

Basic Language Skills: A Statement of Fidelity

I. Introduction

Neuhaus Education Center's (NEC) professional development and curricula are based on current and established, peer-reviewed, scientific research for evidence-based practices in structured literacy instruction. The International Dyslexia Association (IDA) Handbook elaborates on the attributes of Structured Literacy, “Structured Literacy emphasizes the structure of language, including the speech sound system (phonology), the writing system (orthography), the structure of sentences (syntax), the meaningful parts of words (morphology), the relationships among words (semantics), and the organization of spoken and written discourse.”¹ The integration of listening, speaking, reading, and writing makes this instruction multisensory.” IDA also notes that all areas of structured literacy are essential for a student with dyslexia or language-based disorders.

Basic Language Skills (BLS) is an effective curriculum for students with dyslexia or a related disability. BLS incorporates critical, evidence-based components essential to support students’ decoding and language comprehension skills necessary to achieve reading comprehension. The daily lesson includes a rotation of activities delivered through direct, explicit, systematic methods. To build automaticity leading to comprehension lessons include a minimum of 180 minutes of instruction distributed evenly across multiple weekly sessions.

II. Purpose of the Fidelity Statement

Fidelity is a term used to describe the alignment between a written lesson and the way the lesson is actually delivered.²

The following model from Fixsen et al. (2013) can be used to demonstrate the relationship between an intervention, its implementation, and the resulting impact on student outcomes.³

$$\textit{Effective Interventions} \times \textit{Effective Implementation} = \textit{Improved Outcomes}$$

Effective implementation of ineffective interventions does not equal improved student outcomes. Alternatively, without effective implementation, effective interventions do not necessarily lead to improved outcomes for students.

- Research supports the way interventions are designed and the required ingredients that support effectiveness.⁴ As a result, it is important to implement curricula as they are intended to ensure you are able to obtain the intended results.^{5,6} Some degree of teacher autonomy is expected; however, interventions implemented with higher fidelity have been shown to be more effective.⁷
- *The Every Student Succeeds Act* requires schools to use evidence-based interventions, meaning they have been shown to be effective through research.^{8,9} We must remember that using strong evidence-based interventions is not enough.^{10,11} It is important to use interventions in the way they were designed and intended so that aspects that make the intervention work are not lost due to modifications or deviations by the teachers using it in the classroom.

According to Kim and Atanga (2014), teachers must make curriculum-based decisions for planning and enacting a lesson on a daily basis.¹² They must decide first whether to use the lesson in the curriculum and then how they are going to use it. Teachers then make “fidelity decisions” as they determine whether to use, modify or omit elements provided in the lesson or curriculum. When making fidelity decisions, it is imperative to think about how these decisions impact the quality of the lesson or the quality of the implementation of the materials. Certain fidelity decisions may be more critical to the quality of the implementation of the curriculum, which ultimately impacts student outcomes.

III. Key Components of Fidelity

1. Instructional Design:

Structured Literacy instruction emphasizes systematic and cumulative teaching methods that are explicit and diagnostic. The goal is to achieve comprehension, expression, and lifelong reading and writing habits.

BLS integrates:

- Reading, spelling, and comprehension practices.
- Multisensory techniques aligned with the Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teaching Reading.¹³

For students with dyslexia who have been determined eligible for dyslexia intervention, specially designed instruction must address the critical, evidence-based components set forth by the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) and the International Multisensory Structured Literacy Education Council (IMSLEC). The BLS program provides in-depth preparation for specialists working with individuals with dyslexia and other related disorders. The BLS program is accredited by the International Dyslexia Association and IMSLEC. Upon completion of all requirements, participants can apply to the Academic Language Therapy Association (ALTA) to become a Certified Academic Language Practitioner (CALP) or Certified Academic Language Therapist (CALT).

In addition, teachers are trained to use the following sources to support differentiated instruction:

Baseline/Initial Assessment

Completed using curriculum-based Mastery Checks to determine placement in the program. Multiple curriculum-based Mastery Checks may be required based on the student’s scores. Baseline Mastery Check results should be shared with families and/or school personnel prior to instruction. While in training, results should be shared with Neuhaus mentor to determine placement and instruction.

Progress Monitoring

Basic Language Skills daily lesson plans provide the teacher with the opportunity to observe students’ acquisition of the reading skills necessary for automaticity. The Mastery Checks display cumulative skill acquisition and help teachers to be diagnostic and prescriptive by collecting data and noting student progress throughout the delivery of instruction. They are given approximately every 20-25 Concepts. The therapist approaches the Mastery Check results with a diagnostic and prescriptive lens to determine whether the instruction should slow down, quicken, or maintain instructional pacing.

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The Mastery Checks are to be used as part of the lesson planning. On each student's record form, the instructor notes correct responses, errors, self-corrections, and behaviors such as effort, ease, and frustration. The Progress Report for each Mastery Check indicates a summary of results, analysis of results, and next steps/action plan.

Questions to consider when analyzing the Mastery Check:

- Is there a need to review a certain Concept?
- Is there a need to provide additional multisensory techniques to clarify a feature of the language?
- Does the student need additional practice with reading and/or spelling certain sounds?

Mastery Checks are administered throughout the curriculum. Results should be shared with families and/or school personnel in a timely manner. Completed activities from therapy sessions such as Reading Practices, Spelling Practices (words and/or sentences), Comprehension activities, Grammar and Composition activities should also be shared with families for review and updates on progress. Some of these items could be re-read at home for additional practice, if desired. Families should also be encouraged to read to and with the student to create positive reading experiences and foster a love of reading.

Data-driven scope and sequence

Instructors rely on daily student outcomes, as well as Mastery Check results to develop a differentiated scope and sequence that meets students' specific needs and pacing. Thus, ensuring data-driven diagnostic and prescriptive instruction.

2. Materials and Resources

The **Basic Language Skills Program** consists of 3 manuals: *Basic Language Skills: Concept Manual, Book 1*; *Basic Language Skills: Concept Manual, Book 2*; and *Basic Language Skills: Concept Manual, Book 3* each manual includes:

- Scope and sequence with an order of presentation for reading, spelling, Concept introductions and practices with intentionality in instruction.

Additional required manuals include:

- Reading Readiness
 - Foundational prerequisite literacy skills for students lacking the skills necessary to begin *Basic Language Skills: Concept Manual, Book 1*
- The Colors and Shapes of Language
 - Engaging lessons in vocabulary and oral language to build literacy skills for students in grades 1-3
- Scientific Spelling
 - Resource of most common spelling patterns and five spelling rules
 - Student manual provides opportunity for students to create a personal resource with sample words that demonstrate the reliable patterns and rules
- Multisensory Grammar
 - Scripted lessons for introduction to parts of speech

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- Multisensory lessons for identifying parts of speech in context
- Student masters
- Word Detective
 - Scripted lessons for exposure to the history of English language and morphemic analysis of word affixes
- Developing Metacognitive Skills
 - 75 lessons in Vocabulary and Comprehension
 - 8 Lessons at the *Listening Comprehension* level
 - 8 Lessons at the *Transitional Metacognition* level
 - 58 Lessons at the *Guided Metacognition* level
 - As part of the certification pathway, and with the guidance of a Neuhaus Mentor, individuals are learning how activities within a lesson may be adjusted to meet the needs of the students.

3. Instructional Practices

Implementation of Basic Language Skills with fidelity to the program's content and procedures is critical to the success of students. Principles of effective intervention for students with dyslexia have been established by the Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading and the International Dyslexia Association. Structured Literacy emphasizes the structure of language, including the speech sound system (phonology), the writing system (orthography), the structure of sentences (syntax), the meaningful parts of words (morphology), the relationships among words (semantics), and the organization of spoken and written discourse. The integration of listening, speaking, reading, and writing makes this instruction multisensory.

Consider the following scenario and the impact that fidelity can have in the following situation:

Two kindergarten teachers in the same school with similarly performing students and behavioral needs implement a new reading intervention in their classroom. The curriculum includes small-group and one-on-one instructions with the students for 30 minutes each day during their literacy block. Both teachers attended the same training and received the same materials. After 4 weeks of instruction, the campus coach followed up with both teachers asking specifically how the curriculum was implemented. One teacher used the curriculum every day for the full 30 minutes and followed the lesson plan provided at the professional development. The second teacher only used the curriculum for 15 minutes and then used other materials with the small groups of students for the remaining 15 minutes. When the coach reviewed the benchmark performance data, she observed that the students of the first teacher performed higher than those of the second teacher.

In this example, the first teacher implemented the curriculum with greater fidelity and therefore saw greater gains with the students. Additionally, one of the key ingredients of the core reading curriculum was small-group instruction. Therefore, when the second teacher chose to use different small-group materials, it could no longer be assumed that the teacher was using an intervention with evidence supporting its effectiveness.

Implementation must align with the way the intervention was designed. This includes dosage (e.g., how often and how much) and setting (e.g., whole class, small group, one-on-one). When professional

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development and curriculum are used as intended, it increases the likelihood of consistently obtaining the results you are looking to achieve and maintains the intervention's research or evidence base.

The goal of Structured Literacy is the development of deep levels of comprehension and expression and lifelong reading and writing habits. Although all aspects of this instruction are essential for students with dyslexia, this instruction also enhances the reading and academic achievement of all students.

Structured literacy is effective when following effective principles of instruction:

- **Explicit:** Explicit instruction is straightforward and uses precise language for direct teaching, leaving nothing to chance.
- **Systematic and cumulative:** Presents material in systematic order of the English language for introducing, reviewing, and practicing Concepts. Content is cumulative, beginning with the simplest skills and moving to the more complex.
- **Diagnostic:** Diagnostic teaching monitors student mastery level and ability to apply understanding of individual Concepts during instruction. Diagnostic information is used to inform planning and adjust instruction as needed.

Basic Language Skills Procedures

- Basic Language Skills Coursework/Professional Development taught by trained professionals prepared by NEC or an NEC-endorsed provider, certified through Academic Language Therapy Association as a Qualified Instructor (QI), CALT, and/or CALP
- Class size limited to 6–8 students
- Homogeneous grouping (no more than six months' difference in reading stage or two grade levels)
- For students to receive the **maximum** benefit of this intensive intervention, a minimum 180 minutes of instruction per week are required:
 - 60 minutes, 3 days/week
 - 45 minutes, 4 days/week
 - 40 minutes, 5 days/week
- Mastery Checks every 25 Concepts with regular progress reports

IV. Indicators of Fidelity

1. Observable teacher behaviors:

- Secure content knowledge
- Following the lesson sequence with a detailed lesson plan.
- Providing appropriate scaffolding and a gradual release model of instruction.
- Ensuring student mastery before progressing.
- Evidence of well-planned, thorough daily lessons that adhere to curricula
 - Use of guided discovery instruction
 - All elements of a full lesson cycle present
 - Amount of time per element consistent with curricula directives
 - All items necessary for lesson at the ready during instruction

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- Evidence of diagnostic teaching: students do not vary in ability by no more than six months' difference in reading stage or two grade levels
- Once certified, therapists or practitioners should continue to maintain the same high level of program implementation. CALTs and CALPs are bound to the ethical standards of ALTA and required to complete 10 hours of continuing education each year to remain certified.
- While completion of classes allows access to purchase and use materials, it does not guarantee expertise or certification. The only individuals endorsed and approved by Neuhaus Education Center to use Basic Language Skills materials should be in training at NEC (or its approved providers) or certified through ALTA. All other uses of Basic Language Skills curricula are in opposition of this “Basic Language Skills Statement of Fidelity” and do not maintain the high standards of NEC . Certification is only awarded to those who successfully pass the *ALTA Competency Exam* and are accepted as members in the Academic Language Therapy Association.

While in Training

For those instructors enrolled in the Dyslexia Specialist Preparation Program (DSPP), ten videos must be submitted for review by Neuhaus mentor to monitor lesson effectiveness and fidelity to instruction. Conferences with trainee and mentor follow the lesson to provide constructive feedback, discuss student progress, and trainee progress.

2. Student engagement and participation:

- Active involvement in decoding and encoding activities.
- Demonstration of skills in reading fluency and comprehension tasks.
- Evidence that group members are similarly skilled, and meeting demands of pace, skills, and materials

3. Classroom environment:

- Availability and proper use of curriculum materials.
- Structured and consistent instructional routines.
- Environment conducive to learning, allows for mistakes and offers supportive, and corrective feedback.

V. Monitoring and Support

1. Tools for Measuring Fidelity:

- Lesson schedule: Number of teaching minutes per session, number of sessions per week procedures, and daily lesson plans
- Class size and cohesiveness
- Student attendance
- Lesson observation checklists: Are the lesson plan components easily observed?
- Surveys or feedback forms for teachers and administrators.
- Student work samples in reading, spelling, and handwriting practices

2. Feedback and Coaching:

- Therapists-in-Training: Support and guidance from a credentialed Neuhaus mentor.
- Therapists: Opportunities to collaborate with professionals in related fields
- Opportunities for reflective practice and goal setting.

3. Professional Development:

Critical factors for student success in Basic Language Skills are teachers' knowledge and skill. Participants in DSPP build an in-depth knowledge of language structure, receive comprehensive training and participate in an extensive practicum program that prepares them to deliver multisensory instruction consistently using evidence-based methods. DSPP participants learn to utilize assessments and progress monitoring to be diagnostic and prescriptive to support students in building automaticity leading to reading comprehension and the development of written language skills.

The knowledge and skills acquired through participation in DSPP are gradually built through two levels of professional development and practice. DSPP participants meet benchmarks before moving into advanced coursework. As a prerequisite for Advanced coursework, participants in Level 1 teach through BLS Concepts 1-63, submit progress reports on Mastery Checks I & II, and submit 3 proficient recorded lessons. DSPP participants must meet certain timelines. Participants have 24 months to complete Level 1 of the DSPP program. Practitioners-in-training must also accrue a certain number of teaching hours in a minimum of 2 teaching situations. A teaching situation is an individual or small group of homogenous students identified with special needs in learning to read. A homogenous group presents a minimal range in reading and grade levels. Teaching hours are accrued in situations that meet a minimum of 180 minutes weekly in a minimum of 3 sessions. (See Table A below for minimum requirements)

Participants who choose to enter Level 2 of the DSPP must teach all lessons in *Basic Language Skills: Concept Manual, Book 1* and *Basic Language Skills: Concept Manual, Book 2*. Level 2 Participants must also submit a total of 10 video lessons that demonstrate various Concepts and elements from *Book 1* and *Book 2*. Finally, Level 2 Participants are required to accrue a minimum of 700 teaching hours, complete additional training, submit book reports, meet practicum requirements, and write a comprehensive case study within 60 months of beginning the program.

Once certified through ALTA as a CALP or CALT, a minimum of ten continuing education hours are required to maintain certification.

VI. Addressing Variability in Implementation

- To identify deviations from fidelity, Neuhaus recommends consulting *Basic Language Skills Fidelity Statement* to ensure **Instructional Practices** and **Teacher Behaviors** are being followed. Deviations such as group size, amount of instruction per week, and teacher preparation can have a tremendous impact on outcomes.
- For school leadership, additional support regarding implementation and suggestions can be offered by contacting the Specialist Preparation Program Office at SPP@neuhaus.org.
- It may be necessary to develop a continuous improvement plan for a Practitioner-in-training. In such cases where fidelity to BLS is in question, the Specialist Preparation Program Office should be contacted at SPP@neuhaus.org.

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- In cases of CALTs or CALPs not adhering to program fidelity, ALTA should be contacted as deviance from fidelity indicates a breach in ethical standards.
- Families concerned with lack of fidelity and quality instruction for their child should contact school administration first. Additionally, families may contact the Neuhaus Family Support Office for guidance regarding services for their child, NeuhausFSO@neuhaus.org
- If a CALT, CALP or trainee is unable to maintain fidelity of instruction due to lack of support from administration, a school district, or the Local Education Agency (LEA), it might be necessary to contact the State Board of Education.

VII. Commitment to Fidelity

Implementing BLS with fidelity is critical to achieving student success. Adherence to the Knowledge and Practice Standards of Teaching Reading, structured lesson delivery, and regular progress monitoring ensure that students receive the full benefits of structured literacy. Teachers, administrators, and stakeholders share responsibility for maintaining fidelity to enhance student outcomes and ensure equitable access to effective reading instruction.

- For optimal student outcomes teachers, administrators, and key stakeholders will be committed to group size, similar student abilities, instructional minutes, and lesson frequency.
- For optimal student outcomes, the teacher and administrator will be committed to the standards set forth for **expected teacher behaviors, student engagement and participation, and the classroom environment.**
- Only those certified through ALTA and employed by Neuhaus Education Center (or its affiliated programs) may coach, train, or lead professional development of **Basic Language Skills Program** and its materials. Any false representations of a trainer or instructor is in violation of Ethical Standard 5.5 set forth in IDA’s KPS (Standard 5.5 - Avoid making unfounded claims of any kind regarding the training, experience, credentials, affiliations, and degrees of those providing services).¹³

Table A: Basic Language Skills Book 1 – Minimum Number of Lessons				
Concepts	Instruction	Progress Monitoring	Review	Total
1-25	40 lessons	3-5 lessons	3-5 lessons	46-50 lessons
26-50	55 lessons	3-5 lessons	3-5 lessons	61-70 lessons
51-63	(17 lessons)			(17 lessons)
51-76	45 lessons	3-5 lessons	5-7 lessons	53-57 lessons
Lessons required to be eligible for BLS Advanced Class				124-137
Lessons to complete BLS Book 1 Instruction				160-177

Classes meeting 40-45-minutes may need additional instructional lessons.

Classes with 6+ students may need additional instructional lessons.

Certain classes may need 5-20 Reading Readiness lessons.

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Basic Language Skills Book 1 Lesson Activities	60- minute session 3-5x/wk	50-minute session 4-5x/wk	45-minute session 4-5x/wk	40-minute session 5x/wk
Rapid Naming	5 min.	4 min.	4 min.	3 min.
Handwriting	5 min.	4 min.	3 min.	3 min.
Reading Decks (IRD &/or Word Part)	3 min.	3 min.	2 min.	2 min.
Spelling Deck	3 min.	3 min.	2 min.	2 min.
Concept Introduction	10 min.	8 min.	7 min.	6 min.
Reading Practice	9 min.	5 min.	5 min.	5 min.
Spelling Practice	10 min.	8 min.	6 min.	5 min.
Extended Reading & Writing	15 min.	15 min.	15 min.	14 min.
Oral Language	5 min.	5 min.	5 min.	4 min.
Read Aloud	5 min.	3 min.	3 min.	3 min.

Concepts	Instruction	Progress Monitoring	Review	Total
77- 91	50 lessons	3-5 lessons	3-5 lessons	56-60 lessons
92 -105	52 lessons	3-5 lessons	3-5 lessons	58-62 lessons
106-120	46 lessons	3-5 lessons	5-7 lessons	54-57 lessons
Lessons to complete BLS Book 2 Instruction				168-179

Basic Language Skills Book 2 Lesson Activities	60-minute session 3-5x/wk	50-minute session 4-5x/wk	45-minute session 4-5x/wk	40-minute session 5x/wk
Word Study	5 min.	4 min.	4 min.	3 min.
Handwriting	5 min.	4 min.	3 min.	3 min.
Reading Decks	3 min.	3 min.	2 min.	2 min.
Spelling Deck	3 min.	3 min.	2 min.	2 min.
New Concept	10 min.	8 min.	7 min.	6 min.
Reading Practice	9 min.	5 min.	5 min.	5 min.
Spelling Practice	10 min.	8 min.	6 min.	5 min.
Extended Reading & Writing	25 min.	23 min.	23 min.	21 min.

Concepts	Instruction	Progress Monitoring	Review	Total
121-137	45 lessons	3-5 lessons	3-5 lessons	51-55 lessons
138-154	24 lessons	3-5 lessons	3-5 lessons	30-34 lessons
155-169	18 lessons	3-5 lessons	5-7 lessons	26-30 lessons
Lessons to complete BLS Book 3 Instruction				107-119

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