

# WordWorks Newsletter #87:

## New teachers learn fast in schools where SWI is well-established



Hello all,

May 19, 2017

I recently returned from an amazing set of workshops in Bangkok (co-led by [Fiona Hamilton](#)) and Melbourne (co-led by [Lyn Anderson](#)). In both locations I got to see the generative learning that happens at schools investing in on-going professional development in SWI over an extended time.

In this Newsletter I reflect on an aspect of the learning I saw at schools that have committed to supporting SWI for a number of years now. As suggested by the title, I see an exciting pattern of surprisingly effective and rapid adoption of SWI by teachers who arrive at schools where SWI is already established as a basic part of their literacy instruction.

I also point to the many workshop opportunities coming up and highlight a couple of them along with illustrations that reinforce the theme of this Newsletter.

### Read on for the following:

- **Details about two special leaning opportunities:**
  - [Nueva SWI Institute](#) (Click [HERE](#) for the new SWI page on the Nueva website!)
  - [5-day university course at the University of Alberta](#).
- **New SWI videos and tales from the field:**
  - Page 3: Nueva pre-school teacher Carolee Fucigna and her students create a morphological word web on the base <rain>. (Carolee is a special presenter at the [Nueva Institute](#))
  - Page 9: An inspiring example of an etymologically driven activity by a Grade 2 teacher who attended one SWI workshop with me in 2015.
- **Reflections on teacher learning in schools where SWI is established.**

## Upcoming WW Workshops

- **June 26-30: SWI Nueva Institute** near San Francisco. **June 26-27 (Part 1), June 28-30 (Part 2)**  
Part 2 includes **special presentations by Nueva teachers** teaching in early literacy, elementary and middle school contexts. Click [HERE](#) for a flyer and information. For more Information and registration [HERE](#).
- **July 18-21:** First 4-day WW SWI Summer Course on Wolfe Island. (Wait list started). [Email Pete](#) for details.
- **August 17-18, Edmonton:** 2-day SWI workshop hosted by Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium. Details and register [HERE](#).
- **August 21-25, Edmonton:** 5-Day SWI university course at the University of Alberta. Open to undergrad, graduate students and non-students. Details to be announced. [Email Pete](#) to inquire about this exciting opportunity. See the course outline [HERE](#).
- **Sept 18-21, Japan:** Workshop at Saint Maur International School (Contact [Pete](#) if you might be interested in a workshop just before or just after these dates in this region.)
- **October, 19-20, Bay Area:** Pete presenting at [Innovative Learning Conference](#) hosted by [The Nueva School](#).
- **October 25, Chicago:** Pete presenting a Keynote, break-out session and workshop at Everybody Reading Illinois conference.
- **November 17-18, Lausanne, Switzerland:** Public WordWorks SWI workshop hosted by International School of Lausanne. Details TBA. Email Jonathan Twigg, <[JTwigg@isl.ch](mailto:JTwigg@isl.ch)>

## A spotlight on two upcoming workshops

- [Nueva SWI Summer Institute](#): June 26 - 30  
*June 26-27 (Part 1) June 28-30 (Part 2)*

These annual workshops have been key in making the Bay Area the richest hub for understanding and practice of SWI that I know of.

The 5-day structure is extremely rich. People new to this work can get started with the 2-day intro, or take a deep dive into the full 5-day course. Those with a strong background also find the 5-day course extremely helpful. The SWI community knows the value of revisiting the same key concepts again and again over time in different contexts. As our understanding grows, so does our ability to perceive key -- but more subtle -- orthographic concepts that are missed on first encounters. Those who have experience, but are unable to take the full course, can take just the advanced 3-day course. Part 2 starts with orthographic investigations, so participants need to be ready to jump right in. It is also important that this course takes place outside of school time so that teachers can focus on *their* understanding without the pressure of teaching the next day.

### ***Nueva Teachers as Guest SWI Presenters (Part 2)***

Last year we started to have presentations by Nueva teachers. The chance for participants to learn from fellow teachers in these workshops was a highlight in the 2016 SWI Institute. (See more about this when I discuss the ELC International workshop in Bangkok later in this Newsletter.)

For the 2017 Nueva Institute, we have built on last year's success by formalizing these presentations. We have a stellar line up of presenters already planning how they will represent their own perspectives of working with SWI in the early years, in the elementary grades and in middle school. We also have a presentation on Real Script by Nueva's resident "SWI coach" Rebecca Loveless. (See her excellent SWI website [HERE](#).)

## Images from 2016 SWI Nueva Summer Institute



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1. [Rebecca Loveless](#), current SWI coach at Nueva, leads a session on Real Script.



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- 2 - 5 Nueva teachers, visiting teachers and parents dive into engaging SWI investigations.



5

6. Nueva teacher Sam Modest presents on his SWI learning to the group. See [THIS VIDEO](#) of Sam describing the process of how he has been revising structures in his room for the recording of their classroom investigations.



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## “Break-Out Session” for Early Years & Upper Elementary

Most of those presentations will be to the full group, but we will also use “break-out sessions” for a presentation for SWI in the early years by Nueva teachers while I work with teachers of older students to dive more deeply into investigating upper elementary vocabulary.

The Early years presentation will be by Carolee Figucina (pre-school) and Lorraine Ray (kindergarten). Without exaggeration, these two have become world leaders for SWI in the early years. They’ve been deepening their understanding and practice for years now. Carolee runs workshops on SWI in the early literacy that are extremely well received. The combination of students learning with Carolee and then entering Lorraine’s class in Kindergarten has helped me see what is possible when children receive linguistically accurate word-level literacy instruction from the start through SWI.



See Carolee and her pre-schoolers investigate words in the morphological word family of <rain> in [THIS NEW VIDEO](#). I’m so excited to be able to share this video that illustrates so clearly how straight forward it can be to introduce young children to morphological families even when many are not yet readers. Go to [Rebecca Loveless’ blog post](#) for her excellent analysis of this lesson.

## 5-Day University Course on SWI by Pete Bowers at The University of Alberta in Edmonton: August 21 – 25.

Click [HERE](#) to download the course outline for the 5-day SWI course at the U of A is (after after the [2-day ERLC workshop](#) in Edmonton). The chance to investigate orthography through SWI and study in linguistic and educational research for 5 days is a rare opportunity to really dive deeply into this work. The course is not only open to graduate students and undergraduate students BUT ALSO to *non-students*. If you are up for really taking time to deepen your understanding, this will be a great opportunity.

For registration and/or inquiries, please email Dr. Rauno Parilla <[rparrila@ualberta.ca](mailto:rparrila@ualberta.ca)> and/or myself at <[peterbowers1@mac.com](mailto:peterbowers1@mac.com)>.

## Initial reflections on the growing SWI community in Bangkok and Melbourne

Here are just two of comments I received in emails from participants in the public workshops I co-led in Bangkok and then Melbourne.

*“Thanks so much for the life changing PD last week. The team have arrived back in Tokyo and are super excited - all of us - to get started!”*

**Cassie Kitani**, Elementary Principal, Saint Maur International School, Japan.

*“We need you in Australia!”*

**David Hornsby**, author, education consultant, and long-time educational inspiration for Lyn and Jim Anderson along with countless Australian educators over the last number of decades.

## **New teachers learn fast in schools where SWI is well-established**

It is not surprising that teachers who teach with SWI for a few years keep deepening their orthographic understanding and instructional practice. This is especially true for those who take advantage of on-going PD opportunities.

To be clear, the learning I am seeing in these experienced teachers is not just from my workshops. As our SWI community has grown, so have the opportunities for on-going learning. More and more teachers are taking advantage of on-line learning with [Spellinars](#), [LEXinars](#), on-line social networks and other on-line SWI-based courses such as those from the [Dyslexia Training Institute](#). As well, more and more locations have access to SWI expertise for on-going PD. Melbourne has been gaining from visits by Lyn Anderson ([Beyond the Word](#)) and local educational consultant extraordinaire Julie Shepherd. Bangkok has Fiona Hamilton's new "[A Place For Words](#)" providing on-going PD at her own school and beyond. The Bay Area has [Rebecca Loveless](#) offering her own PD. These examples represent just a hint of the current SWI expertise providing leadership around the world.

What stood out for me on these recent trips to Bangkok and Melbourne, however, was the collateral effect that long-term teacher learning has on a whole school community. At [ELC International](#) in Bangkok, and at [Wesley College](#) and other schools in Melbourne, teachers who were new to SWI were so much further along than I expected. Why might that be?

In retrospect, this learning dynamic makes perfect sense.

Teachers who are part of a school's first year of taking on SWI don't have experienced on-site partners (teachers *and* students) to learn with. By contrast, when a new teacher arrives into a culture of learners with expertise to share, it only makes sense that the rate of learning is accelerated.

We learn second languages more effectively and efficiently when we learn with native speakers. Anyone who plays a sport or an instrument knows that the learning curve is increased when we get the opportunity to learn with people whose knowledge and skills are greater than our own.

Why shouldn't this be the case for learning SWI?

Every school has routines and curricular content that new teachers need time and support to catch up in. At Wesley, ELC International, the Nueva School and more and more schools, SWI is just another area for which new teachers need support.

When teachers realize that they have entered a school in which teachers and students have special knowledge about word structure that is new to them, they are motivated to seek guidance to catch up. Of course new teachers get crucial guidance from their colleagues who have been working at this understanding of English spelling for some time. Mentor systems are often established for SWI, and these are extremely valuable. But we should not underestimate the effect of the *student* knowledge for the learning of new teachers.

Improved student learning is a direct effect of the deeper understanding teachers gain over years of work with SWI. Crucially, students in classrooms of these teachers become more effective "spelling scientists" and then take that knowledge with them into their next grade. These students become a force for orthographic learning in their own schools.

While it is logical that teachers become confident with SWI faster when they enter a community with knowledge and expertise in this area, it was inspiring to see so much evidence of this in both Bangkok and Melbourne. In a related note, this dynamic of the effect of *student learning* is being cited more and more as I get requests to work with middle divisions at schools where PD for SWI had previously only targeted the elementary section. Children keep raising our village!

## A Place for Words: Fiona Hamilton's new SWI Initiative at ELC International in Bangkok provides a case in point

Fiona Hamilton has been working with Real Spelling and SWI as long as I have. It turns out we were both at the same 45 minute workshop in Bangkok in 2001! She took her learning to the Jakarta International School, then as a VP at the International School of Beijing (where she brought me for some of my first overseas workshops) and finally as a principal at ELC in Bangkok for a couple of years. This year she moved into a new role as a SWI coach for ELC teachers to conduct PD for other schools in the region through [A Place for Words](#). I've been able to make a few trips to her school over the last three years. This latest visit was the second in this same school year -- and in this short time I saw the greatest growth in teacher learning I've seen there yet.

At our 3-day workshop, Fiona had teachers from across the grades present on their experiences with SWI in their classrooms. In many ways these presentations were the highlight of the workshop for teachers. The teacher presenters made it clear that they were still figuring out their own way with SWI, but this didn't prevent their students from having inspiring learning experiences. The stories from their classrooms and example lessons these teachers shared made it clear that you can just get started before you feel confident in "having the answers". There is nothing Fiona and I could do that would convey that message better than hearing from teachers on that same journey. (Keep this in mind for the [Nueva Institute!](#))

Risa is a Grade 3 teacher at ELC who hasn't been there for the full year and was totally new to SWI. She and her co-teacher Becky (also new to SWI but already fully engaged in it) presented in the workshop about their investigation of the word <imagine>. With the help of Etymonline, they arrived at their first hypothesis that <image> was the base of <imagine>, but then on closer look, they and *their students* revised their

hypothesis. They found evidence that <image> has a base and a suffix!

These novice teachers -- working together with their SWI savvy students -- were dead right!

It took me *years* to realize that <image> is not a base. I often still investigate this morphological family with teachers and students without revealing that <image> is a complex word that can be further analyzed. There is no obligation to fully analyze every word you encounter. If those I am working with raise questions that signal a readiness to go deeper, I offer guidance to toward a deeper analysis, but I may just leave it as an open question.

In this case, however, a team of novice teachers and experienced students arrived at this understanding all on their own. How exciting that these new teachers were able to analyze this word in their first year of working with SWI even though <image> has been almost exclusively *treated* like a base in the SWI community until relatively recently.

Can you see what clues Risa, Becky and their students found in the entry from Etymonline that helped them hypothesize that <image> might not be a base? If not, no worries. As a scientist, your duty is to treat <image> as a base until you have evidence that shows the deeper analysis. I taught <image> as a base for years. So can you!

### image (n.)

c. 1200, "piece of statuary; artificial representation that looks like a person or thing," from Old French *image* "image, likeness; figure, drawing, portrait; reflection; statue," earlier *imagene* (11c.), from Latin *imaginem* (nominative *imago*) "copy, imitation, likeness; statue, picture," also "phantom, ghost, apparition," figuratively "idea, appearance," from stem of *imitari* "to copy, imitate".



ELC International Teachers Risa (right) and co-teacher Becky (left) share their investigation of <imagination> during a 3-day workshop.

## What about the teachers with SWI experience over time?

It is exciting to see how quickly new teachers can learn with their colleagues, but the that does not diminish the thrill of seeing the results of teachers who deepen their understanding of orthography and how to bring it alive for students over time.

Hannah and Jem are kindergarten teachers at ELC International who have been working with SWI for a couple of years now. When I arrived this time, they were so excited to share that they've just never seen their students read like this so early. This is the same experience we see at Nueva with SWI so central into Pre-school and Kindergarten.

I got to teach a lesson in Jem's class after the public workshop. It was such a thrill to get to work with kindergarten students who already had such a strong background in orthographic concepts. I asked Jem to share a favourite book of their kids so that we could investigate it together. They were reading a wonderful book I didn't know called "Ish" by [Peter Reynolds](#).

See a page from that book that we investigated together.

What a gift! We got to talk about the fact that a common suffix <ish> for "kind of" has been used as the source of a base in this word, and had an <ly> suffix fixed to it. The fact that the words <freely> and <quickly> were on the same page let us investigate this <ly> suffix, and the bases they were fixed to as well.

Ramon felt light and energized.  
Thinking ish-ly allowed  
his ideas to flow freely.

He began to draw what he felt –  
loose lines.  
Quickly springing out.  
Without worry.

We made word sums, spelled-out digraphs in the bases of our word sums, and found the trigraph <igh> in <light>. The questions and observations kept coming so that it was hard to leave when the time came. This was a class primed with orthographic understanding from knowledgeable teachers.

## The first A Place for Words Workshop at ELC International -- with teacher presentations



1) Fiona Hamilton introduces her kinder teacher team at the workshop who led the group in a great activity (2).



5) Teachers dive into an investigation of the family of the base <act>. This also teaches about the phonology of <ct>.



3, 4, 5) Grade 2 teachers Sam, Rachael and Andrew lead us in a consonant doubling investigation they did with their class.



In Jem and Hanna's inspiring presentation in the workshop, Hannah made a comment that really stuck with me. It illustrated a fascinating way that working with SWI over time influences instruction. She recounted how earlier in her learning, she discussed with Fiona how she wasn't getting the interesting spelling questions she was hoping for from her kids. She liked the idea that with SWI, you should be able to build a lot of your instruction based on the spelling questions your kids posed. But in the beginning, Hannah was not noticing those interesting questions from her students. Fiona, who could see Hannah was doing great work, encouraged her not to worry. The questions would come.

Over time, however, Hannah noted something striking. As her orthographic understanding grew, she started to recognize that her students *were* asking great questions. But it wasn't until her understanding had grown enough that she could recognize the richness in the questions being asked!

What a beautiful, insightful observation. Of course kids are asking us great questions about spelling all the time. It's just that most of us don't have the linguistic knowledge to see the richness. In a typical classroom, asking about the spelling of <does> is an unproductive, negative experience. The response most teachers can offer sends the message that spelling is irregular, so many words have to be memorized. Such a response also teaches children to give up on asking such questions. "Just because" is not a response that offers any motivation for further questions. But the *same question* in an SWI class is a launching pad for such great learning. Hannah helped me see that that we don't notice rich questions until we have the knowledge to make sense of them.

Once teachers develop this level of understanding, there is just no way to go back. Teachers with this background support their colleagues -- and plant the student knowledge that grows up with the school through the grades.

### **Melbourne moving forward**

This same dynamic for novice and expert teachers was evident in Melbourne. Teachers Lyn and I had worked with for years were reaching new levels of understanding and practice. Some of those teachers have been keen from the start, but some took a few years to get their sea legs with SWI. That kind of shift is so exciting to see.

But again, it was particularly exciting is to see the attitude of teachers who had just arrived into a school where SWI is well integrated practice. Wesley College has hosted my workshops for 5 years now (4 with Lyn). They sent a team of new teachers to our 2-day workshop who had not even been working with SWI for more than a month or two. (They are at the beginning of their school year.) Part of me feared that these teachers might feel overwhelmed by the fact that their colleagues were already so far ahead in this understanding that was so new to them. The opposite was the case.

Lyn and I were both struck by how enthusiastic these new teachers were, and how much they were already diving in. Again, in retrospect, it makes sense. When a teacher arrives at a new school and sees kids interested in investigating words in a new way that "makes sense", the natural response is to be interested as well. Those teachers were keen to take our workshop, because they could already see the evidence that this was knowledge they wanted to engage with too.

When all the teachers at a school are new to this way of thinking about words, it is less clear where this new information is going and how to reconcile it with past practice. Even for those who are very interested from the start, it can seem like it will be too hard for kids. In Bangkok, Melbourne and the Bay Area we are seeing the contrast between a team of novices learning together, and what happens when novices get to learn with expert colleagues. Of course the second context offers so much more support for learning.

## Scenes from Lyn Anderson's and Pete Bowers' annual Melbourne workshop hosted by Wesley College

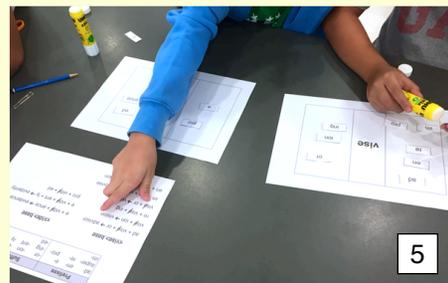
1) David Hornsby's group found the bound base <cre> from the Latin *cre(are)* for "to make, bring forth, produce, beget". It builds words like <creature> and <create>. This group is new to SWI. It took my years to find this bound base!



2) Literacy consultant extraordinaire, Julie Shepherd guides a group in their investigation of <quire>.



3-4) Teachers work through the same matrix constructing activity that the students do in the classroom (5).



It is exciting to work in a number of locations long enough to see the effect on long-term investment SWI. If teachers get enough support in those initial stages, the school community itself can become the main source of its continued learning.

I'm sure that the apparent explosion in SWI we see going on now -- with so many different sources taking leadership in this work -- is part of that same dynamic. As more and more individuals and groups become strong in their understanding of orthography and SWI, the understanding of our wider community will not go backwards. Once you understand the spelling of a word like <does>, or how to use Etymonline to help you analyze the morphological connection between <image> and <imitate> you can't un-understand that learning. Many thanks to ELC International and Wesley College for lighting the way for so many!

### Some teachers need only one encounter with SWI to keep going all on their own

There is another dynamic of learning with SWI that keeps popping up for me that needs to be shared as well. This is the story of those who attended one workshop, or happened across one video, and became dogged independent learners.

Just today I video conferenced with Kaitlynn Kauerauf in South Africa. We hadn't met before. She ran across my website a couple of years ago, went through the videos on my YouTube page, then started to take Spellinars with Real Spelling and has been eagerly moving forward with her learning with *no local support*. She now has enough understanding that she is motivated to start the process of "raising her village".

And consider example from a different Kate in this email:

Hi Pete,

I took your Structured Word Inquiry workshop at Beauvoir School in Washington, DC in the summer of 2015. It really inspired me as a 2nd grade teacher. In March, I gave a

presentation at the annual National Association of Independent Schools conference describing how I used SWI and another workshop to develop a project for my students. It's 7 minutes and the link is below if you'd like to see it.

Thanks a lot for the inspiration—

Katie Jamieson

Go see the glorious [VIDEO](#) of her presentation. She draws on etymology in a beautiful way that got her 2nd graders off to an excellent start to this year. You'll see how Katie brings SWI into her classroom in a brilliant, meaningful way that is extremely moving. Katie understands SWI and has made her own way with it. Perhaps what I love most about this story is that I had no reason to believe that any of this great work that was going on that was sparked by a one-off workshop two years ago. It's moving to know that there must be countless stories like Katie's and Kate's going on that I may well never hear about.

### The joy of understanding -- the best motivator!

Finally, I had to share the moving images and message I received from Emily (pictured at right) who is beaming with pride about having built her first matrix all by herself. Also see Emily and her sister, Anna, working together on a matrix for <fract> growing from a math study. I've been working with their mom to help her kids who have been identified as dyslexic. She has been homeschooling her kids since they were so unhappy in a school system that left them demoralized.

Emily's email and smile with her <struct> matrix says it all.

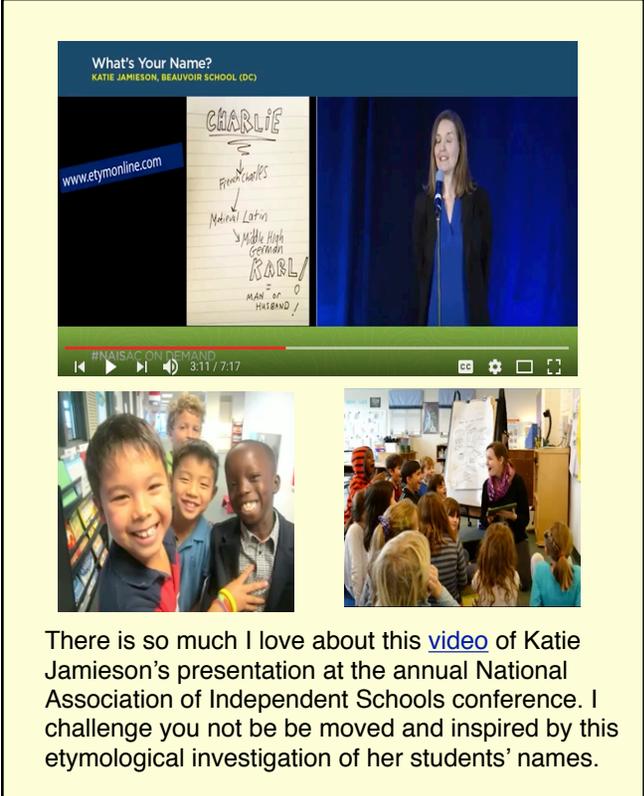
Dear Dr. Pete,

This was harder than it looked! I'm so happy because I accomplished it by myself.

From, Emily

Happy Spelling (truly)

*Pete Bowers, May 19, 2017*



What's Your Name?  
KATIE JAMIESON, BEAUVOIR SCHOOL (DC)

www.etymonline.com

CHARLIE

FRANCIS

MARIAN LATIN

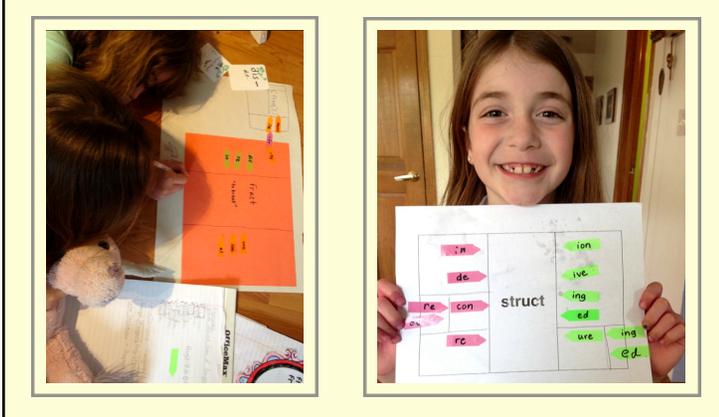
Middle High German

KARL

MAN OF HIS HAND!

#NAISAC ON DEMAND 3:11 / 7:17

There is so much I love about this [video](#) of Katie Jamieson's presentation at the annual National Association of Independent Schools conference. I challenge you not be be moved and inspired by this etymological investigation of her students' names.



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