

Employer Interview Protocol

Revised: August 2023

CAEP Components: R1, R4.2, R5.2

For the Employer data, we have decided to utilize one-on-one and small-group interviews, in order to collect qualitative data from district partner employers. With low response rates on surveys and low attendance in focus groups, the interview structure may be the most effective for us as a small EPP.

Semi-structured Interviews

A semi-structured interview protocol is a set of questions that are used to guide an interview, but the order and phrasing of the questions can be flexible. This allows the interviewer to explore the participant's responses in more depth and to follow up on interesting or unexpected answers. Semi-structured interview protocols are often used in qualitative research, where the goal is to understand the participant's experiences and perspectives in their own words. The following are some of the key features of a semi-structured interview protocol:

- The questions are open-ended, which allows the participant to provide their own answers in their own words.
- The questions are focused on the research topic, but they are not rigidly structured. The interviewer can ask follow-up questions or explore the participant's responses in more depth.
- The protocol is flexible, so it can be adapted to the specific participant and the research context.

Thematic Analysis Process

For our interviews we plan to use the following analysis process:

- Thematic analysis: is a method for analyzing qualitative data that involves identifying themes or patterns in the data. The themes can then be used to develop a deeper understanding of the participant's experiences and perspectives.
 - Thematic analysis is a flexible and versatile method that can be used to analyze a variety of qualitative data, including interview transcripts, focus group transcripts, field notes, and documents. It is a popular method in the social sciences, but it can also be used in other fields, such as healthcare, education, and business.
 - This flexibility and reliance on themes will allow us to share results with faculty and our advisory councils (program and department) easily and using language familiar to participants to explore key elements and themes in the data.

The first step in analyzing semi-structured interview data for employers will be to transcribe the interviews. This will be done by a software tool in Microsoft Teams/Zoom and selectively edited for understanding and clarity. From there, thematic analysis will consist of the following steps:

1. Familiarization: The first step is to become familiar with the data. This involves reading through the data repeatedly and taking notes on the key points.

2. Coding: The next step is to code the data. This involves assigning codes to each of the key points. We will use bracket coding approaches with a key focus on themes and full statements/thoughts from employers.
3. Theme identification: Once the data has been coded, the next step is to identify the themes. This involves looking for patterns and connections between the codes.
4. Theme development: The next step is to develop the themes. This involves defining the themes and providing examples of data that support them.
5. Writing up: The final step is to write up the employer findings. This involves presenting the themes and discussing their implications to advisory councils and the Department faculty and staff.

Thematic analysis is a recursive process, meaning that it is not linear. We plan to go back and forth between the different steps as they develop their understanding of the data. We also plan to focus on the inductive thematic analysis approach which involves identifying themes from the data without any preconceived ideas.

District Partners:

The BW Department of Education met with five administrators from the following schools/districts in 2023-24. One meeting was conducted as a one-on-one session and the additional four administrators met as a small group. Interview dates occurred between April 18-24, 2024.

1. Berea City Schools
2. North Ridgeville City Schools
3. North Royalton City Schools

Proposed Interview Questions:

Here is the list of questions that were approved by the EPP Program Coordinators in 2023SP for the focus groups and we have also decided to apply them to our interview protocol.

Interview Questions & Standard Alignments

	<i>How well has BW prepared completers to:</i>	OSTP Alignment	InTASC Alignment
1	...collaborate effectively with other teachers, administrators, and district staff?	6.3	10
2	...be knowledgeable about assessment types, their purposes, and the data they generate?	3.1	4
3	...analyze data to monitor student progress and learning and use data to plan, differentiate, and modify instruction?	3.3 3.4	6, 7
4	...treat students fairly and establish an environment that is respectful, supportive, and conducive to learning for all students?	5.1 5.5	3
5	...use technology to enhance teaching and student learning	4.7	8
6	...to differentiate instruction to support the learning needs of all students, including students identified as gifted, students with disabilities, and at-risk students.	1.5 4.7	2, 8

Summary

Starting in Fall 2022 and continuing into Fall 2023, initial meetings with local district and school leaders including superintendents, principals, and teachers were had to discuss partnerships and relationships with the EPP. Discussions about teacher preparation coordination were the focus of these initial meetings, including ideas for shared and customized PD courses for the district provided by the EPP/staff; pathways for high school students into BW teacher education programs; and partnerships to further connect preservice teachers with mentors.

The focus of the meetings was typically finding ways to increase enrollment, expand preservice teacher experiences, and return graduates to the districts to staff openings and shortage areas. Mild/Moderate, ESL/ELL, and STEM fields were often cited as critical need areas (along with a consistent request for active EPP students to serve as substitutes).

Strengths of Completers

When discussing EPP candidates and employees, some key elements emerged. Employers roundly supported the EPP programs and quality of candidates, including statements such as “if it were up to me, we would hire every BW candidate we could.” BW was viewed positively and as a solid partner by all districts and leaders interviewed.

In the Zoom group focus group interview, employers discussed graduates as being well prepared to work as a team and to collaborate on effective changes to curriculum, assessments, and data incorporation. Lesson planning was also mentioned as a strength. Another area that was highlighted in the Zoom interview was younger teachers bringing innovative practices into the classroom and working with older teachers as mentors. This was stated twice in the interview as a positive impact that EPP completers were having on veteran teachers in the district. Finally, a focus in the one-on-one interview that emerged was high levels of preparation in planning and classroom management for EPP completers. Being able to trust that a completer was “classroom ready” was a key factor.

Areas of Improvement for Completers

Details about areas of improvement emerged in both discussions as well. There was a concern about lack of English language learner experience, utilizing data to influence planning, and differentiating instruction for all students. Employers specifically mentioned rethinking the way the EPP teaches UDL, specifically adding in one statement that “UDL is a focus of a program, this is not another class, this is good teaching. Every class should be about meeting the needs of all learners.” Another participant added a similar comment stating that “differentiation must occur through every course, we (the EPP) must focus on vertical alignment of differentiation concepts across the programs.” Finally, it was recommended in the one-on-one interview that a stronger focus be made regarding social and emotional learning concepts. This is a major emphasis in the local district where the employer works, and the employer is specifically looking for candidates that can speak to SEL concepts and implementation in a classroom setting.

Final Comments

Overall, EPP graduates were viewed as well prepared and effective, with a key focus on being classroom ready. Candidates were valued, and all employers responded that they would be interested in hiring graduates from the EP. Areas to work on include more cross program focus

on social and emotional learning, assessment and data usage, differentiation, and incorporating UDL practices and concepts.