

Latin

for Students with Learning Disabilities

Recent research suggests that Latin is a viable choice for students with learning problems.

Select Bibliography

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A significant number of students studying Latin or any other foreign language encounter such severe difficulties that their pursuit of learning the language is jeopardized or even ended. Most of these "at risk" learners have diagnosed or diagnosable learning disabilities, but many others who struggle to learn a foreign language do not. The language deficit which links most of these students is poor auditory or phonological processing ability. They encounter difficulty distinguishing, repeating and remembering the sounds of language and struggle to pair a new sound to the concept it represents. Allied difficulties may include general memory problems and difficulty detecting and applying grammatical rules.

There is no single, secret strategy which unlocks the capability of students with these language learning problems. Learning, for them, is always challenging, but teachers find that a combination of strategies can work together to improve greatly LD students' proficiency. The key is the leadership of a teacher willing to implement the practices that we acknowledge to be "best practices."

The ideal teacher for students with learning disabilities is one who:

- ◆ understands the general nature of learning disabilities;
- ◆ is interested in their manifestations in individual students;
- ◆ works consistently with his/her students in a mutual effort to understand individual learning problems and mitigate their effects;
- ◆ sympathetically addresses the affective concerns that often plague students with learning problems;
- ◆ gears class work and evaluation to strengths rather than weaknesses of students;
- ◆ presents material by allowing students to see it, speak it and write it as well as hear it;
- ◆ varies the segments of class time to keep students alert and interested and to involve as many students as possible;
- ◆ is patient, flexible and creative;
- ◆ enjoys his/her calling and makes Latin learning enjoyable for students.

Eight Reasons why Latin is a Good Choice for LD Students

1. The primary emphasis in Latin is customarily placed upon reading, not speaking the language. Students with relatively poor phonological coding (auditory) ability have a better opportunity to learn.
2. Latin students typically see and hear Latin words and sentences as they are read aloud so they can correlate the sound of the language with its written representation.
3. The Latin alphabet is already known to those who know English.
4. Latin pronunciation is consistent. Latin consonants and diphthongs produce one sound when spoken and Latin vowels produce only two. Latin pronunciation can thus be learned quite effectively.
5. Latin is inflected. Learners must break words down into their component morphemes and analyze them in order to determine the role the words play in sentences. This process improves the student's understanding of the mechanics of language because they must use the rules of morphology and syntax. They cannot rely exclusively on word order to obtain meaning.
6. Latin vocabulary acquisition is facilitated by Latin's relatively small lexicon and few idioms.
7. Over 50% of all English words, most scientific and technical terms and most terms expressing abstract concepts are derived from Latin.

8. Latin classes are typically "low incidence" classes in which all students start at the same place in the learning curve. They are not like Spanish classes, for example, populated by students who have had some Spanish previously and have "dropped back" to relearn the language.

The Organizational Characteristics of an Ideal Latin Class are Appropriate for LD Students

1. High degree of structure and planning.
2. Explicit instruction in phonology of foreign language.
3. Information presented to students in written form:
 - ◆ plan for the day
 - ◆ in class or take home assignments
4. Consistent attention to Latin learning method as well as content:
 - ◆ discussion of "how to learn"
 - ◆ assignments designed to teach students how to learn
5. Breaking words, phrases, sentences and reading passages into their component parts and demonstrating how these parts constitute the whole.
6. Consideration of students' needs when determining pace of introduction of new material.
7. Attention to affective issues, especially student anxiety.
8. Frequent repetition and review.
9. Multisensory approach:
 - ◆ seeing, hearing, saying, writing or acting out the Latin
10. Careful consideration of evaluation and testing (pre-tests, separate setting, extended time).