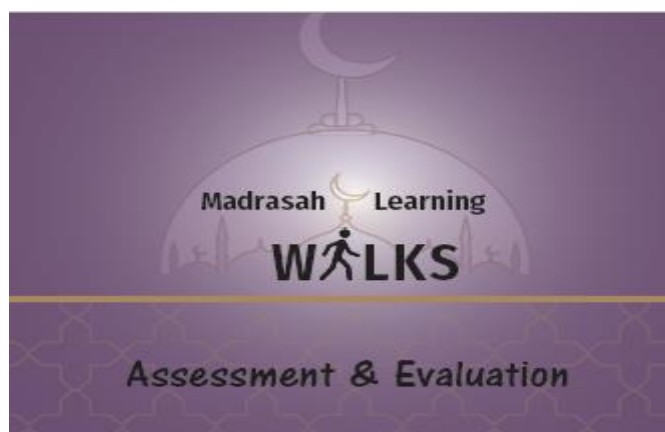


Pilot Remote Learning Walk at Al Murtaza Madressa– Karachi

Date: Friday 9th July 2021

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Purpose of the report

Having developed the Tarbiyah curriculum, MCE sought to experience the implementation of the curriculum. As a result of the curriculum, various madaris worldwide engage with it, each having different experiences with their learners. Therefore, as part of best practice, capturing good teaching and learning experiences would further enable MCE under the assessment criteria to:

- Review what works well,
- promote partnership within madaris,
- enhance management support within individual madaris,
- support teachers in their teaching journey,
- recognise the safe, caring and engaging environment for students.

With all this factored in, MCE launched the first pilot Learning walk after sending questionnaires to all madaris. From a total of **44** responses, **25%** were from Pakistan (Al- Murtaza Madrasah 11 responses), **41%** (18 responses) from six madaris within the COEJ region, **9%** (4 respondents) from three madaris from the NASIMCO region and **25%** (11 respondents) from two madaris from Africa region.

Out of those who responded, Al Murtaza Madressa in Karachi showed enthusiasm in piloting the learning walk. After discussions with the management team, a remote learning walk took place on Friday, 9th July 2021. This report aims to share how the process occurred and celebrate findings as part of good practice.

Al Murtaza Madressa

The principal of Al Murtaza Madressa in Karachi is Sister Fatima Altaf, and Sister Sadaf Fatima is the vice-principal. The madrasah adopted the Tarbiyah curriculum just before moving to online sessions due to the pandemic. Therefore, both the teachers and students have experienced and benefitted from the Tarbiyah curriculum using remote sessions.

Through the initial survey, responses indicated that the administrative team is very supportive of the teachers. Teachers also provide an opportunity for the senior leadership team (SLT) to visit their lessons. After which, a debrief takes place to discuss the observation with some recommendations. Such an approach meant there was an initial comfort for teachers having an open-door policy for SLT visits. Therefore, paving the way to learning walks taking place as part of the pilot project.

However, as discussed in the MCE 2019 conference, Learning Walks were proposed as a process that would help evaluate the quality of teaching and students' learning. In turn, support through coaching as the teachers become the 'walkers' through the first-hand experience and professional peer support developed. Thus, helping to shape the future of *madaris* with networks that can support the concept of '**see it, share it and succeed with it**' instead of recommendations.

Planning the Learning Walk

Gaining teachers consent to conduct the pilot learning walk was essential. So the first step was to identify those who would feel comfortable to invite the MCE team consisting of Naushadbhai Mehrali and Sukainabai Manji to visit the online lessons. In addition, a madrasah colleague and a member of the SLT would also have an opportunity to experience first-hand the teaching and learning within the classroom.

In gaining consent, it helped identify the teachers who were willing to participate in the pilot project and find teachers ready to be the 'walkers' to get the first-hand experience. As a result, **10** out of the

14 teachers who responded consented to visit their online classes. On the other hand, **12** out of the **14** teachers expressed an interest in being a ‘walker’ to gain the first-hand experience. Thus, only 1 out of the 14 did not feel comfortable being visited or becoming a ‘walker’.

It is interesting to note that **3** of the teachers who did not consent were welcome to the idea of being a ‘walker’. Overall, only one teacher out of the fourteen did not feel comfortable taking up a ‘walker’ role but was happy to be visited. Teachers did not have to explain their consents; however, this suggests that the three individuals perhaps did not feel comfortable allowing external or colleagues in their teaching spaces but felt safe becoming a ‘walker’.

The SLT provided the timings of the classes for the day. Then, using that information and consent, it was possible to identify sessions to visit and teachers who would become the initial ‘walkers’. Out of the ten teachers who consented to visits, it was possible only to see **five** sessions due to the overall timing of the madrasah and enabling ‘walkers’ to log in and out of various sessions as they were online. **Four** teachers took part as the ‘walkers’ after examining the availability. Out of this, one of the ‘walkers’ also had a visit in her teaching session.

Learning Walk

Before the remote learning walk day, ‘walkers’ had an opportunity to discuss how to capture the ten minutes within the sessions. They were encouraged to keep an open mind when visiting the classroom through a Zoom meeting. The day was not about judging each other’s practices but gaining an accurate picture of how the curriculum is delivered. The visits would allow sharing the teaching and learning by seeing it and then feeling comfortable applying similar methods or techniques within their classrooms.

We had to get the login details for the remote visits, and the teachers provided these. In two sessions, we had to wait in the lobby before being admitted, whilst three sessions enabled us to join in as expected. The security layer demonstrates that individuals cannot enter the virtual space without logins.

Furthermore, to support the learning walk, each teacher had to provide the context of their teaching, making it easier to capture within a short time. Having the contextual background of the session helped to connect with the lesson as ‘walkers’ would not get an opportunity to see the whole session; therefore, there would be gaps in what happened before and after the visit completes.

Findings from the learning walk

Although the original proposal in 2019 was to conduct learning walk visits in the classroom spaces, this visit had to adapt to how teaching was taking place. Therefore, the MCE team, together with the support from the madrasah admin team of Al- Murtaza Madressa, could complete this initial pilot learning walk remotely. In addition, this pilot learning walk gave insight into how the Tarbiyah curriculum is delivered, especially when teachers adapted to online learning platforms during this Covid-19 pandemic. Finally, the pilot learning walk highlighted an opportunity for teachers to collaborate and reflect on their teaching.

The following section looks at how the visited teachers felt and what a learning walk meant to them. After that, there is a reflection from the ‘walkers’.

What do the teachers say?

After the learning walk took place, teachers who invited us to their class had an opportunity to share how they felt before, during and after the visit on a document. This section highlights what the teachers told us and about the use of the camera during remote sessions.

- One teacher who had felt anxious before the 'walk time' because of having new people in her teaching space became too involved in her teaching and did not realise when we left the session. Later, the same teacher mentioned that her anxiety was lesser when she realised that we had left the session. It is an interesting comment that highlights her approach and how the teacher managed herself. Another teacher reflects on her excitement in knowing that the MCE team were coming to her class. Although this teacher felt confident in her lesson, she became aware that she was repetitive in her teaching because four people were present in her class, two of whom were new (Naushadbhai and Sukainabai). However, her reflection shows that she gained calmness by having the attentive faces of her students (boys group) and quickly got back on track.
- On reflection after the visit, one teacher states how confident she was after the learning walk and happy to have been part of it. As part of her teaching process, she felt she had achieved something through the learning walk and added that she was '*looking forward to more definitely.*'
- Two teachers expressed that they were comfortable because of the experience of having their SLT visit their sessions. One of these teachers commented that she had planned her lesson according to her routine as she recognised through the briefs that it is not '*about judgement rather just about sharing ideas and help us improve further.*' The teacher further commented that she was reminding herself that no one was judging her and continued to teach during the visit. Such a positive attitude demonstrates how our volunteer teachers are willing to develop further professionally.
- Amongst the feedback, there was also a suggestion for teachers to visit external *madaris*. Such learning walks across other *madaris* is something that MCE want to develop once individual madrasahs become accustomed to learning walks. Perhaps with online learning, madaris would have more opportunities to positively share first-hand experiences by '**see it, share it, and succeed with it**'.

Ordinarily, if the learning walk were within a classroom, an individual would take up a space within the room; however, the choice is to be seen on camera or not with remote lessons. So whether using the camera is an advantage or a disadvantage of online learning walks can be discussed at some stage. During the visits, the SLT and colleagues did not use the camera, and only the MCE team made use of it. Only one teacher felt that having the 'walker's camera on was distracting and made her anxious.

Reflection from the walkers

This section highlights some of the experiences that the 'walkers' had experienced, including classroom engagement, safe places created for students to share their ideas, and how a teacher adapted her teaching because of technical issues. The section ends with a discussion on ensuring activities are age-appropriate to achieve a higher engagement.

The MCE team, SLT and the 'walkers' had an opportunity to debrief after the sessions. The initial response was very positive, and there was a huge relief that there were no internet connection issues during the learning walks.

- One of the walkers added that she felt empowered to try out what she had observed within a lesson. Such a comment indicates how powerful learning walks can be for seeing best practices and being confident to try them out.
- In one session, the teacher had used a treasure map on the screen to get students engaged, and active responses from the students were notable. One of the walkers commented that the activity had grasped the age group and hence was *'a good thing to keep in mind, to have age-appropriate activities.'*
- Furthermore, by using such an activity (treasure map), the teacher had helped develop communication and reflective skills as students had to decide who could go on the expedition based on the qualities required.
- In another session, a walker commented how the activity in the lesson helped *'promote reading and comprehending text'*. Such is a valuable skill that madrasahs can equip our younger generation with as they start building the blocks of knowledge for them.
- Using the language that best suits the classroom is a valuable skill and, by doing so, helped to make an inclusive environment for all learners. One of the walker's having experienced this, felt encouraged to do so in her teaching. In this case, the language used to explain further was Urdu. Hence, making it even further accessible for the pupil(s) who might have been struggling with knowledge or information delivered in English only.
- The use of visual aids was appreciated and reinforced knowledge through recapping of previous lessons. In addition, walkers also noted how the tone of teachers fluctuated to encourage students' discussions. There was also a note on how some teachers were using probing techniques to engage students. Such an approach can support retrieving embedded knowledge which is helpful for the students.
- One of the sessions used silent communication resources for assessment purposes. Many of the walkers felt it was something they could adapt to in their lessons.
- Walkers found the brainstorming activity in one session helpful due to the connections made to real-life experiences. Such links create an active curriculum for the younger generation as they grow through their learning experience.
- On seeing how a teacher adapted a resource due to technical issues, there was discussion on having alternatives ready if certain situations occur. Overall, it is about being able to adapt and overcome to create a learning engagement. Some walkers came up with suggestions to adjust, such as using whiteboards or even avoiding using the provided PDFs and instead narrating orally with various cues.
- Adapting activities to age-appropriate is essential as it may hinder learning opportunities. It is especially significant for the early year students who may not be fluent in reading; therefore, perhaps an oral narration with artefacts can help visualise further. An example is when students' higher engagement was evident in a session when the teacher left the script and used artefacts with oral expressions to demonstrate the life of Nabi Nuh.

These are some reflections; however, the walkers will continue their reflective process in their teaching journey as they try out the 'new' strategies.

Linking with MCE's vision

The Tarbiyah curriculum aims to nurture piety by enabling an environment that instils the values of the Qur'an and Ahl al-Bayt (a). This pilot learning walk has provided an opportunity to showcase the quality of teaching within a safe environment. Whilst simultaneously through student engagement, it demonstrated the effectiveness of a madrasah in instilling such values.

As discussed in 2019, using a **TEAM** (Teaching & Learning, Environment, Assurance, Management) approach for the learning walks 'walkers' would either choose an agreed focus or experience the teaching and learning through a ten-minute snapshot. For example, although this pilot learning walk did not have a focused aim, a **TEAM** approach helped gain evidence of **teaching and learning**. Key examples were the use of the curriculum, various resources, behaviour management, classroom engagement, and creating safe, inclusive **environments** for learning.

In addition, **assurance** of long term planning was evident through retrieval of subject knowledge and celebrating achievements when students could connect knowledge with social reality through lived examples. Finally, under the **management** strand, SLT demonstrated safeguarding adults and children with an open-door policy of visiting the classes and ensuring secure logins for sessions.

Overall Findings

Having this opportunity to visit a madrasah remotely during this pandemic was a great experience. The Madrasah teachers and students deserve special thanks as the essential participants within the learning walk. Through the learning walk, colleagues could experience their peers' teaching first-hand and use it as a reflection to enhance their practices.

It was evident that each teacher made a tremendous effort to ensure the delivery of the Tarbiyah curriculum. Moreover, there are opportunities to support young learners to become independent thinkers and reflectors. For example, students had to search for a Qur'an ayah and decode it using a few prompts. It can adapt to any lesson, and by providing learning walk opportunities, sharing best practices could be promoted with other classes within and other *madaris*.

Next steps

There are steps in helping to adopt learning walks as part of a madrasah assessment.

- 1) To continue to provide learning walks opportunities to teachers as they will grow professionally through seeing various first-hand practices.
- 2) To create a buddy system where colleagues can visit lessons and provide an opportunity for reflection. A focused visit could help support the further development of individuals.
- 3) SLT to act as a sounding board as the learning walks can help facilitate tailored support in further developing the teaching and learning experience.

Acknowledgements

MCE would like to express their gratitude to Al Murtaza Madressa for taking up the pilot learning walk, especially with the pandemic challenges. Many thanks to Sister Fatima Altaf, the principal and Sister Sadaf Fatima, the vice-principal, for their invaluable support throughout the process. The teachers need recognition for all their efforts. A special thanks to all those who agreed to be visited. Many thanks to those teachers who became the 'walkers', and we hope this opportunity helped you grow in your practice. This process would be incomplete without the students, especially as they are the future and the Tarbiyah curriculum is a tool kit for their spiritual development.

Mrs Sukaina Manji