



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES

ST. AUGUSTINE, TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO, WEST INDIES

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND EDUCATION

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Back to School in Pan

Prime Minister Keith Rowley recently at one of the “Laventille Nights” made the promise to the people of Laventille that the government would find the money to develop the area and he made further statements about diversification, tourism and pan. He also expressed the opinion that the Panorama competition had outlived its usefulness and some other kinds of initiatives were now necessary to maximize the potential of the steelpan especially in the context of the need for diversification. All this in light of the fact that three steelbands from the Laventille area had been very successful in last year’s Panorama competition.

Lloyd Best’s plan for pan is extremely relevant in the present context and can address three pressing problems simultaneously: the problem of community violence in areas like Laventille, the problem of school violence and underachievement, and the problem of diversification and export promotion.

In the Sunday Express February 12th 1995 Lloyd Best presented “The Best Plan For Pan”. He produced a further a series of articles in the Express newspapers from April 29th to May 2nd 2001 outlining his concept of school in pan. There were also his famous addresses at La Joya and at the panyard in Curepe sometime in 2001. In addition to this powerful theoretical and practical framework, since then, we have accumulated several researches in the creative sector as well a rich history of several initiatives of some very innovative steelbands like Birdsong, Scherzando and St Margaret’s Anglican in Belmont.

Lloyd Best saw the panyard as a platform for economic growth and development. He saw the panyard as a centre of excellence and a pole of innovation and native entrepreneurship. He saw as one of the assets of the panyard the “capacity for civic harmony and community collaboration” as well as the potential for engaging “sleeping resources” and “native intuition”.

Lloyd reflected on the industrial development of England and surmised that England did not discover coal as much as coal discovered England. The human competencies and the spin off activities developed through the exploitation of coal were the basis for further economic transformation. For example, the development of pumps for drilling water out of coal mines would lead eventually to a transport revolution and to the mechanization of industry when the pump driven by steam, was used to drive a locomotive or a factory process. A second wave of industrialization would take place that would require a machine tool industry and a new set of scientific disciplines.

In keeping with this insight Lloyd saw the panyard as natural zone of community mobilization, individual industry, discipline and talent through the production of music. He saw the panyard as a platform for generating direct services in music of course but also a range of other related activities and trades. In addition to concert type performances, there could be CDs and other services such as school feeding, designer clothes, homework centres, the teaching of all kinds of music. In addition, since touring is an essential aspect of the bands, tours could be a vehicle for marketing all of the products of Trinidad and Tobago. An overhaul of panorama competition could see competition not just on music but also different aspects of the panyard environment.

The recommendation was that the panyards emulate, for instance, a Manchester United model. An ideal would be that a panyard have facilities for staging its grand performances and so generate revenues while having all of its various spin off options. A properly administered grand festival of pan music that is sold to the world in this mecca of pan could generate foreign exchange for the country overall as well as for the individual bands and their members.

The panyards, if revitalized, could fulfill the needs of their native communities which could eventually lead to the return of the gangsters who would have been the original owners of the panyards in the first place. If these three winning bands are used as models they can play a part in community revitalization as they provide options to young people who may be at risk. Education in various aspects of the direct music production or the indirect spin offs could be made available to members of the band. The development of the panyard then could be financed out of state funds earmarked for crime reduction, social welfare, education and tourism.

Friends more familiar with the steelpan than I, have told me that there is natural tendency to bond among those who play in any band since people have to learn to relate and value one another's contribution since it is naturally a group effort. There is also a sense of immediate gratification with the steelpan since people can feel some competence very quickly. More so, among the original purveyors of the instrument there is a sense of ownership and freedom.

No manager of a steelband ever complained about short attention spans of its members or that they were from poor communities and single parent families and so had all kind of learning disorders and discipline problems. These are the regular complaints of teachers in the formal system. Unlike the formal system pan evolved as a vehicle for selfhood, for and by people in disadvantaged contexts, and provides an opportunity for their authentic engagement.

If as an experiment we tried to link these upgraded panyards with the secondary schools in the Laventille area then we could link the present programme of "pan in school" with "school in pan".

Success Laventille Secondary for instance already has a successful pan side. If we could come up with a pan music programme for the secondary school this would put the activities of the school steelband on a more formal academic footing. If each school programme is attached to a well-established panyard then students would experience the spin off activities for generating work, employment and further education which the panyard has to offer. This would help to transform schooling as we know it. This would mean that the panyard has to develop the infrastructure and resources to facilitate teaching and learning. This could mean that these upgraded panyards all have a formal youth orchestra which could be the graduating point for students from the school orchestras. The panyards could establish their own training and development activities and grant their own certificates. Would a Despers certificate in pan

music not be attractive to students all over the world?

By Dr. Samuel Lochan, School of Education, UWI, St. Augustine, Trinidad

PS: *This article was previously published in the Daily Express, May 9, 2016*