Module 2 Reflection:

Balancing Mastery with Real-World Accountability

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The transition from a traditional "conveyor belt" model of education to a culture of mastery learning requires a fundamental shift in how schools view failure. Khan (2016) illustrates this challenge by describing how students are pushed forward with accumulated gaps in their learning; when these gaps compound over time, students inevitably hit a wall in advanced subjects (m. 3:20). To prevent these structural failures, Wormeli (2011) argues for the implementation of redos and retakes, asserting that true competence is defined by final proficiency rather than the speed of acquisition (p. 23). As an aspiring administrator, I agree that retakes are essential for closing learning gaps. However, building a sustainable culture of mastery requires balancing this academic grace with "real-world" accountability. My approach to implementation would prioritize teacher autonomy, structural support, and a graded scale of consequences that mirrors professional life.

Building the Culture: Mandates with Autonomy

Wormeli (2011) suggests that denying retakes distorts a student's grade by averaging their practice attempts with their final success, a practice that "retard[s] student achievement and maturation" (p. 22). To align my building with this philosophy, I would establish a non-negotiable baseline: retakes must be available to students. However, I am a proponent of allowing teachers to find the logistical strategies that work best for their specific context. Therefore, rather than mandating a single, rigid policy, I would offer a framework where low-stakes assignments (homework and classwork) allow for unlimited opportunities for mastery, while high-stakes assessments (quizzes and exams) are capped at one or two attempts per quarter.

To ensure this does not overwhelm staff, I would implement Wormeli's suggestion of making retakes "earned" rather than automatic. Students must demonstrate they have engaged in new learning—through a study calendar or corrected original work—before a retake is granted (Wormeli, 2011, p. 25). Furthermore, I would use my administrative role to alleviate the logistical burden by offering the main office as a quiet, supervised space for students to complete retakes during recess or planning periods. This ensures that the policy is supported by administrative resources, not just teacher goodwill.

Addressing Resistance: The "Real World" and Credit Reduction

A primary challenge to implementation is the belief among staff and parents that retakes "coddle" students or fail to prepare them for the "real world." While Wormeli (2011) counters this by pointing out that pilots, lawyers, and surgeons all utilize do-overs in their training (p. 24), my own perspective is slightly different. I believe students need grace, but not unlimited grace. In the professional world, we may get a second chance, but it often comes with "tough conversations, criticism, fees, or penalties." We fail our students if we do not simulate these friction points.

Therefore, unlike Wormeli, who advocates for full credit on retakes (p. 22), I support a policy of reduced credit after so many instances to maintain incentives for timeliness and initial preparation. For example, late homework might incur a 5-10% reduction, while a retaken exam might be capped at 80% or suffer a 20% penalty. These penalties would only take effect after a set number of instances and then increase per instance, depending on the circumstances. Students should not be punished for things out of their control (i.e. disability, socio-economic status, parental involvement, transportation availability, etc.). This hybrid approach honors the mastery

principle—students still learn the material—while respecting the equity concerns of students who mastered the content on the first attempt. It allows for grace and support when failures are caused by things out of control of the student. It teaches that while failure is not fatal, diligence has value.

The Limits of School Responsibility

Finally, implementing mastery learning faces the cold reality of limited resources. As Khan (2016) notes, the ideal of 100% mastery is a "social imperative" (m. 9:01), but practically, it is impossible for schools to ensure every student masters every standard without significantly higher societal investment. Schools cannot be solely responsible for filling every hole or gap in the layers of a student's education; parents and society share that burden as well. My goal as a leader is not perfection, but to limit the number of holes that go all the way through the layers or cause significant weakness in students' abilities. By checking in with teachers for fidelity—asking "Is this working?" and "Is it manageable?"—we can create a system that prioritizes growth without breaking the people responsible for fostering it.

References

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