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# UNTRADITIONAL WAYS OF EXPLORING A TRADITIONAL KOREAN MARKET THROUGH SERVICE-LEARNING PROJECTS IN A GRAPHIC DESIGN STUDIO CLASS

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# Untraditional Ways of Exploring a Traditional Korean Market through Service-Learning Projects in a Graphic Design Studio Class

Arts and Humanities Topics

Graphic Design

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## 1. Abstract

Many traditional Korean markets have lost their customers to modern grocery stores. This threatens to destroy an important cultural center in Korean daily life. To address this issue, the city of Daegu, South Korea initiated a design competition aimed at promoting the preservation of the traditional Korean market. At Kyungil University, my design students entered this local competition as a graded service-learning project.

My students explored how to make the traditional Korean market more valuable to visitors. Students researched, designed, and developed educational board games and infographics to encourage shopping in the traditional market.

In this paper, I discuss the learning outcomes of several of the student's group projects. Each of these projects demonstrates how graphic design students can learn about the community as they serve to help preserve its identity. By discussing the learning outcomes of these service-learning projects, we hope to help support the view that graphic design studio students can learn about their traditional communities through untraditional design practices.

## 2. Keywords

Service-learning, Design Education, Graphic Design

## 3. Introduction

Traditionally, graphic design studio classes fail to teach students how their work impacts their community. They fail for three main reasons. First, they focus too narrowly on teaching technical skills for specific media. For example, graphic design courses at Kyungil University include Web Design, Package Design, and Publication Design. These courses often teach students how to construct artifacts in different mediums, but they rarely offer students a chance to practice these skills together on real-world projects. Since students rarely work on real-world projects, they are not learning how their designs can help others.

Second, traditional graphic design courses often focus too heavily on developing aesthetic taste. Courses often demand that students develop clear, pleasing, and visible designs (Frascara, 1998). These aesthetics do not always solve a design problem. If students mainly focus on delivering aesthetically pleasing forms, they are not likely to think about the social functions of their work.

Third, traditional graphic design courses teach students to please a single client, which is often their instructor. In a traditional class, a graphic design instructor functions as a client, a teacher, and an art director and the interaction between teacher and student is too linear (Canniffe & Wiley, 2011). If they mainly design for their instructor, they are not learning how to design for their community.

In this paper, I describe how an unconventional graphic design course at Kyungil University helped my students learn about how their graphic design work could impact their local community. For the course, my students researched, designed, and developed educational board games and infographics to encourage shopping in a traditional Korean market. In this case study, I found that integrating service-learning into the graphic design curriculum helps my students learn both design skills and cultural knowledge.

Before describing my study, I will briefly explain about service-learning in general and then describe my unconventional graphic design course.

#### 4. Service-Learning

Service-learning is a teaching method that allows students to engage with authentic social issues that help improve communities. This teaching method allows students to draw connections between their community and their formal education (Cress, p7). While community service and community-based learning tries to meet real community needs, service-learning emphasizes academic goals as well. According to Cress, with service-learning,

“Students engage in community service activities with intentional academic and learning goals and opportunities for reflection that connect to their academic disciplines.” (Cress, 2005).

#### 5. Course Description

The graphic design course, Information Design, targeted junior design students at Kyungil University. Design students represented a variety of majors and minors, including Industrial Design, Furniture Design, and Photography.

The course was held during the spring semester from March to June in 2012. The class was held three hours weekly. For six weeks, nineteen students worked in groups of three or four on the service-learning project. The entire class was required to participate in the service-learning project.

The city of Daegu hosted the ‘Design Daegu Academy Competition and Exhibition’. One of the themes from the competition was preservation of the traditional Korean market. As one of the course projects, students were assigned to create a graphic design project for the Dong-gu traditional market (DTM).

##### 5-1. Traditional Market in Korea

Shijang, traditional market in Korea, has been one of the main grocery shopping places in Korean history. These markets sell inexpensive vegetables, fruits, meat, and small home goods.

Most perishable goods are delivered directly from local farms. In 1993, E-Mart, one of the largest modern grocery stores, was opened (Kim, 2011). Since then, other modern grocery stores have opened, including Costco.

With more modern and large grocery stores, the traditional Korean markets have lost customers and the government is trying to save them. For example, the Korean government has started to restrict the hours of operation for modern grocery stores in order to save the traditional markets. However, this new law has not encouraged people to shop at the traditional markets (Choi, 2012).

### 5-2. Design Process

The instructor presented a project topic and she outlined each week's assignment with a specific design agenda. The six week timeline is shown below:

Week 1	Design research: Identifying community needs and design problem
Week 2	Idea sketch: Presenting 3 concepts
Week 3	Design development: Developing design
Week 4	Design Revision: Refining design
Week 5	Final Design: Presenting final design to class
Week 6	Show: Exhibiting design works

### 5-3. Final Designs

Within six weeks, four out of five teams completed their final designs and exhibited them at the 'Design Daegu Academy Competition'. All of the students won awards.

The final designs are shown below:

Team 1: (Vice Mayor Award) Danimgil board game	4 students	
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<p>Team 2: (Participation Award) Information Flyer for Table Setting of Traditional Memorial Ceremony</p>	<p>4 students</p>	
<p>Team 3: (Participation Award) Map for the Dong-gu Traditional Market</p>	<p>3 students</p>	
<p>Team 4: (Participation Award) Drawing Lots Play</p>	<p>4 students</p>	

## 6. Methods

As the instructor of the Information Design course, I conducted a group interview with seven students from the course. I verbally invited the students to participate in the group interview. The students were told that their participation was completely voluntary, and that their participation (or lack thereof) would not affect their current, past, or future grades. The students were told that by participating in the group interview, their answers would be recorded, transcribed, anonymized, and used in a design education research paper. The students also were

told that they were free to leave the group interview at any time, and that they could choose at any time to have their recorded comments deleted and not used in the study. The students signed an informed consent document before the group interview.

A group interview was chosen instead of individual interviews because it would make the students feel more comfortable expressing their opinions to the instructor as a group. The group interview was also chosen because it facilitates information sharing between the students and helps them remember and reflect on their experiences during their group projects.

The group interview took approximately one hour to complete. During the interview, the students were asked questions about their learning experiences and the audio of their answers digitally recorded.

The questions were based on Jorge Frascara's theory of graphic design education. Frascara argues that graphic design teaching should include activities of "emotional, rational, communicative, ethnological, and understanding of the social context". In this study, we focus on the question of whether the graphic design service- learning project facilitates learning design skills and cultural knowledge.

The following eight questions were asked to find out what students learned about themselves as designers and as Koreans:

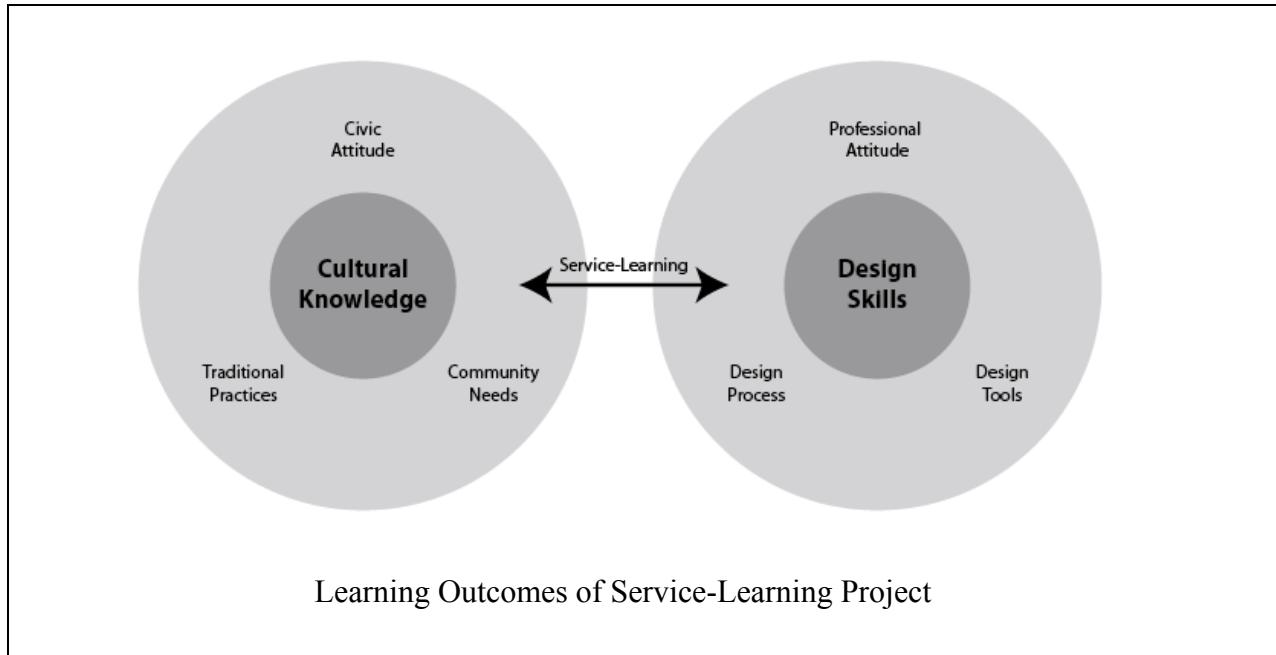
1. What did you learn about the design process?
2. What were the community problems?
3. What was the design problem you addressed?
4. What did you communicate with others and who were they?
5. What skills did you learn?
6. What are the strengths of your design?
7. What are the weaknesses of your design?
8. What benefits do you have working on this project?

After the group interview, I reviewed and anonymously transcribed the audio recordings. Afterwards, I categorized the transcript answers by learning outcome types.

## 7. Results

From the in-depth group interview, students who participated in the service-learning project demonstrated that they learned several types of cultural knowledge and several types of design skills. With respect to cultural knowledge, the students' comments indicated that they learned about traditional practices, community needs, and their own civic attitudes. With respect to design skills, the students' comments indicated that they learned about the design process, how to use design tools,

and their own professional attitudes.



## 7-1. Cultural Knowledge

### a) Civic Attitudes

Students were willing to engage with the Dong-gu traditional market (DTM) in order to help. They believe that their designs can revitalize the market. They easily identified the strengths and weaknesses of the DTM relative to the modern grocery stores.

*"I think we can be a connection between the community and the DTM."* (Student B)

*"We are young, so we are more progressive thinkers than the people at the DTM. Our ideas can help them. If our ideas can change the DTM, the customers are more likely visit the DTM."* (Student A)

### b) Traditions Practices

The students acquired traditional knowledge about Korea. For example, they learned how to set up a traditional memorial service table and how to play the traditional board game, Yut. One team learned that the DTM sells special ingredients throughout the year for the traditional memorial ceremony, Jesa. During Jesa, Korean families prepare special food to honor their ancestors. They perform Jesa during every national holiday, as well as on the days when their ancestors passed away. The team learned that modern grocery stores only sell Jesa ingredients during national holidays. Therefore, most Korean families need traditional markets like the DTM to purchase ingredients on the days their ancestors passed away. The students learned that some customers do not know that DTM sells Jesa ingredients throughout the year. Thus, the team

decided to create an information flyer that lists the DTM vendors who sell Jesa ingredients and describes the table setting guidelines for Jesa. By designing this flyer, students reported that they learned how to find those ingredients in the market and how to prepare and present food for Jesa.

*“I learned how to prepare a traditional memorial service table for Jesa while making the information flyer. I would never know it if I didn’t work on this project.”* (Student A)

c) Community Needs

During the research phase, students learned the strengths and weaknesses of the DTM relative to the modern Korean grocery stores. From these identified strengths and weaknesses, they suggested strategies to revitalize the DTM.

*“We felt really sorry about the market, but the customers would not feel welcome because the place is very crowded and dirty. They did not have any specialized items or stores like the other traditional markets. They need unique items that no other traditional markets have. Other traditional markets are known for some popular items.”* (Student B)

*“There are many competing markets out there. Public transportation to the DTM is not convenient. Around the DTM, the parking lot is crowded. The cars are parked in the streets and this blocks traffic.”* (Student C)

## 7-2. Design Skills

Students comments indicated that they learned about the design process, design tools, and professional attitudes.

a) Professional Attitude

The students mentioned that they are more “serious” about the service-learning design project than their other design projects in other courses.

The students reflected on their own professional attitudes and learned more about how to maintain composure during the design process.

During the group interview, all of seven students responded that their works were novel or unique. More than half of the students reported that they were creative while they were working on the project. In contrast, one student mentioned that their design looks amateur no matter how hard they work. Still, this student claims that their design work is creative.

*“I am not sure if this is a design skill, but I had to interview strangers. I was very embarrassed to interview strangers at the DTM. It was a new experience for me. I am still very shy, but I can interview people and I now know how to do it. Also, I learned that*

*I should never lower my guard. I became too relaxed towards the end of my project, and I made a mistake at the last second when I bought the wrong components for my design prototype.”* (Student B)

*“When I heard about this project, I wasn’t really excited. I asked myself why we were doing this. But last week, I had to write my resume, and I added this project as one of my work experiences. I think it was beneficial.”* (Student A)

*“Our team created a board game combined with the Korean traditional game, Yut. I think that’s very creative. It was a hands-on experience like if you worked at a design firm. We donated our talent to this project. We were able to do it by ourselves without consulting with professional designers. We had to come up with an idea and design a solution for a real world problem.”* (Student C)

*“I thought it is unique that our team came up with an information flyer that shows how to set up the traditional memorial ceremony table. It’s something we haven’t seen before. I think the project is unique too. But the outcome looks like amateur work to me. No matter how hard we do it, this is still student work in the end because we don’t have professional skills yet. I think people would not think our work is professional either.”* (Student A)

*“When we brainstorm, I speak out and express my ideas to my team. I feel that I am a creative person.”* (Student G)

*“I don’t know this is a design skill but I had to take responsibility in a group, and also I had to work with team members.”* (Student E)

#### b) Design Process

Through the course, students followed the design process. Each team presented clear design problems and suggested a design solution. The instructor had extra meetings with each team besides the regular class. Four out of five teams completed their tasks based on the design process schedule.

*“Before the course, I did not know about the design process, but this service-learning project’s schedule was divided by design process each week. I am beginning to understand it and I know that I have to start with research first. It seems the project is more organized by having a design process.”* (Student A)

### c) Design Tools

Students indicated that they learned how to use specific design tools, such as, Adobe Illustrator design software and printing tips.

*“I learned how to use the pen tools in Illustrator for creating complicated shapes.”*

(Student B)

*“I usually work on computers and hardly print them out. I learned how to tile and print properly.”* (Student D)

## 8. Conclusion

In my case study, I found that an untraditional service-learning project can help students learn both design skills and cultural knowledge. Like Eyler, I found that service-learning programs influences “students attitudes, values, skills and their thought on social issues” (Eyler, 1997).

From the interview, students indicated that the service-learning project increased their confidence as a designer. This project appeared to strengthen their self-concept as a creative person who understands the professional demands. They are developing their professional identity as graphic designers.

In addition, the service-learning project appeared to cultivate students’ concerns about their community and raised their level of civic responsibility (Smith-Pariolá & Gòkè-Pariolá, 2006). One student sees herself as a meaningful link between the DTM and society. She began to feel like she could do something for both of parties. Another student felt sympathy for the DTM because its physical condition is very poor. These students learned how to translate community needs into design problems.

This study suggests that design educators should incorporate an untraditional service-learning project into their curriculum to teach students that graphic designers can help preserve the traditions of our community.

## 9. Limitations

The findings are based on very limited data. The study relies on the group feedback of only seven students. Moreover, while I did not see evidence of this, it is possible that some of these students may have felt uncomfortable voicing controversial opinions in front of their peers and the instructor.

In addition, the student feedback did not include information about their perspectives on the final stages of the design process, where their work would be implemented by the community. The students’ works were conceptual designs and were not implemented or adopted in the DTM;

their conceptual work was only displayed at the design competition. The students mentioned that they were very focused on the design competition instead of the community, and some mentioned that their projects were not taken seriously by the community.

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