Mastery-Based Education with a Culturally Responsive Imagination: Remarks on Early Research

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At this uncertain and disrupted time . . .

We can and must be responsive and sustaining with young people in school spaces—both online and in person.

What are you hearing about online schooling this year? How are you thinking about meeting students’ needs?
Mastery Collaborative

Program of NYC Department of Education

NYC PK-12 schools that choose to focus on **mastery-based** and **culturally responsive-sustaining** systems & practices. This is our 6th year.

70 member schools that “cross-pollinate” effective practices and ideas via professional learning, virtual visits, mentoring, and resource sharing. Partnerships this year with 3 geographic districts around NYC DOE.

We focus on school-wide and classroom shifts in the following areas:

- Curriculum
- Classroom Moves
- Grading Practices
- Learner-centered, responsive culture
What looks different in a MC school?

Where’s the teacher?
Students are in the driver’s seat.
The teacher is rarely at the front of the room.

Grades function as feedback.
The focus is away from alphanumeric grades, and more on increasing mastery over time.

Retakes: Students use a “Mastery Retake” system to work more on outcomes they want to improve.
## Five mastery-based power shifts

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional approach</th>
<th>Mastery approach</th>
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<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td>The teacher knows the learning goals and criteria for success, but might or might not share them with students.</td>
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<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td>Emphasis may be on covering content, more than on application of skills.</td>
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<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td>Students are usually instructed in a cohort, with limited opportunity for responsive supports.</td>
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<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td>Assessment may be primarily post-mortem and/or &quot;one and done,&quot; with no plan in place for addressing learning still to be done.</td>
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<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td>Pacing is determined by the need to cover all prescribed course material in the allotted time.</td>
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*Our shifts are heavily informed by [www.competencyworks.org](http://www.competencyworks.org)’s definition of competency education. We believe that each shift represents a move to a youth-centered approach to learning—and also requires significant changes in roles and power dynamics, for both educators and learners.*

**Our pacing shift differs from that of the field at large, valuing responsive pacing more than asynchronous pacing, because we see collaboration and interaction as vital aspects of the learning process.**
CRSE’s 3 pillars: Dr. Gloria Ladson Billings (1994)

a) Students must experience **academic success**.

b) Students must develop and/or maintain **cultural competence**.

c) Students must develop a **critical** (aka sociopolitical) consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order.” *

* “We can’t make students aware of painful truths and just move on. We need to help them turn awareness into power.”

—Khalilah Brann of CRESD
CRE evolves into into CRSE

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy — Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994)
- “empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impact knowledge, skills and attitudes.”

- “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them.”

- “seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling.”
NYSED Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework

CRSE helps educators create student-centered learning environments that:

- affirm racial, linguistic and cultural identities
- prepare students for rigor and independent learning
- develop students’ abilities to connect across lines of difference
- elevate historically marginalized voices
- empower students as agents of social change.

Mastery & CRSE: How do students benefit?

- **Transparency:** The path to success is clear from the start. Clear criteria reduce opportunity for implicit bias.

- **Power shifts and role shifts:** Learning is a student-centered process, with teachers as responsive coaches. This shift should be evident in classroom layout and visuals.

- **Positive learning identity:**
  - school culture that affirms intersectional identities (academics, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability status, and so on)
  - mindsets for learning (growth, belonging, value)
  - cognitive coaching as students engage in learning

- **Mastery of key skills:** Learners demonstrate progress and independent mastery of skills and knowledge that matter in and beyond school. Supports/scaffolds are strategically removed as mastery builds.

Mastery-based learning is not inherently equitable and responsive. It’s up to us to make it that way.

Your observations & questions

- What already makes sense?
- Where are the sticking points?

*Thanks for being here today!*
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NYU STEINHARDT 
Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools
PRE Introduction

Center for Policy, Research, and Evaluation (PRE)

- Our mission is to make research and evaluation for education that is action-oriented, liberating, accessible, and results in more equitable systems, policies, and practices.

- Type(s) of work we do
  - Education-based research in collaboration with partners and communities
  - Education and program evaluation
  - Rapid response research

Visit: bit.ly/NYUMetro_Research (case sensitive) for more about our work!
About the Study

Culturally Responsive Mastery-Based Education Study

- Documented CRE and MBE school-wide policies, practices and resources, teachers’ attitudes and practices, and equity-oriented student outcomes
- Essentially, we were studying how schools integrated CRE and MBE
- We interviewed students, teachers, staff, and admin, surveyed students and teachers, conducted observations, and collect CRE and MBE documents
Key Findings

01 School-wide Policies & Practices
All schools have robust institutionalized MBE systems. Most schools do not have CRE policies and CRMBE practices typically include advisory groups, professional development, and team teacher planning.

02 Teacher Attitudes & Practices
Few teachers practice MBE & CRE; those who do can be categorized in two ways based on their CRE imagination (where they see possibility for CRE and practice it).

03 Student Perspectives
Most students reported having a high sense of belonging, sociopolitical consciousness, intrinsic motivation, academic self efficacy, and cultural engagement across all schools.
Thanks!
Credits

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Breakout: Culturally Responsive, Mastery-Based Education Study

○ What is happening in mastery-based, culturally responsive schools? What's different? Is this a path to equity?
- How are youth experiencing these schools?
- What are some broader implications of this study?