

We have designed each “White Paper” to explore a fundamental educational principle and key issues engaging the education community we serve. It is our goal to partner with our readers as they meet the challenges they face.



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## Mastery Learning & Castle Learning Online

We are living in an information age and any student of history will recognize how far we have come from our roots as an agricultural society. This relatively rapid change can be seen by the advances in technology, but a 1989 study by Gallagher and Pearson disclosed that from 1893 to 1979, instructional practices had remained traditional, resulting in a growing concern that schools would be unable to educate young people in America. (Davis & Sorrel, Mastery Learning in Public Schools, Valdosta State University, GA, 1995)

Since that study, change has resulted as State Education Departments moved toward the concept of **mastery learning**:

- Subject content is divided by units, with a set of objectives or expectations.
- Students work through units in either groups or alone.
- Students demonstrate mastery on unit exams, typically at 80% level, before moving to new content.
- If mastery is not achieved, students receive remediation through tutoring, peer monitoring, small group discussions, or additional homework.
- Additional time for learning is offered for students who require remediation.
- The cycle of study and testing continues until mastery level is met.

Students have a higher level of achievement by using **mastery learning** techniques, than those being taught through traditional methods of instruction.

*Castle Learning Online* is uniquely designed to be used by educators who present content and raise academic proficiency by seeking a mastery level for students. The features found on the student review, testing and assessment website, [www.CastleLearning.com](http://www.CastleLearning.com), or fully explained through the “Teacher Tour” on the home site of the company, [www.CastleSoftware.com](http://www.CastleSoftware.com), employ the concept of mastery learning. The *Castle Learning* site gives the user an extensive database of questions, hints, defined vocabulary and reasons, along with skill development and reading sets, where students can answer questions, learn where they are weakest, return to complete new assignments and then move forward after a teacher determines they have achieved mastery.

In a field study of educators using *Castle Learning*, we learned first-hand what teachers think.

- When it comes to the self-paced aspect of working online with *Castle Learning*, a teacher explained, “I think most students benefit. High end achievers can move at a pace that doesn’t bore them, while struggling students don’t feel rushed or overwhelmed by getting ‘left behind’ because the pace of the rest of the students is too quick for them.”
- The immediate feedback component prompted an educator to say *Castle Learning* is “a good way of finding out what topics I need to review in class before state tests, I can assess the areas that need to be re-taught or reviewed, and I can tell quickly and easily which students are having troubles with a topic.”

Teachers now have a way to check mastery, remediate by whole class or for an individual, and ultimately ensure that student achieve academic success.