

WORDWORKS NEWSLETTER #76

Getting Started: Small sparks fire ever deepening understanding

Oct 25-26 in Illinois

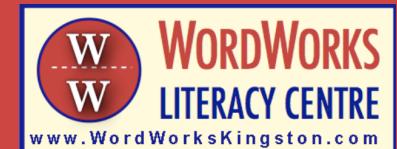
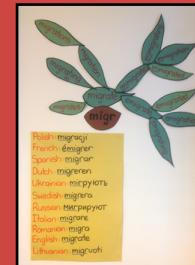
Pete Bowers & Gina Cooke

- Click [here](#) for information and to register for this co-led workshop in Edwards, Illinois.

Feb 7-8, 2015

Workshop in Kuala Lumpur

- Click [here](#) for a flyer with more information and registration.
Pass on to colleagues in the area.



WW Summer Course

2015 dates confirmed!

July 28-30, 2015

Wolfe Island, ON

See details [here](#).

Email to book a spot.

October 1, 2014

Highlights

Stories of small sparks...

Getting started

- ♦ Learning with teachers and students from my trip to schools in China, Germany, and Switzerland
- ♦ Lessons from Lyn Anderson (focus on early years)
- ♦ A rich Real Spellers discussion (novices & experts)
- ♦ A great innovation with the LEX grapheme cards
- ♦ Announcing new resources for getting started:
 - ❖ Videos of class lessons by Pete @ Zurich International School
 - ❖ School-Wide Structured Word Inquiries

Details

Stories of small sparks growing into healthy fires

This fall sees a great many learners encountering structured word inquiry for the first time. Three of my four school visits in September were introductory workshops. I have just returned from presenting a keynote and 3 breakout sessions to enthusiastic participants at the IDA “Reading in the Rockies” conference. In the next weeks I will be presenting a keynote at Everybody Reading Illinois and a session at the Ontario IDA in Toronto.

It seems like an apt time for a WW Newsletter that focuses on the interest of those trying to get started.

Fortunately, as upcoming stories illustrate, those with deep knowledge and experience gain a great deal by revisiting key content for beginners. You will also see that it is common for the insights of novices to deepen the understanding of “experts”.

I have included many resources and links to help teachers get started. But getting *moving* is about *motivation*. And motivation requires *understanding*.

Understanding where we are getting started toward!

Lesson ideas start on page 6 if you want to jump there first. For the moment, I want to paint a picture of the understanding those lessons are building toward, and share stories of how a number of teachers and schools have deepened their understanding from small first steps.

In retrospect it is easy to see the generative power of our first tentative attempts investigating the spelling system with word sums, matrices and spelling-out word structure. Perhaps a little preview of their transformative power will help those at the starting line take that first step.

Consider the following email from a mom to the principal at the Nueva School.

(See more about the learning going on at Nueva right from pre-school [in this Newsletter](#).)

Recently, the principal (Emily) and other educators (Stephanie and Gail) presented a brief introduction of structured word inquiry for parents. Margarita attended that session. She and Eli are the parents of Max (Grade 2) and Maia (Kindergarten).

After that session, Margarita sent the principal the email that follows.

Emily,

During dinner we told Max that we met with you, Stephanie and Gail this morning, and Eli commented on how he wished that as a child he had learned about the English language through Structured Word Inquiry. Max's face lit up and said he could teach us, and he ran for paper to make a word matrix for us to see. It was so much fun to watch his excitement as he explained how it works. Then he "challenged" us to fill in a word matrix that he made for us. Even Maia jumped in and offered her own contributions to the matrix. By the end of the meal, it had turned into a family affair!

Best,
Margarita

What a beautiful little vignette about the joy of learning sparked in young children investigating the structure and meaning of related words with the matrix. The fact that these children are in a school that is going to continue to nurture that learning year after year is truly exciting.



Click [here](#) to consider what Mary Beth Steven's Grade 5 students in a public school in Wisconsin tell us about their experiences after just one year of investigating orthography rather than memorizing spelling.

A path of ever deepening understanding is about the long game, it has nothing to do with speed.

Once a path of scientific inquiry about a domain begins, understanding deepens over time.

The quality of learning that occurs in this way was brought into sharp relief on my September trip. I ended up encountering many teachers I first met during workshops 4 to 5 years ago. I was so proud of the extent to which these teachers have been deepening their understanding and refining their practice ever since.

What is it about this work that a two-day workshop can foster this sort of long-term foundational shift in practice?

Scientific inquiry is not a program.

Teachers at different schools on this trip made the same observation that I think is central to understanding how this could be. They noted the contrast between structured word inquiry and “programs.” They described their initial skepticism about Real Spelling as just another program that would come and then go again. That perception changed, however, once structured word inquiry brought clarity to *their own understanding* of spellings previous training presented as “irregular” or “exceptions.”

When teachers gain the clarity of understanding that comes from scientific inquiry of the spelling-meaning structure of spelling, they have reason to believe that they are not being asked to put effort into learning something that will just change a few years later.

The power of this scientific path can be glimpsed through the straight forward analysis of the <do> and <go> word families with a matrix and word sums. Outside of the Real Spelling community, I have never seen the words <does>, <done> and <gone> described as anything but “irregular” spellings. Once we understand these spellings with the help of the matrix and word sums, we simply cannot *un*-understand them.

A morphological matrix for
<do> and <go>

do	ing	es
go	ne	

Word Sums for <do> and <go>

do + ing → doing	go + ing → going
do + es → does	go + es → goes
do + ne → done	go + ne → gone

Real understanding endures. These linguistic tools offer 100% clear evidence that at least some words presented as “irregular” by all our previous training are in fact conventional and thus *understandable*.

In and of itself, this should be sufficient evidence for teachers to conclude that they have good reason to take time to use these tools to test their understanding of other spellings. When linguistic tools clarify spellings previous training presented as irregular, we have all the evidence we need to conclude that something had to be seriously flawed about that previous training.

The scientific rigour of the matrix and word sum spark movement down a path of ever-deepening understanding. We gain *a means to reject a long-held assumption that turns out to be false*. We can’t know if we are on a safe path until we learn how to identify the unsafe ones.

The workshop was fascinating, but overwhelming. I don’t know how to start. What can one teacher do?

This is a common and understandable reaction. Two days is not enough time to understand the details of the spelling system. It is, however, enough to provide evidence that there is an understanding to seek out.

Before succumbing to feelings of helplessness, consider the following stories.

Shekou International School

My invitation to Shekou was the result of one teacher who attended my workshop with Lyn Anderson in Kuala Lumpur last year and another who had been working with Real Spelling since another session with me years earlier.

In a wonderful surprise, three teachers new to Shekou International School had attended workshops with me at three different schools over the years. Each of these teachers have continued with this work ever since.

It is worth considering how these teachers described their reaction to my first workshop years ago. In each case they described the same sense of being fascinated, overwhelmed and unsure of how to start. Clearly that sense did not get in their way of getting started!

Dresden International School (DIS)

My first workshop at this school was a couple of years ago. That first visit was the result of a single teacher, Bri, attending a two-day workshop four years ago. Bri was so energized by that workshop that she got her friend Ann (then a fellow Grade 4 teacher) to dive in with her.



Bri and Ann at Dresden International School.

Real Spelling Community News

Potential 2015 WW Workshop Dates

Email [Pete](#) if you want to link a school visit to one of the following trips being planned at the moment.

Kuala Lumpur: Feb 7-8, 2015 (*See flyer [here](#).*)

Melbourne: March 14 - 21, 2015 (*Co-led with Lyn Anderson*)

San Francisco: Early March, 2015

I would love to link another school visit to the Kuala Lumpur trip.

San Francisco is linking to my Melbourne trip. If you are able to link to one of these, let me know asap.

Real Spelling Tool Box 2 News

Go to www.realpselling.fr to the latest news about this foundational resource for our community of learners trying to make sense of English spelling.



A new LEXinar with Gina Cooke & Douglas (Etymonline) Harper

Click [here](#) for information about this exciting new Lexinar from Gina Cooke. What a treat to not only learn from Douglas' spectacular ever-evolving on-line etymological dictionary (how could one person do that!!!!). Take any LEXinar you can with Gina. I hope to see more and more opportunities for teachers and students to learn from Douglas as well!

On my return this year, Bri had moved to Grade 1 and Ann is still in Grade 4. Both are doing astonishing work. Our picture together was taken immediately after an amazing lesson with Ann's Grade 4 class that addressed bound bases and connecting vowel letters in words like <geography> and <biology>. I didn't plan to go this far, but her students' questions showed that they were ready for this analysis in early September.

(See Mary Beth Steven's Grade 5 students present their analysis of these words and the connecting vowel letter [at this recent post](#) on her blog.)

Earlier that day I got to watch Bri teach a masterful Grade 1 lesson that integrated morphological knowledge with their big book.



It was also Bri that came up with the wonderful idea of laminating and organizing [Gina Cooke's LEX cards](#) into single letter graphemes, digraphs and trigraphs on a ring for easy reference.

Note how this organization illustrates that the number of digraphs (under the <ph> card) dwarfs the number of single letter graphemes (under the <n> card)!

As is typical of return visits, other teachers found these workshops so valuable. Their learning over the past two years allowed them to make deeper sense of the same content. The learning spiral is powerful -- but it requires the opportunity to revisit!

International School of Lausanne

It turns out that two teachers at this school attended the same workshop as Bri in Sofia about 4 years ago. They have been working away with structured word inquiry ever since. This was the year that their hard work with students and fellow staff resulted in PD for their whole school. The response from teachers has already been astounding.



PYP Co-ordinator Jonathan Twigg consults Etymonline with a teacher during our 2-day workshop in Lausanne. On his right, Lisa Marlow, one of the teachers who sparked this work from my workshop 4 years ago works with another teacher.

(See page 7 for an example of rich learning from a teacher just getting started at Lausanne.)

Zurich International School This was the fourth school I visited on this trip. Regular WordWorks readers will know this as the school hosting [Dan Allen's amazing blog](#). This school did not get its start with one of my workshops, but with one teacher, Dan, whose learning has been planting seeds of understanding at his school and around the world.

(See more about the the lesson I got to teach with Dan's class, and a link to the video of that lesson on page 9.)

Why share these stories?

It feels (and probably is!) somewhat self-serving to share stories of this kind of long-term generative change in understanding and teacher practice based on an introductory 2-day workshop.

I want to emphasize, however, that the essential active ingredient in structured word inquiry is *not me*. This kind of deepening and expanding learning is only possible because teachers are taking on ***scientific inquiry*** of an ***ordered system*** -- English spelling.

Students and teachers need to develop an accurate understanding of how their writing system works. What means could possibly be more appropriate than scientific inquiry for developing a deep, generative understand a complex domain of knowledge?

For the rest of this Newsletter, I point to stories and resources that I hope facilitate teachers jumping in and getting started. There is no hurry to “know answers” but I do suggest that teachers and tutors don’t delay in starting the process of making sense of spelling.

The sooner you start -- the more time you have to learn!

Lessons from Lyn (focus on the early years)

WordWorks regulars will know how often I point to the work of Lyn Anderson and her [Beyond the Word Blog](#). I want to emphasize that my workshops in Sofia years ago and in Kuala Lumpur last year that sparked so much of this learning were both co-led with Lyn.

I asked Lyn if she would share links to posts on her blog that she recommends as particularly useful starting points for teachers trying to get started. Here they are!

Getting started links suggested by Lyn

- [Starting the learning journey](#)
- [Teaching orthography in the early years](#)
- [Can we teach orthography to young children?](#)
- [The power of kinaesthetic learning](#)
- [Starting the learning journey \(article on Real Spellers\)](#)

Integrating SWI with content area study: Learning from a teacher’s first go at SWI!

There were many rich classroom lessons during my September trip. Ironically, however, I was not even present (nor was I needed) for one of my favourite lessons that grew out of these school visits. Consider the richness of the following example of a teacher’s first jump into Structured Word Inquiry.

On my first day at Lausanne, I had 40 minute sessions with each grade level group. Most of these teachers had no background at all in structured word inquiry. I decided that the best way to make use of this time was to ask teachers for key concepts coming up in the next week. In the Grade 5 group it was the topic of <immigration>.

I modelled a quick investigation of this word that brought us to the words <migrant> and <migrate>. Those words helped us hypothesize the bound base <migr>.

With the help of Etymonline, we found these words share the Latin root 'migr(are)' for “*to remove, depart, to move from one place to another*”. We constructed the following word sums that show the structural link between these etymologically and morphologically related words:

im + **migr** + ate/ + ion → migration

migr + ant → migrant

migr + ate → mirate

I then showed teachers how they could make a quick matrix with this word family on the [Mini-Matrix Maker](#) or the [Word Microscope](#).

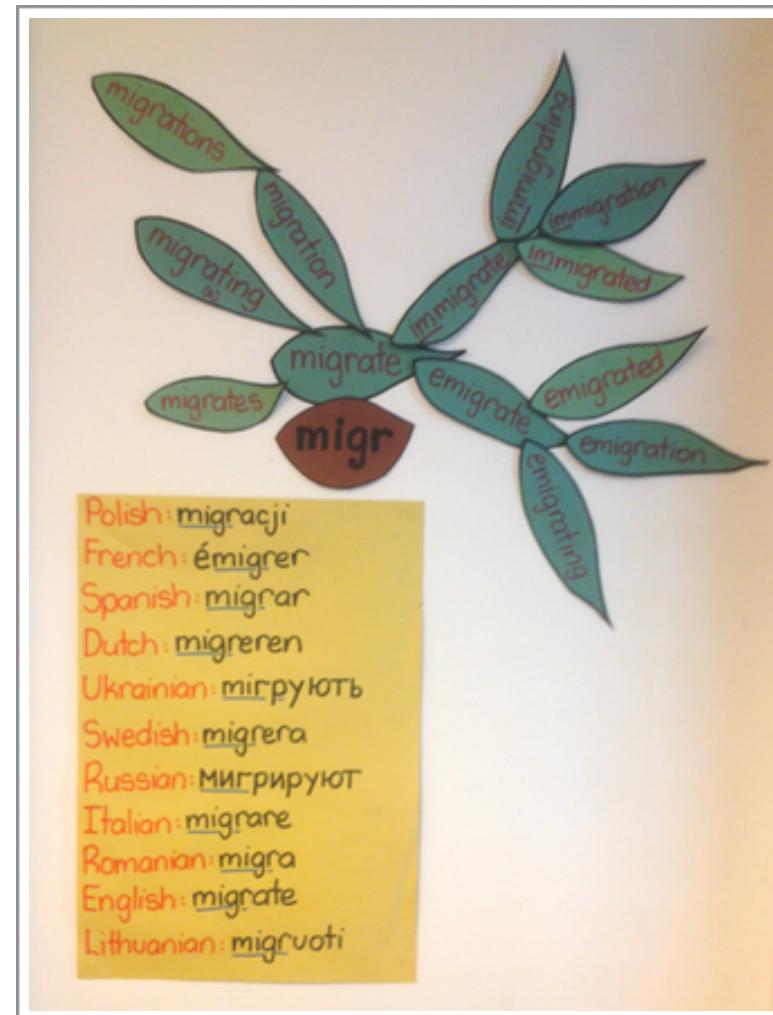
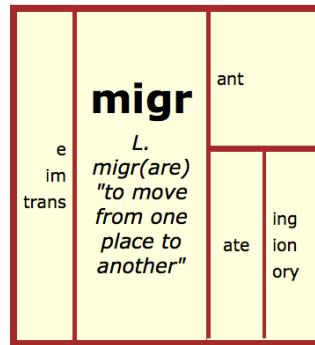
With this background -- all of 40 minutes of PD -- one of the teachers, Graeme, went back to his Grade 5 class to have a go. He later told me that the kids were so on fire that their investigation ended extending over multiple class periods. That session culminated in an amazing idea that had never occurred to me before.

There are many native languages in Graeme's class, so he simply asked students to share the word and spelling for <migration> in their language.

Apparently, as each student spelled out their word, the class started to tremble with excitement as they reached "m-i-g...." and then with the common <r>, the whole class erupted in applause!

(When I shared this story with Dan Allen, he promptly used it for his own class and shared [this post on his blog](#).)

As if this was not an exciting enough start to structured word inquiry for Graeme and his class -- a few days later, I received the following email from him...



The poster above is the result of the investigation in Graeme's class. It shows their morphological web of the <migr> family, and their multilingual discoveries after a 40 minute introduction to structured word inquiry.

Hi Pete,

Today we enquired into <their>, <there>, <they're> like you demonstrated. AMAZING engagement, AMAZING hypothesis, AMAZING understandings!

Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

After we enquired, I gave each table a pile of books. They had 15 minutes to try and search for any sentences using the words <there> <their> or <they're> and write on the table's chart. To make it fun, we made it into a little contest of which group could find the most examples.

I just sent you a visual.

[Note: Follow the links to my [video lessons](#) at ZIS and watch the Grade 1 video to see how I addressed the spellings <there> and <their>. Also, The only editing I did to Graeme's email was the addition of angle brackets <>. It is just too confusing without them. Graeme's "error" allows me to draw attention to the importance of this convention for presenting spellings in text.]

Knowing that there is a story behind every spelling is needed to start looking for those stories.

There are a number of reasons I decided to share these stories from Graeme's class. One reason is that I hope that these are such rich ways of bringing structured word inquiry alive in the classroom that I hope that it inspires the reader to draw from this work like Dan already has.



A rich discussion on **Real Spellers** with novice, experienced and expert Real Spellers

In early September, Rebecca published [this short post](#) on Real Spellers titled “*Schema and phonology*”. It has to do with a great story about encountering the word <schedule> with a student. She explains that she is learning to move away from an over-reliance on phonology and is seeking feedback about how she responded to questions about this word. Rich responses follow, including one with important information about the English language and English orthography from the Old Grouch.

On Sept 30 an OG tutor near the beginning of reframing her own understanding of English spelling published another short post on this string, titled, “*Shaky Ground in New Learning*”. Click [here](#) for that post.

I'm so glad to see Real Spelling posts from people just getting started with this work! She does such a great job of articulating the kinds of questions and dilemmas teachers and tutors new to Real Spelling face. Click [here](#) to read my response to “Shaky Ground’s” questions.

Real Spellers: Our Electronic Meeting Space

This string of posts illustrates how Real Spellers facilitate the collaborative learning our community is built on.

Posting and commenting on Real Spellers is a great way to build not only your own understanding, but that of our whole community.

If you don't get a response to your post or comment after a while, please [email me](#). I know that if I respond to a question on Real Spellers, I'm reaching a wider community, and one with many colleagues who can catch flaws or limitations in my understanding.

I'm looking forward to teachers using Real Spellers as a venue to present their work for our scientific community. I (with Matt Berman's help!) are happy to help with any technical difficulties you might have posting images, movies, etc.

Thanks to regular readers, posters and commentators on Real Spellers!

But secondly, this is also clear evidence that teachers do not need to feel they understand all of this content to just get in there and get started.

These stories illustrate that you do not need to be an "expert" who knows the "answers" before you start. It is common that those new to this work (teachers or students) spark the richest learning for our whole community.

The Structure & Meaning Test: Help from the introduction to the Word Microscope

If I were to highlight just one other practice, along with "[spelling out word structure](#)" and [Real Script](#) that is essential for beginning to deepen your understanding of English spelling, it would be the ability to apply the "[structure and meaning test](#)" to test your own hypotheses of the spelling-meaning connections.



I recommend that you print off and work through [this document](#) explaining the steps of an investigation of the structure of the word <discovery> as you watch the video.

Even if you only have Mac and cannot use this computer tool, I highly recommend [this video](#) of that investigation, and [this pdf](#) as a reference to have on hand as you watch the film. Working though this investigation models the basics of the structure and meaning test in action. If you do have a PC, the pdf will allow you to pinpoint the key features of the WM and how it guides such investigations.

(See [this post](#) on Real Spellers to see how my son Skyler used the Word Microscope to build a matrix that links the word <antidisestablishmentarianism>, <constant> and <stable>)!

Additional Resources for "Getting Started"

❖ [School-Wide Learning from studying the spellings <love> <know> and <come>](#)

I have long pointed to resources and stories from schools about the richness of investigations about these three every-day words. Click [here](#) for a document that pulls these resources together.

My hope is that schools will take advantage of the possibility of having multiple grades -- even an entire elementary section studying about different aspects of English spelling by using the same word as the launching pad at the same time.

❖ [Videos of Pete Teaching in Grade 1 and 5 Classrooms & an Introductory Workshop for teachers at ZIS](#)

During my visit to the Zurich International School, Dan Allen made sure to capture video of each of the lessons I taught and the one-hour introductory workshop I offered. He promptly posted those videos on his blog. [This short document](#) introduces those lessons and offers points to links for resources on the orthographic concepts related to those lessons. See me teach the <sign> lesson from my teacher resource book and other lessons to help you get started.

This screenshot shows a website page with a title bar. Below the title, there is a large image of a classroom. To the right of the image, there is text describing the document as a school-wide presentation on spelling inquiry. It includes a link to [www.wordworkskingston.com](#).

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