

Continuous Improvement Focused Discussion Groups

Bethel University uses Continuous Improvement Focused Discussion (CIFD) Groups to gather data and make program improvements. Typically, our focus groups include the following traits:

- Consists of 6 to 10 participants
- Led by a trained moderator/faculty member who teaches and is well-versed in the content
- Has the purpose of discussing one topic/issue (or related topics) in depth

The term focus group refers to the role of the group members who are focused on a particular discussion topic – in this case the achievement of program completers and how the program is preparing them for the field. We realize that on the surface, such groups can provide information about people’s opinions and feelings concerning critical topic. But the real strength of these focus groups is that we gained insight into their reasons for those opinions. In other words, we understood the “Why?” behind their responses.

Three aspects of CIFD Groups help accomplish this. One, the open-ended questioning format of our focus groups help explore participants’ comments. Two, there is an underlying assumption that participants are usually more willing to express their opinions amidst the security of other people who share some of their concerns and interests. And three, the atmosphere in focus groups is one of sharing, collaboration, and discussing rather than just interviewing, because moderators encourage participants to interact directly with each other. Thus, the format of the group is conducive to gathering information not just about how people feel but also about why they feel that way. This is the essence of our CIFD Groups.

What follows are the summaries of the five groups that met in the spring. These data from the group meetings were used (and are still being used) for program improvement and to make needed changes.

Elementary Education Sub-Committee

Standard How well prepared are our candidates? Or, what would you be looking for if you were going to hire a candidate?	Comments
<p>1. Foundations of Scientifically Based Reading Instruction: Elementary Education Program completers understand the foundations of reading development and effective reading instruction grounded in scientifically based reading research (SBRR).</p>	<p>Candidates have the knowledge and are guided by whatever curriculum they are using. Principals are interested in teachers being able to meet a student where they are and move them forward. Also looking for ways the teacher would know how to implement the activities. Pedagogy seems solid with candidates.</p>
<p>2. Components of Scientifically Based Reading Instruction: Elementary Education Program completers understand the major components of reading development and demonstrate the ability to provide assessment, instruction, intervention, extension, and ongoing progress monitoring in reading.</p>	<p>Recent hires know SBRR. And, if there are things they don't know there is a spirit of willingness to learn and aren't offended by constructive advice, etc, life learners.</p>
<p>3. Learner Development: Program completers understand how learners grow and develop, recognizing that patterns of learning and development vary individually within and across the cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional, and physical areas, and design and implement developmentally appropriate and challenging learning experiences.</p>	<p>Yes, completers demonstrate this. Principals looking for ways candidates specifically zone in on needs.</p>
<p>4. Learning Differences: Program completers use their understanding of individual differences and diverse cultures and communities to ensure inclusive learning environments that enable each learner to meet high standards.</p>	<p>YEs. Candidates have EL knowledge and care about kids. They have motivation to meet their needs.</p>
<p>5. Learning Environments: Program completers work with others to create environments that support individual and collaborative learning, and that encourage positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation.</p>	<p>Yes to awareness of all learners</p>
<p>6. Content Knowledge: Program completers understand the central concepts, tools of inquiry, and structures of the discipline(s) he or she teaches and creates learning experiences that make these aspects of the discipline accessible and meaningful for learners to assure mastery of the content.</p>	<p>Content knowledge is there in both math and reading- science and ss are generally embedded into language arts.</p>
<p>7. Application of Content: Program completers understand how to connect concepts and use differing</p>	<p>Curriculum helps highlight this but teachers have an awareness in activities.</p>

Elementary Education Sub-Committee

<p>perspectives to engage learners in critical thinking, creativity, and collaborative problem solving related to authentic local and global issues.</p>									
<p>8. Assessment: Program completers understand and uses multiple methods of assessment to engage learners in their own growth, to monitor learner progress, and to guide the teacher’s and learner’s decision making.</p>	<p>Seeing many formative checks happening. Also using what curriculum or school-based assessments are there.</p>								
<p>9. Planning for Instruction: Program completers plan instruction that supports every student in meeting rigorous learning goals by drawing upon knowledge of content areas, curriculum, cross-disciplinary skills, and pedagogy, as well as knowledge of learners and the community context.</p>	<p>No concerns, Good engagement with little downtime.</p>								
<p>10. Instructional Strategies: Program completers understand and use a variety of instructional strategies to encourage learners to develop deep understanding of content areas and their connections, and to build skills to apply knowledge in meaningful ways.</p>	<p>Yes- a great variety in all subjects. They come in with a good toolkit of strategies and learn new ones.</p>								
<p>11. Professional Learning and Ethical Practice: Program completers engage in ongoing professional learning and use evidence to continually evaluate his/her practice, particularly the effects of his/her choices and actions on others (learners, families, other professionals, and the community), and adapt practice to meet the needs of each learner.</p>	<p>Early release days support (force) this. Completers are taking active roles in discussions and grade level activities.</p>								
<p>12. Leadership and Collaboration: Program completers seek appropriate leadership roles and opportunities to take responsibility for student learning, to collaborate with learners, families, colleagues, other school professionals, and community members to ensure learner growth, and to advance the profession.</p>	<p>New teachers don’t always have immediate opportunity to lead, but are good participants with other teachers. On</p>								
<p>13. Overall impression of recent completers of this program</p>									
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Elementary Education Sub-Committee

We would strongly consider future completers from BU	We would consider future completers from BU	We have some reservations about BU completers	We would NOT consider BU completers
4	3	2	1

Secondary/All-Grade Sub-Committee

Standard How well prepared are our candidates? Or, what would you be looking for if you were going to hire a candidate?	Comments
<p>1. Learner Development: Program completers understand how learners grow and develop, recognizing that patterns of learning and development vary individually within and across the cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional, and physical areas, and design and implement developmentally appropriate and challenging learning experiences.</p>	<p>Bethel candidates recognize specific needs of individual students. Formative and summative assessment is awesome.</p> <p>Candidates learn concepts through learning theories projects.</p> <p>Bethel students understand the importance of helping learners and this improves with experience.</p>
<p>2. Learning Differences: Program completers use their understanding of individual differences and diverse cultures and communities to ensure inclusive learning environments that enable each learner to meet high standards.</p>	<p>Bethel students are aware of the diverse nature of schools and try to build relationships with students.</p> <p>Bethel completers work well with students and provide support even beyond the classroom.</p> <p>They develop meaningful relationships with all students.</p> <p>Diversity and diverse learning styles can be tough, and the T2T students may have more experience at this.</p>
<p>3. Learning Environments: Program completers work with others to create environments that support individual and collaborative learning, and that encourage positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation.</p>	<p>Bethel completers are great collaborators and work to provide experiences for students that are real-world and applicable to problem solving in groups.</p> <p>They seek feedback and collaboration. Most desire guidance and collaboration.</p> <p>They come ready to team and collaborate.</p>
<p>4. Content Knowledge: Program completers understand the central concepts, tools of inquiry, and structures of the discipline(s) he or she teaches and creates learning experiences that make these aspects of the discipline accessible and meaningful for learners to assure mastery of the content.</p>	<p>Content knowledge comes with experience, but they are coming in with a breadth of knowledge. If they are unsure, they ask questions.</p> <p>They seek out help when they are unsure of content.</p>

Secondary/All-Grade Sub-Committee

<p>5. Application of Content: Program completers understand how to connect concepts and use differing perspectives to engage learners in critical thinking, creativity, and collaborative problem solving related to authentic local and global issues.</p>	<p>Bethel completers may need more work on this area, but this is a challenge for beginning teachers. They are aware and work toward this, but it may depend on the school's goals where they are working.</p>
<p>6. Assessment: Program completers understand and uses multiple methods of assessment to engage learners in their own growth, to monitor learner progress, and to guide the teacher's and learner's decision making.</p>	<p>Bethel completers may be challenged here, but they are exposed enough to be ready for this. The theory and practice is embedded, but requires more practice in the workplace.</p>
<p>7. Planning for Instruction: Program completers plan instruction that supports every student in meeting rigorous learning goals by drawing upon knowledge of content areas, curriculum, cross-disciplinary skills, and pedagogy, as well as knowledge of learners and the community context.</p>	<p>Completers really work with students to pull across curriculum to make connections.</p> <p>T2T seem more challenged at this because they are teaching while learning the content.</p>
<p>8. Instructional Strategies: Program completers understand and use a variety of instructional strategies to encourage learners to develop deep understanding of content areas and their connections, and to build skills to apply knowledge in meaningful ways.</p>	<p>Spiraling and re-teaching are methods that Bethel completers use.</p>
<p>9. Professional Learning and Ethical Practice: Program completers engage in ongoing professional learning and use evidence to continually evaluate his/her practice, particularly the effects of his/her choices and actions on others (learners, families, other professionals, and the community), and adapt practice to meet the needs of each learner.</p>	<p>Yes! This is engrained in the culture, and hopefully reinforced in the schools they are employed. They are self-reflective and see self-improvement.</p>
<p>10. Leadership and Collaboration: Program completers seek appropriate</p>	

Secondary/All-Grade Sub-Committee

<p>leadership roles and opportunities to take responsibility for student learning, to collaborate with learners, families, colleagues, other school professionals, and community members to ensure learner growth, and to advance the profession.</p>	<p>Bethel completers do a great job here! They come prepared to get involved!</p>
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11. Overall impression of recent completers of this program

The completer is very well prepared	The completer is well prepared	There are deficits in the completer's preparation	The completer is NOT well prepared
4	3	2	1

This could probably be a 3.5....

12. Likelihood you or your schools would have interest in hiring future program completers

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Special Education Sub-Committee

<p>Standard How well prepared are our candidates? Or, what would you be looking for if you were going to hire a candidate?</p>	<p>Comments</p>
<p>1. Learner Development: SPED completers understand how exceptionalities may interact with development and learning and use this knowledge to provide meaningful and challenging learning experiences for individuals with exceptionalities.</p>	<p>Present: Susan Lee, Angela Overmeyer, Andrea Hoover</p> <p>*One area that adjuncts identified as a challenge in teaching SPED courses at Bethel was uncertainty regarding courses previously taken and content that was covered. *It was noted that some teacher candidates understand exceptionalities because of their own personal learning difficulties. *Experience teaching with a SPED educator (BU completer) was positive.</p>
<p>2. Learning Environment: SPED completers create safe, inclusive, culturally responsive learning environments so that individuals with exceptionalities become active and effective learners and develop emotional well being, positive social interactions, and self-determination.</p>	<p>*Bethel SPED students are strong in compassion, understanding the need for inclusivity, and being sensitive to cultural differences. Adjuncts incorporate these discussions throughout their courses.</p>
<p>3. Curricular Content Knowledge: SPED completers use knowledge of general and specialized curricula to individualize learning for individuals with exceptionalities.</p>	<p>*Candidates are exposed to a variety of curricular resources and are guided in how to collaborate with colleagues within their schools for district-specific resources.</p>
<p>4. Assessment: SPED completers use multiple methods of assessment and data sources in making educational decisions.</p>	<p>*Adjuncts who are currently teaching in K-12 schools bring in actual assessments with student names blacked out. This gives teacher candidates access to real-world data. Candidates receive instruction and guidance in applying the data to instructional decision-making. It was noted that fieldwork placements do not always lend themselves well to candidates viewing and applying student assessment data.</p>
<p>5. Instructional Planning and Strategies: SPED completers select, adapt, and use a repertoire of evidence-based instructional strategies to advance the learning of individuals with exceptionalities.</p>	<p>*Candidates write lesson plans in SPED courses and are exposed to a variety of instructional strategies. Again, it was noted that candidates are not always given the opportunity to practice instruction in their fieldwork placements, so they are provided with opportunities in class to practice.</p>
<p>6. Professional Learning and Ethical Practice: SPED completers use foundational knowledge of the field and their professional ethical</p>	<p>*Candidates are reminded throughout courses of the need for student confidentiality. The overall impression of BU candidates is that they maintain high standards of confidentiality, advocacy, and adherence to ethical considerations.</p>

Special Education Sub-Committee

<p>principles and practice standards to inform special education practice, to engage in lifelong learning, and to advance the profession.</p>	
<p>7. Collaboration: SPED completers collaborate with families, other educators, related service providers, individuals with exceptionalities, and personnel from community agencies in culturally responsive ways to address the needs of individuals with exceptionalities across a range of learning experiences.</p>	<p>*Candidates participate in a mock case conference with assigned roles and are asked difficult questions that could be asked in an actual setting. Candidates are professional, thinking quickly and responding appropriately, professionally, and kindly.</p> <p>*Some BU candidates are involved in Special Olympics or other organizations that advocate for students with special needs. These candidates demonstrate care for the individuals in that community and are genuinely invested in the field of special education.</p>

8. Overall impression of recent completers of this program

The completer is very well prepared	The completer is well prepared	There are deficits in the completer's preparation	The completer is NOT well prepared
4	3	2	1

9. Likelihood you or your schools would have interest in hiring future program completers

We would strongly consider future completers from BU	We would consider future completers from BU	We have some reservations about BU completers	We would NOT consider BU completers
4	3	2	1

ENL Sub-Committee

Standard How well prepared are our candidates? Or, what would you be looking for if you were going to hire a candidate?	Comments Dr. Monesmith, Marcy Porter and Cindy Deak were in this break out session.
1. ENL preparation program provides opportunities for candidates to develop an understanding of how English language learners communicate for social, intercultural, and instructional purposes within the school setting.	We felt our program does this well plus addressing the importance of conversational language.
2. ENL preparation program provides opportunities for candidates to develop an understanding of how English language learners communicate information, ideas, and concepts necessary for academic success in all content areas (language arts, math, social studies, and science).	*Program is still considered new, but we felt some students aren't able to see all the content areas in their field work. We also suggested more academic language being taught for all the content areas such as social studies and science.
3. Culture: ENL program completers know, understand, and use the major concepts, principles, theories, and research related to the nature and role of culture and cultural groups to construct learning environments that support second language learners' cultural identities, language and literacy development, and content area achievement.	We brought up that some area schools are seeing an influx of Russian students to add to our Spanish speaking students. The term "multicultural learners" is a term that we are seeing an increase in literature as well as the state of Indiana. We are also seeing where our new students are enrolling with lower literacy levels.
4. Planning & Preparation: ENL program completers know, understand, and use standards-based practices and strategies related to planning, implementing, and managing ESL and content instruction, including classroom organization, teaching strategies for developing and integrating language skills, and choosing and adapting classroom resources.	Adapting resources is an area that we felt we all do well as well as emphasize the importance of the WIDA standards. We also require students to look more into each student profile (levels) and plan accordingly.
5. Assessment: ENL program completers understand issues of assessment and use standards-based assessment measures with second language learners.	Formative assessments are planned using the WIDA standards as well as their WIDA levels.
6. Professionalism: ENL program completers demonstrate knowledge of the history of ESL teaching. Candidates keep current with new instructional techniques, research results, advances in the ESL field, and public policy issues. Candidates use	Weren't sure on "public policy issues" maybe ask more of definition or example of this.

ENL Sub-Committee

such information to reflect upon and improve their instructional practices. Candidates provide support and advocate for second language learners and their families and work collaboratively to improve the learning environment.	
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7. Overall impression of recent completers of this program

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4 – all said this	3	2	1

8. Likelihood you or your schools would have interest in hiring future program completers

We would strongly consider future completers from BU	We would consider future completers from BU	We have some reservations about BU completers	We would NOT consider BU completers
4 – all said this	3	2	1

School Administration (Principalship) Sub-Committee

<p>Standard How well prepared are our candidates? Or, what would you be looking for if you were going to hire a candidate?</p>	<p>Comments</p>
<p>1. Mission, Vision, and Improvement: School Administration program completers are able to apply the knowledge, skills, and commitments necessary to collaboratively lead, design, and implement a school mission, vision, and process for continuous improvement that reflects a core set of values and priorities that include data use, technology, equity, diversity, digital citizenship, and community.</p>	<p>We agree.</p> <p>A lot of the students' intuitive thoughts regarding ethics and legal issues seem to stem from their program experiences.</p>
<p>2. Ethics and Professional Norms: School Administration program completers understand and demonstrate the capacity to advocate for ethical decisions and cultivate and enact professional norms.</p>	<p>Absolutely.</p> <p>Students increase their understanding that everything is not black and white -- but that there are shades of grey -- during the program.</p>
<p>3. Equity, Inclusiveness, and Cultural Responsiveness: School Administration program completers are able to develop and maintain a supportive, equitable, culturally responsive, and inclusive school culture.</p>	<p>They think they can. Everyone has biases that are difficult to overcome.</p> <p>We could do more with implicit bias.</p> <p>We do not require a broad base of experiences as we do with teacher prep programs. We recognize that this is logistically difficult, if not impossible, so how can we make them have experiences without forcing them into different districts/buildings for a broader base of experience.</p>
<p>4. Learning and Instruction: School Administration program completers are able to evaluate, develop, and implement coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, data systems, supports, and assessment.</p>	<p>People are limited by their own experiences; we see things through the lens of our own content areas/experiences, and people struggle to expand their vision to a broader responsibility of building-wide or district-wide experiences.</p>
<p>5. Community and External Leadership: School Administration program completers are able to engage families, community, and school personnel in order to strengthen student learning, support school</p>	<p>Community and broad district interaction are addressed in the program -- so the completers have some experiences in those areas. With the online approach to learning, it is sometimes difficult to address the shades of grey and alternate perspectives on various issues. With 7-week courses, follow-up on feedback is a challenge.</p>

School Administration (Principalship) Sub-Committee

<p>improvement, and advocate for the needs of their school and community.</p>	
<p>6. Operations and Management: School Administration program completers are able to improve management, communication, technology, school-level governance, and operation systems to develop and improve data-informed and equitable school resource plans and to apply laws, policies, and regulations.</p>	<p>Completers do understand the "letter of the law" for these things, but the nuances of different districts are difficult to understand when they don't have the experiences in those areas.</p> <p>They know how to find the "go to" person to support these things so that they can be effective in a variety of locations.</p> <p>More emphasis in these areas could be beneficial.</p>
<p>7. Building Professional Capacity: School Administration program completers are able to build the school's professional capacity, engage staff in the development of a collaborative professional culture, and improve systems of staff supervision, evaluation, support, and professional learning.</p>	<p>That is the philosophical goal. Where the rubber meets the road, experience is where this is learned.</p> <p>The internship experiences -- based on the opportunities granted by the school -- are key to this.</p> <p>People have to choose to be leaders.</p>

We could use more case studies and current events discussions in all courses to help candidates become stronger.

8. Overall impression of recent completers of this program -- 3

<p>The completer is very well prepared</p>	<p>The completer is well prepared</p>	<p>There are deficits in the completer's preparation</p>	<p>The completer is NOT well prepared</p>
<p>4</p>	<p>3</p>	<p>2</p>	<p>1</p>

9. Likelihood you or your schools would have interest in hiring future program completers - 4

School Administration (Principalship) Sub-Committee

We would strongly consider future completers from BU	We would consider future completers from BU	We have some reservations about BU completers	We would NOT consider BU completers
4	3	2	1