

Preparing for Leadership

Bishops' High School/
Bishops' High School Old Students' Association
Lower 6 Programme

October 17 to November 28, 2008

Introduction

The Lower 6 Programme for the academic year 2007-08 began on Friday, October 17, 2008 and ended on Friday, November 28, 2008; no discussions took place on Friday, November 21, 2008. In its 11th year¹, the programme involved a maximum of 35 students during the first session and a minimum of 17 students during the sixth session. It was facilitated by Roxane George, Janice M. Jackson, Magda Pollard and Vidyaratha Kissoon; Roxane George joined the team this year. (See the Appendix for the students' and facilitators' attendance registers.)

The areas addressed were as follows:

Week 1	Introduction to the programme Reasons for entering the 6 th form Challenges of 6 th form Expectations of 6 th form
Week 2	Self-exploration
Week 3	Gender in our lives
Week 4	Self and music
Week 5	Gender-based violence
Week 6	Parent-child relationship Lessons learnt from the programme Sharing of outcomes and student requests with the Headteacher, Ms. Daly and Form Mistress, Ms. Merrill

Several students were enthusiastic about the programme. They participated actively in the discussions and willingly examined issues which were of concern to them. They also embraced the opportunity to consider different perspectives as presented by the facilitators.

Week 1 – October 17, 2008

The students were given an orientation to the programme by the facilitators who shared their motivation for wanting to contribute to the development of the current students. They were encouraged to use the opportunity to learn more about themselves and their classmates, with a view to broadening their world view and increasing their level of tolerance and fairness in judgment.

The students worked in five groups to discuss the reasons for entering to 6th Form, the challenges they currently face and their expectations of 6th Form. The results of the discussion appear below.

Reasons for Entering to 6th Form

The students had different reasons for entering the 6th form. These ranged from wanting to be better prepared for the work environment and university to becoming more mature.

¹ The programme began during the 1996-97 academic year but was not offered on for two years.

- To wait two more years to decide what career to choose.
- To set the foundation to enter the world of work and pursue a career.
- To achieve the academic requirements to get into university.
- To defer entry to the world of work or university.
- To avoid doing pre-law at university.
- To further studies.
- To take on a sense of responsibility and maturity.
- To aid decision making for a career choice.
- To become more qualified.
- To prepare for university.
- To interact with different people from various schools.
- To satisfy parents.
- Thought the workload of 6th form would be less.
- To wear the skirt.
- Consider self too immature for university and work environment.
- To become highly qualified to get higher paying job.

Challenges of 6th Form

The vision of the 6th form experience did not reflect the reality in several cases. The prospect of being able to cope easily based on past performance was debunked in light of the demanding nature of the programme. The desire to have an active social life has to be tempered by the need to complete the programme in a limited time and under new conditions which include the assumption of increased individual responsibility for study and research.

The students were encouraged to consider this as a period when deferred gratification with respect to social activities was essential. They were advised that the rewards would be reaped in the future.

The challenges identified were:

- Came to study Law but had to choose IT.
- Fitting into a new environment:
 - Adjusting to the rules e.g., buttoning the top button and wearing tie up to neck.
 - Having to wear a skirt rather than a tunic; now have to press the whole shirt.
- Dealing with new subjects.
- Adapting to different teachers.
- Balancing school and social life.
- Being seniors and having to set an example for the younger students.
- A lot of work to cover in a short period of time.
- Very complex subjects.
- A lot of responsibilities that limit teaching periods.
- A lot of independent research.
- Change in social surroundings.
- Balancing time and management of subjects.
- Adapting to a larger class.
- Time management – clashes in classes (subjects).
- Previous achievements seem insignificant to the Lower 6 exams.

- Higher degree of self-study.
- Not having sports in school.

Expectations of 6th Form

Lower 6 was considered a stage in their development for being given greater responsibility in school and having a greater input in decision making. It was also seen as a time when the students would have a chance to represent the school in different activities.

The students saw this as a period of transition from school to university and/or the world of work. They believed that with the foundation laid in the 6th form, they would be able to define a career pathway. Their expectation of themselves was that they would excel in their studies.

Other Considerations

A major concern for the students is the lack of social activities facilitated by the school. In this regard, they considered it appropriate for form parties and fairs to be held. They also would like to have a graduation and prom at the end of their programme.

The school has not had organized sports for some time. It was adverted that the level of misbehavior in school has resulted from the lack of opportunities to participate in sports, especially for the males. In fact, one male student who entered the school in first form stated that he felt out of place in BHS since the programme was only academic.

Students entered Lower 6 with the view that the programme was an easy one. Having observed their predecessors, they had come to this conclusion. No one had investigated the scope and nature of the programme, therefore they were surprised when they discovered that the workload was so heavy. They indicated that, from this experience, they learnt of the importance of investigating a situation before making decisions.

Several students are studying law. They learnt that being a lawyer is all engrossing, requiring total investment of time and energy. Some began to question their career choice and were assured that the intent of sharing information of the reality of preparation for becoming a lawyer and the practice of law was not to discourage them but rather to help them be realistic in their expectations.

Week 2 – October 24, 2008

The 27 students worked in two groups to engage in self-exploration. They began the discussion by introducing themselves with the following points being made about the value of the exercise.

- It is important to project your voice to be heard by everyone.
- If someone is speaking to you, particularly in a group, and you have difficulty hearing what is being said, you should indicate this. It is important to receive information clearly in order to respond appropriately.
- The more you learn about each other, the greater the chance of identifying similarities and differences as well as being able to communicate appropriately.

Group 1

The students in Group 1 were asked to draw themselves, then identify at least three positive and three negative things about themselves. Some students said that they couldn't draw and were encouraged to try. All eventually produced a drawing.

The positive attributes identified by the students included:

- Being handsome: it was noted that handsomeness/beauty is more than a physical characteristic; it also requires inner attractiveness.
- Helpful: the student gave the example of her welcoming the new students to Lower 6, helping to facilitate their transition into a new environment; another spoke of assisting with chores at home which he has come to like and appreciate. It was pointed out that this student has or is developing skills that are necessary for becoming an independent adult so that assisting with chores should not be considered in a negative light.
- Defines self for self: the student is self-assured in her self-perception.
- Determined: the student completes whatever is begun.
- Organized and goal oriented: the student likes to operate in a structured way.
- Being fun-loving: the student laughs a lot and likes to make others happy as well.
- Loyal.
- Active: the student is involved in extra-curricula activities, especially sports and faith-based activities.

The negative attributes identified by the students included:

- Troublesome: the student said that he interferes with others even if they are studying because he wants to be the centre of attention. It was pointed out that, in life, you will be required to spend time by yourself and this is a time to practise restraint. It was also noted that you need to respect other people's space and desires.
- Has been described as "an old person in a young person's body": the student likes to spend much time by herself.
- Withdrawn: the student's only siblings are two brothers and the fact that she is the only girl is often pointed out by other people. She is uncomfortable with this and does not like to accompany her family anywhere, preferring to stay at home.
- Expects something bad to happen: the student believes that both good things and bad things happen in life and if she goes for two or three weeks with only good things happening, she expects the bad to happen. It was suggested that we need to think of the positive, using our energy for this purpose rather than investing our energy in the negative. Another student stated that we should be prepared for the bad, also thinking that bad is inevitable. A third student advised that we learn from all situations, whether good or bad, and that our focus should be on what we can learn/have learnt rather than on the "bad."
- Argumentative: the student indicated that other people consider him argumentative even though he doesn't think that he is. It was noted that it is important to pay attention not only to what you say but how you say it and that listening is very important so as to capture the points of view of and have respect for others.
- Moody: the student noted that some times she is childish/playful and other times she wants to be left alone. In the latter state, if anyone approaches her, she becomes angry and can lash out. The students were asked to think about what makes them angry and determine whether the things they get angry about are worth it. Some acknowledged that some of the things are trivial.

- Impatient with parents' chatter: the student gets irritated when her mother/father talk and talk and talk. When she doesn't respond, her mother stops talking to her. It was suggested that she speak with her mother about how she feels, particularly since she said that other times they communicate well.
- What other people say about self matters too much: the student said that this "runs in the family." It was stated that she needs to think of herself as the most important person in the world and work towards valuing her self-perception.
- Like junk food: the student recognized that his acne results from his consumption of junk food, said that he knows he has to stop eating it to see improvement in his face but could not say when he would do so. It was noted that the only person who can make the change is he.
- Not being in control of emotions: the student said that when she gets depressed, she draws but does not speak to anyone about her thoughts or feelings. It was pointed out that sharing our thoughts and talking about our feelings can help to give a different understanding of what's happening and relieve stress. The student said that she used to write poetry that was dark but has stopped doing so. Another shared that she writes when she is upset and often tears up the paper or burns it. It was noted that writing and talking mean that we are giving the words and situation to the universe and this process helps to bring relief.
- Procrastination: the student recognizes that he has to address this issue though he has not really taken steps to do so. He noted that there have been no adverse consequences so far.
- Too trusting of others: While not identifying it as a negative in the true sense, one student said that he thinks that he is too trusting of persons and that based on the experiences expressed by others, he thinks that being too trusting could lead to hurt feelings.
- Suffering from acute nervousness when required to speak publicly before a group or to an audience.

Value of the Session

The session helped students to realize that other people have experiences similar to theirs. They now understood that they share many experiences but had not learnt about the commonalities among them because of their silence. In fact, one student described himself as an average teenager without being able to articulate what that meant. By identifying and discussing commonalities, the notion of the "average teenager" became clearer.

It appeared that, having articulated positive and negative traits, the students understood that in order to fully realize the potential of their positive traits, negative traits needed to be addressed. Having been encouraged to express some of their negative characteristics publicly, the students are now more conscious of them and are in a better position to work towards reducing their incidence and impact.

Group 2

The students in Group 2 were asked to draw a picture which represented themselves, and to list things which they thought were positive and negative about themselves. The students who felt that they could not draw were also encouraged to try as they were all participating in an introspective exercise for the first time.

Pictures which were revealed included Superman, lily (being useful), star (shining alone), sunshine and clouds, a horse (strong and moody), a mouse (being timid), a book (from

someone who likes to write), a cartoon character, mp3 player with a fashion model, the sun and a basketball player (representing activity).

Positive attributes identified by the students included:

- Being loving and caring.
- Being quiet.
- Being jovial, liking to make others happy.
- Liking to write.
- Being able to resist teasing and taunts.
- Being creative and artistic.
- Having faith in God.
- Being resilient.

Negative attributes identified by the students included:

- Being talkative.
- Being quiet and not speaking out.
- Annoying other people.
- Quick to get angry.
- Being moody.
- Having no negative attributes.
- Procrastination.
- Being complacent and accepting mediocrity e.g., in grades.
- Not being able to speak fluently.

Issues Raised/Discussion

The students recognized that negative attributes can be worked on while strengthening what was positive. The issues raised included lack of communication with parents for fear of wrath or 'tripping out', being able to deal with colleagues when they are irritating you, managing time, managing jealousy and being able to express feelings, especially in contentious situations.

One student noted that he/she saw someone sitting alone in a corner and tried to be friendly. The person found this annoying. Ways in which you can show that you care without being intrusive was discussed.

Some students are interested in overcoming their fear of speaking in public.²

Week 3 – October 31, 2008

Examining the concepts of sex, gender and socialization, the 30 students identified ways in which females and males are socialized, treated and defined. They identified the sex characteristics of females and males as well as gender roles. Working in four groups, the students discussed ways in which agents of socialization define and reinforce gender roles and stereotypes. They also examined changes which have taken place over time in gender roles and relationships.

² The Georgetown Toastmasters was identified as a possible resource. However, the club does not currently have a school programme.

Role of the Family

- Males are allowed to stay out longer since parents put more trust in them when they go various places.
- Males are not tasked with as much duties in the home, e.g., washing dishes.
- When a male goes out of the house, not much emphasis is placed on what he wears.
- Females are not given as much trust as males so they had difficulty in going out late or to events.
- Females are taught to cook, clean, etc. from a young age.
- Females are constantly scrutinized by parents on what they wear.

Role of the School

- Boys are expected to fetch furniture, girls are not.
- Girls have to maintain the classroom's appearance – e.g., fixing flowers.
- Girls have more rules to abide by than boys.
- Girls are not allowed to participate in certain sports e.g., basketball.
- More is expected from the conduct of girls than boys by teachers.

Role of the Media

- Women do not get as harsh punishment as men when they commit similar crimes.
- Men are more likely to be criminals.
- There is a notion that women are more likely to be abused than men.
- When men cheat, they are not looked down on but when women cheat, they are called degrading names.
- Women are referred to by degrading names in songs.
- There is a preference for women over men.
- Companies use sex to sell products.

Role of Religion

- For Muslims, women are not allowed to reveal certain body parts because they are considered sacred.
- Men are mostly the head of the nuclear/extended families.
- There has never been a female pope.

Week 4 – November 7, 2008

The students reviewed the previous week's discussion on gender. They raised issues of divorce, reasons for divorce and not "standing gay or lesbian people." During the discussion, it was revealed that they students did not know about Apartheid and knew little about Nelson Mandela. Two students volunteered to conduct research on Mandela and make a presentation during the next session.

Individual students played a selection of music which they each liked, including gospel, R&B (Ne-yo, Alicia Keys), dancehall and Akon. They discussed lyrics, rhythm, the use of instruments and the importance of trying to understand the messages conveyed by the music. One student felt that listening to Ne-yo would make them become homosexual; it is alleged that Ne-yo is gay.

The discussion then turned to whether listening to Akon would turn them into an abusive, violent men.

The last piece was Alicia Keys "superwoman." Some of the boys thought that there was no problem with that song being relevant to men, changing from "superwoman" to "superman".

Week 5 – November 14, 2008

The 18 students were introduced to issues pertaining to human rights. They were told about and shown the GAWL/NCW booklet on the Guyana Constitution prepared by the Guyana Association of Women Lawyers and the National Commission on Women. They learnt about civil and political rights as against social and economic rights.

The film, "Fear, Force and Resistance," produced by the Guyana Human Rights Association and the Rights of the Child was screened. A few students made comments while others appeared to have rather thoughtful expressions. One boy in particular appeared sad and very reflective but made no contribution. The issues of "Force, Fear and Resistance" as highlighted in the video seemed new to the students.

The issues raised in the film encouraged reiteration of the importance of taking responsibility for one's actions and the need for the students to inform their parents and guardians about their whereabouts. It was noted that violence is ever present in our society and that this has or could have impact on us.

One facilitator's experience as a student with a friend who used to skip school to meet with boys from another high school was shared. She noted that a group of her peers decided to speak to the teacher about her behaviour as they thought it was not in her best interests. This led to a discussion of positive peer pressure as distinct from negative peer pressure. Both were portrayed in the video.

The fact that as leaders of tomorrow they had a duty to be responsible and to display leadership qualities was emphasized.

The students listened to a brief presentation on career choices. They were given copies of the BHS Directory and advised that they would find a number of career choices listed against the names of former students. They were quite interested in the Directory. One student asked for how long one had to attend BHS before being considered a BHS student and was informed that once one had attended the school, one was considered a past student.

Week 6 – November 28, 2008

The 17 students participating in the final session reflected on the programme. The comments of two of them are examples of the value of the programme.

- I was given the opportunity to speak my mind and give my opinions on various topics. This helped to relieve stress.
- Well, I would say I learnt a lot. This programme has changed my attitude, behaviour and the way in which I relate with others.

The students discussed and identified lessons they have learnt as follows:

I learnt

- That I should show respect for authority.
- To be honest, especially with my parents.
- That people's lives are shaped or influenced by what their parents believe and experience.
- To respect my parents' rules.
- That communication with those around you can allow persons to respect your wishes.
- That your choice in music can signal to others who you are.
- That even though you may see things that you want to change or find negative about yourself, they may not necessarily be bad things.
- How to be more accepting of myself.
- How to be understanding when it comes to my parents.
- That I must be responsible in knowing what time to come home and to not give in to peer pressure.
- That there are different people with different personalities and we have to learn to accept them as they are.
- That I am not the only person who goes through problems.
- To be more tolerant of homosexuals.
- That roles of women and men are changing, with women doing jobs that were previously considered men's jobs and vice versa.
- To look at things from a different perspective because I was able to hear the views of adults and other members of my peer group.
- That I should open up to my parents and allow them to know what is going on in my life and problems that affect me and how we can compromise.
- That the negative light in which I sometimes look at myself is not right so I should focus on the positives more.
- To be respectful of people and their choices and not judge based only on my own views. I also learnt to talk about my problems.
- That negative emotions such as anger should never be bottled up inside because they would only affect and hurt me.
- Not to succumb to peer pressure and to obey my parents.
- That when my parents say "No," they are preparing me for my future life in the outside world.
- That we have to appreciate other person's values and cultures.
- That if we want something to be changed, we have to step forward and do it.
- How to be a better leader and also to be a follower, taking corrections from others.

The students also revisited the issue of their relationship with their parents and the extent to which they are given the opportunity to decide where and when they go out. Some noted that they have the freedom desired to a large extent while others have that freedom some of the time. Yet others are not allowed to socialize outside the family's circle. As a consequence, some are quite frustrated.

One student indicated that he thinks it is imperative for some latitude to be given to help him prepare for post-school life when he will have to interact with others at work. He noted that he will be ill-equipped with the social skills necessary for effective functioning. He pointed out that his parent is fearful of his venturing out because society has changed and he considers he would be in danger if he is exposed to the dynamics of the current society.

Another student noted that her freedom is curtailed because she violated her parents trust in the past. She considers herself more mature now and believes that this warrants her being granted more freedom. She had not realized that because of past experience, her parents need to reestablish trust in her before the parameters will be changed.

In response to a query about how the BHSOSA may be able to help bridge the gap between students and their parents, it was suggested that parents be invited to discuss issues similar to those discussed with the students. A suggestion was made to the Headteacher that issues such as these be discussed at Parent-Teachers' Association meetings since many parents learn to be parents through experience rather than through a process of preparation.

Examining Students' Requests

The students had raised the issue of parties, fairs, graduation and a prom during the first session. Their ideas were shared with the Headteacher and Form Mistress. The concerns of security and cost of events such as these was raised. It is hoped that favourable consideration will be given to the facilitation of social interaction among the students.

Another issue raised at the beginning of the programme was the lack of a structured sports programme. It was noted that with the appointment of a physical education teacher, this matter is likely to be favourably addressed.

Concluding Remarks

The facilitators welcomed the opportunity to interact with this group of enthusiastic, mannerly and engaged students. They found the students a delight to work with and were struck by the openness and demonstration of a willingness to learn in many cases.

The focus of the programme at BHS is mainly academic, with apparently restricted opportunity for the fostering of social skills beyond those inherent in a strong academic programme. The absence of activities such as class parties and class and school concerts denies the students the chance to develop planning, negotiation, conciliation and collaborative skills which could derive from such involvement. It is hoped that this void in the schools programme will be filled in the near future. The concern that such activities would be rather costly may be assuaged by support being given to the students by parents and teachers in determining the nature of refreshments provided. The goal of the class parties, for instance, is the facilitation of camaraderie rather than the engorgement of food while the concerts not only permit an expression of the versatility of talent in students but also fosters social and organizational skills.

The facilitators will encourage the BHSOSA to assist the school as well as the parents, either at a class level or through the PTA, in the pursuit of excellence. The BHSOSA has shown through its programmes that it places much store on the psychosocial development of the students and is therefore ready to collaborate in any new endeavours which would redound to the students' benefit.

Participation of Students

Name	School	Occupational Choice	1	2	3	4	5	6
Arjune, Jason	BHS	Computer Technician/ Accountant	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Baksh, Rafeena	BHS	Computer Technician	✓	✓	✓	-		-
Barker, Trovecia	BHS	Lawyer/Administrator	✓	-	✓	✓	-	✓
Barnwell, Savannah	BHS	Lawyer	✓	-	-	-		
Carter, Jay	BHS	Network Administrator	✓	✓	-	✓	✓	✓
Cave, Terrence	BHS	Lawyer	✓	-	-	-	✓	-
Chanderballi, Ramona	BHS	Paralegal	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	-
Chapman, Calvin	St Stanislaus College	Lawyer/Novelist	✓	✓	✓	-		-
David, Tiffany	St Joseph's High	Lawyer	✓	-	✓	✓		-
Davis, Kadeem	BHS	Lawyer/Judge	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Donald, Wesley	Brickdam Secondary	Lawyer/Accountant	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-
Dundas, Yannick	BHS	Business Manager/ Entrepreneur	✓	-	-	✓		-
Edinboro, Dellyssa	BHS		✓	✓	✓	-	-	✓
Gouveia, Tristanna	BHS		✓	✓	✓	-		-
Hardwar, Luanna	The New Guyana School	Business Manager	✓	✓	✓	✓		-
Haynes, Ariel	Marian Academy	Lawyer	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Haynes, Wainright	Richard Ishmael Secondary	Accountant/Computer Engineer	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	✓
Hemerding, Twain	Central High	Businessman	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hohenkirk, Tiffany	St Stanislaus College	Lawyer	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hookum, Stephanie	Marian Academy	Legal Adviser	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
John, Utieka	St Joseph's High	Lawyer	✓	-	✓	✓		-
Jordan, Ronald	St Stanislaus College	Lawyer/Psychologist	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kanoo, Christina	BHS	Accountant	✓	✓	✓	-		-
Layne, Tioni	Marian Academy	Lawyer	✓	-	✓	✓	-	✓
Liverpool, Collene	BHS	Lawyer/Interpreter	✓	✓	✓	✓		-
Melville, Ulin	St George's High/Tutorial High	Lawyer	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	✓
Narine, Justine	BHS	Environmentalist	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Peters, Akilla	BHS	Designer/Accountant	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rambissoon, Tesrick	BHS	Business Manager	✓	-	-	✓		-
Ramjohn, Felicia	BHS	Manager/Teacher	✓	✓	✓	✓		-
Ross, Carlos	BHS	Businessman	✓	✓	✓	✓		-
Sinclair, Melissa	Mackenzie High School	Lawyer/Judge	✓	✓	✓	✓		-
Stoby, Joanne	BHS	Accountant	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Thompson, Susanna	St Stanislaus College	Lawyer/Legal Adviser	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Vandeyar, Melissa	The New Guyana School	Lawyer	✓	✓	✓	✓		-
Total			35	27	30	26	18	17

Participation of Facilitators

Facilitators	1	2	3	4	5	6
Roxane George	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Janice M. Jackson	✓	✓	✓	-	-	✓
Magda Pollard	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	✓
Vidyaratha Kissoon	-	✓	✓	✓	-	✓