Essential 4: a shared commitment to reflection, innovation and generative knowledge

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**Abstract**  
**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to describe the key aspects and give examples of Essential 4 of the Second Edition of the National Association for Professional Development Schools (NAPDS) Nine Essentials.  
**Keywords**  
Collaboration, Reflection, Partnership  
**Paper type** Research paper

**Overview**  
This article provides more details about Essential 4 from the Second Edition of the National Association for Professional Development Schools (NAPDS) Nine Essentials (NAPDS, 2021). It also aims to clarify the concepts: reflective practices, responsive innovation and generative knowledge. Table 1 provides a comparison of the original Essential 4 and the revised Essential 4.

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The full description of the revised Essential 4 states

A PDS Values and respects professional knowledge that is practical as well as theoretical and that recognizes the influence of context and culture. In a PDS, reflection is a shared expectation. PDSs are living laboratories for creating, implementing, refining and sharing innovative approaches to teaching and learning. Any PDS participant may initiate innovations, and everyone should have the opportunity to serve in the role of leader and learner. Through innovation and reflection, PDSs generate new knowledge about teaching and learning (NAPDS, 2021, p. 15).

What’s new in the revision

It is critical to point out that the revised Essential 4 still emphasizes a shared commitment to reflective practices. Innovation has been clarified to focus on responsive innovation, which we will describe in this article. Furthermore, the concept of generative knowledge was also added. It is important for all participants in school–university partnerships to consider how their collaborative work serves as a healthy combination of theoretical ideas as well as work that is responsive to needs and also practical for specific partnership contexts. Additionally, this work is equally burdened by universities and schools and should be able to be led by anyone within the partnership generating new knowledge about teaching and learning.

In reflecting on the revised Essential 4, the new ideas highlighted in Essential 4 include the following:

1. Values and respects practical and theoretical professional knowledge;
2. Recognizes the influence of context and culture;
3. Reflection is a shared expectation;
4. Professional Development Schools (PDS) are living laboratories for creating, implementing, refining and sharing innovative approaches to teaching and learning; and
5. Any participant may initiate innovations, and everyone should have the opportunity to serve in the role of leader and learner.

Members of successful partnerships find that each voice is valued and respected for the professional knowledge that they bring to the table. The balance of that knowledge is likewise valued and respected for its theoretical and practical aspects. The shared leadership has various members, at times, taking the lead while at other times taking the role of learner contributing to the generative knowledge about teaching and learning from the reflective practice and the responsive innovation.

Key concepts

The key concepts that are brought forth in the revised Essential 4 include Reflective Practice, Responsive Innovation and Generative Knowledge. Each aspect enriches the next one in order to provide a robust partnership for school and university partners.

Reflective practice is the process of habitually thinking about, analyzing and assessing one’s own actions and experiences in order to learn, grow and improve one’s practice. Every educator does this on a daily basis reflecting on their work and using that reflection to

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<td>A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practices by all participants</td>
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improve their practice. They may engage in that reflection after the lesson is over, as they drive home or as they plan for the next day’s lessons. The important part of the reflective practice is the process of it happening regularly thus leading to improved practice.

**Responsive innovation** includes the development of new processes, products and practices that address issues identified by data and the needs of PDS participants and partners. Inquiry-based practice is part of responsive innovation as participants embrace a culture of examining research and theory and reflect on ideas that may impact their PDS work. After reflecting on their practice or other information that helps them think about their practice, responsive educators develop new ways to do whatever they are working on to improve their practice, to refine their partnership or to support their colleagues in new and productive ways. The work in a PDS is inherently innovative. Those innovations are important for continuous growth and development of a partnership or personal growth to refine practice as an educator.

**Generative knowledge** leads to new knowledge, which can be used to interpret new situations, solve problems, think and reason, and learn. When partners collaborate to put together their ideas and practice, they creating new ways to solve problems and generate new thinking and new learning. Generative knowledge happens best when educators are open to seeking new ways of doing things whether they embrace an idea from a colleague or hone in on something that they want to improve in their own practice and seek out others for new ideas. It also keeps a partnership fresh with new ideas to help with the sustainability of that partnership.

### Deepening your understanding of revised Essential 4

**Generative knowledge**

Teacher-led inquiry, action research projects, and collaborative research that consists of university-based and school-based individuals provide fertile opportunities to develop generative knowledge. Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2020 provide frameworks, ideas and examples to support classroom-based research that is led or co-led by teachers. Further, Putman and Rock (2017) provide frameworks for action research projects to systematically investigate research questions in classrooms and schools. Additionally, NAPDS has multiple articles that are indexed on Proquest and/or Google Scholar that include examples of classroom-based research in the context of school–university partnerships.

**Responsive innovation**

Scholars in education have written and carried out multiple studies framed in the constructs of design-based research (DBRC, 2003), design experiments (McKenney & Reeves, 2018) and design-based implementation research (Coburn & Penuel, 2016; Rigby, Forman, Fox, & Kazemi, 2018). In all of these constructs, practitioners and researchers collaborate to identify problems of practice or questions, devise a theory of change or theory-based way of addressing the problem or questions, and then through implementation collect data, and refine how they address the problem and questions. This work is iterative and cyclical and in the case of partnership work, continues to come back to the needs and input of partnership participants and stakeholders.

### Conclusion

The collaborative manner of looking at partnership work through the lenses of reflective practice, responsive innovation and generative knowledge deepens the good work that school and university partners are doing and will continue to do through their mutual commitment to valuing and respecting the practical and theoretical aspects of their work. The opportunities that this engaging partnership work provides to each member of the partnership are the opportunity to be a learner, to be a leader and to be a wonderful partner. What more could school and university partners ask for in a valued and respected relationship?
References


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