

# RECOGNISING PERSONALISED LEARNING

BY CHASEN STAHL

Many schools espouse a philosophy of education aimed at 'preparing students to succeed in the real world' or some variation thereof. Most educators also strive to ensure that students are afforded the opportunity for individual expression of academic ability and that intervention and support is tailored to meet the unique needs of every child. Indeed, most would agree that these are noble goals and some of the foremost responsibilities of any school.

Rare, however, are examples of students engaging in learning that reflects the circumstances, challenges, and interactions one would expect to find in the 'real world'. Nor is it common to find within traditional curriculum opportunities for students to engage in – and be formally recognised for – real world experiential learning and demonstrations of students' unique abilities.

Many of the challenges inherent to bridging this gap between aspiration and execution have long since been identified and studied in detail by people much more knowledgeable and experienced than the author of this article, and there is no singular, agreed upon set of solutions to which every school can look for answers.

That said, Aoba-Japan International School (A-JIS) has recently made encouraging progress in our efforts to deliver personalised learning to students, and here we will explore how and why we are leveraging a powerful new medium for quantifying,

communicating, and recognising individual student learning pathways, the MTC Mastery Transcript, in order to deliver on our promise to students.

### AOBA IN CONTEXT

A-JIS is a secular, private international school located in Tokyo, Japan accredited by the Council of International Schools and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. It is authorised to deliver the continuum of the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum, inclusive of the Primary Years Programme, the Middle Years Programme and the Diploma Programme. A-JIS also offers an alternative accredited high school diploma, our Global Leadership Diploma, designed to meet the needs of students who would like to design a more personalised learning pathway targeting their individual post-secondary academic and professional goals.

Within our senior school programmes and Global Leadership Diploma in particular, we have long endeavoured to balance flexibility and personalisation with academic rigour and formal recognition of learning. This is much easier said than done, however, and we have continually sought to improve our ability to deliver on this goal through thoughtful programme design, curriculum organisation, and robust student support mechanisms.



**BALANCING FLEXIBILITY AND PERSONALISATION WITH ACADEMIC RIGOUR AND FORMAL RECOGNITION OF LEARNING IS MUCH EASIER SAID THAN DONE.**

As part of these efforts, A-JIS recently decided to join the Mastery Transcript Consortium (MTC) and leverage the Mastery Transcript for our senior school students. After extensive research and deliberation, we concluded that the power of the MTC collective combined with a modern, student-centred solution for transcripts would greatly aid us in further defining the student-centric nature of our senior school programmes and supporting student's success in their post-secondary careers.

### ENTER THE MASTERY TRANSCRIPT

What is the MTC Mastery Transcript? How does it differ from a traditional transcript? And why do we believe it will allow our school to provide opportunities for and recognise individualised, experiential learning and advanced academic achievement outside the bounds of traditional curriculum?

Put simply, it is a transcript created to serve students from all backgrounds, and to support them in a variety of post-high school goals,

whether that be admissions to a selective four-year university, placement at a community college, or entry into the workforce.

The Mastery Transcript is supported by the MTC, a network of user schools. The schools inform the MTC's development and ensure the rigour and relevance of its standards for credentialing. It was born out of a recognition that traditional school transcripts are a vestige of an outdated, industrial model of education and that a new approach to transcripts is required to support the needs of modern students, with a focus on personalisation and demonstration of real world knowledge, skills, and experience.

Several key elements of the transcript differentiate it from traditional transcripts and allow it to support the A-JIS goals of fostering and celebrating individual student achievement.

> **COMMUNITY DRIVEN:** the Mastery Transcript is continuously developed and improved based on feedback from the



community of schools comprising the MTC, all of whom share in a vision of relevant, personalised learning. The consortium is also an excellent resource for sharing knowledge and best practice. Leveraging the power of the collective, the MTC is an important part of the transcript experience and is where much of the legitimacy and validation of the transcript is derived from.

> **MODERN:** the Mastery Transcript itself is a web-based, digital artefact that can be updated in real time, allowing anyone to dynamically view and explore a student's learning pathway and accomplishments. Its look, feel, and features are reflective of the type of modern software applications that students interact with on a daily basis and that leading universities and companies expect when reviewing

the accomplishments and experiences of prospective applicants.

> **CUSTOMISABLE:** schools using the transcript can customise their credit format and backwards map against their unique curriculum and circumstances as needed, providing maximum flexibility to meet individual student needs.

> **CONSISTENT, LOGICAL, VALIDATED:** while customisable and flexible to the needs of different schools and students, the transcript is built upon a research-based foundation centred around the concept of 'Mastery Learning'. The roster of academic advisers, researchers, and other specialists actively contributing to the development of the Mastery Transcript represents an impressive cross-section of

disciplines spanning the global education community. The definitions, measurements, and representations of student learning are consistent across all transcripts and for every student, ensuring logical consistency and aiding comprehension for those viewing and interpreting Mastery Transcripts.

> **NO GRADES OR GPA:** it is focused on communicating and recognising students' real world accomplishments, and demonstration of skills and competencies through evidence and clear articulation of learning outcomes. While A-JIS will continue to record marks for our IB courses and mainstream curriculum as necessary, the Mastery Transcript allows our students to transcend the limitations of these representations of learning and make choices about how they express their achievements and individual character.

### ASK QUESTIONS FOR TODAY

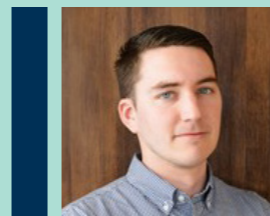
As we continue on our journey to redefine and improve personalised learning for students and recognise their individual achievements, we also continue to ask ourselves the following questions, and would recommend any school exploring similar themes to ask the same.

1. How can we support students who want to pursue advanced academic courses and qualifications not offered within our school curriculum?
2. How can we provide students with opportunities for experiential learning, including internships, entrepreneurial activities, volunteering, content creation, and more, while still applying rigorous academic standards and ensuring fair recognition of their achievements?
3. How can we ensure that the individualised, diverse profiles of our graduating students are not only recognisable and applicable to university admissions offices around the

world, but are also internationally competitive and able to highlight their unique talents in order to support entry into top universities?

4. How can we translate student learning and achievement into a high-quality artefact whose use extends beyond just a record of credits, but also functions as a resume and portfolio of work that can not only be used for university admissions but also leveraged for internship and career development purposes?
5. How can we support a diversity of learning opportunities and meet individual needs while also ensuring that every student is provided with a common foundation of academic and professional skills and concepts?
6. How can we leverage a flexible framework for recognising and communicating student achievement within a context that is shared by other schools, externally validated, academically rigorous and relevant, and widely recognised?
7. How can we accomplish all of this while aligning and integrating with our mainstream curriculum, credit requirements, and other academic structures to maintain consistency and alignment of learning approaches and target outcomes, and streamline administrative routines, including grading, matriculation, and university application procedures, for everyone?

In the case of A-JIS, we feel that the Mastery Transcript provides compelling answers to many of these questions and for this reason have committed to incorporating it as a core component of our education strategy.



#### THE AUTHOR

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