

Report of the Lower Sixth Contact programme for 2010/2011

Introduction

The Lower 6th programme completed its 12th year during the period October 15 to November 26, 2010.

The group consisted of 59 students, 49 of whom came from other schools around the country. A total of 27 students attended all six sessions. The average attendance per session was 46 students, with the highest attendance by 53 students being during the second session.

The six sessions addressed the following topics:

- The Lower Sixth Experience
- Positive and Negative Aspects of Self
- Gender in Our Lives: The Impact of Socialization
- Cultural Influences and Expressions in Culture
- Music and Domestic Violence
- Communication and Evaluation

The facilitation team consisted of Golda Gaskin, Roxane George, Janice M. Jackson, Vidyaratha Kissoon, Vivienne Mitchell, Magda Pollard and Charlene Wilkinson.

Week 1 – The Lower Sixth Experience

Expectations of Lower Sixth: The students identified their expectations as follows:

- To pass Unit 1 CAPE
- To learn to be disciplined so that it would be easier to cope with university life or the working world – for those who plan on just doing one year of 6th form
- To successfully complete all SBAs on time
- To go on field trips to various places that would benefit us
- To improve public speaking skills and to learn
- To improve analytical skills
- To pass CAPE with excellent grades
- To make new friends
- To excel in all subjects being written
- To use the opportunity to be successful in the different areas presented
- School party at Thirst Park
- To improve in people and communication skills
- To leave Bishops without battle scars
- To excel at CAPE exams
- Teachers to be understandable
- Completion of syllabi
- Less unimportant activities such as house meeting every month so we can focus on schoolwork and get work done

- Preparation for UG
- School fairs to raise money
- Teachers must find a good/fun way of putting over work, e.g., use of technology in History
- Teachers to be impartial and focus on individual abilities and not label persons if they are deemed a slower learner.
- Good education
- Fun (not just academics)

Challenges faced in Lower Sixth: The students identified some of the challenges they face as follows:

- Too many rules
- The manner in which girls have to comb their hair
- The fact that the boys are unable to wear boots
- Have to come to school from 9 am to 3 pm and not just come when we have a class
- Guys cannot wear long hair
- Girls cannot sit under the shed – the VIP section
- Short time to complete assignments
- Social stratification in BHS
- Freedom of expression
- Big Weezy
- Teachers' expectations and parents' expectations
- Staying away from certain classes: Sociology class is boring.
- Staying off people's bad sides, especially teachers
- Following all rules and regulations of the school
- Not to laugh at Mr. Tudor's name
- Coping with the given workload
- Unreasonable deadlines for assignments
- Difficulty with complex nature of assignments due to lack of textbooks
- Timetabling issues, subject clashes, and limitations on subjects to be done
- Need more access to the library
- Anti-social people
- Unavailable/expensive textbooks
- Only one kind of activity (sports)

On group presented the results of their discussions as a poem.

A New Beginning by Kezia

A new beginning
 Afraid of what might happen
 New things come our way
 Brighter future but challenges are present
 Rules to follow, how terrifying?
 Elocution, debates and drama

Meeting new people, not so easy
Antisocial or not it is....
But yet we still work together
How different it is? We're now getting used to it?
Hair all pulled back, ribbon?
That's so not me
Shirt buttoned to the throat
How uncomfortable

Even though we're now getting used
We are all a part of the Bishops' High School
Aspiring for greatness and reaching to the top
So we'll have our teachers to help but we'll abide by the rules
You never know... It might be better than expected
We will do our best to keep the banner of BHS flying high.

Discussion

A major source of contention appeared to be the relationship between the students who are originally from the Bishops' High School and the new entrants. Some students vehemently expressed their views. Some students seemed to have preconceived ideas of what others may be like. The students mentioned that the school has various clubs and activities, some good teachers and a fully functional library. One group used a skit to do their presentation on the issues which they faced. They discussed ways of trying to resolve some of the challenges especially as it related dealing with the challenges.

Week 2 – Positive and Negative Aspects of Self

In groups, the students looked at themselves and attempted to identify positive and negative characteristics.

Some negative aspects identified were:

- Nervousness
- Moodiness/hot tempered
- Arguing/talking back
- Too friendly
- Slow to forgiveness
- Lying
- Hard to calm one's self down

Some positive aspects noted were:

- Thoughtfulness
- Open-mindedness
- Friendliness
- Caring

- Loyalty
- Likes giving advice
- Confidentiality
- Good listener

Discussion

Some students noted that this session was their favourite since they learnt more about themselves and each other. Some students said that they did not appreciate having to discuss personal issues in the open.

Week 3 – Gender in Our Lives: The Impact of Socialization

This discussion looked at how gender impacted on leadership roles and expectations. There were discussions about gender in the school system and related issues.

Week 4 – Music

None of the students brought music of their choice. However, some students performed including a performance on an imaginary guitar. Of note is that the songs performed by the students were mainly gospel songs. A selection of songs was then played and the reaction of the students noted. The soca and dancehall selections brought positive responses.

Discussion

Some students stated that they would listen to any songs produced an artiste they liked. Some said that the type of music they listen to depends on their mood at the time. Having stated some of the artistes whose music they like, one of the facilitators asked how they felt about an artiste whose music has a lot of profanity, but who states that his children are not allowed to listen to it. Most students felt that there was nothing wrong with that. Some vehemently defended the artiste stating that his messages were relevant and resonated with them. While they thought that it was up to parents to monitor what their children listened to, they admitted that their parents did not know what music they listened to.

Week 5 – Communication

This session began with students passing a whispered message. The message reported by the last student was totally different from the original message. Students gave some reasons for the distortion. These included misinterpretation, poor listening skills, lack of enunciation, re-interpretation, malicious intent, environmental noise and the emotion of the person transmitting the message.

Students talked about the forms of communication. They thought that in school you are taught to communicate in terms of conducting yourself properly, i.e., speaking quietly, not speaking while someone else is speaking and speaking to persons in authority. They said that the most important part of communication is listening. Another set of students focused on the effects of communication using computer technology. They thought that one has to be careful with the

types of messages sent via email or texting. They noted that some photographs, when uploaded to the Internet, represent defamation of character.

This type of communication also has positive effects. New friends and distant relatives can be met and new friendships developed.

Week 6 – Relationships and Evaluation of the Sessions

The students enacted a play displaying the interaction between young people of opposite sexes. A discussion then ensued on which parties in the play were right and how they could have corrected their action. In small groups the students then discussed a number of scenarios about relationships and what they saw as the characteristics of healthy relationships. Some of the students were aware of persons who were living in abusive relationships and some asked questions about ways to help people who were in those relationships.

Evaluation

Forty-five students submitted evaluation forms. A summary of their comments appears below.

What the students learnt

Many of the students said they learnt how to interact with others. Some mentioned finding self-confidence and leadership qualities within themselves.

- I learnt that as we grow older, more responsibilities are given to us. It is up to us to utilize our values positively so that we can be leaders.
- I learnt to be more understanding and accepting of the opinion of others.
- ...It also gave me more positive ways of viewing certain issues/challenges and dealing with them.
- I learned to have self-control, be disciplined and respectful to my peers, adults and others.
- My entire perception of life and situations has changed considering the world in general and how we cooperate to bring about stability.
- A lot.

The favourite session

The sessions on music and relationships/violence using drama were the most popular.

- My favourite parts were music and the last session which dealt with relationships and abuse in relationships. This is because they were very interactive and these topics the adolescents enjoy. They are things that are happening around us.
- My favourite part was the day of the music as we were allowed to express our music types without criticism.
- My favourite part was the discussion on healthy relationships. It helped me to boost my resolve to form healthy relationships myself and also to help those in an unhealthy situation.

- Learning about the three positive and negatives about peers. It was amazing to know what persons had on the inside of them and that made me know how to approach people.
- My favourite parts were the drama/skits that were performed as well as some discussions. This is so because they were very informative and at the same time interactive.

What the students did not like

Quite a number of students (15) referred to the sessions as boring or having too much talking. Some of these mentioned that they felt that the topics were too limited or time was wasted at the beginning of the sessions. Other students did not like going into small groups because they felt it was either redundant or it forced them to reveal personal issues. A small number of students did not like the arguments that were generated in some sessions, while three had difficulties with the facilitators' style. It was mentioned that the facilitator in small group discussion would not allow free expression of the students or would speak excessively.

- I did not enjoy that during our group sessions a specific mentor did not allow for the free expression of opinion as it relates to an activity we were asked to carry out. Instead of a democratic guidance, the interaction we were faced with authoritativeness
- They were sometimes dull. Some of the topic areas were not relevant to me personally
- Too much talking; needed more activities.
- I hated going into groups.... In my opinion, persons would have been more open to discussion privately. Also I felt forced to burst out my feelings to complete strangers. It should have been a matter of choice.
- ... Some of the lecturers were very big.
- It took a lot away from our academics.... It was the only day on our timetable that we did not have any clashes.

Recommendations

The majority of the recommendations were for having more interactive activities and drama. Some students also felt that some of the topics should be revisited to include more social issues.

- Not to be too personal with the questions. It's insulting.
- Find out from the students you're working with how it would be enjoyable to them and work based on their suggestions
- Youths need more talk based on marriage, sex relationships, etc.

Twenty students read the brochure. While most of those thought that it was informative and gave an insight into the content of the programme, a few thought it was too wordy and scared some students away. The suggestion of distributing the brochure to each student was made.

General comments

Many students said that the sessions are useful and gave a break from normal school work. Other persons said that the time was needed for school work.

- ...I would like to see activities demanding more leadership roles as other members hid under the shade of the “spokesperson.”
- These sessions are very interesting as they help us express ourselves and the work of the team should be applauded.
- Less talking next time ... please ... sessions should be logical... Should relate to each other.
- Should have food at every session.

Those who commented in this section said that the sessions should continue, with the modified formats to allow more interaction and activity.

Facilitator’s Reflections

The facilitators realized the issues faced by the students who entered Lower Sixth from other schools, and the tensions which were not resolved very well. The facilitators also recognised the need to be more creative and active, while acknowledging the challenge of dealing with a large group in a plenary session. There were attempts to use the technology but there were several hiccups with the technology.

Conclusions

The increase in the number of students means that there will be a need for a increase in the number of facilitators who can be responsive to the need of the students. The next session should also include an evaluation which would look at the experiences of students who would have participated in the previous sessions. An assessment would be made of the various tools which are available to deliver the sessions so as to diversify the experiences.

Submitted 11 July, 2011

[This report was delivered late due to the work commitments of the facilitators after the end of the sessions] The print version of this report was delivered with the evaluation forms to the school.