

WW Newsletter #90: SWI the first 16 years!

Making sense of how the written word woks -- over the years and around the world

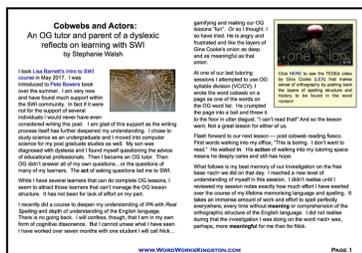
Highlights

- WW Special Publications (Halifax and Toronto, Canada): Two stories of tutors new to SWI having breakthroughs with struggling students
- On Real Spellers: New investigations to share
- Reflecting on the stories behind the current SWI community in the light of recent workshops from around the world (Japan, Ottawa, Halifax California, Australia, Bangkok, Jakarta, Melbourne, Tasmania...).
- Current revision of wording for the “4 questions” and new related resource from Scott Mills

WW Special Publications:

Click [HERE](#) for a story from Stephanie Walsh, a Halifax OG tutor new to SWI.

Click [HERE](#) for a distinct, but similar story from a tutor new to SWI from Toronto.



Consider the transformative learning experiences these tutors offer their students. Investigating the interrelation of meanings, structures and phonology of words in a morphological family offers the joy of understanding to students who have been struggling in the context of standard remedial instruction. In Stephanie's story we see a child in a demoralised state of learned helplessness -- moved to joyful, active engagement with the understanding brought with their discussions supported by a matrix, word sums and IPA notation.

Upcoming SWI Workshops

- **Nov 15-16 Switzerland:** On-site workshop **International School of Lausanne**.
- **Nov 17-18, Switzerland:** Public workshop at **International School of Lausanne**. See poster [HERE](#). Register [HERE](#).
- **Jan 19-20, Toronto:** SWI workshop downtown. Details TBA.
- **Jan 17-19, Tasmania, Aus:** **Lyn Anderson & Ann Whiting** present a 3-Day Summer English orthography course “**Caught in the Spell of Words**” in Tasmania! I cannot recommend this workshop enough!
- **Jan 24 - 26, Edmonton AB:** Public SWI workshop hosted by [ERLC](#). Includes in-school model lessons and work with just teachers. Details TBA.
- **March 25-26, Portland:** Etymology 5 with Gina and Doug. Click [HERE](#).)
- **April 27-28, Melbourne:** Special SWI workshop for experienced teachers hosted by Wesley College. I will be presenting with Lyn Anderson again -- and Ann Whiting will be a special guest presenter as well! Details TBA -- contact Pete if you are interested in an on-sight school workshop with your teachers and students in the area. Also contact me if your school might want to book me near that date. Bangkok is a likely other stop on this trip.

Recent posts on SWI lessons on Real Spellers

- Click [HERE](#) for Ann Whiting's inspiring post “SWI as leverage for deepening understanding and written expression.”
- Click [HERE](#) for a lesson investigating <vision> and <provide> in the context of a Scot Caldwell's class studying Canadian Native peoples.
- Click [HERE](#) for a response to a question about <filter> and <infiltrate> from a Gr. 7 teacher fairly new to SWI.

WordWorks' first trip to Japan!



Above: See of teachers diving in during a full-staff, full-day workshop at Saint Maur. This trip included model lessons with elementary, middle school and high school teachers. A wonderful recognition of the school-wide relevance for studying the written word. I also snuck in a couple sight-seeing pics!

Recent and Upcoming WordWorks Workshops

It has been a busy fall. Since September, I've had on-line video workshops with schools in Jakarta, California, Ontario, Alberta and Hong Kong. I had the pleasure of my first Japan trip to work with teachers and students at the lovely [Saint Maur International School](#). Next, and closer to home, I visited the wonderful [MindWare Academy](#) in Ottawa. This school for dyslexic students sent a contingent of teachers to my very first summer course *years* ago. I was so excited to find they are still plugging along! I then returned to the [Al Huda Elementary School](#) in Toronto before returning to San Francisco to present at my 3rd biennial [Innovative Learning Conference](#) at Nueva. From San Francisco, I continued on to 1-day workshop at the [Lincoln-Way High School in Chicago on Oct. 24th](#) before delivering a Keynote at the "[Everybody Reading Illinois](#)" conference on the 25th. Next I'm off to Switzerland to return to the [International School of Lausanne](#) for 2-days with their students and teachers, followed by a [2-day public workshop](#) they are hosting. And from Lausanne, I get to go to France to join Gina Cooke ([LEX](#)), Douglas Harper ([Etymonline](#)) and a band of crazy orthographers to study orthography and humanity with the Real Spelling Old Grouch who started this whole orthographic journey for all of us. Phew!

Orthography in Japan and beyond - old is new again

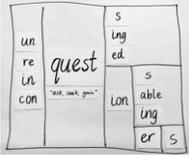
The key spark for the 5-day on-site workshop at the Saint Maur school in Yokohama was that they had sent a team of teachers to last year's 3-day workshop I co-led with Fiona Hamilton with her [A Place For Words](#) consultancy based out of at the [ELC International School](#) in Bangkok. (See more on the inspiring learning Fiona is supporting later in this newsletter. I highly recommend contacting [Fiona](#) regarding SWI professional development opportunities if you are in South East Asia.)



a place for
words
professional development
for educators



At *aplaceforwords*, we believe all educators deserve the opportunity to deepen their own understanding of English orthography. New insights will help each teacher, from K-12, be more effective in doing what they love most - empowering students.



The Saint Maur team returned to Japan keen to dive in and booked me for this workshop. Upon my arrival, I discovered that the link between Saint Maur and orthographic study goes back much further than I could have guessed. Their curriculum co-ordinator, Annette Levy, (who sent the team of 3 teachers off to Bangkok) first discovered Real Spelling when she met Ann Whiting (of the brilliant [Word Nerderly](#) blog) in Kuala Lumpur over a decade ago!

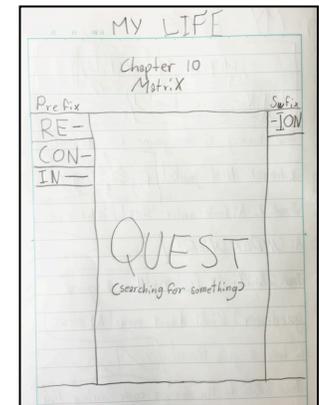
After meeting Real Spelling through Ann, Annette organized a Real Spelling workshop in Kyoto where she was working at the time. Since moving to Saint Maur, Annette was looking for an opportunity to bring that understanding to her new school. Our [Bangkok workshop](#) gave just the spark she was looking for.

Besides the group of 3 teachers that studied in Bangkok, the entire staff at Saint Maur was brand new to orthography and SWI when I arrived. The next two stories arrived in my mailbox within a week of that visit.

An email from a teacher to the principal:

Hi Cassie,

Today I found this matrix mixed in with the free writing in a student Writer's Notebooks. It is so exciting that she wanted to look into <quest> in her own time and build a matrix!



Note that this was not an assignment to create a matrix. The student was working on free writing. Under a title "My Life" this grade 2 student chose to have an attempt at a matrix on <quest> all on her own -- just for fun.

Then, in a second email, this exchange is passed on...

Shout out to Grade 1, Laura and Michael and our SWI work. Sitting with Laura and Luke (Grade 1, 2 SWI lessons with me) yesterday in the cafeteria and Luke says:

"Look Mrs. Kitani there is a final non-syllabic <e>"

Where?

"On the pink word" (Welcome)

Woo hoo!

The teachers and students at Saint Maur have already become excellent orthographic scholars -- they can't help but [notice](#) orthographic structures spontaneously.

Tracing some trails of orthographic learning over a decade and around the world

The busyness (not *business!*) of this fall made me curious about the origins of this interest in SWI. When I followed the trail backwards, I was astonished by the interconnected

pathways of learning I uncovered. It is a joy to see evidence that seeds of learning planted since my first encounter with Real Spelling in 2001 continue to blossom and pollinate new learning in communities around the globe.

Consider Yokohama. As we saw, an early root of this visit began well over a decade ago with Annette encountering Ann Whiting in Kuala Lumpur. That resulted in Annette bringing the scientific study of orthography to Kyoto, and then Yokohama.

But the arrival of SWI in Yokohama was also supported by Fiona Hamilton of [A Place for Words](#) in Bangkok. Fiona began working with Real Spelling in Jakarta when she attended that same Bangkok workshop I did! After working with Real Spelling in Jakarta, she moved to Beijing where she brought me for one of my earliest overseas workshops. (See a video of a teacher in Beijing introducing me to the etymology of the word <matrix> during one of those visits to Beijing [here](#).)

Fiona then moved on to Bangkok and, of course, brought her orthographic understanding with her. Eventually she established her own excellent SWI based consultancy. The first major workshop for [A Place for Words](#) was the one we co-led. This was the workshop that provided the opportunity for Annette to send a team of teachers to the work she already knew she needed to bring to her school!

Video: Teachers Reflecting on learning from SWI

Fortunately, I get to share a video that reflects the learning Fiona is inspiring. While working on this newsletter, Fiona shared [THIS LINK](#) to a new post on her [A Place For Words](#) website with a six-minute video in which teachers from her school, [ELC Bangkok](#), share their reflections on learning/teaching with SWI at the end of the year.

Fiona explained that she simply asked her teachers to 'say something' about working with SWI at the end of the year and let the camera roll.

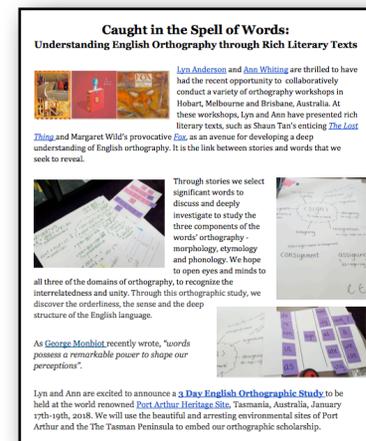
Apparently the three women you see in the film sat for an hour talking with that prompt. This 6 minute video gives just a glimpse of the kind of teacher learning SWI is inspiring.



Now, let's go back the the trails of learning [Ann Whiting](#) planted.

We saw that Ann got Annette started in Japan. She was also key for my learning and that of [Lyn Anderson](#). Ann came to our school in Balikpapan, Indonesia to support our learning in that first year of working with Real Spelling. Lyn took SWI to Sophia, Bulgaria, then to another school in Indonesia where she began her blog, "[Beyond the Word](#)." Lyn's consultancy has become a key resource for teachers working with SWI -- especially teachers of younger students.

Ann and Lyn have both recently retired from the classroom and are teaming up to do workshops over 15 years after first meeting! Click [HERE](#) to download a one page document (screen shot, right) with accounts from their recent joint workshops in Hobart, Melbourne and Brisbane, in Australia. That document also points to their upcoming [3-day workshop January 17-19 in Hobart, Tasmania!](#)



And here's another tangled trail that goes back to 2001

Elsa Donahue (who was recently honoured as 2017 National Distinguished Principal) is a good friend/colleague who was at another school in Indonesia when we (and Fiona) first encountered Real Spelling at a conference in Bangkok in 2001. (Marcia Henry was in the same 45 minute session too!)

Elsa ended up bringing Real Spelling to her school in Indonesia and then to Africa when she became the elementary principal at the Lincoln School in Ghana. Elsa invited some teachers at her new school to work with Real Spelling in France. That generated interest to have me come and work with their staff and students in Ghana a number of times. Natashya and Michael were two teachers in Ghana who dove right in, but soon moved on to Switzerland and brought their learning with them. The PYP coordinator at that Switzerland school, Jacinta Janssens, was inspired by their work, and brought me over to do PD. Jacinta ended up returning to Melbourne and brought SWI to [Wesley College](#). Jacinta's support of SWI with PD from myself, Lyn Anderson, Julie Shepherd and others over the years has made Melbourne one of the major hubs for SWI in the world.

Next, Natashya and Micheal left Switzerland and followed Elsa to Jakarta. Eventually SWI become a key to the instruction in the [Jakarta Intercultural School \(JIS\)](#) -- one of the top international schools in the world. Natashya is now also doing SWI PD of her own as well.



[HERE's](#) a video from my YouTube page when Natashya walked me around her Grade 2 classroom at JIS

Meanwhile, the learning Natashya and Michael brought to Switzerland spread to Dan Allen. His [Grade 5 blog](#) at the Zurich International School was an early touchstone for so many teachers. At [THIS LINK](#) you can download a document with links to the videos Dan took of me teaching lessons when I visited there.

It was Dan's blog that Grade 5 teacher extraordinaire, [Mary Beth Stevens](#) happened to discover one day. As she tells it, she found Dan's blog and lost her weekend. I've highlighted the amazing work on [Mary Beth's blog](#) countless times, including [this post](#) with a video of her students reflecting on SWI. (screen shot above). See her [amazing YouTube page](#) too!



The interest sparked by Natashya and Micheal in Switzerland also got SWI going at the [International School of Lausanne](#) where I got to do a workshop in October 2014.

That trip sparked [WW Newsletter #76 about "Getting Started"](#) that I highlight on my [About WordWorks](#) page. That newsletter includes one of my all-time favourite stories of a teacher diving in to SWI immediately. His investigation of <migration> after a 45 minute introduction was a brilliant one that I never would have thought of myself. I am so pleased to be returning to work with this school next week!

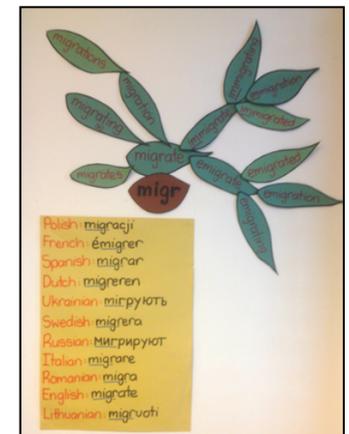


Image from WW Newsletter #76 of a teacher's investigation of <migration>.

And, how did Stephanie Walsh in Halifax -- whose story began this newsletter -- get started with SWI? She encountered it through an on-line conference by the [Dyslexia Training Institute](#) (DTI) in San Diego. And how did they encounter SWI? Years ago, one of the co-founders of DTI, Dr. Kelli Sandman-Hurley, had a table in the exhibit hall at an IDA conference next to the table for [Sound Literacy](#) by Kathy Penn -- a Wolfe Island Course alumnus. (Check out her [excellent literacy app and blog](#).) Kathy shared her space with [LEX's](#) (Gina Cooke) [essential linguistic references](#) for educators. After seeing the buzz of conversations at the table next to her, Kelli skeptically asked me what was going on. As she wrote in [this article](#) for the International Literacy Association, the matrix I constructed for <sign> on a napkin changed her life. Kelli went back to San Diego and began the process of fundamentally altering the understanding and practice of her organization.

Amazingly, years before I met Dr. Kelli Sandman-Hurley, it was another <sign> matrix on a napkin that resulted in the Keynote and workshop I just presented for the [Everyone Reading Illinois](#) annual conference in Chicago. I was a PhD student presenting a poster on the intervention study I conducted with my supervisor John Kirby at the [2008 SSSR conference in Asheville, North Carolina](#). I happened to sit down next to Lisa Hannum for lunch one day. When she asked about my research interest, I drew a <sign> matrix on a napkin. Lisa likes to recount that it was when she mentioned Marcia Henry's name that she saw me become more interested talking with her! At the time Lisa was active in booking speakers for the Illinois Branch of the IDA (which later became Everyone Reading Illinois). That conversation led to her inviting me to present at my first IDA conference.

I was honoured (and nervous!) when both Marcia Henry and Gina Cooke arranged to attend my session. It was in Lisa's kitchen that I first met Gina in person.

I first met Gina virtually in an email from Marcia to Real Spelling, myself and Gina. Gina was already a linguist and well-respected certified Instructor of Teaching in the Children's Dyslexia Centers' Orton-Gillingham program. The orthographic understanding that Gina has fostered with her work before and after encountering Real Spelling cannot be overstated. Her work, including the linguistically precise resources at her [LEX Store](#), her [LEX blog](#), on-line [LEXinars](#) and presentations/workshop on her own and [annual Etymology conference](#) with Douglas Harper have all been invaluable to the growth of my orthographic learning and that of our wider community.

A lot can start with a <sign> matrix on a napkin...



Years of Gina's work and my many return visits to the Chicago area have sewn seeds of learning that are truly starting to blossom. The enthusiastic response to this latest conference -- including comments about the keynote and the packed afternoon workshop -- make it clear that Chicago area is yet another hub where SWI is going to continue to grow steadily.

Another important source of the learning in Chicago is the result of the work of Mary McBride, Ellen Meyer and LeeAnne Layden as educators and SWI trainers in public schools. See their website [HERE](#). When Mary's superintendent noticed that wherever she went, the students under her guidance had higher standardized test scores, he had me come up for more PD. One thing I love about Mary's story is that she was also at that first IDA workshop I did in Chicago -- and was most unimpressed! But she kept investigating, and between learning with Gina, Real Spelling and myself over time, she has become a major influence in the growth of SWI. It's not uncommon for people who start out skeptical to become leaders of SWI. Just as it should be in scientific inquiry.

Keep in mind that I've restricted myself to background stories that have a direct role in provoking the workshops and stories mentioned in this newsletter. I have not addressed any of the stories behind the learning at the [Nueva School](#) and the San Francisco Bay Area or Alberta (two key hubs of SWI), or the learning from the various Facebook SWI pages that have developed, the [Real Spellers website](#) -- and countless other generative learning journeys.

As I prepare for my next set of workshops and on-line work, I know that countless new seeds of learning will be planted. Some of that work may blossom right away as we saw with my Japan visit. In other cases, it will be next year, or even a

decade from now before I am made aware of the learning that results. Many of those seeds will grow in places I will likely never know. And that is just fine with me.

Preview for Next Newsletter...

• **Why does this learning persist?**

I cut a good deal of this issue as it just grew too big for one issue. One thing I will use for a follow up Newsletter is my thinking about how and why these stories of ongoing learning through scientific word investigation has been so persistent. This is especially interesting given that there is no "easy to use" program associated with SWI or Real Spelling, and no major publisher behind any of this work.

• **Revised wording for "4 Questions" and a new context**

I have recently reworked the "4 Questions" I use to guide scientific word investigation. Here is the previous wording:

Found an interesting word?

Investigate with these 4 questions...

1. What does the word mean?

2. How is it built?

↑ • *Can you identify any bases or affixes with a word sum?*

3. What other related words can you think of?

• **Morphological relations:** *Can the [Word Searcher](#) help you find words that could join your word on a matrix?*

• **Etymological relations:** *Can a word origin dictionary (e.g. [Etymonline](#)) help you?*

4. What are the sounds that matter?

• *What grapheme/phoneme correspondences can you find that fit within your hypothesized morphemes?*

Found an interesting word?

1. What is the sense and meaning of your word?

2. How is it built?

↑↓ • *Can you identify any bases or affixes with a word sum?*

3. What related words can you find?

- ***Morphological relatives:*** Look for words that share a base.
- ***Etymological relatives:*** Look for words that share a history.

4. What graphemes function coherently here?

- Check that they represent the phonemes *across the morphological family*.
- Check the influence of word origin on grapheme choice.

My most current wording of “4 questions for SWI”

I will share my own thinking about why I am much happier with this new wording at a later date. For now, I encourage you to consider the differences yourselves. Perhaps you’ll have suggestions for improvement. I know this will not be my final revision.

• **New frame for SWI based on “4 Questions” from SWI**

Just as I was going to “press” with this newsletter, Scott Mills sent me a link to [a new post](#) on his excellent website “[Language Innerviews](#)”. Scott presents a way to frame investigations based on these 4 questions and contrasts it to a standard vocabulary model you have likely seen before. This is not something that would be used in every investigation, but I see great potential in its use for guiding teacher/student work with scientific word investigations. I hope to address this resource and the [new interview](#) Scott has posted with linguist and morphologist Mark Aronoff. Such great stuff keeps on growing!

Pete Bowers, Nov. 9, 2017

Nothing motivates like understanding!