**
On one of my first days, I taught in a Grade 2 class led by Anne-Louise. It was clear that she was very excited about what she saw going on. As I headed off for the next lesson, she emailed me a link to the blog she had posted for her parents about the lesson I just taught! (See image above.) Since then, Anne-Louise has emailed me with numerous excellent questions, and she has been corresponding with Real Spelling and Dan Allen as she works overtime to soak up what she was learning.

**A grade 4 Class**
I was lucky to be able to visit Nicole’s Grade 4 class for a number of lessons. When I arrived for my first session, I was delighted to find she and her class had already started a sticky-note morpheme chart, and that she had already jumped in with the first <sign> lesson from my teacher resource book.

I had touched on that lesson in my first staff-wide teacher workshops, and Nicole wasted no time in getting started. Because she had introduced her students to the basics of morphology by investigating members of the <sign> family with the matrix and word sum, I was able to jump ahead quickly and go further than I expected. By the end of my first lesson with them, a student provided a hypothesis for the conventions for replacing single, silent <e>, which we started
testing with the data supplied by word sums from a set of matrices.

(As a related aside -- watch this video of a Grade 7 student articulating her group’s scientific analysis of the conventions for suffixing and the single, silent <e>. This is another example of the spectacular videos embedded on Ann Whiting’s “Word Nerds” blog. I told you the her blog is amazing!)

In the next lesson we were able to establish that the student hypothesis was correct, and then practice applying that convention to a set of word sums with the help of a suffixing flow chart from Real Spelling. Throughout, we were able to encounter and begin establishing numerous fundamental facts about English spelling that are rarely encountered in schools. (See panel at right for a partial list of the concepts addressed.)

I’m not suggesting that in the first couple of classes that Nicole’s Grade 4 students had complete control over these ideas (graphemes were also addressed in these lessons), but each of these foundational facts about English spelling were introduced, and will necessarily be encountered again and again by any class that continues to work with writing out and spelling out word sums and constructing matrices.

On each return visit to Nicole’s class I was so impressed to find evidence that she and her students had been thinking deeply about questions that arose in our work. For example, consider the chart and the white board that greeted me when I returned for my last lesson with Nicole’s class. (Pictured on next page.)

We had encountered the interesting word sum for the word <agreed> the day before. I use this word to introduce application of the spelling law that can be stated this way:

No complete English word can use the same letter three times in a row.

Some of the core ideas about English spelling encountered in these first few lessons in Nicole's class.

(Sorry to plug a book, here, but it seemed silly not to point out that these lessons are from my book that is de + sign + ed to help teachers get started understanding and teaching how English spelling works!)

- Written morphemes can have multiple pronunciations, but retain their underlying spelling to signal connections in meaning. For this reason we should not pronounce morphemes until they are in a specific word. Instead we can spell them to signal that the underlying morphological spelling is the one one “name” of a morpheme that is consistent.

  This was illustrated by the fact that the base <sign> can be pronounced /zæn/ (in design or resign) /sɪɡn/ (in signal or signify), /sɪɡn/ (in designate) /sæn/ (in sign or assign).

- “Word family” is the proper term for words that share a common written base regardless of pronunciation.

- A morpheme is a base or an affix. They are the building blocks of meaning in words. (I like a grade 5 student’s definition which described morphemes as “the bits between the words in a [fully analyzed] word sum.”)

- All words are either bases, (simple words) or bases with at least one other morpheme fixed to it (complex words).

- A word sum can be used to identify the constituent morphemes of a complex word.

- A matrix shows the interrelation of morphemes for a morphological family that shares a common written base.
The bell rang as I rushed through the analysis of *agreed*. As I scrambled to the next class, I suggested that they might investigate the word `<fully>`. Nicole was not concerned that she did not actually know the answer to the structure of this word. She had learned enough from our sessions that she knew she could guide her class through a rich investigation by writing out potential word sums and scientific observations explaining their thinking. That discussion resulted in two hypotheses (including a word sum) that you see in the image above. Anchoring that discussion by taking notes helped the whole class to consider, contribute to, and refine their “language lab’s” hypotheses. As scientists know, recording thinking in an organized way is a crucial means for organizing one’s thinking. It also gave me a space to add my own observations below theirs.

On her first introduction to structured word inquiry, Nicole showed that she was completely ready to take the key step into inquiry-led teaching. In this instruction, the teacher models scientific inquiry by investigating questions with his or her students before they know the answer themselves.

Consider the critical lessons about investigating novel questions that Nicole taught her children by taking on my challenge with her students *before she knew the answer herself*. They saw that when their teacher is presented with a spelling question that she can not explain, she works through a hypothesis about spelling structure with a written word sum and then records the thinking of the group with carefully worded statements.

When a teacher starts using word sums in this way, it will not be long before students think carefully about questions of word structure by generating word sums *before* they ask for help with an answer. This is one of the key things I work very hard to get teachers to do. The act of constructing a word sum forces the learner (teacher or student) to consider the full structure of a word. Word sums structure not only to *words*, but also *thinking*.

**Key lessons for instruction:**

- By taking on this new way of thinking about word structure and meaning with word sums for herself, Nicole is providing excellent teaching!
The first step in becoming a better teacher of how the writing system works is to become a committed learner oneself.

Modelling good scientific inquiry, Nicole doesn’t stop at the first hypothesis, she solicits and considers other ideas as well. Hypothesis 2 (illustrated on the white board) is that <fully> might be a base. Although there turns out to be evidence for a deeper analysis of this word, this is an excellent hypothesis.

Something I tell teachers and students again and again is that to do safe scientific investigations, they shouldn’t draw any conclusions that go deeper than they can prove. Thus, until it was demonstrated that the structure of <fully> and <agreed> could be explained with two-step word sums that apply the spelling convention that complete English words can not use the same letter three times in a row, the conclusion that <fully> is a base was the appropriate conclusion. (Those conventions and word sums are explained in the book.)

Over few lessons, Nicole’s class worked hard with word sums and matrices to discover, test and prove the hypothesis that “vowel suffixes replace single, silent <e>s.”

I decided to make use of that new knowledge in a favourite activity based on investigating the word <imagine>.

I use this activity to help students and teachers get comfortable with a series of basic processes central to the scientific investigation of word structure and meaning. Teachers and students who do this activity are guided to do the following:

- Use the Word Searcher to collect potential words for a morphological word family;
- Prove which are and which are not related in structure and meaning by using word sums and dictionaries;
- Arrange the morphemes from their word sums into a matrix.

Download the lesson and instructions for this activity here.

Is it a suffix?
One of my favourite things about this lesson is that it forces us to encounter familiar words with suffixes that many have never thought of before. When we are analyze such words with a matrix or word sum those tools identify the structures we need to resolve.

Just about every class I have done this activity with runs into questions like these that provide opportunities to learn how to do scientific inquiry into words:

- Does <imagery> use a suffix <-ery> suffix or an <-ry> suffix? Both would works structurally.
- Is there such a thing as an <-ry> suffix?
- How do we find out?

It was a student who first introduced me to these questions during the first use of this activity. I welcomed the rich opportunity for inquiry-led teaching.
Back in Nicole’s class, a student identified this same issue and asked me if <-ry> was a suffix. We investigated with a dictionary and found <-ry> listed as a variation of the <-ery> suffix. More importantly, it provided evidence of other words that we could analyze coherently with this suffix (devilry and rivalry). Now we had evidence that the <-ry> suffix existed, but the question about whether imagery used <-ry> or <-ery> remained open. I have my own holding position on this question. I’ll let you develop your own hypotheses.

Classroom structures supporting inquiry-led learning
Since we had tested this suffix, I told the student that he could add it to their morpheme chart. I added that they should get an “Affix Hypothesis” chart in their class so that students could add hypothesized affixes that the class could test. As I pointed at the morpheme chart I saw that Nicole had already set that structure in place. Take a look at the picture on page 6. The orange section above Nicole’s head is where her students have started to share their affix hypotheses!

Summing Up Grade 4 Lesson
I realize that I have given a great deal of detail about this one class during my Wesley visit. I could have gone into similar detail about so many of the classes I visited.

Just like we can learn a great deal by diving into the morphology, etymology and phonology of any one word, diving into the learning of one classroom can be a useful illustration of what can happen when teachers and students are given the opportunity to investigate the structure of English spelling through a process of scientific inquiry.

Spelling Detective Episode: What is the structure of <devotees> and how do we decide?
To reinforce the practice of identifying and proving the existence of previously unfamiliar affixes, I decided to end this Newsletter taking up a related question I received from a teacher and student recently.

Hi Pete,
Ben wants to know if this word sum is correct and why.
*de + vote + e + s → devotees*

Although I provided an answer to this question in my response, I’m not going to supply my own conclusion here. Like the the assignment with the investigation of <imagine>, and Nicole’s initial investigation with her class about the word fully, the key lesson is not the answer, but learning how to go about looking for an answer.

There are a couple of wonderful things about this short question worth pointing out before starting a scientific investigation.

First, notice that the student’s question is in the form of a word sum. This is crucial. Because the student has presented me with a word sum, I can assess what he knows and does not know. Thus I have information on which to base my response.

Second, notice that Ben asks not just for what the word sum is, but also *why*. This is not a student just looking for an answer to understanding this particular spelling, he is looking for help knowing *why* spellings are as they are.

Finally, I’ll add that I begin my response with evidence from his word sum that Ben knows the spelling of the word *devotees*. I make the assumption that he knows the meaning of this word.
With that, I’ll try to offer some guidance about how you and your students can learn by investigating Ben’s excellently posed question. As ever, scientific inquiry aimed at understanding the spelling of a word must target both structure and meaning. That means I need to use word sums and etymological references.

1) Structure: To have confidence in a word sum, one needs to be able to prove each element (written morpheme) in that word sum, and any suffixing changes.

In Ben’s word sum, the most glaring question relates to the <e> between the two plus signs. Unless you and your students can come up with evidence of a suffix <-e> or a connector vowel letter <-e-> that for some reason do not replace the final, single silent <e> of <vote>, we have to abandon the hypothesis that there is an <e> morpheme in this word.

(To learn about connecting vowel letters, click here for the Real Spelling Gallery of tutorial films on morphology. The film “Connecting Vowel Letters” provides an excellent introduction to this feature of English spelling. If you watch that film, I highly recommend to follow it up by watching the film on “Combining Forms” in the same Gallery.)

If we do not have evidence for this structure, we have to attempt other word sums. What other possibilities are there? Since Ben has provided the correct spelling of <devotees>, try other hypotheses of word sums that could result in this spelling.

2) Meaning: Word sums always work in both structure and meaning. Is there evidence in Ben’s hypothesis that <vote> is the base of <devotee}? A word sum is the structure test. To answer this question, though, we also have to be able to apply a meaning test.

The “Meaning Test” -- Common Root Origin:
To be confident that a structurally plausible word sum is actually correct, we have to check that both the hypothesized base and the hypothesized word that it builds go back to the same root origin. I will illustrate with a different investigation.

Do <bequest> and <question> share a base?
I might hypothesize that the word bequest has the structure <be + quest> and shares the base <quest> which builds words like question, inquest, and conquest. I can present the structural evidence that there is a base <quest> for “a long or arduous search for something.” I can also show evidence that there is an Old English prefix <be-> in words like because or befriend. So the structure <be + quest> appears structurally plausible. But do the words bequest and question really share a common base, and thus belong in the same matrix? This hypothesis needs to pass the meaning test before I can safely draw that conclusion.

If I look at the root origin of both question and its base <quest> I find the Latin root ‘quaerere’ for “ask, seek, gain”. When I look up bequest I find that this word goes back to a Proto-Germanic origin for “saying”. I don’t know much about
Proto-Germanic origin. Nevertheless, I have clear evidence that bequeath and the base <quest> (from the Latin ‘quaerere’) do not share a common root origin. The hypothesis that bequest and question belong in the same morphological word family may be tempting structurally, but it does not pass the meaning test. As a scientist, I must abandon the hypothesis that these words are part of the same morphological family.

(See this link for more on using etymology to test morphological connections.)

Back to Ben’s Question!
So to test Ben’s word sum, go to your dictionary or etymonline to see if the word devotee has a common root origin to his hypothesized base <vote>. What is the next step?

If you find evidence that <vote> is the base of devotees, try other word sums with this base and provable affixes that could result in the spelling of the word devotees.

3) How do you prove an affix?
The principle I use for identifying any affix is the following:

Identify at least two words that use the same letter string fixed to a known base or stem for the same purpose.

Ben hypothesized a prefix <de->. To prove that is correct, we need to find other words using this prefix. A good dictionary should help. My Oxford includes an entry for a <de-> prefix. This is a good sign, but as scientists we don’t just accept answers from the dictionary. We interrogate the evidence it presents. I do know about the bound base <duct> and <scend> so the examples deduct and descend provide good evidence for <de->, as does denude with its familiar base word. I’m now curious about the word derelict. According to Oxford there is a base or stem <relict>. (Something to investigate later!) From this reference, I can find evidence of a <de-> prefix. So we are now left with this much of Ben’s word some confirmed:

de + vote

To record what I know so far, I complete a starter word sum by writing whatever is left in the known spelling of the word:

? de + vote + ees → devotees

(The initial question mark signals a starter word sum used to help me think -- not a considered hypothesis.)
The starter word sum helps me see the final <s> signaling a plural. I refine the starter word sum with this analysis:

? de + vote + ee + s → devotees

Zeroing in…
If there is evidence that the base <vote> shares a root origin with the word devote, there are three questions to test. Is there an <ee> suffix? If so, would it replace the final, single silent <e> of devote? Would an <ee> suffix make sense in devotees?

And that, my fellow word scientists, I leave for you to prove!

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**de-**

| [diː] |
| prefix |
| 1 (forming verbs and their derivatives) down; away: descend | deduct. |
| · completely: denude | derelict. |
| 2 (added to verbs and their derivatives) denoting removal or reversal: deaerate | de-ice. |
| 3 denoting formation from: deverbal. |

ORIGIN from Latin de ‘off, from’; sense 2 via Old French des- from Latin dis-.

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Peter Bowers, Sept 19, 2012