Essential 3: professional learning in the context of PDS’ and school-university partnerships

Drew Polly  
*The University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, North Carolina, USA*

Bernard Badiali  
*Pennsylvania State University, Malvern, Pennsylvania, USA*

Rebecca West Burns  
*University of North Florida, Jacksonville, Florida, USA and Kutztown University of Pennsylvania, Kutztown, Pennsylvania, USA*

Cynthia Coler  
*School of Education, California Lutheran University, Thousand Oaks, California, USA*

Michael Cosenza  
*Department of Learning and Teaching, California Lutheran University, Thousand Oaks, California, USA*

Krystal Goree  
*Baylor University, Waco, Texas, USA*

Donnan Stoicovy  
*State College Friends School, State College, Pennsylvania, USA, and*

Kristien Zenkov  
*George Mason University, Arlington, Virginia, USA*

Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this article is to provide a description as well as examples related to Essential 3 in the Second Edition of the NAPDS Nine Essentials.

**Keywords** Leadership, Professional development, Professional learning, Inquiry, In-service teachers, Teacher inquiry

**Paper type** Practitioner paper

**Why is Essential 3 important?**

Professional learning (PL) opportunities (sometimes referred to as professional development) continues to be one of the most powerful levers for positively improving teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017; Martin, Polly, Mraz, & Algozzine, 2019; Revised Essential 3: professional learning

© Drew Polly, Bernard Badiali, Rebecca West Burns, Cynthia Coler, Michael Cosenza, Krystal Goree, Donnan Stoicovy and Kristien Zenkov. Published in *PDS Partners: Bridging Research to Practice*. Published by Emerald Publishing Limited. This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) license. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this article (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this license may be seen at [http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode)

Received 6 June 2023  
Revised 6 June 2023  
Accepted 6 June 2023

PDS Partners: Bridging Research to Practice  
Emerald Publishing Limited  
e-ISSN: 2833-2059  
p-ISSN: 2833-2040  
DOI 10.1108/PDSP-06-2023-0017
Polly, 2017; Polly & Hannafin, 2010; Polly et al., 2017). Impactful, large-scale syntheses of research (e.g., Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Heck, Banilower, Weiss, & Rosenberg, 2008) found that effective PL opportunities have specific characteristics including that they, (1) are grounded in learners’ authentic setting, (2) are focused on relevant topics about teaching and learning that learners are interested in, (3) include a combination of knowledge and pedagogies, (4) occur over a long period of time or duration and (5) include actively engaging, collaborative experiences.

In professional development schools (PDSs) and school-university partnerships, all participants are learners and have the right to participate in high-quality PL opportunities. Aligned to research, these PL opportunities should be guided by participants’ needs and interests and focused on their practice.

In the Second Edition of the National Association for Professional Development Schools (NAPDS) Nine Essentials (NAPDS, 2021), we tried to capture the research base about PL. This ensures that these activities in PDS and school-university partnerships are aligned to the extensive research foundations that are accepted by the broad education field.

We see that PL is a vehicle to improve teaching and learning and to advance the work of Goodlad; this should in turn improve society (Goodlad, 1994). The Second Edition of the Nine Essentials includes the following statement:

The result of working and learning together in a PDS should be better teachers and better schools, which means better learning for children and youth, thus leading to a better society. (p. 13).

Key concepts of Essential 3
In this section we compare the First and Second Editions of Essential 3 and describe the key concepts and terms in the new version of Essential 3. Table 1 provides a comparison between the First Edition and Second Editions of Essential 3.

Key terms
The concepts *professional learning* and *leadership* are central to the revised Essential 3. We defined each in the following ways:

1. **Professional Learning**: Professional learning is an ongoing process by which individuals acquire knowledge that informs and advances practice.

2. **Leadership**: Leadership is a deliberate, action-oriented, decision-making, function. It is not passive. Leadership is a process of responsibly influencing others.

Professional learning. In alignment with current literature and views of the broad education field we opted for the term “professional learning” instead of “professional development.” Scherff (2018, no page number) makes the following distinction between the two phrases:

There is a useful distinction between traditional “professional development” and professional learning, which is intended to result in system-wide changes in student outcomes. Professional development, which “happens to” teachers, is often associated with one-time workshops, seminars, or lectures, and is typically a one-size-fits all approach. In contrast, professional learning, when

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Comparison of the first and second editions of Essential 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Original Essential 3</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing and reciprocal professional development for all participants guided by need</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
designed well, is typically interactive, sustained and customized to teachers’ needs. It encourages teachers to take responsibility for their own learning and to practice what they are learning in their own teaching contexts.

Since PDS and school-university partnerships inherently embrace ongoing, continuous learning the phrase professional learning made more sense instead of professional development.

Leadership. Leadership is included in the new version of Essential 3 since there is a critical importance for leaders to be part of professional learning. In PDS and school-university partnerships, leadership can be done by multiple people.

The Nine Essentials document (NAPDS, 2021) includes the following statement about leadership:

Part of professional learning is the development of leadership skills. PDS participants engage in the process of significant and responsible influence of others. PDS should look for opportunities to develop educators’ leadership capacity. In a PDS, everyone is encouraged to lead with the expectation to exercise responsible leadership (p. 13).

Leadership should not be viewed as just a responsibility for administrators or those in leadership positions (Lindahl, 2008). PDS and school-university partnerships are collaborative structures and provide fertile ground for models of shared or distributed leadership.

Other key changes from the First Edition to the Second Edition of Essential 3

Reciprocal professional learning

In the original Essential 3, the concept of “reciprocal professional development” is emphasized to honor PL opportunities that are led by either school-based faculty personnel as well as university-based individuals. No one entity or partner should always be seen as the “facilitator” or the “learner,” but in fact all are capable of leading and taking the initiative for these efforts. The idea of reciprocal professional development is still beneficial. However, the Second Edition of Essential 3 puts more emphasis on the fact that all learners should embrace and participate in PL and learn together. The phrase reciprocal professional development, however, sometimes leads people to believe that either the university-based or P-12 school-based individuals should be facilitating the other group as opposed to the intended message of collaborative PL in which all participants and partners engage.

Guided by need and spirit and practice of inquiry

In order to align to PL research, these opportunities should be guided by data as well as the practice of inquiry. The need for PL on specific concepts or topics can be obtained through looking at data related to student learning, teaching observations, surveys or other methods to gauge participants’ interests. While PL can originate from one of the partners (university or P-12 school), all participants and partners should have buy-in and a desire to engage in learning.

The Second Edition of Essential 3 also references the idea of professional educators being guided by the spirit and practice of inquiry. The cycle of inquiry includes multiple phases. Pedaste et al. (2015) conducted a synthesis of literature and found five phases detailed in Table 2.

Based on the definitions provided by Pedaste et al. (2015) the selection of topics for professional learning should be influenced by the various phases. As described in the table, PDS participants engaged in inquiry participate in a cyclical process of selecting a problem or
idea, determining a hypothesis or solution, designing an investigation to examine the hypothesis and analyzing data. As individuals who are committed to collaborative partnerships, inquiry-guided professional learning is best explored by groups that include multiple participants from varied entities of the partnership.

Examples of professional development in the context of PDS’ and school-university partnerships
In this section, we describe one professional learning experience in the context of school-university partnerships.

Improving mathematics teaching and learning
Led by inquiry and need. In an already-existing school-university partnership, the administrator and the school leadership team, which included a university-based faculty member, conducted their annual needs analysis and determined that they needed support with mathematics teaching and learning across all grades. Through the university-based faculty member they started working with a different university-based faculty member. The school already had established a culture of inquiry-based work around data meetings in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in Literacy, but was in the beginning stages of PLC work related to mathematics.

In this school-university partnership, professional learning was inquiry-focused. Many teachers had asked the principal for support and more resources to teach mathematics, and student data indicated that students were performing below both the state and district average for the last five years for schools that had similar demographics.

Focused on students instead of teachers. The professional learning focused on teachers, school administrators and the university-based faculty member learning about the state mathematics standards through a cyclical process of examining data and student work. By seeing students’ strengths as well as their current misconceptions all conversations focused on how to best meet their students’ needs and support students.

This focus on students led to a safe environment where teachers were transparent and vulnerable about the concepts and strategies that they felt comfortable or uncomfortable with. As students’ work samples included strategies that were unusual to teachers, everyone collaborated to analyze the strategy and figure out what students did. When students did not provide strategies that may be useful the university-based faculty member or a teacher would share and contribute possible strategies to use in future lessons.

Shared leadership. During professional learning opportunities different teachers took turns leading the conversations and facilitating the conversations. At times the university-based faculty member asked questions to keep the conversation moving and shared

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>Selection of the topic and overview to the topic or problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptualization</td>
<td>Developing and refining questions. Forming hypotheses or predictions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigation</td>
<td>Plan the process and methods to examine the questions and test hypotheses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Make sense and analyze the data or information collected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>Make sense of the findings from the investigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Refine the conceptualization and questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>Share, discuss, write, or communicate the process and outcomes of the inquiry process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.
Phases of inquiry

Source(s): Adapted from Pedaste et al. (2015)
strategies, but in most cases teachers took turns leading and being responsible for keeping conversations focused on students and standards.

The process of establishing shared leadership began by having the administrators assign teachers different meetings that they would be in charge of. However, as time went on teachers began volunteering and choosing which meetings they would facilitate based on their interest.

Driven by data and flexible based on need. The partnership focused on mathematics for four years. During this time the professional learning was modified based on teachers' interests and students' needs. As stated previously the initial period focused on using student work samples to unpack the state mathematics standards and ensure that the learning activities met their full extent related to rigor and depth. There was a season of the partnership where teachers desired to learn more about how to create word problems and support their students. Lastly, there was also a season of the partnership where the focus was on differentiation and making sure that teachers were adequately equipped with resources and ideas to meet students' needs.

The focus of professional learning was flexible and was able to shift over time based on data and the needs of the participants. The flexibility and culture of basing professional learning off of data and teachers' needs had been established before the partnership focused on mathematics. This culture, which was embraced by all school-based teachers and leaders, was central to all activities, including the partnership.

Looking ahead
While the revision of Essential 3 is not drastic from the First Edition to the Second Edition of the NAPDS Nine Essentials, the Second Edition provides an opportunity for PDSs and school-university partnerships to examine the quality and nature of professional learning. Those individuals involved in partnerships and decision-making should consider how professional learning and leadership opportunities can enhance partnerships. During this process there is a need to center and prioritize the needs of students as well as the desires of teachers and school-leaders.

References


**About the authors**

Drew Polly is a professor in the Elementary Education program at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Drew Polly is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: drew.polly@charlotte.edu

Bernard Badiali is an Emeritus Associate Professor of Education at Pennsylvania State University.

Rebecca West Burns is the Bill Herrold Endowed Professor & Director of Clinical Practice and Educational Partnerships for the College of Education and Human Services at the University of North Florida, and co-author of the new book, (Re)Designing Programs: A Vision for Equity-Centered, Clinically Based Teacher Education.

Cynthia Coler is an adjunct professor in the Graduate School of Education at California Lutheran University, Thousand Oaks, California.

Michael Cosenza is a professor in the Graduate School of Education at California Lutheran University and serves as Director of the PDS-Residency program.

Krystal Goree serves as the Director of Professional Practice and School-University Partnership Liaison in the School of Education at Baylor University.

Donnan Stoicovy is a retired educator with 45.5 years of experience in public and independent schools with her last three years serving as the Head of School at State College Friends School.

Kristien Zenkov is a professor of Education at George Mason University and co-author of the new book, Fires in Our Lives: Advice for Teachers from Today’s High School Students.

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website: www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm
Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com