

LIFE SKILLS IN THE CLASSROOM



Facilitating Taqaddam Classes

Facilitating the learning and development of life skills requires different methods and approaches to teaching and lecturing. Taqaddam classes are designed for students to have time to think, engage, experiment, explore and reflect.

It is also important to create a safe and inclusive environment in which all students feel comfortable doing these things. Here we highlight some key approaches to facilitating Taqaddam classes.

- Use 'participatory approaches' so that every young person has a chance to experience what is being explored
- We strongly encourage teachers to participate as equals during the class discussions and activities, sharing your experiences and illustrating that we are all lifelong learners, without being dominating or influencing too much what the students are thinking and feeling
- Avoid teaching methods that require you to speak a lot, lead from the front or need students to try and remember information
- See 'Creating a Safe and Inclusive Environment' on page 35
- Often activities will require splitting up the class. Grouping them into different teams can be quick and easy. For example, if you have a class of 20 and you want teams of 3, then divide 20 by 3 (6.6) and so count students 1, 2, 3, up to 7 and then get all 1's, all 2's together etc...

The Format for the Classes

Every classroom session should have a structure that students become familiar with. The more you follow this structure, the more your young people will come to expect it and the higher the quality of the session. Some young people will even come, looking forward to it! Here's the format we suggest you follow and below, you'll find more information to help ensure your Taqaddam class is rich in reflection and learning.

1. **Preparation before the session**
2. **Arrive and check-in**
3. **Core activity and debrief**
4. **Supplementary activity and debrief** (depending on time)
5. **Check-In about Make it Happen!** (when appropriate)
6. **Check out**
7. **Personal teacher reflection after the class**

Preparation before the session

You won't be able to deliver these sessions without first familiarising yourself with the content and ensuring you have all the resources you need. Take time to understand the outcomes, and what you want to achieve from the session. Ensure there is enough time. Be realistic. It's better to do something small well, than something big, not so well. Check if you need to do any printing, photocopying, preparing flip charts, etc.

Check in

This ensures that everyone has an opportunity to speak and helps everyone 'arrive' in the room. Here are 3 ways of checking in, depending on the time you have.

A quick check in (about 2-5 minutes)

Ask a simple question like 'how are you today?' or, 'how is was your week?' Explain that they should give a brief answer - a single word, 3 words, a single word and physical action, answer in no less than 5 words and no more than 10 or a short phrase. If you choose a single word, say they can't repeat what's already been said to ensure a wider variety of answers.

A good check in (about 5-10 minutes)

Let them know that you have 5-10 minutes for checking in and ask a deeper question like 'how have you used your life skills this week?', 'give 3 short explanations of when you've used the life skills today', or 'How can [Life Skill] be useful for life, work and for the world?' This could be an open question to all, or answered quickly in pairs – whatever way you do it, ask them to think deeply before answering.

A deeper check in (10 minutes and above)

This is a great opportunity to take your time with the group, make sure everyone gets an opportunity to speak and have time to say how they are really feeling and to be listened to.

You could ask everyone to get into pairs (if there's an odd number, you can pair with someone or you can have one group of 3) and have 1-2 minutes each to explain how their week has been or their relationships to the life skills for instance. Explain that once they've shared to each other, the person they're paired with will share back to the whole group.



Activity & Debrief (Core and/or Supplementary)

These are detailed in the Activity sections. You need to complete the Core Activity for each class, and if you have time you should also include a Supplementary Activity that works well with the Core. A good debrief on all activities is essential for students to process and expand on what has been learned and explored in the activity.

Make it Happen! check in

We suggest that once students are working on their Make it Happen team projects you include at least a quick check in about progress in class. The projects should be led by the students but it can help to see if teams are working together effectively on their social action ideas – to catch any potential issues before they grow into problems and to ensure that the teams are progressing towards well towards the MiH event. In the past, some teams leave things late to start and this has a negative impact on their experience and the quality of their projects.

Check out

This is an important way to finish the session as you may see how people have gained new insight or changed their mood because of your session. This process is the same as the check-in but with different, more evaluative questions like ‘what have we discovered today?’ or ‘what one thing do I want to remember from today’s sessions?’

Personal teacher reflections after the class

Take a little time after the class to reflect on the experience, think about what worked and how things could be improved for next time. Also, take the opportunity while it’s fresh in your mind to make notes on the students, recording any observations about their progress or potential challenges.



Creating a Safe and Inclusive Environment

Trust is key to really making your class a place where students can freely explore their ideas and thoughts. In trusting and safe environments, genuine community between students and the teacher can be formed and nurtured.

It is necessary for group members to be able to trust that the group is a safe place – a place where they can be honest and not fear that they will be judged or disrespected. Here are some TOP TIPS for creating a safe and inclusive environment.

Group Agreement

- During the first class, write a Group Agreement (with all members of the group present and contributing) a document that outlines the guidelines for the class discussions.
- Ensure that the Group Agreement is visible during each Taqaddam class.
- Send the Group Agreement to students or have them write it up in their Handbooks.
- Review the Group Agreement at regular intervals.
- As teacher, model the safety and confidentiality guidelines.

Staging

- Ensure everyone knows each other's names.
- Have students sit in a circle to encourage a sense of equality.

Timing

- Include a check in at the start of each session and a check out at the end of each session. The check in allows students to focus on the class, connect with themselves in the moment and ask for support where needed. The check-out allows students to reflect on what has happened during the class and how they are feeling.
- Provide opportunities for students to reflect on their strengths and what they are bringing to the group.

Behaviour of group leader

- Teachers should act as equals in this environment.
- Share personal anecdotes.
- Treat participants with respect and consideration – all contributions are valid and welcomed.

Keep discussions constructive and positive

- Clarify the objectives of each session to the group. These can be found on your lesson plans.
- Refer back to the Group Agreement if the group is deviating from it.
- Keep an eye on time, ensuring that the conversation keeps moving with as many people contributing as possible.
- Ask dominant participants to allow others to speak.
- If the group starts to share frustrations or negativity, ask them how they would like to address this.
- Step back when the group is functioning well – help students become independent learners and take control of their learning.

Encourage participants to engage

- Write student comments on the whiteboard.
- Ask follow-up questions and paraphrase the comments for everyone to ponder. A combination of initiating and probing questions can be an effective approach to bring out participants' ideas further.
- Ask the contributors for further clarification and/or elaboration.
- Revisit past contributions and incorporate them into subsequent discussions.
- Encourage others to add their reactions or ideas to build on each other's comments.
- Do not be afraid to admit your own confusion if you don't know something – invite others to provide resources and use the opportunity to discuss with the group how one might go about researching the issue.

Encourage and embed resilience

- Emphasise that we all make mistakes and failing sometimes is part of the learning process.
- If a student is having difficulty understanding a concept, talk about the process of learning and how their brain is growing as new connections are being made.
- Encourage in students the power of YET... For example 'I don't understand/I don't know... yet!'



Here's some extra space for
your thoughts and ideas!

A series of horizontal dashed lines providing space for writing.





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