

■ LOCAL REGIONAL STUDIES NETWORK

PAGRARA IT KINAARAM

Weaving Weaves in the Classrooms

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INTRODUCTION

Republic Act (RA) 10533, otherwise known as the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 added two more years of high school to the basic ten-year education cycle. Under the K to 12 Curriculum, Technology and Livelihood Education (TLE) and Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) Track specializations may be taken between Grades 9 to 12. TVL Track has four strands: Agri-fishery Arts (AFA), Home Economics (HE), Information and Communication Technology (ICT), and Industrial Arts (IA).² Curriculum contextualization is another essential feature of the K to 12 Curriculum where new contents are linked to learners' experiences to make learning facilitation effective and discussions relevant to them.³

In the case of Northwestern Panay, *pagrara* (handicraft weaving) is one of the topics contextualized in schools. It is a handicraft weaving practice in Northwest Panay that utilizes abaca (*Musa textilis*), bariw (*Pandanus copelandii*), nito (*Lygodium circinnatum*), and other natural fibers to produce bags, hats, carpets, placemats, and other weaving products for local and export markets. These products reflect the knowledge and skills of local culture bearers in weaving as they continue to sustain a tradition that is

part of their identity. However, challenges to the heritage's sustainability in terms of awareness and knowledge transfer in the community need to be addressed. Schools, in particular, have significant roles in this matter.

In this context, this paper locates the *pagrara* (handicraft weaving) heritage in curriculum and instruction in public high schools in Northwestern Panay and how the promotion and inclusion of handicraft weaving heritage in schools can be enhanced in terms of policies and guidelines.

METHODOLOGY

Data collection was done either through interviews or correspondence with five public school teachers who are knowledgeable and with experience in integrating *pagrara* into their classes. They were asked about the role of schools in the preservation and sustainability of handicrafts, the challenges that they experienced in integrating *pagrara* in classrooms, and how such integration be enhanced. Data collection happened between November to December 2024. Findings are discussed in connection to existing Department of

1 University Research Associate, Center for West Visayan Studies, University of the Philippines Visayas.

2 Department of Education revised list of TVL specializations.

3 Department of Education, The Learning Action Cell as a K to 12 Basic Education Program School-Based Continuing Professional Development Strategy for the Improvement of Learning, DO No. 35, s. 2016 (7 June 2016).

Education (DepEd) policies and offerings related to handicrafts.

FINDINGS

Handicraft weaving in schools

Handicrafts made from *nito* and *abaca* produced through *pagrara* in communities in Pandan, Antique, and Ibajay, Aklan are placemats, trays, coasters, and baskets. On the other hand, in Libertad, Antique and Nabas, Aklan, *bariw* is mainly utilized in making products such as the *banig*.⁴ Handicraft weaving is incorporated in selected schools in these municipalities.

In Sta. Ana National High School (SANHS), a public high school catering to learners in upland communities in Pandan, Antique, a specialized Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) Track – Home Economics strand specializing in handicraft is offered.⁵ It is a Non-National Certificate (NON-NC) specialization that enables learners to demonstrate the necessary skills in handicraft weaving. In Ibajay, *nito* weaving is incorporated into the Special Program in the Arts (SPA).⁶

Challenges, however, beset the integration of *pagrara* in classrooms in Northwest Panay. These include inadequate facilities, limited artisans to teach the craft, lack of teachers with specialized weaving skills, and non-interest from learners.^{7,8,9} Balancing weaving lessons with other subjects and addressing learners' varying levels of interest in this traditional craft also poses difficulties.¹⁰

Consistency has also become a challenge for teachers since there are only specific topics where *pagrara* can be integrated.¹¹ Furthermore, the absence of a National Certification (NC) for Handicraft (Basketry, Macrame)¹² limits learners' opportunities for industry alignment.¹³

On the other hand, partnerships between local weaving communities, Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) programs such as the Kapit-Bisig Laban sa Kahirapan- Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services (KALAHI-CIDS) and the Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP), and cooperatives provide opportunities for the handicraft weaving to thrive. For SANHS, providing hands-on learning experiences, incorporating cultural heritage into lessons to spark learners' engagement, and showcasing learners' outputs during the quarterly "Portfolio Gallery" contributed to emphasizing the relevance and sustainability of the craft.¹⁴

Prospects for enhancement

Handicraft weaving is a shared heritage of Northwest Panay communities. It has been part of the identity of many weaving communities in the area and has been a source of livelihood for some. Though efforts from the DepEd to integrate it into the classrooms, as well as offering it as part of the TVL track, are significant contributions to the promotion and preservation of the *pagrara* in the area, sustaining such efforts continues to be a challenge and entails additional policies.

4 Mary May Lachica, response to questionnaire by Ericka Galvan, District MAPEH Coordinator, Nabas, Aklan, 5 December 2024.

5 Donald Antoy, Teacher-in-Charge, Santa Ana National High School, Santa Ana, Pandan, Antique, interview by the author, 17 November 2024.

6 Rodrigo Talingting Jr., response to questionnaire by Ericka Galvan, Cultural and Special Program in the Arts (SPA) Coordinator, Ibajay Integrated School, Colong-Colong, Ibajay, Aklan, November 11, 2024.

7 Antoy.

8 Talingting.

9 Lachica.

10 Lachica.

11 Roderick Calcaña, response to questionnaire by Joeffritz Varon, Teacher III, Libertad National Vocational School, Libertad, Antique, 18 November 2024.

12 Department of Education, K to 12 Home Economics – Handicraft Curriculum Guide (May 2016).

13 Antoy.

14 Antoy.

With the passage in August 2023 of Republic Act No. 11961 or the Cultural Mapping Law, the significant role of schools in integrating cultural heritage such as *pagrara* in classes is needed more than ever, such as in the case of Northwest Panay. This is because the law mandates local government units (LGUs) to “conduct a comprehensive cultural mapping of their areas of jurisdiction” where a coordination with the National Commission for Culture and the Arts and relevant cultural institutions, including the “Department of Education (DepEd) for the institution of cultural awareness in basic education; capacity-building program for teachers in mapping the heritage resources of local communities and cultural pedagogy; and localization and contextualization of educational material and content based on the locality’s cultural profile to cultivate awareness and prided in a community’s cultural identity.”¹⁵

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **A National Certification II equivalent from the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) for Handicraft (Basketry and macrame) will strengthen *pagrara* as a promising specialization to pursue for students from handicraft weaving communities.**

The NC is “the document issued by TESDA to individuals after being subjected to a National Competency Assessment and proven competent in all the required units of competency of a national qualification defined under the promulgated Training Regulations.”¹⁶ Schools serving students from communities where *pagrara* is practiced can have offerings on handicraft weaving (basketry, macrame) with NC as an enticement.

However, providing adequate facilities and resources and capacitating teachers with specialized trainings in teaching handicrafts is a crucial step to avail and qualify for TESDA assessment and accreditation. Here, handicraft-focused organizations, where many of their members are skilled handicraft weavers, such as the Sto. Rosario Multi-Purpose Cooperative (STORMPC) and Santa Ana–San Joaquin Agrarian Reform Cooperative (SASJ AR COOP) in Pandan, member-organizations of Libertad Bariw Weavers Federation (LIBAWFED) in Libertad, the Monlaque Agrarian Reform Cooperative and Aparicio Agrarian Reform Cooperative in Ibajay, and the established private enterprises in Nabas can be tapped by or can offer their expertise to JDVP-TVL partner institutions in terms of skills training.¹⁷

2. **Mainstreaming handicraft weaving in curriculum and instruction for cultural promotion.**

In the classroom, teachers can integrate handicraft weaving into their lesson delivery regardless of the subject area they are teaching.¹⁸ In this manner, teachers can look at handicraft weaving from different perspectives and not just limit it to the arts. Social Studies subjects, for example, can discuss the relevance of handicraft weaving to society, culture, and economy, while English and Filipino subjects may use handicraft weaving as a subject for their creative or formal writing, and Science subjects may discuss why fibrous plants like abaca, nito, and bariw are ideal raw materials for weaving.¹⁹

15 An Act Strengthening the Conservation and Protection of Philippine Cultural Heritage through Cultural Mapping and Enhanced Cultural Heritage Education Program, Amending for the Purpose Republic Act No. 10066, Otherwise Known as the “National Cultural Heritage Act of 2009,” RA No. 11961 (24 August 2023), Sec.15(c).

16 Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), Circular No. 107-2021: Omnibus Guidelines on Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Program Registration, Circ. No. 107, s. 2021 (10 December 2021).

17 Department of Education (Philippines), Guidelines on the Implementation of the Joint Delivery Voucher Program for Senior High School Technical-Vocational-Livelihood Specializations for School Year 2022-2023, 2023, DepEd Order No. 006, s. 2023 (21 March 2023). The guidelines aim to enhance the capability of DepEd SHS to implement the TVL track through partnerships with institutions that are equipped with the necessary resources to carry out the program.

18 Lucille Bolivar, response to questionnaire by the author, Special Science Teacher I, Mag-aba National High School, Mag-aba, Pandan, Antique, 18 November 2024.

19 Bolivar.

3. **Integration of handicraft weaving in local events for greater cultural appreciation and foster inclusivity**

A policy on localizing celebrations related to culture such as National Arts Months, National Heritage Month, and Indigenous Peoples Month Celebration wherein schools include in their celebration their communities' respective handicrafts and local arts will allow for a more contextualized and more personalized celebration, which can contribute to learners' appreciation for them.²⁰

4. **Establishment of a community-based School for Living Tradition (SLT) to facilitate knowledge transfer**

The establishment of a School for Living Tradition (SLT) for *pagrara* is another significant community-based initiative that can strengthen knowledge transfer and skills development for practitioners and learners to safeguard their weaving heritage. However, as the establishment of the SLT is under the jurisdiction of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), the DepEd can explore the possibility of a partnership with NCCA and formulate a policy where schools with a cultural heritage worth preserving can partner with the community in the establishment of the SLT.²¹ Lastly, in the case of schools in the area that implement Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd), *pagrara* is a fitting inclusion in its curriculum and instruction.

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²⁰ Bolivar.

²¹ Calcaña.

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