

Foreword

I am so pleased that the SPELL diagnostic (*Spelling Performance Evaluation for Language and Literacy*) and its accompanying supports for teachers continue to be refined for practitioners in its 3rd edition. This diagnostic system is unique, comprehensive, and valuable for teachers and clinicians who wish to inform their interventions with meaningful data.

The SPELL diagnostic is informed by decades of research on how children learn to spell, what goes awry when they have difficulty, and how spelling and reading skills are interconnected. Beginning in the 1970's, with the work of Charles Read and others, studies of spelling development revealed just how dependent this skill is on phonology and other language processes that underlie both word-level reading and spelling. Before then, spelling assessment and instruction tended to reinforce the mistaken but understandable view that learning to spell relied on rote memory processes. Traditional programs expected students to remember words by writing them many times in lists or by studying flash cards. Those practices did not work well for students with spelling difficulties and related word-level reading difficulties, and it is more than past time that the field moved ahead.

Learning to spell relies not on “visual memory” but on awareness of language systems that are represented in print. A student’s written spelling reveals how accurately the individual can identify the phonemes and spoken syllables in a word, as well as their understanding of the word’s structure, use, and meaning. Written spelling shows how well the individual has internalized basic phoneme-grapheme correspondences, orthographic patterns in print, meaningful parts of words or morphemes, and the relationship between how a word is spelled and the grammatical role it plays in a sentence. The SPELL diagnostic analyzes in great detail what a student knows and has yet to learn about these linguistic complexities and links this information to instructional programming.

SPELL-3 is a valid, reliable, and eminently useful diagnostic measure. The diagnostic analyses guide practitioners to implement structured language teaching that will not only improve spelling, but that will also boost students’ reading, vocabulary, and language comprehension. As a bonus, teachers and clinicians will delight in discovering much about spoken and written language, along with their students. To the authors, thank you for this significant achievement.

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