



# Philippine Traditional Crafts in Discipline-Based Art Education: A New Prospect

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THIS PAPER LOOKS INTO the possibility of studying Philippine traditional crafts using an art education framework called discipline-based art education (DBAE). The prospect is borne of a desire not only to offer an alternative to existing art education but more importantly, to give traditional crafts attention and recognition within a formal classroom setting. The discussion will first deal with the term “craft” or “crafts” and its connotations, followed by the position of crafts in Philippine art schools, and how crafts studies is handled by the Philippines’ Asian neighbors. This will be followed by a description of DBAE and, finally, a list of suggestions on how crafts can be incorporated into formal secondary education.

## **Craft/Crafts**

The term “craft” originally came from the Old English word *craft*, which means power, strength, or might. Later on, it came to mean “skill or art” and was associated with an idea of “mental power” (Harper 2001). Eventually, it was linked to “things made by hand” (Oxford Dictionaries 2009). Other connotations of the word are decorative arts (handmade luxury goods for use and display inside buildings or on the human body), “trade and folkways,” and “long traditions of pre-industrial production of handmade objects” (Metcalf 1999).

The term “crafts” came into wide use with the Arts and Crafts movement, which was founded in the late nineteenth century and drew upon the vision of English theorist and critic John Ruskin (1819–1900). Ruskin was known for his criticism of classical architecture and for his essay in praise of Gothic cathedrals. He saw in the Gothic the “democratic spirit” (Rodel and Binzen 2003, 22) and the individual worth and effort of the craftsman. He shunned the uniformity of symmetrical buildings and saw such work as the “subjugation of the craftsman” by the architect (22). In Victorian England, Ruskin took issue against industrialization and the factory system, which for him deprived the worker of individuality (22). He exalted the dignity of human labor and was known to have said: “No one can teach you anything worth learning but through manual labor” (6).

William Morris (1834–1896), a student at Oxford, took up the vision of Ruskin and translated it into criteria for action. While Ruskin championed the dignity of labor, Morris practiced it himself, engaging in work that was previously “reserved for the lower classes” (Metcalfe 1999). He spearheaded the Arts and Crafts Movement, founding in 1861 his manufacturing and decorating firm called Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. The firm produced furniture, tapestry, stained glass, furnishing fabrics, carpets, printed books, and much more, all made by hand (Danky and Wiegand 2006, 163). It also was part of a collective reaction against the “mechanization of labor” and mass-produced goods (Rodel and Binzen 2003, 5-6). The “term Arts and Crafts was coined after the Arts and Crafts Exhibition of 1888 in London” (9). The movement itself, which stressed “fine handcraftsmanship, honest design, and local materials began in England and spread to continental Europe and America” (9).

As the Arts and Crafts Movement gained steam, crafts came to be reckoned for their aesthetic qualities—beauty was no longer the exclusive preserve of fine arts. In the previous decades, philosophers like Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), argued that the aesthetic experience must involve a “disinterested attitude” or “disinterested contemplation” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 2005, 13:9; Copleston 1985) and that art, the object of an aesthetic experience, “is a kind of representation which has its end in

itself, but which nonetheless, although it has no purpose external to itself, promotes the culture of the mental powers with a view to social communication” (in Copleston 1985, 366). On this note, crafts do not fall under Kant’s idea of art, as they are necessarily imbued with functionality and possess a purpose “external to itself.” Similarly, Ruskin’s view of aesthetics was tied to social awareness; it moved away from Kant’s “disinterested contemplation” of an artwork and towards “a broader examination of the environment from which the work emerges” (Metcalf 1999). Morris, following Ruskin’s lead, opposed the notion of fine art. For Morris, art is “man’s expression of his joy in labour” (Chilvers and Osborne 1994); hence, craft for him qualifies as art.

### **UNESCO Definition**

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines “crafts” as follows:

Those produced by artisans, either completely by hand, or with the help of hand tools or even mechanical means, as long as the direct manual contribution of the artisan remains the most substantial component of the finished product. These are produced without restriction in the terms of quantity and using raw materials from sustainable resources. The special nature of artisanal products derives from their distinctive features, which can be utilitarian, aesthetic, artistic, creative, culturally attached, decorative, functional, traditional, religiously and socially symbolic and significant (Vencatachellum 2004, 51–52).

Such definition consolidates the connotations and implications of the term “crafts.” However, this proposal refers to traditional crafts or what Metcalf relates to as “folkways” (Metcalf 1999). Even so, the author is also keen to note the social dimension of every piece of traditional craft; it considers the dignity of human labor and the cultural and social milieu to which the craftsman belongs.

## Crafts on the Margin

The history of crafts education in the Philippines parallels the rise and fall of an empire. It started small, with the scattered and informal teaching and learning of crafts during the pre-Hispanic period, where crafts production catered to the needs of a chief, a social elite, or the general population of consumers (Brumfiel and Earle 1987 in Junker 2000, 262). In Spanish colonial Philippines, convents were turned into schools and workshops of carpentry, iron works, drawing, painting of images, cutting and sewing of altar cloths, designing and sewing of altar pieces, textile weaving, and other forms of practical arts (Flores 1998, 143). Such schools, serving as handmaidens of missionary work, came to an end when the *Academia de las Bellas Artes* opened in 1785. At that time, painting and drawing then came to be regarded for its purely academic worth (Flores 1998). Crafts education in the Philippines reached its peak during the American period when the educational system was revised and expanded to include industrial work and crafts for livelihood, like woodwork, clay modeling, basket and mat weaving, and embroidery and lace making (Sobritchea 1996). Over the decades, crafts subjects offered under the American public school system would be jettisoned, save for woodwork and clay modeling, which still figure in the present curricula of the public elementary school system. What have come to take the place of crafts are painting, sculpture, architecture, photography, printmaking, dance, theater, and cinema (Department of Education 1998). Such a trend continues into the tertiary level. In three major Philippine universities conferring fine arts degrees, common areas of specialization include painting, sculpture, advertising arts, and industrial design.<sup>1</sup> Although crafts may be part of the curricula, no undergraduate or graduate degrees are offered in the area of crafts.

The Philippine art scene echoes the same preference for painting and sculptural works and also draws a broad distinction between crafts and fine arts. While the fine arts enjoy the patronage of the higher centers of learning, crafts—much less, traditional crafts—have not been equally fortunate. The marked difference between functionality and pure aesthetics assigned to crafts and fine arts, respectively, seems to have relegated crafts

to a position of inferiority. As such, public exhibitions of crafts have not been common in the local art scene. Galleries are wont to present painting and sculptural works, which are seen as the sole possessor of commercial and aesthetic value. Even the locally conferred National Artists Award sees art as distinct from craft and, therefore, is open only to artists who are or were practitioners of Western-oriented art.

To help remedy this, the National Commission for Culture and the Arts launched the *Gawad Manlilikha ng Bayan* (literally, National Creators Awards) to honor traditional artisans and culture bearers. Also, in 2002, the exhibition “Crafting Economies” opened at the Cultural Center of the Philippines. Curated by Patrick Flores, the exhibition aimed to confront the “marginalization of ‘craft’ in the contemporary art world; it sought to integrate it with the present-day concerns in aesthetic judgment, and then finally discredit the distinction of art and the discrimination of craft without ceding the agency of aesthetic critique and experience” (Flores 2001, 11). Clearly, this exhibition acknowledged the aesthetic properties of craftworks, to help clear the way for their integration into the art world. Its aim is not to end up calling craft art but to see craft’s “aesthetic potential.” Flores clarifies:

To reconsider craft is not to invest it with artness (to do so would be to fall into the ‘art’ trap once again), but to reoperationalize its aesthetic potential. By the same token, to renounce art is not to reduce it to craft, but to redeploy the mode of its making in society and history. It is this ‘society and history’ that renders art/craft material to our lives, that allows it to circulate in an economy of exchange and reciprocation (11).

Seen this way, crafts become de-marginalized and could rightly find a place in mainstream art society and education in the Philippines. Its aesthetic qualities could be recognized, as well as their production within a particular social and historical environment, which renders both craft and art significant to ordinary life.

## Crafts Studies in Asian Education Systems

Interestingly, the marginalization of crafts does not appear to be a universal phenomenon. In some regions of East and Southeast Asia, crafts institutes and colleges are well-attended. Craft education in Korean universities, for instance, falls under the art department, which runs three main programs: the “fine art” program, which offers painting and sculpture; the “craft” program, which features work on metals, ceramics, wood, fiber, and glass; and the “design” program, which offers industrial design, graphic design, and fashion design. Until the 1970s, craft and design were classified as “applied arts” (Jeon 2004, 218). According to a 2004 report delivered by Yong-il Jeon, a professor of Design from Kookmin University, the state of craft education in Korea is well-attested by impressive figures. Universities with crafts majors total fifty-eight, with some 2,042 students majoring in the various fields of crafts, like ceramics, metal and jewelry, woodworking, fiber, and glasswork. The highest number of enrollees is in ceramics, which also happens to be one of the oldest craft practices in the country. The regions of Seoul and Kyongsang-do are the biggest sites of universities and, therefore, of crafts colleges. Within a college curriculum, crafts majors complete 130 units of humanities and take up subjects such as drawing, modeling, and computer-aided design. The humanities subjects take up the first and second years, while the major classes take up the third and fourth years. In lieu of a thesis, students create works for a Bachelor Degree Show.

Crafts graduates have a wide array of career opportunities; they may pursue an independent craft practice, work in a team as a studio artist, work in a company or industry, land a post in the education sector, work in a craft distribution firm, or form part of a craft research organization or agency, such as a museum or a restoration company. Professor Jeon notes that a majority of craft practitioners, which he calls “craft artists,” are highly educated. They create and exhibit works in shows at par with international standards.

In Korea, the high school curriculum prepared by the Korea Institute of Curriculum and Evaluation aims “to enable students to attain knowledge and skills in diverse fields so that they will be able to carve out a career in accordance with their aptitudes and interests” and “to encourage students to work to develop our traditions and culture in a way appropriate for the global setting.” Such skills include crafts-making; hence, ceramics and textile are offered under the Industry subject area (Korea Institute for Curriculum and Evaluation: 2006). There are also specialized high schools devoted to the arts, which most likely include crafts, considering that Korean universities are known to group crafts courses with fine arts programs under the same faculty of arts. Unfortunately, no detailed information regarding specialized Korean high schools could be accessed by this author. Reference to it was simply made in a website of the Office of the Prime Minister of Korea (2006).

Japan’s integration of crafts into university education varies little from that of Korea. Crafts courses are offered in arts and design universities under the Faculty of Arts’ Department of Crafts. The courses take four years to complete, with specializations in the following fields: ceramics, metalwork, textile, glass, lacquer, dyeing, and embroidery. Unlike Korean crafts programs, crafts departments in Japan do not offer woodworking. The most common crafts specialization is in ceramics, whose practice dates back to the ancient Jomon period (c. 7500–300 BC), followed by metalwork and textile, then glass, lacquer, weaving, dyeing, and finally embroidery. Crafts specialization programs are offered not only at the undergraduate level but also at the M.A. and Ph.D. levels. Students are expected to blend traditional techniques with contemporary aesthetics. Their work must also be informed by a sense of “functional beauty,” which the Joshibi University of Art and Design (2006) termed as “beautility” (beauty of utility) or which the Tohoku University of Art and Design (2006) expressed as “the unity of functionality and beauty.”

In Southeast Asia, crafts education has also established itself in formal learning centers. Keris-making is offered as a course in the fine arts department of the Indonesia College of the Arts in Surakarta (Guntur 2004). In Malaysia, the state-run Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation operates the National Craft Institute, which provides academic and skills training in various fields of Malaysian crafts such as batik, weaving, ceramic, woodcraft, bamboo and metal-based craft. The institute offers diploma and certificate programs; diploma programs run for a total of three years, while the certificate programs are completed in two. A 2004 report on the state of Malaysian crafts noted a total of 436 institute students (Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation 2004).

Thailand incorporates craft studies in its secondary-education curriculum, which consists of the “academic stream” and “vocational stream” (Sedgwick 2005). In the latter, crafts education occurs alongside “Thai and foreign languages, science, mathematics, social studies, physical education, and art” (Sedgwick 2005). Students under the former are prepared for university education and graduate with a Certificate of Secondary Education (*Mayatom VI*), while vocational stream students receive a Certificate of Vocational Education (*Por Wor Chor*) upon graduation and are prepared for employment and further studies (Sedgwick 2005). Under the vocational stream program, students specialize in one of the five major fields: agriculture, home economics, business studies (marketing, travel and tourism, public relations), arts and crafts, and technology (mechanical, civil, electronic, industrial) (Sedgwick 2005).

The foregoing has listed how crafts are incorporated into formal education systems of some East and Southeast Asian countries. The accommodation of crafts courses within formal education in the Philippines therefore has precedent and should not therefore be dismissed. Not unlike her neighbors, the Philippines has a long history of craft production that goes back to pre-Hispanic times. It is about time that crafts education is elevated to a new level of reckoning, at the very least, in the secondary school system.



## Discipline-Based Art Education as a Framework for Studying Crafts

The following discussion describes DBAE and explores how various Philippine crafts could serve as course content. This section draws from two authors, Robinson Castellano Soria, a Filipino, and Stephen Dobb, an American. Soria's dissertation entitled "Art Education and Student Artistic Development across Three Cultures" uses the DBAE framework to assess student artistic achievement in the Philippines, Taiwan, and the United States. His recommendations include adopting the DBAE approach in art classrooms to enhance public school art education, and to upgrade the quality of life of the general public (Soria 1997, 205). This present proposal carries Soria's recommendation further by integrating traditional craft objects into a DBAE-based curriculum. On the other hand, Stephen Mark Dobbs is the author of *Learning in and through Art*, which comprehensively describes the DBAE method of teaching art. His book serves as a major source in this section's discussion.

### What Is DBAE?

Robinson Soria (1997), in his study of Philippine art education, defines DBAE as:

"a contemporary approach to art education that presents a broad view of art and emphasizes art in the general education of all students from kindergarten through high school. This approach integrates content from four art disciplines, namely: aesthetics, art criticism, art history and art production through a focus on works of art" (Soria 1997, 205; cited in Dobbs, 1998, 3).

Stephen Dobbs, author of *Learning in and through Art*, describes DBAE as "designed to provide exposure to, experience with, and acquisition of content from several disciplines of knowledge, but especially from four foundational disciplines in art—art making, art criticism, art history, and aesthetics" (1998, 3). By teaching art using these foundational

art disciplines, learning is centered on the “creation, understanding, and appreciation of art, artists, artistic processes, and the role and function of art in cultures and societies” (3).

Before DBAE, art classes had been centered on creative self-expression. This approach considers the learner innately creative and expressive (Soria 1997, 4), who needs nurturing rather than instruction. As such, teachers only need to provide motivation, encouragement, support and opportunity; they are in no way to impose adult concepts or images; they must take caution against inhibiting the learner’s self-expression; indeed, a learner’s underdevelopment is attributed precisely to adult intervention. Furthermore, under this educational philosophy, works of art are not viewed as material for study. They are perceived to negatively affect the learner’s self-expression and creative development. As for evaluation, what is paramount is the learner’s growth and process of art making (Soria 1997).

On the other hand, DBAE calls on a balanced art curriculum that stresses content from four art disciplines (Soria 1997). It is a reaction against an approach that saw art primarily as creative self-expression. In the 1960s, the creative-self-expression school was at its peak in the art curricula; however, in a number of conferences in the United States, art educators began questioning the dominant pedagogical philosophy. Later on, theorists, scholars and researchers proposed alternatives (Soria 1997). And by the middle of the 1980s, DBAE had emerged as a solid counterpoint to art education (Soria 1997).

### **Characteristics of DBAE**

To understand DBAE in finer detail, we turn to Stephen Dobbs’s work, *Learning in and through Art*, in which he enumerates the characteristics of DBAE. Quoting Dobbs verbatim:

- “Students are engaged in the rigorous study of art derived from the four art disciplines;
- A long-range program-planning capacity for art is in place, given impetus by the adoption by the local

school district, university, or art museum of a policy statement and goals for student learning that include comprehensive art education;

- A written art curriculum framework exists, or is in the process of being developed, in which learning is sequenced within and between grades to reflect the developmental and age-appropriate factors;
- Written, sequential lesson units and learning experiences engage students in balanced attention and study derived from the content of the four foundational art disciplines: art making (also known as studio art or art production), art history, art criticism, and aesthetics (also known as philosophy of art);
- Art is taught by certified teachers who are given opportunities for professional development to build their knowledge, skills, and understanding of DBAE. Art specialists and classroom or other subject teachers collaborate in planning and teaching;
- Students have access to school-sponsored and community-based art experiences and resources, such as frequent visits to art museums or to other public art settings;
- Assessment of student learning is conducted regularly, with the results reported to stakeholders, including students, teachers, administrators, policy makers, and parents;
- Art may be integrated into the general curriculum through application of the distinctive lenses acquired through study of the four art disciplines to content in other subject areas. Art may be integrated into other subject areas and vice versa;
- Art education is for all students, not just for those who demonstrate talent in making art. Students with special needs are also identified and provided with art

instruction at all levels. DBAE is for all students, not just for those who are identified as “gifted and talented” and therefore favored with art instruction;

- The art program is appropriately coordinated, administered, and supported at different levels: by the faculty leader and principal within the school, and by the curriculum supervisor within the school district. The superintendent may assume responsibility for advocating and explaining the program to the school board, which in turn can support the program with parents and the community; and
- Technology is used to broaden art teaching and learning options. Teachers and students have access to technology and use it (a) to enhance production, creation, and/or design of works of art; (b) to communicate about art; and (c) to access and manage information about art (1998, 5-6).”

A comprehensive program needs the cooperation of not just a few teachers but also the entire body of educators in a given school or district. At this point, there may be reservations about its application to the local Philippine setting, what with a dearth of resources: physical and material, including professional training for DBAE educators. These shall be discussed in due course. In the meantime, it is important to dwell on the four foundational art disciplines, the heart of DBAE, and how they can be applied to the study of crafts in a Philippine context.

### **The Four Art Disciplines and the Study of Crafts**

The four foundational art disciplines of the DBAE are: art making, art criticism, art history, and aesthetics. The discussion of each owes heavily and exclusively to Stephen Dobbs’s *Learning in and Through Art*, but the possible applications of each discipline to the study of crafts are entirely the present author’s.

## Art Making

Art making is the process of “responding to observations, ideas, feelings, and other experiences by creating works of art through the skillful, thoughtful, and imaginative application of tools and techniques to various media” (Dobbs 1998, 27). Through art making, students can explore and study a host of concerns and issues. By studying and encountering an array of media and tools, students may ask about the sources of the “artist’s visual idea” and how these take form in an “art object” (31). Students can also learn “traditions of craftsmanship,” including “potentialities of materials” could give rise to insights on artists’ preference for materials to be used, the steps involved in working with certain media, the influence of the environment, and work habits on a piece of work (31). Students learn to “express thoughts, values, and feelings” visually through methods developed by artists, and they can come up with a variation of somebody’s work or a completely new take (31). Art making also teaches students about “visual problem solving” or how artists resolve “the tension between opportunities and limitations at hand.” (31). Lastly, it also brings students to “the motivations and attitudes of artists,” as well as “their contributions to society,” and how personal, social, and cultural backgrounds shape their works (32).

As for actual craft making, this segment of the DBAE creates an opportunity for the students to engage in actual craft making—for instance, Ilocano pottery.<sup>2</sup> An actual pottery sample may first be examined in class in terms of texture, material, and even use. Students would then try their hand at actual pottery making. They learn the steps and discover the skills to produce a clay vessel. In the course of the activity, they can:

- Discover the techniques—for instance, the right pressure to apply, the moderation needed to handle wet clay, and other technical details.
- Identify the tools used to create designs and fashion the clay into their desired form. They may realize, for instance, that a kitchen ladle could be a good paddling tool, or that a fork could be used to impress designs on

the clay's surface. This way, students learn the traditional way of making Ilocano pottery, which they may see from an invited artisan or even from a video documentary. Also, innovation and improvisation are introduced and even encouraged.

- Explore potentialities of the material and tools and gain insight into what makes one molding material better than another. For instance, students can grasp how different types of commercial clay behave compared to clay soil. And in taking up, say, Bulacan paper-cutting craft, they can point out why a specific type of scissors works better than another; why a certain kind of paper is more suitable for paper cutting; or what motif is best given the available tools.

In the area of visual problem solving, the students can discover how to resolve tensions between opportunities - the means available - and the restraints encountered, say, in clay molding. What does one do when he or she discovers a weak layer of clay at the bottom of the vessel? Certain issues would press for solutions, too. Where is the best place to conduct an open firing, for instance? What time of the day? What precautions should be observed? What kind of skills would be needed to mold a newspaper, which has been soaked in water for days and mashed? Could this be combined with other molding materials like clay soil or commercial clay? How would one resolve its internal supports? In the case of paper cutting, how does one remedy a situation where the paper is accidentally wet? Could a cut-out still be executed on it?

Issues of work space will also demand attention. How should the work space be arranged? Is sitting better than squatting as one shapes the clay? How do work habits affect the production of a craft? Is having a snack while working compatible with pottery making or with other craft-making activities, for that matter? Other issues of interest are themes, subject matter, and the function of a craft. Again in clay molding, what does one

need the clay pot for, and how will its use determine its size, shape, and design? Will it be painted over or glazed?

Lastly, students can also read about artisans and appreciate their philosophy, as well as their social contributions, not least of which is to keep some traditions alive. However, a lot of work in this aspect has yet to be done since traditional artisans are not famous and celebrated. All the same, in looking at the artisans themselves, students can appreciate various influences and contributions to an artisan's work: training, experience, and cultural and social backgrounds. They can also develop some good habits and personal qualities for good craftsmanship, like perseverance, patience, self-awareness, and resourcefulness.

### Art Criticism

Art criticism has to do with “describing, interpreting, evaluating, and theorizing about works of art with the end of increasing understanding and appreciation of art and its role in society...” (Dobbs 1998, 38). Here, the roles of “language, thoughtful writing and talk about art” come to the fore (38). The DBAE classroom draws on art criticism to help students carefully observe works of art, comparing and contrasting them while considering the contexts in which they were produced. A class can discuss: “the subject and theme of the work;” “the intentions, interests, or social or political concerns of the artist;” the “significance” of the medium; the opinion of critics about the work and how it bears on the development of artists; the artwork's function in society and audience's interpretation of and reaction to the artwork; and the “aesthetic experience” the artwork provides and how it “sustains attention” and stimulates “active discovery of new things” (38).

In incorporating art criticism into craft education, one can take, for instance, the tradition of handloom weaving. Traditional textiles, such as those produced in weaving centers in the Mountain Province, Ifugao or Ilocos Norte, are adorned with motif, both figurative and nonfigurative. In art criticism, students can take up these subjects and explore how they

relate to the main function of the textile piece within a given cultural environment. The prevalence of the lizard motif in Ifugao textiles, or the flowers, mountains, and rivers in Itneg textiles, can be points for discussion. So is the crocodile motif in most T'nalak and B'laan fabrics, or the *ukkil* or *okir* motif in Tausug and M'ranao textiles, metalwork, and woodwork. These design patterns and motifs may also be studied by comparing the views of anthropologists and the communities that actually use them.

Furthermore, art criticism can study the colors of a craftwork. Topics of note could be:

- Why traditional pottery is stained reddish-brown or sometimes left alone with the natural color of the clay soil reveal information well related to the function of each clay piece.
- Why certain indigenous communities prefer certain colors in their fabrics has much to say about that community's perception of a certain hue. Why do Ilocanos, for instance, use yellow and its related hues a lot, even in their food?
- Why bamboo poles, which are used as procession arches in parades are never painted over is also worth taking up. Despite there being no red horses endemic to the Philippines (or anywhere else for that matter), why do Paete *taka* (papier-mâché) makers paint their horses bright red?

Art criticism can also discuss aesthetic experience; students can focus on, say, the power of a Vigan silver frontal<sup>3</sup> to sustain attention—what with its seemingly simple fern pattern pressed on the metal's surface, but which, upon closer inspection, reveals human faces hidden within the fern pattern. Optical illusions figuring in Itneg or Ilocano blankets are capable of mesmerizing the viewer—more so, after learning what the motif stands for.



Within the art criticism segment of DBAE, students are trained to express their appreciation for crafts in written and verbal discussion. Here, the opportunity for students to go deeper into the understanding of a certain craftwork is immense. The functionality of a craftwork is seen within the context of its designs, colors, and form.

### Art History

Art history is described as “inquiry into the historical, social, and cultural contexts of art objects, focusing on the aspects of time, tradition, and style’ as they relate to artworks” (Dobbs, 1998, 38). Dobbs states that the purpose of art history is “to establish and sustain a systematic order in the cultures and traditions of art” (Dobbs: 1998, 38). As far as educational goals are met, art history has the ability to develop in students the notion of “historical thought” by discussing “the processes of causation, change, continuity, motivation, and evidence.” Such a concept may be taken up as “elements that influence the development of art” (Dobbs 1998, 39). There, too, is the concept of “historical imagination,” which is accessible through art history when “students speculate about the beliefs and values of other people and cultures” as seen and articulated through their art (39).

Historical imagination can enter the discussion by highlighting the development of the *bakya*, or Filipino wooden clogs. The *bakya* used to be carved with rural images on its heel and created with a crocheted *dahon* or flap. Its variations through time are matters of historical study. The same holds true for native Filipino costumes, the history of which is linked to different and specific sociocultural conditions.

According to Dobbs, historical inquiry into a work may take a wide range of forms:

- Authentication
- Iconography, or “the meanings of the objects and symbols in the work”
- Provenance, or the “history of the ownership of the work”

- Function
- Style
- Psychology, or “the personal factors that help relate the artist to his or her time and the work to a particular social or cultural milieu;” and
- Connoisseurship, or how “the intensive study of the work reveals or helps resolve with regard to problems of authorship, ownership, or physical condition.” (43)

Applying art history to the study of crafts, students get an idea of the long tradition of craft making in the country. However, unlike art history, volumes of which have been widely circulated, a consolidated reference for the study of Philippine craft history has yet to be produced. Early historical accounts about the Philippines by chroniclers and travelers, ethnohistorical data, and dictionaries produced during the Spanish colonial period all refer to traditional crafts. Yet all these have to be compiled and published to benefit Philippine craft education under the DBAE framework. Is not this belated publication on Philippine craft history another indication of the marginalized position of Philippine traditional crafts? In the study of craft history, other references may include early samples of crafts in museums, where developments in craft production can be noted. Both continuity and divergence may be detected by comparing old craft samples with new ones.

In the path exploring craft history, some areas of historical inquiry may not always be possible. Authentication, which requires modern equipment and methods, need not be studied at the elementary and secondary education levels. However, this area could easily be integrated into a heritage conservation program at the university level. The same is true with connoisseurship or the study of works in terms of issues of authorship, ownership, or physical condition.

When integrating art history to crafts education, visits to ethnographical museums, where crafts are displayed, become necessary.

The only problem is that in the Philippines, ethnographical museums are not aplenty. And until they are established, craft samples, especially the early specimens, can be exhibited with the cooperation of private collectors. Schools may also begin building their own collections of inexpensive crafts such as hats, mats, cooking utensils, pottery, and the like, which the DBAE-inspired crafts classes can eventually use as teaching materials. Such a collection may serve as a laboratory for craft history classes, where cataloguing methods to establish provenance and documentation can be practiced.

### Aesthetics

Aesthetics is a “branch of philosophy... that examines the nature, meaning, and value of art” and other things, from an aesthetic point of view” (Dobbs 1998, 46). The study of aesthetics helps students “understand what distinguishes art from other kinds of phenomena, the issues that such differences give rise to, and how one may justify judgments about art objects” (46). Concretely, classes can inquire into whether crafts can possess aesthetic qualities, that is, whether crafts can hold qualities that make them art or render them “beautiful.” Discussion may revolve around the aesthetic qualities of, say, the *abel iloko*, the *piña*-made *barong tagalog*, the bamboo procession arches of Quezon province, the humble clay *caramba*, or the *kiping*-decked Lukban house on a Pahiyas festival day (held in May each year). More advanced classes can look into the aesthetic issues that surround crafts vis-à-vis paintings and sculptures.

As an adjective, aesthetic speaks of “a particular kind of experience one can have with any phenomenon. (46) As Dobbs says, aesthetics encompasses the “study of the special qualities of the aesthetic experience and its unique contributions to human life and culture, with the complexities and subtleties of aesthetic experience, which, for the purposes of DBAE, focuses on the visual imagery of art objects” (46). In this regard, an experience in attending the annual Pahiyas festival, a visit to a traditional artisan’s workshop, or one’s hands-on experience in sitting with a back

strap loom in a small Ifugao village can become a subject for aesthetic discussion in a crafts class.

Aesthetic inquiry builds on the “content of the other three disciplines” (Dobbs 1998, 49). It “directs attention to the act of artistic creation, the art object itself, its interpretation and appreciation, critical evaluation, and the cultural and social context” (50). Following Dobbs, one can ask whether the value of an art work is external to it. In responding to this, one would refer to artist’s motives and intentions; the tools used and constraints faced; the theme or subject; the sociopolitical influences on the artist; the media, etc.

The question of beauty is also part of aesthetic inquiry. Students get to think philosophically about the nature of art and beauty; that is, they explore reasons why (or why not) a work is beautiful, drawing from the three other disciplines mentioned above.

When applied to crafts education, aesthetic inquiry takes actual craft pieces as subjects on which to base aesthetic judgments. Students explore questions related to its production; for instance, the artisan’s possible considerations in designing a wooden *bulul* (Ifugao rice god); the aesthetic reasons why a particular textile pattern is effectively placed in one portion of the tapestry and not in another; or the reasons for one’s preference for a certain craftwork over another.

Aesthetics can also look into the value of crafts within a given cultural context, and the demands on or responsibilities of the artist. If, for instance, a life-sized *bulul* is used by an art collector as a clothes hanger, is its aesthetic value reduced or enhanced? And why or why not is this an aesthetic issue?

Aesthetic inquiry raises the level of craft appreciation by teaching students how to argue for or against their interpretations and perceptions of crafts. To bring this discipline to a common and accessible level raises not only the position of crafts in Philippine society but also the awareness of the general public.

### Other Benefits of a DBAE-Crafts Curriculum

Aside from the benefits that the study of craft offers using the four foundational art disciplines, it may also be noted that through crafts the student can heighten his or her understanding of the communities that serve as cradles of crafts traditions by direct contact with these crafts and the dynamics involved in their production. As such, the learning that the students arrive at is firsthand and not mediated by a secondary source. Moreover, an emphasis on the value of crafts as works of beauty promises to create appreciation for ordinary things, which in the long run ought to develop a sense of integrity and pride in products, no matter how commonplace, simple, or inexpensive. Much later on, this attitude could extend to ordinary manifestations of what is national, giving rise to national pride.

Still, the fact that crafts education promises to empower the youth who may have no available means to pursue professional courses could not be ignored. Countries like Thailand have long realized the export potential of crafts products. There is no reason why the Philippines could not likewise benefit from the export of its crafts and boost its gross national product by building up its pool of crafts practitioners. This breed of craftsman may well become “craftsman-businessman,” as opposed to “craftsman-artists,” both of which metalsmith and scholar Bruce Metcalf have distinguished (Metcalf 1997). That the DBAE-crafts proposal could give rise to such a breed is not to be a bemoaned possibility. After all, crafts are admittedly functional to begin with. And yet, as the experience of beholding an *abel* Ilokano fabric or a Pahiyas festival house could prove and as the previous discussion had shown, crafts can be reckoned with aesthetically. The possibility of extending its functionality *per se* to encompass its monetary benefit to the craftsman does not veer away from its nature in the present time or a century ago.

### Envisioning the DBAE-Crafts Curriculum

Having discussed the four foundational art disciplines and their possible applications to the study of crafts, this paper has argued for reconsideration of crafts in formal education. And now it offers a proposal for a DBAE-based curriculum for secondary education. This includes classroom activities, issues, and questions with each of the four disciplines of the DBAE.

A DBAE-crafts curriculum for first to fourth year high school levels may take the following form:

Year level / Craft	First Quarter	Second Quarter	Third Quarter	Fourth Quarter
1 / Philippine Paper cutting	Paper cutting	Paper cutting criticism	Paper cutting history	Paper cutting aesthetics
2 / Philippine Mats	Mat weaving	Mat weaving criticism	Mat weaving history	Mat weaving aesthetics
3 / Philippine Costumes	Costume making	Costume Criticism	Costume history	Costume aesthetics
4 / Possible selections: taka (papier-mâché), lanterns, leaf art, indigenous jewelry, textiles, pottery, etc.	Craft making	Craft criticism	Craft history	Craft aesthetics

The proposal above takes into consideration the current state of public school system resources—from the points of view of both the school and the students. As such, pedagogical concerns pertain to level of difficulty, expense, and safety. It is noticeable that the materials needed for the crafts courses are easily accessible and inexpensive. Crafts classes, like mat weaving and costume making, leave plenty of room for innovation, given various materials that can be potentially used. Synthetic materials, like plastic or even paper, may be employed for the mat-weaving classes. Costume-making classes, on the other hand, could make use of fabrics from old clothes, blankets, and curtains. Neither are the crafts dependent on expensive equipment or tools. The emphasis is clearly on handmade products, which rely on inexpensive materials and almost hazard-free tools.

The curriculum above covers all four years of secondary crafts education, and is formulated as a government-defined curriculum for all public schools. The last year of craft education allows some flexibility because it is open to regionalization and is determined by the traditional craft originating from a particular region—for instance, taka-making for the Southern Tagalog region, lantern making for the Northern Tagalog region, textile weaving for the Cordillera region, and pottery and textile for Northern Luzon. The Visayas region could adopt leaf art and Mindanao may adopt indigenous jewelry making, drawing from the T'boli tradition of personal ornamentation. Using this scheme of regionalization, the crafts curriculum makes for embedded learning, where the crafts studied include those native to the particular region, and from which the students ought not to be alienated.

With such specialized knowledge required by the curriculum, crafts educators must have a strong background in Philippine art and anthropology. Educators may also come from the ranks of artisans, especially during the first quarter classes. Schools, with the help of local government units, must also procure appropriate teaching materials. In known crafts-producing centers or regions, crafts classes may go more deeply into its inherent crafts practice. As such, weaving production centers

may dedicate more time to textile subjects. This would ensure the preservation of the region's cultural heritage at the institutional level.

A DBAE-curriculum would rely on a district- and even province-wide cooperation. This would include the involvement of local governments, which would provide logistical support for the artisans who in turn will train instructors and visit schools and art classes. Since the public schools are wont to deviate from the Department of Education art curriculum and follow an arts program suited to resources available to them, the implementation of a crafts-centered art education need not be highly contentious. The crucial element rests more on the preparation of the instructors, which in this case would have to come from the ranks of Philippine Art and Philippine Studies graduates. How to lure them into the public school education system will constitute the greatest challenge to this program. Nonetheless, just as the present National Service Training Program is working in public schools all over the country, so perhaps Philippine Arts students could serve in public schools and help carry out crafts education in the country.

### **Conclusion**

The foregoing discussion showed the current position of crafts within the Philippine education system and how the Philippines falls short among other Asian countries in adopting an intensive crafts education curriculum. A framework to reintroduce the study of crafts has been proposed in this paper through a discussion of the discipline-based art education. By recommending DBAE, this paper has suggested not only a new manner of studying crafts but also, more importantly, the feasibility of integrating crafts into formal instruction by using the four art disciplines of art making, art criticism, art history, and aesthetics. Ultimately, the paper demonstrated that crafts could be considered and taught in classrooms using a specific framework. To further extrapolate the feasibility of a crafts curriculum, the paper also developed a division of craft topics for a high school crafts curriculum program. The envisioned curriculum may, once successfully



realized, spur the opening of crafts degree courses. The author is aware, however, that several other factors and forces will have to come into play to turn that dream into reality. For the purposes of this paper at least, the author had set forth her vision and broached that possibility.

### Notes

- 1 These degree programs are commonly offered in the University of the Philippines College of Fine Arts, the University of Santo Tomas College of Fine Arts and Design, and the Philippine Women's University School of Fine Arts and Design.
- 2 The artisan may be invited through an agency-to-agency arrangement where the municipal government where the artisan resides could be requested to sponsor the travel cost of the crafts person. Or if the school happens to be in a locality where a craft is practiced, then a practicing artisan may be invited to the classroom to demonstrate and teach the students. The artisan could also instruct the teachers, who will later on be responsible for demonstrating craft making to the students.
- 3 A silver frontal is pressed metal that serves as a decorative panel facing the congregation on altars inside Catholic churches. It was a practice introduced during the Spanish period.

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