

# Latin Locomotive® BUILDING PRE-SCHOOL LITERACY SKILLS



Summary of Program Evaluation Report by Barbara M. Burns, Ph.D., Cognitive Development Lab  
Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences at the University of Louisville

## Overview of the Latin Locomotive Program

This Evaluation Report describes a year-long pilot program evaluation of Prospect Latin School's Latin Locomotive® Program as conducted by Dr. Barbara Burns and two of her doctoral students Ruby C. Harris, M.A., and Danielle D. Brown, M.A., both in the Ph.D. Program at the University of Louisville. As a result of the research study, core parts of the Latin Locomotive® Program have been fully incorporated into the day-to-day curriculum at Prospect Latin School.

Prospect Latin School's Latin Locomotive® curriculum was designed to build pre-schooler's emerging English literacy skills by taking them on an adventure with the mother of all languages, Latin. In the study, 29 preschool students ages three and four at participating NAEYC accredited preschools participated in weekly songs, games, and activities to learn Latin root words under Prospect Latin School's Latin Locomotive® curriculum. A comparison group of an additional 37 students were from other NAEYC accredited preschools and did not receive this program.

The premise was that by taking Latin root words, children would add up to ten or more English words to their vocabulary. Because of the phonetic difficulty of the English language, the program's goal was to let children experience the interconnectedness of ideas that relate words together rather than just word or letter memorization – plus begin to build a mental framework with the building blocks of English. And since all Romance languages are 60%-70% based on the parent language of Latin, youngsters with experience in Latin would find that later language acquisition comes more easily – like having a free ticket to a much faster train ride, thus the name Latin Locomotive.

Throughout the nine-month school year, the Latin teacher conducted regular train stops with the children and interacted one-on-one to build an informal spoken Latin vocabulary. Parents also participated in weekly home activities.

## Evaluation of the Latin Locomotive Program: NEPSY Scores

Figure 2 shows the percentage of students in the Latin and comparison groups that scored above the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile on the Language scale of the NEPSY standardized test for children in both fall 2004 compared to spring 2005. The 75<sup>th</sup> percentile can be qualitatively interpreted as "Above Expected Level." The percentage of students scoring at or above the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile increased for the Latin group from 48.3% to 62.1%, but the comparison group showed a loss in the number of students performing at this level from 56.8% to 54.1%.

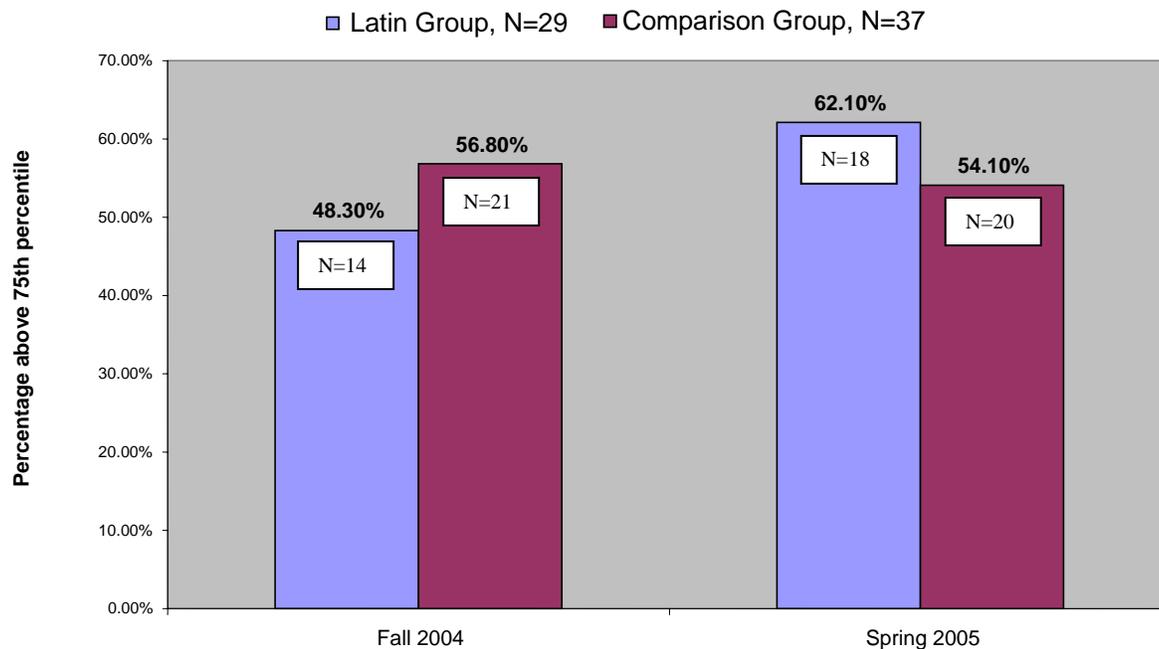


Figure 2. Percentage of students scoring above expected level on NEPSY language scales