THE IMPLICATIONS OF MASTERY LEARNING
FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION
LEARNING DISABLED AND EMOTIONALLY IMPAIRED
STUDENTS AND TEACHERS
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MASTERS THESIS
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in partial fulfillment of the Masters of Education
This study was done to investigate an approach to teaching and learning that would provide more appropriate instruction for teachers and individualized help for learning disabled and emotionally impaired students. Mastery Learning has been implemented in many programs for a number of years. It has proven to be an effective approach used in general education. Our curriculum committee wanted to investigate the possibility of implementing Mastery Learning into our special education school program. Staff members overwhelmingly agreed that Mastery Learning should be a challenge to pursue beginning in the summer of 1997. Guidelines as to background information, the components involving Mastery Learning, the advantages and disadvantages, as well as the implications will be very helpful in the future in developing a Mastery Learning program.
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CHAPTER ONE

Virtually all teachers are concerned with the appropriateness of instruction for our students, regardless of the level we teach. We know, for instance, that different students learn in different ways and while one approach to teaching will be appropriate for some students it is likely to be inappropriate for others. Most teachers would like to provide more individualized instruction and help for their students. But the constraints and demands of the classroom environment make individualization hard to accomplish.

Mastery Learning was developed to help teachers provide a higher quality of learning for more of their students. This is certainly the case for special needs students. As teachers we are challenged daily to enhance learning, self concept, and motivation in our classrooms. As a result of being involved in our school curriculum committee, we investigated the teaching and learning process known as Mastery Learning and if this theory could be implemented into our K-12 learning disabled and emotionally impaired program.

Curriculum can be defined as a “study of what is valued and given priority and what is devalued and excluded” (Cherryholmes, 1987, p. 297). Our curriculum committee has spent many hours investigating curriculum that would meet the needs of our learning disabled and emotionally impaired population of students. We wanted to implement in our classroom an approach suggested by Spady (1992) that is, in Spady’s words, “success based”. We wanted to provide, in addition to life-skill/social-skill/literacy, a curriculum that focuses on fewer and more relevant outcomes that would provide an organization and rationale for content and teaching strategy while reducing the pressure to cover the curriculum.

By the time these students have reached our self contained school setting, placement is the ongoing struggle. The school staff, in an effort to meet the continuum
mandate of P.L.-94-142 (the Education for all Handicapped Children Act, renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the federal law which ensures that the handicapped children have a series of alternative placements available to meet their educational needs, wanted to incorporate a curriculum that would meet the needs of our school population of self-contained, departmentalized classrooms. Our focus is to implement a curriculum to enhance learning, self concept and motivation. Anderson (1992) has suggested that most if not all, current reform oriented activities are geared toward only 90% of students in the United States schools because they do not consider students who have exceptionalities. In his view, the 10% of the school population with disabilities is simply overlooked in most reform activities. For our special education school population, the 10% provided us with a foundation to begin research on learning theories.

If a change of service is needed on the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) because of continued educational failure, the instructional objectives need to be specific to measure the progress of broad outcomes and the style in delivery of content must be addressed as well. It is often argued that O.B.E. (Outcomes Based Education) is actually Mastery Learning with a new name (Ysseldyke, Thurlow, & Shriner, 1992). All students have the right, and must receive the opportunity to learn to meet high rigorous content (Shriner, Ysseldyke, Thurlow, & Honetschlager, 1994). Simply changing the physical placement of the student may alleviate problems within certain classrooms, but it does little to enhance learning, self concept and motivation. By this point in the educational process, teachers have the complicated problem of dealing with students who have little or no motivation to learn, poor self concept of their learning ability and academic skills far below those of their peers (Lazeron, Foster, Brown & Hummel, 1988). Learning disabled and emotionally impaired students come into senior high with baggage that is heavy with experience in scholastic failure and disciplinary referrals. They bear notable problems in social adjustment, social perception, self concept and motivation (Deshler and
Schumaker, 1993). There is evidence that Mastery Learning procedures used effectively during the first two or three years of school can be very successful in raising the level of achievement of the entire class. If Mastery Learning is used during the next four to five years, the achievement and academic self-concept of the students will continue to be very positive (Guskey, 1994).

Schools are a reflection of the economic, political, social and technological advances of an increasingly global community. In recent years, educational change has addressed curriculum design and re-educating teachers in science and mathematics, integrating diverse populations into school and community settings, and teaching and learning excellence (Lieberman, 1986). Currently the educational revolution demands change in thought and practice to ensure progress toward the attainment of excellence for all students. We must strive for curricular relevance and individualized instruction for students with disabilities and those who are at risk for school failure due to the related effects of environmental variables (Jenkins and Sileo, 1994).

Our staff is currently using the Brigance (Brigance, 1981) as a curriculum-based approach. Our goal is to modify our traditional curriculum to respond to the differences in the needs and learning rates while at the same time helping our students accomplish high level outcomes of significance. As a result, our teachers will be much more focused on the learning capabilities of our students and far less on covering a given amount of curriculum in a given time block. Also, there will be less reliance on norm-referenced standardized tests as indicators of either student or teacher accomplishment. Our questions at the beginning of each year should be: What are the outcomes of the class?, How will I measure the progress or lack of progress my students made toward those outcomes?

For the last two decades, educators at the University of California, Los Angeles, have been studying teaching decisions and their implementation: the essence of the process of teaching. They have found that regardless of who, or what is being taught, all teaching
decisions fall into three categories; what content to teach next, what the student will do to learn and to demonstrate learning has occurred, and what the teacher will do to facilitate the acquisition of learning? When these professional decisions are made on the basis of sound psychological theory and if these decisions also reflect the teacher's sensitivity to the student and to the situation, learning will be increased (Hunter, 1996). Our curriculum committee wanted to emphasize the importance of teachers in identifying consciously and deliberately the decisions we make in the classroom in each of these three categories and to base these decisions on research-validated knowledge. For our curriculum committee, the teaching and learning process known as Mastery Learning combines what we know about effective teaching and learning in a set of sound and useful instructional practices.

Mastery learning is not a new idea in education. In several individualized systems of instruction developed during the 1920s and 1930s, students were required to demonstrate their mastery of each lesson on formal tests before moving on to new material (Washburne and Marland, 1963). But Mastery Learning programs did not become a prominent feature on the educational landscape until the 1960s (Kulik, 1983). At that time several educators developed teaching methodologies in which Mastery Learning played a key role. Basically, these practices involve procedures for planning and organizing instruction, along with strategies for giving students regular feedback on their learning that can be used to correct individual learning errors. In essence, Mastery Learning provides teachers with a better way to individualize teaching and learning within a group-based classroom and allows teachers to pass along the benefits of learning success to more of their students than ever before. In addition, each day more teachers discover the important and positive influence they can have on their students' learning through Mastery Learning (Guskey, 1997). If Mastery Learning is to be implemented as a future curriculum in our program for teachers and students, the implications must be examined both cognitively and affectively.
The purpose of this study is to determine the components of Mastery Learning, the major advantages and disadvantages, and the implications of Mastery Learning from the perspective of kindergarten through twelfth grade special education classrooms.
CHAPTER TWO

If we really wish to alter the high degree of predictability in learning outcomes, an approach to teaching and learning that provides more appropriate instruction and individualized help seems essential. Learning disabled (LD) and emotionally disabled (EI) students who experience difficulty in the classroom are highly reluctant to participate in basic skill instruction and exercises. In fact, among all students receiving services for educationally handicapping conditions, adolescents with emotional/behavioral deficits have the lowest promotion rate, the highest rate of failing grades in secondary mainstream courses, and the lowest grade point average in both special education and regular education classes (U.S. Department of Education, 1990). They feel offended by the infusion of “baby work” into the lesson plans despite the fact that they are not using or do not know these rules and tools. Couple the skill deficiency with a behavioral problem, then the student and the school have a mutual problem, one another. All too often, by this point in time, each party is asking, what is the use? The frustration school personnel and the student have for each other hinders them from realizing the potential and the responsibility within their relationship. The key to this dilemma is finding a motivational technique that will encourage these students to invest time in basic skills learning and practice. The theory of mastery learning is based on the belief that all children can learn when provided with conditions that are appropriate for their learning. This study will investigate the the components of Mastery Learning (see chapter Two), the major advantages and disadvantages, and the implications of Mastery Learning from the perspective of kindergarten through twelfth grade special education classrooms (see chapter Three).
**Historical Perspective**

The most current applications of Mastery Learning are based on the ideas outlined in the middle 1960s, by John B. Carroll and later transformed into an effective working model by Benjamin S. Bloom. But these ideas are really not new. The basic tenets of Mastery Learning were described in the early years of the twentieth century by Washburne and Morrison, and can be traced to such early educators as Comenius, Pestalozzi, and Herbart (Bloom, 1974). The modern notion states that if students are normally distributed with respect to aptitude, and all students are given the same instruction, then achievement will be normally distributed. Applying the Mastery Learning theory, the same normal distribution will achieve mastery of the subject matter if provided with individualized instruction and appropriate learning time. Academic achievement, according to Carroll’s theory, is simply the amount of time required by the learner to attain mastery of a learning task (Horton, 1981). Mastery Learning is an optimistic theory of school learning based on the notion of managing learning rather than managing learners. Ysseldyke, Thurlow, and Skinner (1992) suggest that schools can provide not only equality of educational opportunity but also equality of educational outcomes. In addition, Mastery Learning addresses present concerns about basic education as well as current pressures for accountability and minimum competency testing. Advocates further suggest that compensatory learning programs for disadvantaged children may be successfully incorporated in the principles of Mastery Learning.

**Components of Mastery Learning**

Bloom began a series of investigations on how the most powerful aspects of individualized instruction might be adapted to improve student learning in group-based classrooms. Bloom believed that under these more appropriate learning conditions, 80% or more of students could reach the same high level of achievement typically attained by
only the top 20% of students under more traditional forms of instruction (Guskey, Passaro, & Wheeler, 1995). Bloom recommended that the material be divided first into instructional units, similar to the way the chapters are organized in a course textbook. Following a teacher's initial instruction in each unit, a formative evaluation or quiz is administered, not as a part of the grading process, but to provide feedback to both the students and the teacher about what material was learned well and what was not. Special corrective activities are then offered to students who require additional time and practice to learn the material. For those who have learned the material well, special enrichment activities are planned to give them opportunities to strengthen and extend their learning. Following the corrective work, a second formative evaluation is administered to verify student success. Typically, corrective activities are made specific to each item or part of the test so that each student needs to work on only those concepts or skills that he or she has not yet mastered. The results from the formative assessment provide the student with a specific prescription for what more needs to be done to master the unit's learning objectives. The activities are designed to present the material differently and involve the student in alternative approaches to learning the material. The corrections may be worked on with the teacher, with peers in cooperative learning teams, or by the student independently (Guskey, et al., 1995).

The formative assessment process, combined with systematic correction of individual learning difficulties, provides each student with a more appropriate quality of instruction than is possible under more traditional approaches to classroom teaching. Using this approach, according to Bloom, virtually all students could master the subject material (Bloom, 1976). Outlined here are the most basic and the most critical elements of the mastery learning process. Although the actual appearance or format of these elements may vary, they serve a very specific purpose in the mastery learning process and most clearly differentiate mastery learning from other instructional approaches. Two elements
that are essential are feedback and correctives, and congruence among instructional components. What students are taught and how they are taught must be congruent with the specified learning objectives. Although essentially neutral with regard to what is taught, how it is taught, and how learning is evaluated, Mastery Learning does demand consistency and alignment among these instructional components. Instructional alignment describes the extent to which stimulus conditions match among three instructional components: intended outcomes, instructional processes, and instructional assessment (Cohen, 1984). Congruence among instructional components is essential for effective teaching and learning at any level. A particular approach to teaching might include very precise feedback and corrective procedures as a part of the instructional process. But if the feedback students receive and the learning errors they correct are not congruent with the procedures used to evaluate their learning, few are likely to meet with learning success. In a mastery learning class, the feedback students receive should always be congruent with specific learning criteria and the procedures used to evaluate their learning.

The delineation of these essential elements offers several important implications. First, it illustrates that mastery learning can be very broadly applied. Second, these essential elements clearly show that teachers do not have to dramatically change what they are doing in their classrooms or the way they teach in order to use mastery learning. Third, the changes required to implement these elements of mastery learning are relatively modest. Fourth, and perhaps most important, through the careful and well-planned implementation of these elements teachers can pass along the benefits of learning success to many more of their students (Guskey, 1987).

Few approaches to education have attracted as much attention in the recent years as mastery learning. Educational researchers, as well as classroom teachers and school
administrators, have become increasingly interested in mastery learning as a means of enhancing instructional quality and improving student learning (Guskey, 1987).

In planning, the first task is to examine content to be taught in order to refine objectives. These must be stated in concise, behavioral terms that can be accurately measured. The component skills needed to achieve the objectives must be identified and tests developed to measure mastery of these skills. The criterion for mastery should be established at this stage of planning. Learning units lasting about 2 to 10 hours must be planned with lesson plans developed for each element of the units. Diagnostic tests, corrective and remedial steps for each unit, and enrichment activities for each unit are an integral part of the learning. Much of the work of Mastery Learning occurs before instruction begins. Once the program is under way and as teachers gain experience and share material and ideas the work load is reduced. In teaching the elements of the learning units, the teachers should allow students adequate time to practice each new skill; provide frequent, regular and direct reinforcement; give students cues to help them select the appropriate responses; see that all students participate actively in the learning tasks; furnish direct instruction in the learning task; and monitor each student’s work carefully and often (Horton, 1981).

Mastery learning can be initiated by starting with one subject at a time and moving to other areas as the teacher and students feel ready. Basic skills lend themselves more readily to the mastery approach, and it is wise to start in one of these areas (Guskey, 1997). It is also important to provide a classroom environment conducive to mastery learning; emphasizing respect for the academic work being done and a need for continued improvement. The environment needs to be supportive and nurturing but also businesslike and task-oriented.
CHAPTER THREE

Major Advantages

The major advantages for students utilizing mastery learning are exemplified in the results of several major research studies. The first study involved twenty-seven elementary and secondary schools. Involved in the study were group-based and teacher paced classrooms that were utilizing mastery learning. Achievement results were overwhelmingly positive. The average effect size for studies involving elementary students was .89. Studies involving junior high school students had a very similar average effect size of .93, while those involving high school students had an average of .72 (Guskey and Gates, 1986). A possible explanation for the differences across grade levels is the academic preparation and learning history students bring with them to a teaching and learning situation can have a powerful effect on their level of achievement (Bloom, 1976). The history determines the cognitive skills and abilities students bring to the classroom. It also influences how they feel about learning and about themselves as learners. Elementary students enter classrooms with a learning history that is much less extensive than that of high school students. Therefore, the potential to improve student achievement in the elementary grades is far greater because the learning deficiencies are likely to be easier to overcome. Students tend to retain what they have learned longer under mastery learning, both in short-term (2-3 weeks) and long-term (4 months) studies. The effect size favoring of students taught mastery learning was .52 (Guskey, and Gates, 1986). Another research study involved the effects of mastery learning with learning disabilities or behavior disorder students (Kulik, Kulik, & Bangert-Downs, 1990). This research evidence demonstrates that students with disabilities often experience greater achievement gains in Mastery Learning classess than do their more able counterparts in traditionally taught
classrooms. In 1987, Thorpe-Gordon Elementary School in Jefferson City, Missouri committed to implementing the ideas and techniques of Mastery Learning. The goals of the program were to ensure each student's mastery of the learner outcomes presented in regular classrooms, but also to help students in self-concept, attitude toward learning experience, peer relationships, on-task behaviors, learning strategies, and independence in their own learning experiences. When the program began in 1987, 40% of the students, who had been low performers were in the bottom two quintiles, which is comparable to the state-wide totals. By 1989, only 10 percent of the students scored in the bottom quintiles. M.M.A.T. scores (comparable to our M.E.A.P.) increased by 13.64 percent (Guskey, Passaro, Wheeler, 1995). This study does indicate that by achieving greater learning success using mastery learning the frequency distributions decreased and the low performing students did make substantial gains. In addition, teachers, who adopted Mastery Learning generally found that their students became more involved in the learning process, attendance rates increased, behavior problems were reduced and students felt better about learning and about themselves as learners (Guskey, 1985). A meta-analysis of findings (Kulik, Kulik, Bangert-Downs, 1990) from 108 controlled evaluations showed that Mastery Learning programs have positive effects on the examination performance of students in upper grades in elementary, high schools, and colleges. The effects appear to be stronger on the weaker students in class, and they also have positive effects on students attitudes toward course content and instruction but may increase student time on instructional tasks.

Educational program innovations that have incorporated Mastery Learning strategies have produced dramatic changes in teaching and learning, changes in attitude and school climate, changes in behavior, and changes in school spirit. One of these innovative programs is the Chicago Mastery Learning/Learning Strategies (CML/LS) for upper elementary students. It aims to improve reading comprehension by teaching diverse
learning strategies and by embedding these strategies within the Mastery Learning framework (Katims and Jones, 1985).

Another innovation is the University of Kansas Institute for Research in Learning Disabilities (KU-IRLD). The KU-IRLD was founded in 1977 to prepare students with mild disabilities to meet the demands of the regular curriculum. The KU-IRLD staff has focused on strategy instruction for learning disabled and other at-risk students (Schumaker and Deshler, 1992). From this work, the Strategies Intervention Model (SIM) (Deshler and Schumaker, 1986) has emerged. The SIM Instructional Methodology is both an intensive and extensive approach for instructing at-risk students (Ellis, Deshler, Lenz, Schumaker, & Clark, 1991). This strategy enables at-risk students to deal successfully with the demands of the regular class environments cognitively, behaviorally, and emotionally.

Teachers who aim for success rates of 90 percent to 100 percent on student assignments produce more learning than teachers who tolerate higher failure rates (Brophy, 1982). Many teachers using mastery learning develop more positive attitudes toward teaching, have higher expectations for students and take greater personal responsibility for learning outcomes. Teachers expressed more positive attitudes toward the philosophy and practices of mastery learning after they had used these practices in an elementary classroom setting for only three weeks. The effect size for this attitude change was 1.67 (Okey, 1977). More recently, studies found that teachers who successfully implemented mastery learning began to alter their expectations for their students' achievement and find it much more difficult to predict which students' will do well and which students' would experience difficulties.

Generally, teachers form expectations about students' abilities during the first couple of weeks of the school year, these expectations are highly related to students' final achievement (Guskey, 1982). But in this study, that relation was found to approach zero for teachers implementing mastery learning, apparently because the teachers were effective
with many more of their students. In another study, teachers also alter their explanations as to why they are effective in the classroom, giving less importance to personality factors (effect size = .38) and greater importance to teaching practices and behaviors (effect size = 1.13) (Guskey, 1987). Finally, in a large scale study involving 117 junior and senior high school teachers who used mastery learning saw improvements in student learning outcomes. As a result, teachers began to feel much better about teaching and their roles as teachers (effect size = .61), accept far greater personal responsibility for their students' learning successes and failures (effect size = 1.25) (Guskey, 1984). It appears that the successful use of mastery learning can have powerful effects on many teachers variables.

Cohen (1987), sees Mastery Learning as a method of revealing exactly what teachers teach and defining precisely the intended outcomes of that teaching. He believes the greatest contribution of Mastery Learning is that it helps teachers check the match between what they do in the instructional process and what they measure as outcomes. Teachers using Mastery Learning develop more positive attitudes toward teaching, higher expectations for students and greater personal responsibility for learning outcomes. Mastery Learning can help teachers organize personal responsibility and ensure congruence among learning goals, instructional techniques, and procedures for assessing or evaluating students' learning. It provides a mechanism through which teachers can offer students regular feedback on their learning progress and guidance in correcting learning difficulties. The major advantages for students utilizing Mastery Learning is achievement results were overwhelmingly positive for elementary, junior high school, and high school students. Another factor is students tend to retain what they have learned longer under Mastery Learning, both in short-term (2-3 weeks) and long-term (4 months) studies. Finally, low performing students did make substantial gains when using the Mastery Learning approach.
Major Disadvantages

The evidence from mastery learning indicates that most students can learn everything the schools have to teach and that they can learn it at a mastery level with relatively little additional instructional effort. Mastery learning seems to fit well with current concerns about education. What then is the source of discomfort with it? Why hasn’t it been more widely used? Are their problems with this approach about which we need to be aware?

First, it requires specifically stated instructional goals, which most educators find more difficult to agree on than broad educational goals. Also, many teachers have not had the training or experience to tailor their instruction to specific goals required by mastery learning. The available models for mastery learning provide only broad, general guidelines and leave the filling in of day-to-day and minute-to-minute strategy up to the teachers. Teachers will need more preservice and inservice training before mastery learning can be used in classrooms. Second, proponents of mastery learning interpret equality as meaning that students attain mastery of the same competencies. Opponents argue that equality is the opportunity to develop in different directions according to one’s abilities and interests, but not necessarily to achieve the same results. Opponents are concerned that emphasis on achieving specific instructional goals may be at the expense of other curriculum areas. Until this philosophical difference is resolved, Mastery Learning is not likely to be widely supported by the entire educational community (Horton, 1981).

Another problem stems from the fact that for mastery learning to succeed, more and better instruments for diagnosing student academic problems and assessing gains must be readily available to teachers for use without the help of specialized personnel. Without effective corrective instruction at each step of the way, Mastery Learning fails, and this is also a problem. At present, we have neither the resources nor the well defined
instructional modes to assure that Mastery Learning will work. However, we are more sophisticated in providing corrective help needed in basic skill areas than in such areas as teaching students to think creatively or to engage in decision making.

Many teachers perceive themselves to be working at full capacity now, and to increase instructional time and effort only 10 to 20 percent seems overwhelming. Unless a teacher is dedicated to the concept of Mastery Learning, the enormity of the task is likely to hinder its widespread adoption (Horton, 1985). If more attention must be paid to learning at the preschool and primary levels, this may mean spending more money in the early years and less later on. Whether educators and the public are willing to act on what we know about the importance of learning in the early years is an open question. The sticky problem of definition of curriculum is an inherent concern in working with Mastery Learning. After a student achieves mastery, does the teacher provide additional content for mastery? If so, are 95 percent of the students expected to master this enrichment material too? Until some of these questions are resolved, Mastery Learning is likely to stay outside the mainstream of American classrooms. Furthermore, in nearly all schools, time is fixed while the amount of content mastered is flexible. We have yet to invent practical means for implementing this in day-to-day school planning.

A final problem is that educators are generally humanistically oriented people who might look at a model grounded in a behavioristic base for teaching and learning as a one-sided approach. Many teachers reject the idea that learning can be broken down legitimately into small bits and pieces and then presented to the learner sequentially and systematically. Teachers will have to be convinced that mastery learning can contribute to divergent and creative learning styles to ensure what constitutes a good learning environment (Horton, 1985).
Implications

"Being able to influence a student’s motivation to perform a task can have long term benefits for learning" (Frymier and Shulman, 1995, p.44). It is suggested that in order to prevent the frustration, anger and lack of motivation experienced by the learning disabled and emotionally disabled student that unique teaching strategies be used (Cohen and Beattie, 1984). Educators must seek, test, and venture on unconventional, creative methods to re-engage learning disabled and emotionally impaired students in learning.

There is little doubt that teaching is one of the most difficult and challenging of all professions. The responsibilities of teaching can sometimes be overwhelming. In the face of these challenges and responsibilities, teachers often lose sight of the tremendous influence they have on their students. Teachers not only affect what and how their students learn, but also shape in large part their students’ attitudes toward learning and how they feel about themselves as learners. I believe Mastery Learning offers teachers a way to make the best and most positive use of that influence. It gives teachers a powerful tool; accountability, that will increase their effectiveness in helping more of their students learn well and gain the many positive benefits, such as motivation and improved self-concept, in their learning success.

There are several important implications that stem from the description of Mastery Learning. The first is that Mastery Learning is very adaptable in its’ application. It is possible, for example, for two teachers to implement Mastery Learning successfully in identical courses or grade levels using very different approaches. Both would employ the same essential elements of the Mastery Learning process, but the way they conduct their initial teaching, the formative assessments they use, and the kind of corrective activities and enrichments their students engage in could all be different. In other words, there is no
one best way to implement Mastery Learning. Successful applications depend, to a large extent, on the teachers' ability to adapt the essential elements of Mastery Learning to fit the particular context in which they teach and the unique characteristics of their students. These essential elements can be applied across the entire range of learning objectives, from the very basic to the extremely complex such as problem solving and deductive reasoning (Guskey, 1985).

A second implication is that teachers do not have to alter drastically what they are doing in their classrooms or the way they teach in order to use Mastery Learning. The use of Mastery Learning does not require any alteration in school policy, class scheduling, or classroom arrangements. Unlike many new ideas and strategies that are designed to replace teachers, current teaching methods, Mastery Learning builds upon those techniques (Fullan, 1982). Rather than forcing teachers to abandon the practices they have developed and refined over the years, Mastery Learning provides teachers with the means for improving practices. It empowers them to make the best use of the skills they already have. Providing feedback, correctives and enrichments and ensuring alignment and congruence among instructional components can be accomplished by most teachers with relatively little extra effort, especially if tasks can be shared among teaching colleagues. The careful and systematic use of these elements can lead to significant improvements.

A third implication of Mastery Learning is the extensive research evidence shows that the use of Mastery Learning can have extremely positive effects on student learning and outcomes (Guskey and Pigott, 1988; Kulik, et al., 1984). Equally important is that the improvements that Mastery Learning brings not only to student achievement. Mastery Learning has also been shown to have very positive effects on students' attendance in school, their involvements in class lessons, and their attitudes toward learning (Block, Efthim, & Burns, 1989; Guskey & Gates, 1986; Guskey & Pigott, 1988). This has been referred to as the “multiplier effect” of Mastery Learning (Guskey, Barshis, & Easton, 1982),
and it makes Mastery Learning one of the most cost-effective means of fostering educational improvements.

Fourth, and perhaps most important, through the careful and well-planned implementation of these essential elements teachers can pass along the benefits of learning success to many more of their students. Teachers generally find that Mastery Learning they can help most, if not all, of their students attain a much higher standard of learning and earn far better grades. As a result students feel much better about learning and about themselves as learners. They develop a more positive sense of personal pride, confidence, and well-being. This, in turn, helps teachers feel more effective and makes teaching much more enjoyable and far more satisfying as a profession. Many teachers report that the use of Mastery Learning has helped renew the enthusiasm they once felt for teaching. Frequently they describe their feelings as a “rebirth”--a rekindling of the flame the years of heartache and frustration in the classroom had nearly extinguished (Guskey, 1980). This was certainly the case when our curriculum committee had an inservice presented by two educators that are currently implementing Mastery Learning in the Grand Rapids Public School District. Their “rebirth” began in 1991, and since 1993 they have been implementing it as part of their Strategic Plan. The mission of the plan is to equip all students with the knowledge, skills and motivation they need to succeed in school and throughout their lives. One of the strategies focuses on Mastery of Curriculum. Our school principal arranged a visit for the entire staff to the Shawnee Elementary School program. We were given information on the evolution, foundation and implementation of their Mastery Learning program. Commitment, teamwork, and a vision, continues to be their Mastery Learning program. The Grand Rapids school system envisions the implementation of Mastery Learning in all 60 elementary and high school programs by 1998. These programs have been developed around the premise of “the least restrictive environment” Their program, using Mastery Learning increased M.E.A.P. scores 42%.
After several months of investigating the theory of Mastery Learning, along with the visit and inservice, our school personnel will begin the process of planning for the implementation of Mastery Learning in our curriculum in mid-August of 1997. Hopefully, our vision will create a desire for the total involvement of all the Muskegon Public Schools Mastery Learning philosophy. That remains to be seen.

Today more and more teachers are coming to recognize how necessary it is to use tests and assessments as learning tools rather than simply as devices to categorize students and assign grades. Many are offering corrective activities who may need a little more time or another instructional approach to learn well. They are providing enrichment activities for fast learners who can benefit from the opportunity to extend and broaden their learning. Many teachers are working hard to ensure their instructional methods, feedback and corrective enrichment techniques, and their assessments are aligned with the learning goals they value most.

Conclusion

The Mastery Learning process is certainly not perfect (Horton, 1981). It may not help all students master everything they are taught. Nevertheless, strong evidence (Ysseldyke, Thurlow, Skinner & Carroll, 1992) shows that Mastery Learning can sharply reduce the variation among students in terms of their mastery of specified learning goals (Guskey, Passaro, & Wheeler, 1995), as well as greatly increase the efficiency and effectiveness of special needs students' learning skills, self-concept and motivation (Cohen & Beattie, 1984, Frymier & Shulman, 1995, et al., 1990). Teacher accountability, positive attitudes, higher expectations (Brophy, 1982, Okey, 1977, Guskey & Cohen, 1984) for students and greater personal responsibility are paramount in creating an instructional tool that is powerful, palatable, and overall practical (Guskey, 1997).
The important consequences of accepting the premise that "all" students can learn well were put into perspective several years ago during a televised interview with educator Mortimer Alder on public television (Guskey, 1997). Interviewer William F. Buckley challenged Alder and the educational philosophy he advocated by sternly asking, "Are you sure all children can learn?" Alder’s immediately replied, "No, I am not sure. But I don’t believe you are sure that all children cannot. And I prefer to live with the hope, rather than your doubt (p. 212)!" I believe it is precisely this perspective that must guide all our endeavors in meeting the needs of our special education population.
REFERENCES


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____ X Thesis

SUPERVISOR'S SIGNATURE OF APPROVAL

Using the ERIC thesaurus, choose as many descriptors (5 - 7 minimum) to describe the contents of your paper.

2. Secondary Special Education  7. Student Evaluation
3. High Risk Students  8. Learning Strategies
4. Elementary Special Education  9. Teaching Methods
5. Learning Disabilities  10. School Improvement Programs

ABSTRACT: Two to three sentences that describe the contents of your paper

A historical perspective on Mastery Learning. The components and implications for classroom instruction and practice. The major advantages and disadvantages of Mastery Learning from K - 12 Special Education classrooms.

** Note: This page must be included as the last page in your master's paper.

rev 5/94

9 - 11/04/94
CHAPTER ONE
(Objective 2 An understanding of current issues in their field.)

Demonstrates in-depth understanding of at least one issue in their field.
1. Describe why this problem/issue is worthy of study. ___
2. Identify resources that strengthen the case. ___
3. Give a succinct history of the problem/issue. ___
4. Describe options for addressing the problem/issue. ___
5. Articulate why the option selected was chosen. ___

CHAPTER TWO
(Objective 1 An understanding of the recent research in their field.)
(Objective 4 Demonstrate the ability to critically analyze and synthesize existing and emerging knowledge and pedagogy in their major area.)

6. Includes recent and seminal sources in review of literature. ___
7. Includes statement of generalization that are supported by the cited research. ___
8. Finds, integrates and evaluates related work (compare/contrast, categorize). ___
9. Provides a summary of their literature. ___

CHAPTER THREE
(Objective 3 Demonstrate the effective use of research methods appropriate to their field of concentration.)
(Objective 5 The ability to communicate concepts germane to their major area effectively to others through various kinds of literacy e.g. numeracy, graphics, printed text, computers and electronic data.)
(Objective 6 Demonstrate the ability to adapt their work to the needs of their clients.)

10. Gives insight into the methods of other researchers. 11-15
11. Systematic and comprehensive description of the development/design of the project. ___
12. Communicates findings in the context of past work. 17
13. Written in a style that addresses the needs of the clients (students, teachers, administrators, parents, school board, etc.). ___
14. Provides recommendations for further research and/or dissemination. ___

Faculty Signature ______________________________ Date Reviewed ______________________________

Approved SOE Graduate Committee 2/14/94

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10 - 12/19/95