

CELF®-5 Metalinguistics Case Study

The following case study illustrates interpretation of CELF-5 Metalinguistics test and Index scores. This case study presents interpretation of CELF-5 Metalinguistics test and Index scores in conjunction with CELF-4 Australian test and Index scores.

Kevin, age 14 years and 9 months



History and Referral

Kevin is age 14 years and 9 months. English is Kevin's first language. He recently moved from another city, and his previous school records indicate that he was receiving speech and language services for a receptive and expressive language disorder that was diagnosed several years earlier. Currently, Kevin attends Year/Grade 9 mainstream classes. The school's speech-language pathologist provides him with intervention services 30 minutes/twice a week to support his semantic development (i.e. vocabulary and word knowledge) and language comprehension (i.e. oral comprehension, reading comprehension) skills. These were the areas identified on his Individualised Education Plan (IEP) by his previous school.

Kevin's teachers report that he is struggling academically. He has difficulty following class discussions. More specifically, he has difficulty maintaining the topic during both classroom and small group discussions; he either interjects off-topic comments, or fails to understand nuances of the discussion. Kevin is failing most academic subjects, and his teachers and his mother are concerned that he may not be able to pass the high stakes assessments which are required for promotion to Year/Grade 10.

Kevin is also struggling socially. He is increasingly frustrated over perceived criticisms and social communication issues. For example, he has difficulty recognising when classmates are using sarcasm and takes every comment literally. He has difficulty understanding jokes, and often becomes embarrassed when a classmate needs to explain why the joke is humorous. As a result, Kevin avoids joining in many peer interactions, and has difficulty making and keeping friends.

Re-Evaluation Questions

After reviewing Kevin's present level of academic achievement and functional performance, his mother, teachers, and speech language pathologist agreed that a re-evaluation of Kevin's language abilities was appropriate to determine the following:

1. Does the student continue to manifest a language impairment?
2. If a language impairment is present, what are the patterns of strengths and weaknesses?
3. What implications does the profile of strengths and weaknesses have on the student's ability to access his education?
4. Does the student continue to qualify for speech and language intervention services?

Test Results

The speech-language pathologist administered the CELF-4 Australian and Kevin's scores were as follows:

An Overview of Kevin's CELF-4 Australian Scores

Core Language and Index Score	Standard Score	Confidence Interval	(90% Level) Percentile Rank	Confidence Interval
Core Language Score	85	80–90	16	9–25
Receptive Language Index	92	87–97	30	19–42
Expressive Language Index	89	84–94	23	14–34
Language Content Index	92	87–97	30	19–42
Language Memory Index	87	82–92	19	12–30

Test Scores	Scaled Score	Confidence Interval	(90% Level) Percentile Rank	Confidence Interval
Word Classes	9	7–11	37	16–63
Following Directions	9	7–11	37	16–63
Formulated Sentences	9	7–11	37	16–63
Recalling Sentences	6	5–7	9	5–16
Understanding Spoken Paragraphs	7	5–9	16	5–37
Sentence Assembly	10	9–11	50	37–63
Semantic Relationships	10	8–12	50	25–75

Kevin's CELF-4 Index scores were all in the average range; however, he had difficulty with tasks that involved orally presented information of some length, such as on the Recalling Sentences and Understanding Spoken Paragraphs tests. On the former he just "gave up" when the sentences became complex. On the latter, he struggled to understand the main idea and make inferences and predictions. With input from Kevin's teachers and mother the speech language pathologist completed the Pragmatics Profile. Of note was his difficulty with ambiguity, such as on Item II.

(telling/understanding jokes/stories that are related to the situation); and Item 12 (showing sense of humour during communication situations).

Based on the pre-evaluation concerns of his teachers and mother the CELF-4 results and the speech-language pathologist's observations, she decided to administer the CELF-5 Metalinguistics to gather more information about Kevin's language competence. The results follow:

Test Results

The speech-language pathologist administered the CELF-5 Metalinguistics and Kevin's scores were as follows:

An Overview of Kevin's Metalinguistics Scores

Core Language and Index Score	Standard Score	Confidence Interval	(90% Level) Percentile Rank	Confidence Interval
Total Metalinguistics Index	77	72-82	6	3-12
Meta-Pragmatics Index	82	74-90	12	4-25
Meta-Semantics Index	73	68-78	4	2-7

Test Scores	Scaled Score	Confidence Interval	(90% Level) Percentile Rank	Confidence Interval
Metalinguistics Profile	7	6-8	16	9-25
Making Inferences	9	7-11	37	16-63
Conversation Skills	5	3-7	5	1-16
Multiple Meanings	6	4-8	9	2-25
Figurative Language	4	3-5	2	1-5

Kevin's Total Metalinguistics Index Score of 77 (confidence interval of 72-82) placed his overall performance in the low/moderate range of severity. His Meta-Pragmatics Index Score of 82 (confidence interval 74-90) placed his language abilities in the border line/marginal/at risk range. Kevin's Meta-Semantics Index score of 73 (confidence interval 68-78) placed his language performance in the low/moderate range and indicated a weakness in meta semantic tasks.

Kevin's test scaled scores range from 4 to a high of 9, indicating certain areas of strength and weakness. Making Inferences (9) is in the average range. Conversation Skills (5), Multiple Meanings (6), and Figurative Language (4) are all in the low to very low range. The Figurative Language test score (4) indicates an area of particular weakness.

Analysis of Kevin's error response patterns on the Figurative Language items indicate that opaque idioms (i.e. idioms in which the meanings of the words making up the expression have no resemblance to the figurative meaning) are interpreted literally. The error analyses for Multiple Meaning and Conversation Skills indicated structural and semantic weaknesses.

Input from teachers and parents on the Metalinguistic Profile confirmed weaknesses in idiomatic language as well as particular weaknesses in conversational use and knowledge. The speech-language pathologist also noted that the student exhibited some difficulty with identifying the gist (i.e. main idea) of conversations. Consequently, he rarely tried to extend the conversation and did not always maintain the topic appropriately when he did.

Recommendations and Follow-up

The CELF-5 results indicate that Kevin may have acquired adequate linguistic knowledge, perhaps through the prior years of intervention. However, the CELF-5 Metalinguistics results indicate that he may not have the metalinguistic skills necessary for full communicative competence and academic success as the classroom content becomes more inferential in nature. Based on the assessment information, Kevin would benefit from structured language tasks to address his weakness in the area of meta-semantic language. Goals and objectives should be specifically targeted toward explicit teaching using meta-semantic tasks such as resolving lexical and structural ambiguities, and recognising non-literal language. In addition, weaknesses in conversational competence as evidenced by performance on Conversation Skills and the Metalinguistics Profile could be addressed by such strategies as assigning a peer-tutor or conversational role-playing activities.



***For more information about CELF-5, please visit
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