

**Question: Does the CELF Spanish over-identify kids as having a problem?**

The **CELF-3-Spanish Edition** is a useful test as long as it's being utilized with the right child! Taking a look at its large normative population, you find that it was normed entirely on BILINGUAL Spanish speakers, most of who have English as their other language. All of the participants were reported to be fluent Spanish speakers but no formal measures of language proficiency were employed to assess levels of fluency.

Practically, this means that the test can give you a fair picture of conversational (grammar/sentence construction) language skills of students who are conversationally fluent in Spanish. It also taps some more advanced language skills with the Word Associations subtest and the Listening to Paragraphs subtest.

However, there are two groups of children for whom this measure alone may not provide a clear picture of language skills; first, with those who are enrolled in bilingual (native language) education. These students have had opportunity to develop more advanced language skills in Spanish, and so the CELF may over estimate their abilities. Therefore children who are struggling with language-based tasks in the bilingual classroom may score well within the average range on the CELF.

The second group for whom the CELF may give a questionable picture is the group of children who are speaking primarily English at this point in their lives. This profile is seen frequently when children have been enrolled for several years in English-only education, and also utilize English as their primary language in the home (often with their older siblings). These students frequently experience

the phenomenon of “language loss” in their first language, and simply don’t have the Spanish conversational fluency to do well on this measure. They generally are still limited English proficient, but they are English dominant.

Because of risks involved in using and interpreting the CELF with these two groups of children, the following suggestions are made:

- 1) With the group of children who are receiving opportunities to develop advanced Spanish language skills, the CELF can be utilized but should also be accompanied by language sampling, work samples, teacher reports, and other measures in order to avoid over-estimating abilities. A child may clearly qualify for services based on informal measures and yet have a CELF score within the average range.
- 2) With the group of children who has experienced first language loss due to lack of opportunity for continued native language development, **The CELF3-Spanish Edition** is not recommended for use.
- 3) A thorough history of the child’s language use in their home and throughout their school program should be obtained prior to the testing, and language proficiency assessment should also be taken into account before selecting measures to use.

Assessing bilingual children is never black and white. While standardized tests do exist in English and Spanish, we must not rely on scores alone. The most appropriate testing involves additional measures – including language sampling, parent/ teacher interviews, observation in the classroom and other contexts, etc. **The CELF-3 Spanish Edition** is a useful tool, however, should not be used alone.