

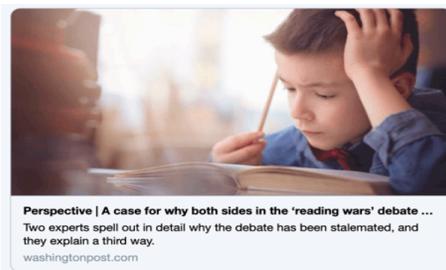
# Recent publications related to Structured Word Inquiry (SWI)

Pete Bowers, Phd, April 10, 2019

- 🍌 **Washington Post article** (Bowers & Bowers, 2019)
- 🍌 **A chapter in the latest publication by the Primary English Teaching association of Australia (PETAA)** (Anderson, Whiting, Bowers & Venable, 2019)
- 🍌 **An article in the prestigious psychology journal *Current Directions in Psychological Science*** (Bowers & Bowers, 2018a)

## Washington Post Article

Some time ago, one of those pieces on the phonics vs. whole language debate that often circulate landed in my brother's email box. That piece was published in the Washington Post column of Valerie Strauss.



Jeff was frustrated at seeing the same debate repeated and contacted Strauss to see if she would be interested in posting an article providing an alternative view of this topic. She was interested, so Jeff invited me to help him compose this piece. I'm pleased at the discussion it has sparked. If you look at the comments you will see that I've responded to questions raised about our piece. I'm pleased that the discussion seems productive. Feel free to join the conversation.

Click [HERE](#) to read the article on Jeff's Blog.

Join the conversation after the article on the Washington Post page [HERE](#).

## Chapter in Australian Publication (PETAA)

The Primary English Teaching Association of Australia ([PETAA](#)) is one of the largest associations for primary educators in Australia. Along with long-time colleagues and fellow orthographic scholars

Lyn Anderson, Ann Whiting (See their amazing website [here](#)), I was invited to write a chapter for their next publication.

Lyn and Ann wrote a rich account of an orthographic investigation over the course of a school year with a young class. They provide a window of what SWI (Bowers & Kirby, 2010) can look like in the early grades. It is not *just* literacy instruction -- it is orthographic study as leverage to enrich any subject area study.

My job was to introduce and reflect on their account by providing a context for their instructional account in terms of theory and research. Gail Venable is a brilliant orthographic scholar and a crucial colleague/editor for so much my work. Her influence on my section became so substantial that our part of the chapter clearly became a co-authorship between me and Gail. Of course the four of us collaborated on each others' sections as well.

**Why we need this chapter:** A detailed account of orthographic inquiry through SWI with young children combined with a how that practice links to theory and research is unique and timely. There is a long-standing assumption that literacy instruction must start with phonological aspects of orthography before other linguistic features like morphology are explicitly addressed.

For some, the idea of making morphology a key feature of early literacy instruction just does not occur. Some explicitly recommend *avoiding* morphology until after phonological aspects of spelling are addressed. Jeff and I describe that explicit view as the "phonology first hypothesis." See more on this topic [here](#) (Bowers & Bowers, 2018b) where Jeff and I address a number of serious problems with this hypothesis.



The phonology first hypothesis lacks supporting evidence. It must predict that *including* morphology from the beginning of instruction will result in lower literacy gains compared to restricting instruction to phonologically-based influences on spelling. We are aware of no research with this finding. In fact, the evidence from meta-analyses (Bowers, Kirby & Deacon, Goodwin & Ahn, 2010, 2013) and reviews (Carlisle, 2010, Reed, 2008) is in the opposite direction. Younger and less able students gained the most from the inclusion of morphological instruction.

The understandable fear that reducing time for phonologically-based instruction (due to adding morphological instruction) will degrade phonological awareness is also contradicted by the evidence. In their two morphological meta-analyses (Goodwin & Ahn, 2010, 2013) the outcomes with the greatest effect sizes from interventions including morphological instruction were *phonological awareness* outcomes. Morphological awareness outcomes had the *second* highest effects. In Anderson et al. (2019), we quote the interpretation of this result by Goodwin & Ahn (2013, p.23):

*Similar to Bowers et al. (2010), results suggest that early morphological instruction may be particularly helpful perhaps because of the synergistic relationship between phonology and morphology and the larger repertoire of root [base] and affix meanings available for use. If a reciprocal relationship exists between morphological knowledge and literacy . . . it makes sense to jump start this knowledge from an early age.<sup>1</sup>*

In our meta-analysis (Bowers, Kirby & Deacon, 2010) and in two recent chapters (Kirby & Bowers, 2017, 2018) we show that the best current evidence is that morphology should feature from the beginning of formal instruction. We also emphasize that we do not yet have any research evidence for how best to teach morphology.

<sup>1</sup> *For further study:* In Kirby and Bowers (2017) we present our “binding agent theory of morphological knowledge” which builds on Perfetti’s (2007) lexical quality hypothesis and cognitive load theory (Schnotz & Kürschner, 2007; Sweller, Ayres & Kalyuga, 2011). This binding agent theory provides important theoretical background for the premise of SWI that instruction should reflect the interrelation of morphology and etymology.

It is this identified gap in the research that makes this chapter with Lyn and Ann’s instructional account as so important. A key challenge preventing the research from moving forward is that few researchers have any reference for what morphological instruction might look like in the early years -- let alone SWI instruction that addresses the interrelationship of morphology, etymology and phonology. Lyn and Ann’s account provides a model that educators and researchers can study. Gail and I attempt to show how their practices fit with established theory and research regarding learning and instruction.

See information on this PETAA book [HERE](#). You can purchase a digital copy [HERE](#). Our chapter is quite a different perspective than the rest of the chapters in the book!

## Current Directions in Psychological Science Article

According to Wikipedia, *Current Directions in Psychological Science* is ranked among the top 10 psychology journals worldwide. It publishes articles by invitation and focuses on concise articles written to be accessible to non-experts. Jeff was invited to submit an article. They published this 5-page paper that I think is a particularly accessible overview of current issues in literacy research and why structured word inquiry is a rich addition to the research discussion.

Find a copy of this article and a number of other publications from Jeff and Jeff and I at his blog at [THIS LINK](#).



## References

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