# *Concepts in Literacy* and Online Certification Program for Dyslexia Specialists: 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.  *IDA Dyslexia Handbook:  What Every Family Should Know* 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 Dyslexia Handbook* also notes that all areas of structured literacy are essential for a student with dyslexia or language-based disorders.

*Concepts in Literacy* is an effective curriculum for students with dyslexia or a related disability.  *Concepts in Literacy* is only available to those individuals who are enrolled in, or have completed, the Online Certification Program for Dyslexia Specialists (OCPDS).  *Concepts in Literacy* 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 in word reading that leads to comprehension, lessons include a minimum of 120 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

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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, systematic, and diagnostic. The ultimate goal is to achieve comprehension, expression, and lifelong reading and writing habits.

*CIL* integrates:
- Reading, spelling, comprehension, text structure, and written composition strategies.
- 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 Center for Effective Reading Instruction (CERI).  The OCPDS program provides in-depth preparation for specialists working with individuals with dyslexia and other language-based disorders. The OCPDS program is accredited by the International Dyslexia Association as an IDA Accredited Plus Program. Upon completion of program requirements, participants can apply to CERI to become a Certified Structured Literacy Dyslexia Specialist (C-SLDS).

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

**Baseline/Initial Assessment**

Curriculum-based progress monitors are completed to determine placement in the program. In addition, the Phonological Awareness Screening Test (PAST) is used to determine strengths and weaknesses in phonological and phonemic awareness.

- Multiple curriculum-based progress monitors may be required based on the student's scores.
- Baseline Progress Monitor administered, and data reviewed prior to the beginning of instruction with families and/or school personnel prior to instruction.
- Specialists in training share Progress Monitor results with Neuhaus mentor to determine placement.

## Progress Monitoring

*Concepts in Literacy* daily lesson plans provide the teacher with the opportunity to observe students' acquisition of the reading skills necessary for automaticity. The Progress Monitors demonstrate cumulative skill acquisition and help teachers to be diagnostic and prescriptive by collecting data and noting student progress throughout the delivery of instruction. Progress Monitors are given approximately every 10-12 concepts.

The Progress Monitors are to be used as part of the lesson plan. On each student's record form, the specialist records items correct, challenging patterns or words, and behaviors such as effort, ease, and frustration.

Questions to consider when analyzing the progress monitor:

- 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 or spelling certain sounds?

Progress Monitors are administered throughout the curriculum with results provided according to district or state guidelines.

Reading & Writing practices, Spelling practices, and Comprehension & Composition activities can also 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.

OCPDS participants are encouraged to share information with parents about the ACE Podcast through Literacy.io. The ACE Podcast provides free family literacy support. Text structures presented mirror those taught in *Concepts in Literacy* making literacy support and language the same at both home and school. The ACE Podcast is available in English and Spanish.

## Data-driven Scope and Sequence

This is a prescriptive, diagnostic practice to honor student's previous knowledge, so valuable time is not spent reteaching already mastered content.

For students with prior knowledge, a data-driven scope and sequence can be used to determine concepts mastered, concepts in need of review, or concepts to introduce. This information is gathered through completing multiple progress monitors to create a data-driven scope and sequence that directs an individual student's needs.

The stages of reading development are not tied to the age or grade of the student, but rather to their reading ability and experience.[14]

## 2. Materials and Resources

- *Concepts in Literacy Volume 1*, Student Masters, Key Word Deck, Image Deck
- *Concepts in Literacy Volume 2*, Student Masters, Key Word Deck, Image Deck
- *Concepts in Literacy Volume 3*, Student Masters, Key Word Deck, Image Deck
- *Concepts in Literacy Volume 4*, Student Masters, Key Word Deck, Image Deck
- *Concepts in Literacy Volume 5*, Student Masters, Key Word Deck, Image Deck

## 3. Instructional Practices

Implementation of *Concepts in Literacy* 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) and 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 implementation with fidelity can have on instruction:

> 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 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.

## Concepts in Literacy Procedures & CERI Requirements for Certification:

- Courses taught by trained professionals prepared by NEC or an NEC-endorsed provider, certified through Center for Effective Reading Instruction as a Certified Structured Literacy Dyslexia Interventionist or Structured Literacy Dyslexia Specialist
- Appropriate group size: Based on Instructional Tier, group size should range from 2-8 students.
  - Students requiring highly intensive instruction would benefit from a one-on-one setting.
- Homogeneous grouping: No more than a six-month differential in reading stages between students, and/or no more than two grade levels

As part of an IDA Plus Accredited program, OCPDS must also adhere to the following requirements from CERI:

- 150 Minimum Teaching Hours plus teaching into the Advanced *CIL* curriculum
- 3 Teaching Situations must include individuals or groups in the following categories:
  - 2 Teaching Situations must begin at Concept 1
  - Lower elementary Teaching Situation required (Gr. 1-3)
  - Upper elementary Teaching Situation required (Gr. 3-5)
  - Teaching Situation of choice (Gr. 1-5, can be extended through Gr. 8 with approval)

CERI Required Student Teaching Situations

| Sessions Per Week | Minutes Per Session | Minutes Per Week |
|---|---|---|
| 2 sessions | 60 min per session | 120 min total per week |
| 3 sessions | 45 min per session | 135 min total per week |
| 4 sessions | 30 min per session | 120 min total per week |
| For students to receive the maximum benefit of this intensive intervention, Neuhaus strongly recommends that specialists-in-training or specialists work with students at a minimum of four days per week for at least 45 minutes per session. | | |

Duration of instruction for each Teaching Situation must be 24-consecutive weeks and/or 48 sessions.

- Extended standard academic breaks (i.e., summer break, spring break, fall break, etc.) do not disrupt the consecutive week count.
- Each teaching situation requires a minimum of 3 completed progress monitor reports (9 total)

## IV. Indicators of Fidelity

### 1. Observable Teacher Behaviors

- Instructor follows the lesson sequence and all components.
- Quantifiable knowledge of the CIL content and procedures
- Following the scripted lesson plan while also being responsive and attentive to student needs
- Lesson is well paced: Pace is brisk and maintains student engagement but allows time for questioning and explanation of material.
- Lesson plans are complete, prepared, and easily accessible.
- Appropriate scaffolding provided to students.
- Student mastery evident before progressing to new concepts.
- Use of anecdotal and progress monitor data to inform and adjust instruction.
- Evidence of diagnostic teaching: students do not vary in ability by more than six months' difference in reading stage or two grade levels.
- While completion of the initial phase of professional development 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 *Concepts in Literacy* materials should be in training at Neuhaus Education Center or certified through CERI. All other uses of *Concepts in Literacy* curricula are in opposition of this "OCPDS Statement of Fidelity" and do not maintain the high standards of NEC . Certification is only awarded to those who complete all coursework, successfully pass the Knowledge and Practice Examination for Effective Reading Instruction exam (KPEERI), and are accepted as members in the Center for Effective Reading Instruction.

### 2. Student Engagement and Participation

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

### 3. Classroom environment

- Availability and proper use of curriculum materials.
- Structured and consistent instructional routines.
- Environment conducive to learning, allows for mistakes and supportive. Corrective feedback given as required.
- Clean working space free of clutter and distraction.

# V.  Monitoring and Support

## 1. Markers for Administration and/or Literacy Coaches to Measure Instructor Fidelity

- Lesson schedule:  Number of actual 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 comprehension

## 2. Feedback and Coaching

- Teachers in Neuhaus certification programs will be assigned a mentor who reviews recorded video demonstration lessons and provides feedback and coaching for future lessons.
- Mentors will review student progress and assist with data-driven decision-making while in the program.
- Upon certification, ten continuing education hours provide opportunities to collaborate with professionals in related fields.

## 3. Professional Development

OCPDS Professional Development consists of synchronous and asynchronous instruction. Participants are expected to allocate approximately 8-10 hours per week to meet the demands of coursework.

Phase 1 is a 10-week course that builds knowledge in Science of Reading and Structured Literacy. Participants will be trained in *Concepts in Literacy* lesson procedures, methods of instruction for decoding, encoding, comprehension, and composition.

Phase 2 is a 3-week course that continues to provide a deeper understanding of research and practice for students with reading delays.  Additional lesson procedures are introduced with an emphasis on encoding, fluency, and using technology to enhance instruction.

Phase 3 is a 3-week course that provides an in-depth focus on improving student outcomes in comprehension and composition.

In each phase, participants learn to utilize assessments and progress monitors to make diagnostic and prescriptive decisions which support student outcomes in literacy skills including fluent reading,  reading comprehension, and written language skills.  Likewise, participants are expected to engage in practicums with peer collaboration, mentoring, and feedback to strengthen knowledge of curriculum and implementation.  These practicums are supervised by certified Neuhaus mentors.

Participants must also complete the following assignments:

- 3 book reports
- 5 self-guided studies

- 8 demonstration videos: Demonstration videos must be 45-60 minutes in duration and include specific skills, topics, and content found in the five *Concepts in Literacy* manuals.  Video submissions must include a weekly lesson plan that contains the submitted lesson.  The demonstration video must also include student spelling sample(s).

Upon review, a Neuhaus mentor will provide written feedback to each participant.  A virtual meeting provides a debrief of the lesson with suggestions for improvement and recommendations for  the next submission.  Specialists in training must wait for feedback before recording the next lesson.

# VI.   Addressing Variability in Implementation

Fidelity ensures that interventions are implemented as designed to achieve intended outcomes. Research shows that higher fidelity leads to improved outcomes.[7] Teacher autonomy must be balanced with adherence to core instructional components to maintain program integrity.

To identify deviations from fidelity, Neuhaus recommends consulting this document 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. While adjustments may be made to meet individual needs, critical components such as dosage and instructional design must remain intact to preserve the program's evidence-based effectiveness.

1. For school leadership, additional support regarding implementation and suggestions can be offered by contacting the OCPDS Program Office at OCPDS@neuhaus.org .
2. It may be necessary to develop an improvement plan for a trainee.  In such cases where fidelity to *CIL* is in question, the OCPDS Program Office should be contacted at OCPDS@neuhaus.org .
3. In cases of Certified Structured Literacy Dyslexia Specialists (C-SLDS) or Certified Structured Dyslexia Interventionists (C-SLDI) not adhering to program fidelity, CERI should be contacted as deviance from fidelity indicates a breach in ethical standards.
4. If a C-SLDI, C-SLDS 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 *CIL* with fidelity is critical to achieving student success. Adherence to IDA Standards, structured lesson delivery, and regular progress monitoring ensure that students receive the full benefits of structured literacy. Specialists and Specialists-in-Training, administrators, and stakeholders share responsibility for maintaining fidelity to enhance student outcomes and ensure equitable access to effective reading instruction.

1. For optimal student outcome teachers, administrators, and key stakeholders will be committed to group size, similar student abilities, instructional minutes, and lesson frequency.

2. For optimal student outcomes, Specialists, Specialists-in-Training, and administrators will be committed to the standards set forth for **expected teacher behaviors**, **student engagement and participation**, and the **classroom environment**.

3.  Only those certified through CERI and employed by Neuhaus Education Center (or its affiliated programs) may coach, train, or lead professional development of OCPDS, *CIL* and its materials. Any false representations of a trainer or instructor are in violation of the ethical standards 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).

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