

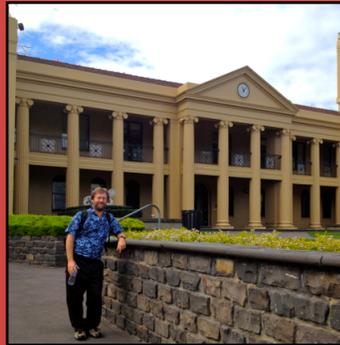
WORDWORKS NEWSLETTER #70

A school year in review -- Children raise the village

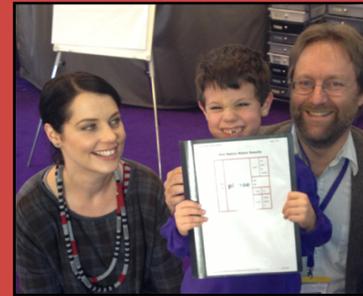
Upcoming Workshops

- New openings for WW Summer Courses July 2-4 & 16-18
Contact [Pete](#) if you are interested.
- Nov. 2-3 Workshop in Chicago area with Pete Bowers & Gina Cooke looking for a home
Contact [Pete](#) or [Gina](#)

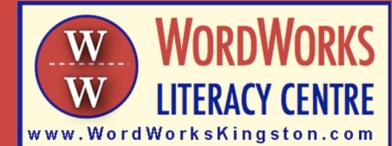
June 1, 2013



Pete at Wesley College
St. Kilda Campus, Melbourne



Hugo and his Mom, Robyn, show off Hugo's precious folder of Mini-Matrix-Maker Matrices to Pete and the world!



Headlines

- *News on upcoming workshop*
- *What Pete learned from students in Melbourne*
- *New WW resource on teaching the spelling of base words*
- *Inspiring student summations of learning from a year of structured word inquiry*

A school year in review -- Children raise the village

In my [last Newsletter](#), I signalled the intent to use a theme I borrowed from Jose Bright, the founder of [Teboho Trust](#) in South Africa. When [I visited there years ago](#), he explained his work with poor students in Soweto by arguing:

👤 ***“When the village is broken it is going to take the children to raise the village.”***

Obviously the context I in which I work is very different. I do, however, see a similar dynamic in my domain. Over and over I see the learning of children guiding adults like myself away from false assumptions towards clearer understanding.

So many examples illustrating this non-hierarchical learning community have blossomed in the last couple months. I shelved some of what I had planned so that I can point you to some of these illustrations of student guidance from around the world.

If you only visit one link from this Newsletter, I recommend that you jump to page 7 right now. Click on a post from on of the classroom blogs with student reflections on the year.

These students have a great deal to teach us about what can be learned when the principles of scientific inquiry are put to the task of understanding English spelling. We owe these teachers a great debt of gratitude for making their classroom learning public. These “Word Labs” of students and teachers really are raising our village’s understanding of English spelling.

The Details

Upcoming Workshop News

WW Summer Courses (new spots available)

It turns out I *may* still have room for at least one person in each of my Summer Courses on Wolfe island (July 2-4 and July 16-18). See information [here](#). Contact [Pete](#) with any questions.

November 2-3 Workshop in Chicago area with Pete Bowers & Gina Cooke

Gina and I have been planning to do a joint workshop for some time. We have not finalized the details, but the plan is to co-lead a 2 day workshop in the Chicago area Nov. 2-3. We are seeking partners that would be interested in hosting such a workshop in exchange for a reduction in workshop fees. Contact [Pete](#) or [Gina](#) if you are interested.

Contact [Pete](#) if you are curious about any other school visits workshops next fall or winter. The dance card is filling up!

WordWorks Down Under

There is so much to share about what has been going on in Melbourne since [Wesley College](#) invited me to work with them last August. As a part of that first trip, I ran a one-day workshop Wesley opened to other schools in the area. That single day

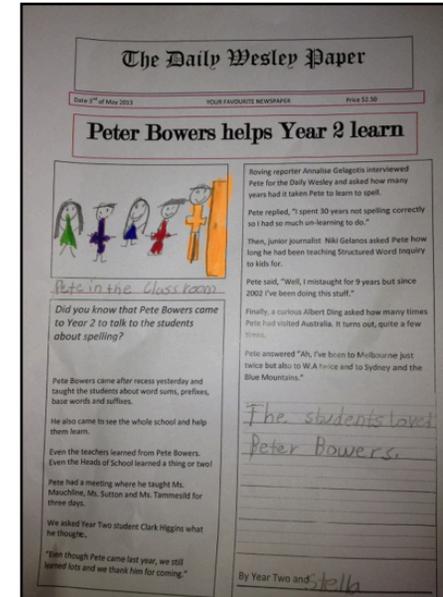
sparked enough interest that this trip I was invited to conduct workshops at [Plenty Valley Christian College](#), [St. Mark’s Dingley Catholic School](#), and Mullum Primary School (a public school).

Teachers from many more schools were introduced to this work this time around as well. Part of my work with Wesley was an intensive 3-day workshop for 8 of their teachers. However, they opened that session up to 8 teachers from the area as well. More than 30 teacher attended another 1-day workshop Wesley hosted and even more attended an evening workshop hosted by the Mullum Primary School.

There is no doubt that you will be hearing much more from Melbourne as this community of learners is truly on fire.

However, my most selfish pleasure during my three weeks of working with students and teachers in Melbourne was the remarkable number of new spelling discoveries I made simply by investigating words with these students.

Thanks to these students, I can pass on some of that new knowledge to all of you...



Grade 2 Students publish an article on Pete’s visit to Wesley College complete with interview!



Scenes from 3-day workshop at Wesley College, Melbourne

Left: Teachers dive into group spelling challenges.

Right: Craig Irvine, teacher from a Melbourne public school explains his group's hypothesis about the morphological and etymological relationships between the words <repercussions> and <concussion>.



Teachers from a 1-day workshop hosted by Wesley College (above, left) and an evening workshop hosted by Mullum Public School (below) learn from a Grade 7 student in Kuala Lumpur (above, right).

Click [here](#) to see the lessons this student has to teach all of us through his presentation of what he learned when he investigated the structure, meaning and history of the word <dissident>.



Just a few things I learned by working with students and teachers “Down Under”

📍 The structure of <magician>

Go to [this post](#) on Real Spellers that is a response to an exceptional question from Scott, a Grade 6 teacher at Wesley. He dove into an inquiry-led investigation about the spelling of the word <magician>. Only because Scott was open to following a hypothesis of one of his students did discover a base in this word that I had never considered before!

📍 The structure of <beauty>

I was asked to investigate <beautifully> by a Grade 6 class. They quickly saw that this word could be analyzed this way:

beauty/i + ful + ly → beautifully

However, now that the word sum showed the underlying spelling <beauty>, another question occurred to us. Could that final <y> be a suffix?

Maybe <beauty> is a *stem*, not a base. A [stem](#) is an already complex word - a base and at least one other morpheme - to which another morpheme is added. In this case, we wondered if <beauty> has a bound base <beaut> and a <-y> suffix?

We went to the [Word Searcher](#) and typed <beaut> in the search engine to investigate that hypothesis.

Search Results for "beaut"(13 matches)

| | | |
|----------|------------|-------------|
| beaut | beauteous | beautifies |
| beauts | beautiful | beauticians |
| beauty | beautician | beautifully |
| beauties | beautified | beautifying |
| beautify | | |

We were surprised to see <beaut> presented as a word! “Hmmm.” I thought aloud. “I don’t think that’s a complete word. I think it’s a ‘clip’ of a full word. Like when people say ‘She’s a *beaut* isn’t she?’ in talking about a new car or boat.

Off we went to Etymonline:

beaut (n.) 

1866, abbreviated form of *beauty* in the sense of "a beautiful thing or person."

[Etymonline](#) concurred with my hypothesis that <beaut> was a clip by calling it “abbreviated form”. We saw no evidence of a <-y> in <beauty> being replaced by any other suffix. Based on that evidence, I argued that we had to treat <beauty> as a base.

Having reached our conclusion, we went to the [Mini-Matrix-Maker](#) to build a matrix on the base <beauty>. I asked students to pick any word from the [Word Searcher](#) list to analyze into word sums as we built the family of word sums to make our matrix. By this time, students knew that they had to think about how to [spell-out words carefully](#) because I typed a plus sign in the word sum whenever they paused as that signalled a join between morphemes.

We ran into an exciting problem when I started to type out the word sum for the 2nd or 3rd word suggested by a student. We stumbled on spelling out the structure of this word when we realized that it didn’t analyze into a suffix we knew. This is how sums work. *They guide us away from false assumptions.*

In that moment, I saw clear evidence countering the conclusion I had just recommended to the class! It’s always such a gift when we get to learn something new right with our students.

Fortunately, I knew about connecting vowel letters. These are single vowel letter morphemes that act like suffixes in many ways. They replace single, silent <e>s like vowel suffixes, but they don’t cause doubling like most vowel suffixes do.

Suffixing Conventions References

-  [Big Suffix Checker](#) from Real Spelling.
-  [Interactive Suffix Checker](#) from Neil “Word Searcher” Ramsden.

Unlike suffixes, connecting vowel letters can never be final.

Connecting Vowel Letters

-  To learn about this morphological structure, find the free tutorial film on this topic in the “Morphology Album” of the [Real Spelling Gallery](#).



I had encountered this word <beauty> many times before. In fact I had investigated this very question with students many times. But in the past, I had always managed to ignore the evidence of one of the 13 words in that list.

I think it was two factors that helped me make the discovery this time around.

- 1) As is common, the student picked one of the more rare “advanced” (interesting?) words that I may well have never analyzed with a word sum.
- 2) My goal of helping students’ understanding encouraged me to be as precise as possible in the process of spelling-out and writing out word sums. That precision that I used “to help the students” brought new clarity to *my* own understanding.

My extra care in working with students brought evidence to light that forced me to abandon my previous hypothesis and realize that while <beaut> does seem to be a clip of <beauty>, it has grown into its own base that builds words with and without this <-y> suffix!

(See [Gina Cooke's TED talk](#) on <onion> which gets into the story of <one> and <lone> to see another interesting story of new bases being born.)



In case you didn't notice, I'm going to let you do your own analyses of the 13 Word Searcher words to see if you can find the word that sparked this discovery.

After you “have a go” yourself, you can zoom into the picture (at left) that I took of the matrix we built in that class to check your analysis against ours. Do [share](#)

any discoveries, questions or alternative analyses you identify.

🤖 Is <slown> a word?

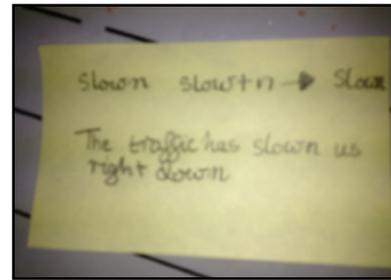
In yet another class we were working on the base <know> as part of a lesson like the one described [here](#) (with many resources for teachers to use).

To test the hypothesis that <known> uses an <-n> suffix, we looked for other words with this same suffix as I have done many times before. One student suggested <slown>.

I was about to disregard her hypothesis, but I have trained myself to follow students’ leads just in case. I just asked her for a sentence with this word. She responded matter-of-factly,

"The traffic has slown us right down."

Hmmm... That actually sounds kind of normal! I thought. I told at first I wasn't sure she had a “real word” but her sentence seemed convincing. I asked her to put her word on their wonder wall to remind me to look into it more deeply later.



Like me, the classroom teacher was dubious at first. But she agreed that this is was typical Melbourne usage.

Of course we can also say "The traffic has slowed us right down." But who are we to say <slown> is wrong?

Soon we we thought of other words such as <flown> and <shown> to add to our bank of words with an <-n> suffix.

And in case you are convinced that the word <slown> is not a legitimate word, you may want to take up your position with [these publications](#).

👤 The link between <responsibility>, <sponsor> and making a pledge

Another class offered a list of words relevant to their current studies that we might investigate. The word <responsibility> grabbed my eye for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is obviously a fundamental concept that is worth investigating carefully. As well, speaking from personal experience, I know just how often teachers struggle with the suffix <-ability>. Try as I might, I have found no way to analyze the letter sequence <ability> into two coherent suffixes. Until someone presents an analysis that can go deeper, we just need to accept this 7-letter suffix!

So with that prompt to create a lesson, I made a quick search on the words “responsibility” and “speech” with the assumption that I would find some inspiring statement about the nature of the concept of responsibility. It took about 2 minutes to find [this lovely statement](#) from an African leader named Selassie that I had never heard of before. With that quote at the ready, I created a few slides that I could use for a class investigation.

Investigate word *structure & meaning*

Selassie's speech on Responsibility
 It is both the duty and responsibility of the world's fortunate few to help fulfil the legitimate aspirations of the unfortunate many.
(Taken from: http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Selassie%27s_speech_on_Responsibility)

Mean?
 Built?
 Relatives?
 Pronunciation?

responsibility

prefix
Base
suffix

Structure Test & Meaning Test

The spelling & meaning test

I decided to model the process of going through the “[spelling and meaning test](#)” to identify a family of words related to the base of this word. This would give me a chance to model the use of [Etymonline](#), the [Word Searcher the Mini-Matrix-Maker](#).

As with the investigation of <beauty>, I was about to learn something about this word that never occurred to me before.

I encourage you to use the linked tools and resources to see if you can follow the trail that links the word <sponsor> and <responsibility> with a common bound base that has the underlying denotation “to pledge, promise”.

Summing up the learning in Melbourne

I have only shared four stories of new learning for me from a couple weeks with students. This only represents a small amount of the learning I gained in that time.

At the end of two weeks with Wesley I presented teachers with three group discussion questions as a means to assess structured word inquiry in comparison to typical spelling instruction:

- 1) What new facts about the spelling system or spelling-meaning connections did you learn in these two weeks?
- 2) What are some of the interesting spelling questions your students asked in your classes this week?
- 3) How would you respond to these questions in the years of instruction before you encountered Real Spelling and took on a structured word inquiry approach in your classroom?

I leave the reader to consider this question of whether the *learning of the teacher* and *the quality of the questions students ask* are a valid tools for assessing the quality of instruction.

Recent Teaching Resources on Real Spellers

Here are a couple of recent WW documents that I have created and posted on Real Spellers.

- **Teaching the spelling of a base**

Go to this [link](#) to get the newest WW document. I created it in response to a tutor who asked for help when a student who misspelled the base word <first> as <*ferst>. She didn't understand the reason for the <ir> digraph instead of the <er> and thus didn't know how to help her student.

Since this is such a common type of question, I need a practical guide for teaching the spelling of a base which also keeps teachers focused on the central target of structured word inquiry -- *ever deeper understanding of the spelling system, not learning the spelling of specific words one-at-time.*

The fact that individual words are not the *prime* focus of structured word inquiry does not mean that we cannot target individual words when we choose. Thus, I include a Real Spelling resource I use all the time to help students fix the spellings of individual words in their long term memory.

- **The spelling & Meaning Test**

Go to this [link](#) for a document I've been using to help students and teachers understand the scientific process to determine the nature of the relationship between any two words that appear to have a spelling connection.

- **Lesson Plans Folder on Real Spellers**

The "Spelling & Meaning Test" document is just one of many available in the "Lesson Plans" folder on Real Spellers. Go there now for ideas for lessons from K-12.

2012-2013 Structured Word Inquiry MVP?

There are a number of sources behind the explosion of learning evident around the world this year. [Real Spelling](#), [LEX](#) and [WordWorks](#) continue to evolve and grow in terms of the guidance they offer to educators trying to make sense of English spelling and how it can be taught.

[Real Spellers](#) has become a particularly important resource for this community. This site offers an electronic meeting space where teachers, tutors and linguists share their learning from investigations, seek advice and share lessons and resources.

Tools like the [Word Searcher](#) and [Etymonline](#) have long been available to help guide the learning of students and teachers.

The recent refinements of the [Word Microscope](#) and the new [Mini-Matrix-Maker](#) have added a major new support for this learning.

However, even with all of the above, something particularly special has happened this year. If I had to suggest an MVP award for inspiring and influential work in 2012 - 2013, I would have to nominate to the classroom blogs listed under the "Key Links" box on the [WordWorks home page](#).



Classroom Blogs

- ◆ [Dan Allen's Grade 5 Class](#)
- ◆ [Skot Caldwell's Grade 1 Class](#)
- ◆ [Jen Munnerlyn's Grade 1-5](#)
- ◆ [Mrs. Steven's Grade 5 Class](#)
- ◆ [Ann Whiting's Grade 7 Class](#)



On-Line Resources Supporting Structured Word Inquiry

- ◆ [Etymonline](#)
- ◆ [Word Searcher](#)
- ◆ [Word Microscope](#)
- ◆ [Mini MatrixMaker](#)

Class Room Blogs & Structured Word Inquiry: Student reflections learning from the scientific study of the spelling-meaning structure and history of words

For me, the highlights of the entire year in terms of evidence of student learning are contained in a number of recent Classroom Blog posts. Teachers from these blogs decided to offer their students an opportunity to reflect on their own learning from studying spelling. The discussions and videos that resulted are moving, inspirational illustrations of learning far beyond what many suspect is possible in elementary classrooms.

But the evidence of what is possible is all right out there ready for you to explore. So let's get to the links.

In no particular order...

👤 ***Mrs. Steven's Grade 5 Blog***

MRS. STEVEN'S CLASSROOM BLOG

Go to this [link](#) to see the post "What Have We Learned So Far?" I showed just the first half of the first video from this blog at the end of my two weeks of workshops at Wesley College. When the head of curriculum spoke at the end to up my time at the school, she specifically pointed to this video as an inspiring example of what kids can learn when we give them the opportunity. The understanding and enthusiasm shown by these students is even more impressive once we realize that this summary of learning happened only 3 months after Mrs. Steven's introduction to Real Spelling and structured word inquiry when she happened upon [Dan Allen's Grade 5 blog](#).

I also have to point you to [this more recent post](#) in which we get a window into what happened when Mrs. Steven's class began sharing their learning with Grade 4 students.

How lucky that we get to gain from Mary Beth's participation in the July 2-4 WW Course!

👤 ***Dan Allen's Grade 5 Blog***



This blog is in its second year. If you go back to the archives, you will see that the first year contains some of the most inspirational examples of learning one could hope to find in a Grade 5 class. However, that was Dan's very first year working with Real Spelling. I was struck by a comment he made to me before Christmas this year. He said, "Pete, we're already ahead of where we were at the end of last year in so many ways."

This is a comment worth considering. It is not that Dan suddenly received a group of students that were twice as advanced. The difference was that Dan's understanding had evolved after a year of studying spelling with his students.

This story from Dan was a major inspiration for me to frame the question to assess spelling instruction mentioned earlier:

"What new facts about the spelling-meaning structure of words have you learned as result of your classroom instruction?"

Like Dan, any teacher who uses scientific inquiry to guide their instruction of the written word will continually refine their own understanding and thus refine and improve their instruction.

To see examples of what his students have to share at the end of this year, click [here](#) for his “Orthography Reflection” post.

Here are just a couple of “teasers” illustrating the kind of observations Dan’s students have to offer:

Sebastian: “I’ve never been good at memorizing, but I’ve always liked exploring and investigating.”

Nicky: “The experience of orthography changed my life. Now when I write I know how to spell words, but not only that, I also now know how to investigate them.”

👤 *Ann Whiting’s Grade 5 Blog*



Ann has been working with Real Spelling since before I encountered it. That tells you that she has been refining her understanding and classroom practice for a *long* time!

The video of the student describing his learning from the investigation of <dissident> that I use at almost all of my workshops was from her class a year or two ago.

I hope you all go visit [Ann’s end of year post](#) with her students’ reflections. And as with all of these blogs, I encourage you to

read (and add to!) the comment section. Here’s an excerpt of a comment by Mary Beth Steven that also gives you a sense of what Anne’s students are thinking:

We also had a lovely discussion regarding Shamir’s thought, “...it’s like knowing the name of someone but then actually getting to know him or her, because with a word when you start searching for its roots, you get a connection with it.” We remembered back to the first day of school when we knew so little about each other. We thought about how our relationships have grown in such wonderful ways, and we agreed that Shamir thought of a beautiful analogy!

👤 *Skot Caldwell’s Grade 1 Blog*



The addition of Skot’s Grade 1 Blog to the set of resources from which our community can learn has been invaluable. Explore any post for wonderful examples of learning through study of the spelling system in a Grade 1 class.

[This most recent post](#) is a wonderful window on how Skot integrates this work seamlessly into reading instruction -- and much more.

And with that, Sus and I thank you all for another great school year with WordWorks!

Pete Bowers, May 31, 2013