Collaborative Pedagogy: A Student-Centered Approach to Geographic
Education

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of
Southwest Texas State University
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements

For the Degree

Master of Applied Geography

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San Marcos, Texas
December, 1999

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Chapter 1

All for one, and one for all --- Alexandre Dumas

In the last ten to fifteen years, the idea of collaborative learning has enjoyed growing interest and focus in the educational arena. In traditional classroom settings, students often are treated only as receivers of knowledge. The teacher presents or provides knowledge to the students, and it is the responsibility of the students to receive the knowledge and process it in such a way that they understand it. Learning is seen as a one-way process flowing out of the teacher and into the students. The individual knowledge and experiences of each student are not considered valuable to the overall learning of the classroom as a whole. Also, in a traditional classroom each student is in competition with other students. Grades are assigned to each student, and students are often ranked according to how they performed in the classroom against their classmates. Clearly, in the traditional classroom model, there is very little incentive for collaboration or cooperation among students. By collaborating and cooperating, a student may aid another student and thereby lose his or her edge over the competition.

A growing number of educators believe that the traditional model is not the most productive learning tool. Collaborative and cooperative learning models are being evaluated to determine if they are more beneficial. Advocates of collaborative and cooperative learning recognize that since the dawn of humankind, humans have had to cooperate and collaborate in order to survive. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Russian prince named Kropotkin envisioned a collaborative society

where individuals divided their time between labor-intensive agriculture and small scale industry so that people were able to live in a leisured society punctuated by the integration of work. The author Warder Allee, influenced by the work of Kropotkin, studied the animal kingdom where he found that "living beings not only struggle and compete with one another for food, mates and safety, but they also work together to insure to one another these same indispensable conditions for development and survival" (1931:353). In the modern business world, business leaders bring together employees to solve problems collaboratively. *Webster's New World Dictionary* defines "collaborate" as working together in some literary, artistic, or scientific undertaking. While the concept of cooperation and collaboration is not new, only recently have these ideas entered into the realm of formal education.

Collaborative learning has been seen by some as the new wave in instructional models for teaching students in the classroom. This model has received widespread support and use within higher education with some "trickle-down effect" to grades K-12.

Note, this thesis clarifies and critiques the collaborative learning instructional method and applies it to geography education. First, a literature review examines the recent research findings, and determines the advantages and drawbacks associated with this alternative learning method. Next, the collaborative learning model is compared and contrasted to the cooperative learning model. Next, research is presented based on a survey conducted in the Houston urban area and in the more rural Rio Grande Valley in South Texas. This survey investigates how teachers of World Geography perceive the values of using collaborative/group learning

techniques in their classroom. Finally, a week-long curriculum unit is then presented that applies the collaborative learning technique to a World Geography lesson pertaining to Russia.

THESIS OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this thesis are to define what collaborative pedagogy is and determine how it differs from cooperative learning. This research also investigates the most useful strategies in enhancing opportunities for collaborative teaching and learning. The study will further explore whether collaborative learning methods have been integrated into the curriculum of geography or other related disciplines and will address how model curricula in World Geography can best illustrate collaborative learning techniques.

This significance of this research is to link collaborative learning with the geography education reform movement and recommend its integration into standards-based curriculum materials. The collaborative learning instructional model has the potential to provide educators with an archetype for assisting them in curriculum development in geography. Currently, geography teachers are encouraged to incorporate the 1994 *Geography for Life: National Geography Standards* within their geography curriculum. However, teachers who use the standards complain frequently that the standards are difficult to implement within their geography lessons. Teachers often become frustrated at the complexity of the standards, and consequently choose not to use them when developing curricula for geography.

This thesis also provides teachers with innovative instructional strategies to use in implementing the standards in their geography lessons. According to the *Guidelines for Geographic Education: Elementary and Secondary Schools,* published by the Joint Committee on Geographic Education and the Association of American Geographers list five skills that all geographically informed students should know are the following:

1. Ask geographic questions

2. Acquiring geographic information

3. Organizing geographic information

4. Analyzing geographic information

5. Answering geographic questions.

Collaborative learning provides teachers with an instructional model that assists students in acquiring these five key geographic skills that a geographically informed student must know.

The collaborative learning instructional model has the potential to provide a framework that would allow students to ask, acquire, organize, and answer questions pertaining to geography. The collaborative model also provides educators with an instructional method for incorporating geography standards into their curriculum.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study is to review the current literature on collaborative learning, to differentiate it from other instructional teaching methods, and apply it to a model curriculum. Within the literature, there is some confusion between collaborative and cooperative learning techniques. This study clarifies the similarities and the differences between these two methodologies.

Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning refers to an instructional method of teaching where students, at varying abilities, work together in small groups towards some common goal in which the desired outcome is the same for all members of the group. Totten *et.al.* (1991) states that "the shared learning gives students an opportunity to engage in discussion, take responsibility for their own learning, and thus become critical thinkers."

Trimbur (1989) suggests that by using collaborative learning individuals "engage in a process of intellectual negotiation and collective decision-making," and by doing so they "reach consensus through an expanding conversation" (602). Bruffee states that "collaborative learning replaces the traditional classroom social structure with another structure: negotiate relationship among students and a negotiated relationship between those student communities and the teacher" (1995: 17). In a collaborative learning environment, the teacher turns some of the responsibility for their own learning over to the students. Furthermore, students

within the group then become responsible not only for themselves, but for one another as well. In order for the group to be successful, each student must interact with and encourage the others.

Proponents of collaborative learning argue that this educational form has a wider range of benefits and greater potential than the more traditional approaches. They suggest that the dynamics of the group are the strongest educational benefit of this type of instructional model. For the group to succeed, communication among group members is imperative. Group members discuss methods for solving problems, elucidate their position or reasoning, and defend their position on specific topics. Within a collaborative classroom the thinking process is made public, thereby giving group members insight into each other's ideas. As the process proceeds, students constantly must re-evaluate their own ideas and the ideas of others in the group.

Researchers believe that collaborative learning model is also beneficial to the personal development of the students (see, for example, Bruffee 1983, 1984; Hill and Hill, 1990; and Whipple, 1987). Students participating in collaborative learning exchange and evaluate their ideas as well as the ideas of their classmates. This interactive exchange of ideas helps to promote positive attitudes among group members, builds their self-esteem, and gives each student a sense of belonging. Through group discussion, each group member must decide what type of role or responsibility they wish to assume in order to complete the required task. Depending upon the assigned task, each group must determine what roles are needed to assist the group in completing the required task project. By accepting responsibility for a

certain task each student is able to perform in the capacity of a leader in a certain area within the group. Whether leading the group, presenting the material to the class, or taking notes during group discussion, each role is pivotal to the overall success of the group. Proponents suggest that group discussions assist students in learning tolerance for other ideas and solutions, thereby promoting the care and respect for others if the group is to be successful (see, for example, Bruffee 1983, 1984; Hill and Hill, 1990; and Whipple, 1987). Collaborative learning groups help students to develop social and intellectual skills that are not as likely to be developed in a traditional educational format.

The collaborative learning educational model is seen by many to be extremely beneficial for students of all ages. Proponents of collaborative learning suggest that it encourages students to be independent thinkers, reduces competition and competitiveness in the classroom, and allows students to develop leadership skills and positive attitudes towards their fellow students (see, for example, Bruffee 1983, 1984; Hill and Hill, 1990; and Whipple, 1987). The skills that students develop during collaborative learning groups will assist them as they move from the academic world into the business world.

Theoretical Background

Group learning and social interaction as a means of effective and efficient learning is not a new concept. In the 1920s and early 1930s, Vygotsky (1978), a developmental theorist and researcher from Russia, consistently argued that individuals are not only biological, but that they are a product of human culture. The way in which we

process knowledge is based upon our social history, and language is the key component by which we learn about our cultures and ourselves. This process helps us, as individuals, to organize our verbal thinking and regulate our actions. Children and young adults achieve higher intellectual functioning by interacting with adults and other children around them. Vygotsky (1978) argued that students are capable of performing at higher intellectual levels when asked to work in a collaborative situation than when asked to work individually.

Vygotsky's premise is based on the concept of inner speech. He suggested that children learn more effectively when they engage in activities and dialogues with others, particularly adults or more proficient peers. He believed that over time children internalize dialogue so that it becomes inner speech, and their inner speech is what drives their behavior and thinking. Vygotsky defined inner speech as the conversations that we carry on within ourselves. These conversations begin as social dialogue with other people, but later they become a major mode for learning, planning, and self-regulation. Vygotsky reasoned that when individuals are confronted with a difficult problem, their inner speech (talking to oneself) would become external.

Vygotsky also argued against the traditional learning methods used in our schools. Vygotsky viewed learning as a profoundly social process, which emphasizes dialogue and the varied roles that language plays in instruction and in mediated cognitive growth. For instance, mere exposure of students to new material through oral lectures neither allows for adult guidance or for collaboration among their peers (Vygotsky, 1978, 131).

Other proponents of group learning also suggest that students gain more by working together rather than individually. Piaget (1928; 1932) felt that collaborative learning plays a crucial role in constructive cognitive development. Piaget believed that peer interaction is more beneficial to learning and development than traditional adult to child or teacher to student scenario. When students interact with adults or teachers, generally they follow whatever the adult/teacher suggests rather than following their own natural learning process. Johnson and Johnson (1986), who have done extensive work evaluating students in group learning environments, also suggest that there is evidence that cooperative teams achieve higher levels of thought and retain information longer through group learning than students who work individually.

Characteristics of a Collaborative Classroom

For a collaborative learning environment to flourish and grow, Tinzmann (1990) suggested four general characteristics that must be present for this instructional model to succeed. Each is discussed below.

The first characteristic is that knowledge is shared among teachers and students. Teachers using the collaborative learning method still continue to provide knowledge and information to the students. However, the students themselves also bring their own knowledge and information, which is based on their own personal experiences, languages, and cultures. In the collaborative model, the student's knowledge and experiences are perceived to have merit, thereby assisting the student in connecting what they are learning in school with the everyday world around them.

Vygotsky's research also suggests that formal education and knowledge gained from the community are both fundamentally important to a student's development. Collaborative learning is a way for students to bridge the gap that exists between life experience and the more traditional formal education. In a collaborative learning classroom, students will be able to make the connection between formal education and knowledge that students gain from their everyday lives.

Secondly, authority is shared between the teacher and students. The group assumes some of the previous authority of the teacher by setting their own specific goals, making decisions on how the group is to proceed, analyzing what they have learned, and assessing the outcome to determine if they met their goal. For the group to be successful, each member must fulfill his role or obligation. This group situation is sometimes referred to as the "sink or swim" approach. Without everyone working together toward their common goal, the group will not be able to reach their desired outcome for the project.

The third characteristic of a collaborative learning classroom is that the teacher takes on the role of mediator. The teacher's role during group discussion is:

(1) to help students and the group proceed when the process stalls;

(2) to assist the students in making connections between the new information presented and previous learning in other areas;

(3) to encourage students to use their own knowledge and skills to help fellow students;

(4) to encourage students to listen and treat others with respect; and

(5) to help the students use their critical thinking skills to think through activities.

The teacher is there to provide assistance to the group as needed without taking away from the learning and inter-dynamics of the group.

Finally, groups that are heterogeneous in nature seem to be the most effective. Groups in a collaborative learning classroom may be comprised of individuals who may be from a different race, religion, culture, and proficiency level. Every student's experiences, perspectives and backgrounds are seen to have value within the classroom learning environment and students are given the opportunity to learn from other students, and no one is deprived of contributing to the group.

Goals of Teachers and Students in a Collaborative Classroom

In a collaborative learning classroom, the objectives of the teacher and students are vastly different than in more traditional classrooms. The teacher's goal is to assist the students to connect new information with their prior knowledge. The teacher must be able to create learning tasks and activities that allow students to make overall connections with the new information and with the student's prior knowledge. Also, a teacher must effectively demonstrate what he or she expects from the activity. Students must know how and what is expected of them, so that they can meet the teacher's desired goal or outcome for the project.

The students' overall objectives are different within a collaborative learning classroom than in a traditional classroom. First, students are active participants throughout the entire learning process. The students begin by organizing and setting goals for their group. At this time, a general direction is chosen on how the group wishes to proceed. The next step, for the group, is to take on the majority of the

responsibility for their own learning activities. The students learn to take responsibility by monitoring, balancing and adjusting their progress, and questioning each other. Finally, each student must evaluate and assess their own learning. By examining their own success at learning the material, each student assesses if they learned what was intended for them to learn; determines how effective this method or strategy was to their overall goal; and whether their outcome represents their best work.

Benefits of Collaborative Learning

Proponents of collaborative learning suggest that interaction among group members assist students in building their self-esteem, their sense of belonging, and their leadership skills (see, for example, Bruffee 1983, 1984; Hill and Hill, 1990; and Whipple, 1987). This interaction provides students with the opportunity to discuss numerous approaches to problem solving, and to expound and defend their own ideas. As the interaction proceeds, each student must consistently assess and re-evaluate their ideas as well as those of the other students. This exchange provides students with the opportunity to learn from other students' experiences and knowledge.

In a collaborative learning model, students have the opportunity to participate within the group, thereby allowing each student to voice and elaborate on their own ideas. However, in the traditional classroom setting, this level of student participation is not always the case. Because traditional classrooms are routinely set up in rows, students who sit along the back and perimeter are generally far removed from interactions taking place near the front with the teacher. Whereas in a collaborative

learning classroom, the desk are already arranged into groups, thereby allowing for students to interact on a more personal level. Students who are intimidated by the traditional classroom seating arrangements may fill intimidated to voice their opinion within a large classroom. However, these same students may feel more comfortable talking and exchanging their ideas within a smaller group. This method of learning may encourage shy, withdrawn students to participate and become more interactive in class discussions (Narin 1995).

Since collaboration and discussion is key to the group's success, students spend a great deal of time interacting with their peers. This interaction allows students to meet and exchange ideas with classmates that they might not associate with in a traditional classroom setting. Collaborative learning gives students the opportunity to become more comfortable with their peers, and to perhaps develop new friendships. As the students interact and become part of the learning process, they begin to see that their ideas and opinions have value. This allows them to see that their ideas and opinions have value.

Disadvantages Associated with Collaborative Learning

Up to this point, this study has reviewed the theoretical under-pinning and the benefits of this instructional method. However, there are some difficulties and challenges that an educator faces in trying to implement collaborative learning. The collaborative learning model is difficult to implement and, at times, requires time consuming preparation. Educators wishing to use this methodology need to familiarize themselves with the positive and negative aspects of this learning style.

Tinzmann's (1990) article list five challenges and conflicts that may be associated with collaborative learning:

1. **Classroom control** --- classes using collaborative learning techniques tend to be noisier due to the discussion taking place within the group. It is essential for teachers to provide students with a clear objective for what they expect on the part of the students. Students must know what their parameters are so the group may interact more effectively.

2. **Preparation time for collaboration** --- the teacher's planning time will increase since teachers must modify and adjust their current lesson plans to incorporate collaborative learning techniques.

3. **Individual differences among students** --- in the beginning, students may need assistance in learning how to negotiate the individual differences among group members.

4. **Individual responsibility for learning** --- some students may feel insecure in classrooms where the teacher turns over some of the responsibility for learning to the students.

5. **Conflict of values** --- finally, some teachers may be insecure in allowing the group to take on some of the roles previously held by the teacher. Many educators believe it is their job to teach or convey the knowledge to the students, and they feel uncomfortable turning over this responsibility to a group activity.

Other complaints and concerns regarding collaborative learning focus on the methods by which students work in groups. Bruffee (1995) states that students do not know inherently how to work together in groups. Therefore, they must learn the

skills that are needed to make group learning effective. He argues that, for each group to be successful and reach a joint conclusion, the group itself must agree upon the direction that they wish to go. However, consensus by all group members is rare. Therefore, Bruffee states that the group must come to some type of understanding or undergo some type of change if they wish to reach some type of consensus. The success of each individual group rests on the group's ability to reach an overall consensus.

Trimbur (1989), however, views the idea of consensus as detrimental to collaborative learning. Trimbur believes "that the use of consensus in collaborative learning is inherently dangerous and a potentially totalitarian practice that stifles individual voice and creativity, suppresses differences, and enforces conformity" (Trimbur 1989, 602). His argument is based on the premise that if students must come to a consensus of opinion, then consensus will no longer represent the group as a whole. He fears that the consensus may only reflect the opinions of a select few, thereby stifling the other students' opinions and forcing them to adhere to an imposed line of thought or reasoning. He also states that "collaborative learning denies differences and threatens individuality" (Trimbur 1989, 603). This argument is interesting in that proponents of collaborative leaning suggest that the instructional method actually encourage individuality. Trimbur believes it is unrealistic to expect collaborative learning to magically transcend the problems associated with a more traditional classroom learning style. He feels collaborative learning does not take into account other extenuating factors of American culture; for example, America's

ethnocentric attitude with respect to other cultures and beliefs, the tendency to blame the victim, and the prejudices and misconceptions of each individual.

Wiener (1986) examines another potential problem associated with collaborative learning. He claims that it is unrealistic to believe that collaborative learning can function as well in the classroom as the theory suggests. The collaborative learning model is based upon the concept of unstructured learning. This could be very difficult to implement in a classroom environment. Educators are mistaken, according to Wiener, if they believe that simply putting chairs into groups and giving students some problems to solve will transform students into a successful collaborative learning experience-. He argues that for successful implementation of collaborative learning, the key to success hinges on the quality of the assigned task.

Cooperative Learning

According to materials presented at The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga Instructional Excellence Retreat in May 1996, the following information was presented on the characteristics of cooperative learning and how this instructional method enhances student learning. Cooperative leaning is a generic term for various small groups, and diverse interactive instructional procedures. In a cooperative learning classroom, students work together on academic tasks in small groups to help themselves and their teammates learn together. According to the material presented at the conference, the following are factors that have been found to lead to effective cooperative learning.

Attention must be paid to the group size and composition. It has been suggested that the most effective group size is between four to eight individuals. Groups smaller than four generally do not allow for enough dialogue or exchange of ideas to make group learning effective. Groups of more than eight become too large to manage, and student involvement begins to wane.

Teachers must have a clear understanding on how they wish to proceed and students must be able to use cooperative tactics to accomplish their required task of goal. For instance, teachers must plan in advance, how they wish to address the problems of group grades. Most students, teachers, and parents are uncomfortable with the idea of group grades. Therefore, this issue needs to be resolved before proceeding with a cooperative learning strategy. Additional issues that must be addressed in advance is the level of noise in the classroom, arguments and disagreements between group members, building trust among students in the group, and helping each student participate fully. Tasks or projects must be structured so that students in their groups must cooperate with one another to accomplish their goals or the required task.

Teachers must implement the changes associated with cooperative learning slowly. Students will need time to adjust to the new expectations required by this learning method. Time must also be set aside for introducing cooperative learning techniques and strategies within the classroom. Students must be taught the necessary skills and procedures needed to implement cooperative leaning techniques. A range of skills are needed such as finding ways to give positive feedback, support and accept other ideas and opinions, reach a consensus, and negotiate difficulties

within the group. Students require regular practice in the development of these techniques. In this type of learning environment, each individual student needs to be held accountable for his or her own work progress or learning.

Before beginning an activity in cooperative learning, teachers must be very clear about their goals and time lines. In addition, teachers must clearly state what function or role each member must play within the group --- monitor, observer, facilitator, reporter, and recorder and rotate each individual's role in the group so that each student is able to participate in various tasks.

The Similarities and Differences between Collaborative and Cooperative Learning

Within the literature on collaborative and cooperative learning, there is some confusion as to what is collaborative learning and what is cooperative learning. Because of its close association with cooperative learning, throughout some of the literature these concepts are used interchangeably. Based on the literature review, for this thesis, collaborative learning is based more on the theoretical aspects of a learning model while cooperative learning is more of a methodology.

Collaborative learning and cooperative learning share many commonalties including:

➤ The teacher relinquishes some of the authority for learning to the students; the students must accept some responsibility for their own learning.

➤ The teacher offers help and assistance and is more of a coach or facilitator.

➤ Learning and teaching is shared among the students and the teachers.

➤ Students are actively learning in a small group rather than passively receiving the information from the teacher.

➤ By participating in groups, the students develop higher-order thinking skills, use their problem-solving ability, and formulate ideas based on their own knowledge.

➤ The teacher must structure activities that allow students to make the connections between formal education and everyday knowledge.

➤ The group of students must meet some type of goal at the end of each project or activity.

> Developing leadership skills, building self-esteem, and promoting care and respect for other ideas and beliefs are benefits of both instructional methods.

> The students work through their own thought processes and assumptions because they articulate their own ideas within the group.

> Group participation is used to help develop the students' social and team building skills that are beneficial throughout the students' life.

> There is heterogeneity within the groups; each group contains students from different races, cultures, beliefs, and achievement levels.

> Groups generally range in size from four to eight members.

> Students and teachers evaluate and assess the experience to determine how well it succeeded.

Although collaborative and cooperative learning share many general characteristics, there are also significant differences that exist between them. One of the first and most noticeable differences is in the teacher's involvement or responsibilities within the classroom. Another difference that distinguishes the two learning methods is the amount of autonomy of the individual groups. The group's obligations and responsibilities vary greatly between the two methods.

Bruffee states that one of the most distinguishing differences between the two methods is that "teachers tend to make different assumptions about the nature of authority of knowledge" (Bruffee 1995, 12). In a cooperative learning classroom, the teacher's role is to move around the room, from group to group monitoring the group's progression, answering questions, and assisting the students when it is needed. In a collaborative classroom, the teacher does not monitor the group or move

about the room during group discussion time. Each group is free to govern themselves and to proceed on their assignment as the group determines. The teacher generally directs any questions or concerns, on the part of the group, back to the group. By directing questions back to the group, the group becomes responsible for solving their own problems. The teacher's participation during group time is minimal, and teachers are encouraged not to intervene in group discussion except under certain well-defined conditions.

In a cooperative learning classroom, at the end of each class or discussion, the group generally presents some type of written or oral presentation. Some teachers have used cooperative learning techniques to prepare students for exams; at the end of group-time the students are given a written or oral exam. However, in a collaborative learning classroom, the group does not generally produce a product at the end of each class period.

Another difference between the two instructional methods is that, early in a cooperative learning classroom, the students are given instructions on how to develop certain group skills that they will need in order to make the cooperative learning groups function more efficiently. Students are taught skills such as --- constructive feedback, active listening, and what the responsibilities are for certain roles within the group. However, the collaborative learning method does not set aside time to instruct the students on small-group skills. Collaborative learning adherents believe that the students themselves already possess the skills that are necessary to make group learning successful.

Bruffee (1995) believes that competition within the classroom may have a negative effect on the student's incentive to learn. The objective behind the student's role assignment is that it allows students to participate on a more even playing field. Each student is equal in their role and responsibility to the group, thereby lowering competition among the students. However, in a collaborative learning environment, the element of competition is not removed from the group. Bruffee (1995) acknowledges that within a collaborative learning environment competition still exists, especially between groups rather than among the individuals of the group. According to this educational theorist, "collaborative learning also recognizes that there will be some dissent or different views within the group. This is assumed to be a necessary aspect of learning" (Bruffee 1995, 17).

Another difference is the overall framework within which each methodology operates. The collaborative learning model functions on a more theoretical level; whereas, the cooperative model functions more as a method. In a cooperative learning scenario, students are given instructions on how to proceed, roles to play, guidance along the way, and outcomes or projects to reflect their endeavors. However, in the collaborative learning model, the same is not true. Students are not given the guidance or instructions that the cooperative learning students receive. At times there may not be an expected project or outcome at the completion of the assignment. In the collaborative learning model, the students become more responsible for their own learning and benefit from the exchange of ideas with their fellow students. The students learn to interact, negotiate, and think for themselves, with less participation or guidance from the teacher. The collaborative learning

model suggests that the students already posses the necessary problem-solving skills that are needed to carry out this type of learning. They simply need the opportunity to practice these skills.

Finally, the last challenge associated with collaborative learning is whether the effectiveness of the method corresponds with the age or developmental level of the group. This method has been used for groups ranging from pre-school to business employees. Proponents of this learning style argue it can be used effectively at any age group or developmental level. However, Bruffee (1995) argues that this might not be true. Bruffee believes that primary school children would function better in a cooperative learning environment as opposed to a collaborative learning environment. Since the cooperative learning environment is more structured, it is better suited for primary school-aged children. However, he argues that adolescents and adults may become frustrated at the constraints and limitations of cooperative learning and function better in a collaborative learning environment. He states that adolescents and adults need less supervision and are better able to critically engage in the task that are required in a collaborative learning environment. Bruffee's argument seems to be saying that collaborative learning may be more effective in teaching high school and college-level courses, and cooperative learning may be more effective in primary school.

Chapter III

Survey and Methods

Using this solid theoretical foundation from the published literature, this thesis now turns its attention to an analysis of the attitudes of K-12 teachers on the value of collaborative learning. This study analyzes the view of educators on how they perceive collaborative learning techniques in their classrooms. A survey was conducted in an attempt to examine whether the teachers' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages associated with collaborative learning agree with the views found in the literature. This study surveyed teachers in the Houston urban area and the much more rural Rio Grande Valley to determine their thoughts and feelings on this alternative learning method. The two regions were then compared and contrasted to see if views on this learning method vary between the Houston area and the lower Rio Grande Valley.

METHODOLOGY

Teachers were surveyed to learn more about their attitudes and opinions regarding collaborative learning techniques and its usefulness in geography classrooms. Within the current published literature review, there are several key issues that are often discussed as disadvantages or challenges associated with this instructional model. This survey attempts to determine whether or not current Social Studies/Geography teachers perceive the same difficulties associated with this instructional method, as do proponents of collaborative learning.

In an attempt to assess teachers' perceptions and feelings about the collaborative learning instructional model, a survey was conducted to examine how teachers felt about collaborative learning in their classroom. The main question guiding this phase of the study was: do teachers in grades K-12 perceive that the collaborative learning instructional model is or can be difficult to implement within their classroom? The following questions were posed in this analysis.

- Do you believe that collaborative learning is more or less beneficial for students to learn an assignment?

- Do you believe students need constant supervision while participating in collaborative learning groups?

- Do you feel groups' function better when teachers or students select the group?

- Do you feel that class is more difficult to control during group time?

- Do you feel that more teacher planning time is required in planning for group learning activities than the more traditional lecture method?

- Do you feel that by turning over some of the learning to groups that some students may be insecure and not learn as well as others?

- Do you believe that group learning allows students to become more individualized thinkers and problem-solvers?

The above-mentioned questions were selected to reflect the challenges and conflicts associated with collaborative learning based on the work of Tinzmann (1990).

- Do you feel that class is more difficult to control during group time? (Classroom control)

- Do you feel that more teacher planning time is required in planning for group

  learning activities than the more traditional lecture method? (preparation time for

  collaboration)

- Do you feel that by turning over some of the learning to groups that some students

  may be insecure and not learn as well as others? (individual responsibility for

  learning)

The next question reflects concerns expressed by Tinzmann (1990) and Bruffee

(1995) regarding the disadvantages of collaborative learning:

- Do you believe students need constant supervision while participating in

  collaborative learning groups? (Individual differences among students)

Tinzmann (1990) and Bruffee (1995) were both concerned that students need

assistance in learning how to function in groups because students do not know

inherently how to do so.

　　　The next questions were chosen to determine how teachers perceive the

collaborative learning instructional model as a whole, and whether or not they

thought this instructional model was more or less beneficial to the overall learning of

the students.

- Do you believe that collaborative learning is more or less beneficial for students

  to learn an assignment?

- Do you believe that collaborative/group learning allows students to become more

  individualized thinkers and problem-solvers?

The dependent variable in this study was the teachers' attitudes about collaborative learning. The independent variables of the study were as follows:

- The grade-level that the teachers taught;

- The type of district the students were from;

- The exemplary status of their school.

These independent variables were correlated with the teachers' perception of the collaborative learning instructional model.

The complete survey is shown in Appendix A.

After selecting questions to reflect teachers' perceptions of collaborative learning, data was complied by asking two different groups of teachers to fill out the survey and assess their perceptions of the collaborative learning model and its techniques. A group of thirty-four teachers, located in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, were chosen because of their current participation in a distance learning project taking place at Southwest Texas State University. The survey was mailed out to the 34 high school teachers and they were asked to evaluate and assess their use of collaborative learning techniques within their classroom. Out of the thirty-four surveys mailed to the teachers in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, 20 surveys were returned for analysis. This same survey was also given to Social Studies/Geography teachers at a FOG (Friends of Geography) Conference held on February 20, 1999. The teachers in the Houston area also taught Social Studies and/or Geography at various grade levels and from different disciplines within their districts. These teachers were handed the survey during the conference and asked to fill it out during the day. At the end of the

conference, 64 surveys had been returned. The teachers at this conference came from

various districts within the Houston area.

Chapter IV

Results and Implications

The data were complied and the information was entered into a SPSS – PC statistical package for further analysis. Because the survey reflected nominal data, descriptive statistics were chosen as a method for analyzing the data. This method was chosen because of its ability to explain the relationship between two or more variables. Also, because the data collected were nominal in origin, a chi-square analysis was chosen to assess whether or not there is any significance between the variables in the survey. The chi-square method was chosen for its ability to evaluate whether the observed frequencies differ significantly from an even distribution and present them in a cross-tabulation or contingency table. The larger the observed frequency is, the more likely the difference results are statistically significant.

After running the chi-square analysis on the survey variables used in this study, it was determined that there was no statistical significance between any of the variables in this study. The highest significance was noted on the question of exemplary school status and collaborative learning may make students more insecure. However, the results of this analysis most likely reflects the small numbers associated with those schools listed as exemplary (yes – 23.8%, no – 76.2%), rather than that the findings were overall significant in nature.

The most interesting findings of this survey, however, were reflected in the frequency analysis of the entire data. Below is the overall frequency analysis of the data.

What grade level do you teach?   Bar Chart

K-4   **(17.9%)**
5-8   **(34.5%)**
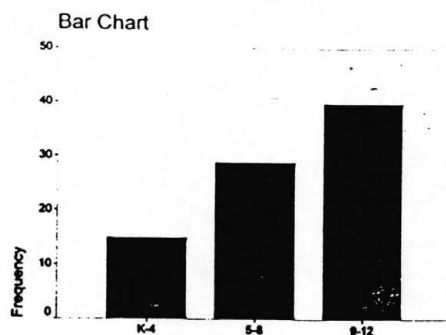9-12   **(47.6%)**

Figure 1

How long have you been teaching within your district?

0 – 5 years   **(47.0%)**
5-10 years   **(21.7%)**
10-15 years   **(7.2%)**
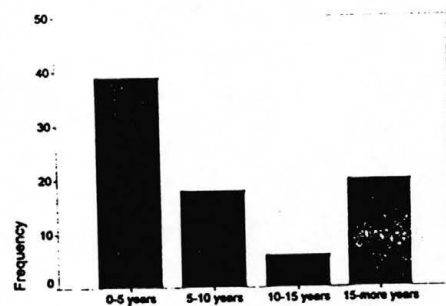15-more years   **(24.1%)**

Figure 2

Describe what type of district that you are from?

Low income   **(36.6%)**
Middle Income   **(51.2%)**
High Income   **(12.2%)**
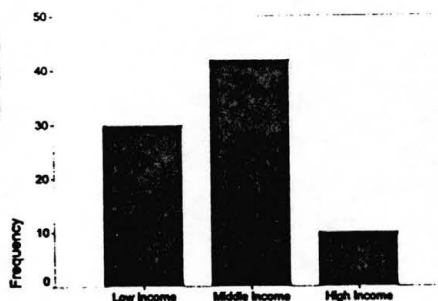
Figure 3

Is your school considered an exemplary school?
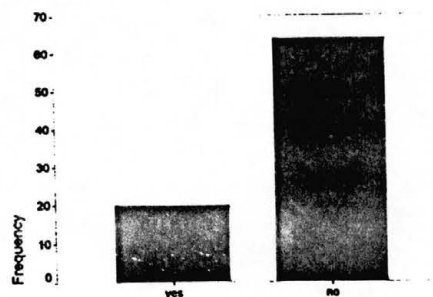
Yes   **(23.8%)**
No   **(76.2%)**

Figure 4

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In your classroom --- do you encourage students to work together in groups or individually when trying to solve problems or assignments?

In Groups   (53.6%)
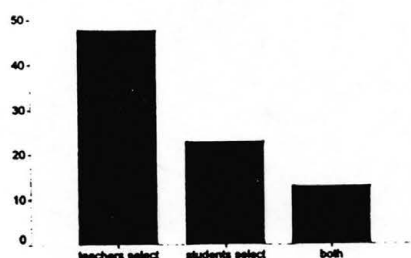Individually   (17.9%)
Both   (28.6%)

Figure 5

Do you incorporate group learning activities within your lesson plans ---

Frequently   (53.6%)
Sometimes   (32.1%)
Occasionally   (14.3%)
Never   (0.0%)
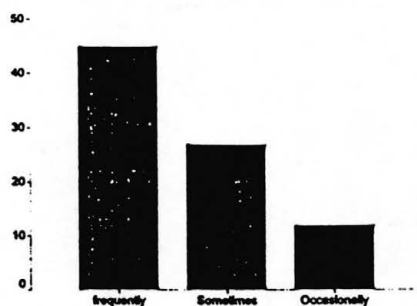
Figure 6

In designing group learning activities --- do you incorporate cooperative/collaborative learning techniques?

Frequently   (41.7%)
Sometimes   (38.1%)
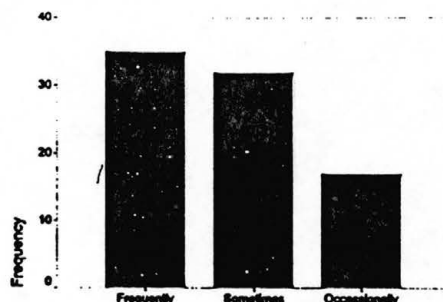Occasionally   (20.2%)
Never   (0.0%)

Figure 7

Do you believe that cooperative/collaborative learning is more beneficial or less beneficial for students to learn an assignment?

More Beneficial (81.0%)
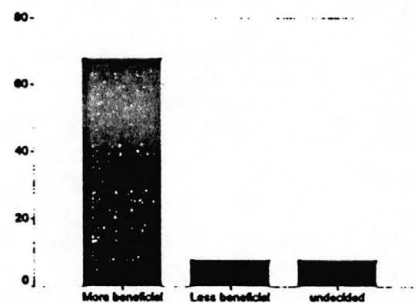Less Beneficial (9.5%)
Undecided   (9.5%)

Figure 8

31

Do you believe that students (while participating in groups) need constant supervision by the instructor?

Frequently   (39.3%)
Sometimes   (42.9%)
Occasionally   (17.9%)
Never   (0.0%)
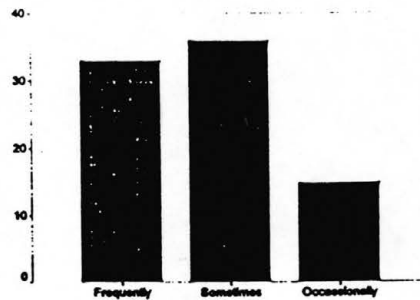
Figure 9

When creating groups for an assignment --- do you find that groups function better when the teacher select the members of the group or when the students themselves choose their own groups ----

Teacher selects group members   (57.1%)
Students select group members   (27.4%)
Both   (15.5%)

Figure 10

Do you feel that the class is more difficult to control during group time?

Yes   (31.0%)
No   (56.0%)
Unsure   (13.1%)

Figure 11

Do you feel that more time is required in planning for group learning activities than the more traditional lecture methods?

More time is required   (76.2%)
Less time required   (13.1%)
Unsure   (10.7%)
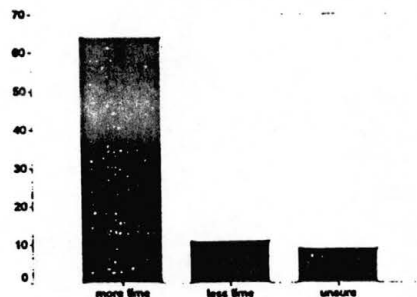
Figure 12

Do you feel that by turning over some of the learning to groups that some students may be insecure and not learn as well as others?

Yes   (42.9%)
No   (44.0%)
Unsure   (13.1%)
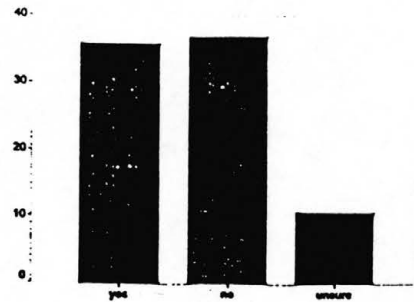
Figure 13

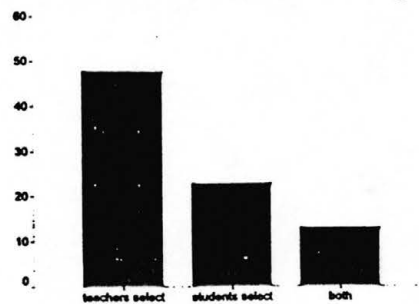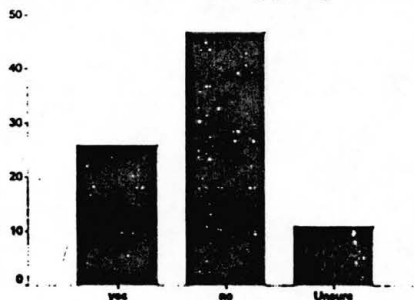Do you believe that group learning allows students to become more individualized thinkers and problem-solvers?

Yes   (67.9%)
No   (10.7%)
Unsure   (21.4%)
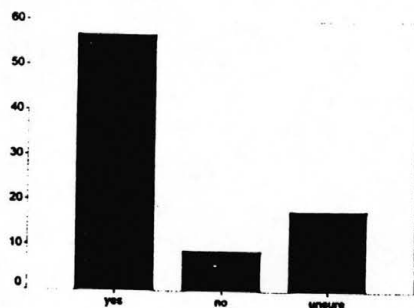
Figure 14

In an overall assessment of the frequency distributions, several key factors emerged. First, the majority of the teachers polled in this survey were teaching at the high school level or in grades 9th through 12th (Fig. 1). Also, the majority of the teachers had only been teaching between 0-5 years (Fig 2). These two questions were significant in that collaborative learning techniques become more easily implemented as students mature and become older. Therefore, teachers in high school are more likely to use this method rather than teachers teaching at the lower grade levels. This survey was conducted with the majority of the teachers teaching at the high school level; therefore, the survey seems to be an adequate representation of Social Studies/Geography teachers' opinions about this instructional method. Also, the fact that most of the teachers had only been teaching between 0-5 years 46.4%, is relevant

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to this study in that through teacher training and classes, these teachers may have

been exposed to this instructional method through their educational classes.

Therefore, these teachers may have some background knowledge about this type of

learning style, where older teachers may not have been exposed to this more recent

instructional method.

In reviewing the type of districts and the exemplary status of the schools, it

appears from this survey that the majority of the teachers polled considered

themselves from middle income districts 51.2% and that only 23.8% considered their

schools to be exemplary in status (Fig 3, 4). Therefore, most of the teachers polled

came from either low or middle income districts with only 12.2% coming from high

income districts. This is interesting to the overall findings because the opinions of

this survey may more likely reflect the opinions of teachers across the state, since

most school districts across the state are either low or middle income districts.

In the teachers who were surveyed, a total of 53.6 % stated that they

encourage their students to work in groups (Fig. 5). Also, 41.7 % of the teachers

surveyed frequently incorporate collaborative learning activities within their lesson

plans (Fig. 7). This is significant in that it appears that within a majority of the Social

Studies and Geography classrooms, teachers are using group learning activities more

than the more traditional lecturing method.

In surveying teachers about whether or not collaborative learning techniques

were more or less beneficial, 81.0 % stated that they found collaborative learning

more beneficial for students to learn an assignment. This finding supports

proponents' view of collaborative learning as an effective model for students to learn

within the classroom. Therefore, it may be suggested that this type of learning method is becoming more utilized in the classroom, and that the more traditional method of teaching is making way for this new instructional teaching technique.

In assessing whether the disadvantages associated with this type of learning style coincide with the literature review, several key components emerged. First, 42.9 % of the teachers feel that students participating in collaborative learning groups need some supervision while participating in group activities (Fig. 9). The findings on this question also reflects Tinzmann (1990) and Bruffee (1995) opinions that students in the classroom need assistance in learning how to function in groups and students must be taught the necessary skills for the groups to effectively carry out the assigned task.

Another finding that coincides with the disadvantages or challenges of collaborative learning is that 57.1 % feel that groups function better when teachers select the group as opposed to when students select the group (Fig. 10). One of the disadvantages of collaborative learning, as stated by Bruffee (1995), is that the developmental level of the students involved is very important to the overall effectiveness of collaborative learning. The data collected on this survey seems to reflect this opinion in that teachers feel that collaborative learning is more effective when they chose the members of the group. This concept goes against one of the fundamental principles of the collaborative learning theory in that students should work through the whole process independently rather than helped along by a teacher or instructor.

The findings of this survey also seem to reflect that some of the concerns expressed about collaborative learning may actually be true. For example, 76.2 % of

the teachers surveyed agreed that collaborative learning requires more preparation time that the more traditional lecture method.

Another finding is that teachers were almost equally split on the question about whether or not Tinzmann's (1990) suggestion that collaborative learning may make some students insecure (Fig. 13). Results from this survey suggested that 42.9 % of the teachers felt that collaborative learning may make some students feel more secure, whereas, an almost equal 44.0 % felt that collaborative learning does not make some students feel more insecure. It is difficult to determine from this question whether or not this result is an advantage or disadvantage proponent of collaborative learning.

However, the results from this study indicate that overall teachers do not view group time as more difficult to control as the literature suggests. Furthermore, other results from this survey indicated that the suggested disadvantages of collaborative learning where teachers feel that group time more difficult to control? Tinzmann's (1990) stated that one of the disadvantages of collaborative learning is that many individuals find that group time makes the class more difficult to control. However, the findings of this survey suggest that this opinion may not be accurate in all classrooms. In this study, 56.0 % of the teachers surveyed stated that they did not find group time more difficult to control (Fig. 11).

Finally, 67.9 % of all the teachers surveyed did seem to agree with the proponents of collaborative learning that this type of instructional method helps students become more individualized thinkers (Fig. 14). This finding does seem to

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support the proponents' view that this type of learning method helps students become better at problem solving.

CHAPTER V

Application of the Research Findings to the Geography Education Curriculum: A Collaborative Learning Curriculum Unit

During the review of literature on collaborative learning, it became evident that this educational model has been used very little in curriculum development in geography education. Geography education has, in recent years, moved to the forefront as a core subject due to its incorporation into the Goals 2000: Educate America Act. A great deal of emphasis has been focused on determining what is essential for geography students to know.

In 1994, the *Geography for Life: National Geography Standards* were created as a way for students to meet the demands of our more global, inter-connected world. The National Geography Standards suggests the guidelines for what every American student should learn at different grade-levels. However, after the creation of the standards only minor attention has been paid to developing curriculum for use within the classroom. The standards do not specify overall instructional methods that may assist educators and teachers in implementing the standards within their geography curriculum.

The incorporation of the collaborative learning instructional method in conjunction with the current National Geography Standards would assist geography education by extending innovative strategies into geography curriculum development.

The collaborative learning techniques and instructional methods could be used to assist students in their quest to know and understand the world around them by encouraging students to be independent thinkers, developing their leadership skills, and helping students to apply their knowledge and interpret the world around them.

This study applies the collaborative learning technique to a High School World Geography curriculum unit. The unit contains a two week geography learning activity that integrates the collaborative learning instructional model. The contents of this unit focus on the current conditions taking place in today's Russia Federation. This unit reflects the current economic, political, and environmental difficulties that Russians currently face in their ever changing world.

This curriculum unit was designed for teachers who wish to incorporate collaborative learning techniques into their classrooms through the Five Fundamental Themes or the eighteen National Geography Standards.

RUSSIA --- THE EVOLVING COUNTRY
Create A Power of Place Video Lesson

A Curriculum Unit on Russia

Regional Geography: Russia
Grade Level: High School

DESCRIPTION OF LESSON

This lesson is intended to give students an opportunity to explore Russia using collaborative learning techniques. Through group work, students will decide upon a region, research the topic, analyze the data, and present the information. Upon completion of the assignment, students will have utilized their higher-level thinking skills (critical thinking) and organized their thoughts and ideas into a presentation and a press release.

GRADE LEVEL

High School (9-12 Grade)

PURPOSE

This lesson is intended to increase the student's geographic proficiency in applying the five skills of geography (asking, acquiring, organizing, analyzing, and answering geographic questions) to a geographic region in Russia. At the completion of the lesson, students will have incorporated the six essential elements, taken from the *National Geography Standards – Standards for Life,* within their presentation and press release.

The Six Essential Elements
1. The World in Spatial Terms
2. Places and Regions
3. Physical Systems
4. Human Systems
5. Environment and Society
6. The Uses of Geography

At the completion of this lesson, students should have a better understanding of the complex physical, cultural and economical conditions that exist within the Russian realm.

FUNDAMENTAL THEMES

Each of the five themes of geography, taken from the *Guidelines for Geographic Education,* will also be incorporated within each of the student's presentation.

- ➤ **Location** – position on the Earth's surface
- ➤ **Place** – physical and human characteristics
- ➤ **Regions** – how they form and change
- ➤ **Movement** – humans interacting on the Earth
- ➤ **Human-Environmental Relations** – relationship between humans and the environment

CONNECTION TO NATIONAL GEOGRAPHY STANDARDS

Standard 1: The World in Spatial Terms –
How to use maps and other geographic representations to acquire, process, and report information from a spatial perspective

Standard 3: The World in Spatial Terms –
How to analyze the spatial organization of people, places, and environments on the Earth's surface

Standard 4: Places and Regions –
The physical and human characteristics of place

Standard 8: Physical Systems –
The characteristics and spatial distribution of ecosystems on Earth's surface

Standard 10: Human Systems –
The characteristics, distribution, and complexity of Earth's cultural mosaics (cultural impact)

Standard 11: Human Systems –
The patterns and networks of economic interdependence on Earth's surface

Standard 14: Environment and Society –
How human actions modify the physical environment

Standard 15: Environment and Society –
How physical systems affect the human system

Standard 18: The Uses of Geography –
How to apply geography to interpret the present and plan for the future

CLASSROOM TIME:

This unit will usually require two weeks of classroom time - if the teacher tapes the student presentations. If the students are not filmed, the learning activity can be completed in 1 ½ weeks. This assessment is based upon 50-minute classes.

MATERIALS NEEDED

Teacher materials for presentation
1. Enough copies of the group project packet so that each student may have one
2. A map divided up into five geographic regions
3. Enough copies of the divided map for every student in your class
4. Transparency of **Things to Remember**
5. Transparencies on the Kola Peninsula Information
6. Transparencies on how the project will be graded
7. Transparencies with maps of Russia
8. Video Camera --- if possible
9. Tripod --- if possible
10. TV with VCR --- for viewing presentations
11. Two certificates or awards to present to the best video production --- and any other type award the teacher feels is most appropriate

Student materials for presentation
1. A group project packet –
2. Atlases – including Goodes World Atlas or other reliable atlas
3. Library Books
4. Encyclopedias
5. Internet access
6. Textbook
7. Map divided up into five geographic regions
8. Any equipment necessary for their presentation (computer, overhead, etc.)

OBJECTIVES

Upon completing this unit, students will be able to:
1. Use geographic inquiry skills to research the issues pertaining to their region and examine related information
2. Acquire, organize, analyze, and present geographical information
3. Make predictions based on the gathered information

In this project, students are asked to create their own *Power of Place* video on a particular region in the Russian Federation. Each group must focus their presentation around some type of **relevant issue** pertaining to their region. Each group will give an oral presentation and turn in a press release. Each member of the group will assess the performance of other members of their group. The teacher also will evaluate the overall presentation or performance. The total score for this project is 100 points.

PROCEDURES:

Create a Power of Place Video

DIRECTION:
Each group will be asked to put together a presentation similar to the *Power of Place* video. Students will be divided into groups for the purpose of examining a specific region within Russia. Each group is required to focus on some specific issue within their assigned area. Each presentation should contain information about the physical, cultural, and economic features. Presentations may actually be videotaped (create a real video) or students may present a mock production.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT:
➢ Two-week long lesson on Russia
➢ The teacher will divide a Russian map into five sections or regions
➢ Students are asked to work together in five different groups (not a mandatory number)
➢ Each group is to choose a leader, reporter, and any other position the group feels that they need
➢ Each group is to focus on one region of Russia
➢ Each student is given a group project packet
➢ Students must conduct research on their region
➢ Each group must decide on an issue or problem to base their research around
➢ Students are to present their research in the form of a skit or presentation
➢ The skit or presentation is to be acted out or performed as if they are creating a video on this region --- the video is to model the "Power of Place" video that the students will watch in class
➢ Ideas and Suggestions:
  ▪ An individual or reporter may pretend to interview a family within the region
  ▪ A reporter may do a story on the region
  ▪ They could present the information in the format of a newscast
  ▪ Special documentary on some topic in the region
  ▪ A regular newscast in their region – news, weather, sports, cultural events, etc.

- ➤ **OPTIONAL**: the teacher may choose to videotape the students presentations or the students may videotape themselves in advance and show the video during their presentation time. If the teacher does not have access to video camera --- the students could just put on a mock video presentation for the class.
- ➤ **Requirements of each presentation**
  - ◆ Each presentation must have some type of map that reflects their issue
  - ◆ Information on the physical and cultural aspects of the region
    - ❑ Climate and topography
    - ❑ Ethnic groups
    - ❑ Predominant languages of the region
    - ❑ Predominant religions of the region
    - ❑ Economic factors – primary, secondary, tertiary
    - ❑ Environmental conditions
    - ❑ Brief historical facts (if relevant)
    - ❑ Current events about the region (if relevant)
  - ◆ Each group must turn is a press release before putting on their presentation
- ➤ **What each presentation must contain**
  - ❑ Each presentation must contain a map that reflects their issue or focus of their presentation
  - ❑ Each group must have some type of visual aide – Power Point presentation, posters, mobile, storyboard, posters, posters with maps attached, etc.
  - ❑ Some type of table, chart or graph of your region
  - ❑ Predictions about this regions future
- ➤ The predictions about the future section --- is to model H. J. de Blij's synopsis at the end of each tape or unit. This is to be the final wrap-up of the presentation --- for someone to summarize the region and make predictions.
- ➤ **Before beginning this unit** --- briefly brainstorm with your class on the questions: **What are some words or images you think of when you hear the word "Russia"?**
- ➤ Next the students watch Unit 7 and Unit 8 --- "Power of Place" videos about Russia
- ➤ Students are then briefed on the objectives, expectations and requirements of the project
- ➤ While the students are in-groups, the teacher is to move about the room assisting if necessary. However, questions about the project should be directed back to the group to solve if at all possible.
- ➤ Before each group presents, have them turn in a Press Release with the Scorecard attached to the front.
- ➤ The Press Release must contain:
  - ▪ information about their regions
  - ▪ their scripts
  - ▪ a copy of their map or maps
  - ▪ a copy of their charts, tables or grafts
  - ▪ their bibliography
  - ▪ and any other information they used to compile their presentation

- ➤ During the presentations --- students are given a tally sheet to rank each group's performance
- ➤ Presentations are limited to 20 minutes
- ➤ At the end of the presentations --- the teacher tallies up the rankings and finds which two groups scored the highest
- ➤ The top two presentations will receive an award on the last day of the unit
- ➤ **First Place**: Wins an Emmy Award
- ➤ **Second Place**: Wins a Katy Award
- ➤ The teacher may make up a certificate and/or choose an award that they feel is appropriate for this lesson
- ➤ **At the end of the unit** – the teacher will have the students write a one page response to the question – **How has your perception changed about Russia?**
- ➤ The teacher will then lead a **Class Discussion** about what the students have learned from the lesson
- ➤ The teacher may use this last write up as a gauge on how much the students actually got out of the project
- ➤ The final day or 1 ½ days should be set aside to view the video presentations taped by the teacher or students

Information before starting the group projects:
(a) Divide the Russian map into (5) different regions – located in the teacher's handouts
Note that five (5) is not a mandatory number --- it is possible to have as many regions or groups as you would like
(b) Suggestions for dividing the map ---
- • Have one region with St Petersburg in it
- • One region around Moscow
- • One region along the Caucasus Mountains
- • One region around Lake Baikal
- • One region along the Far East region
- • Divide Autonomous regions into five separate categories
- • Be careful however --- some regions may have very little information on them
(c) Make copies for students in the class
(d) Three Russian maps --- on transparencies are enclosed.
   (1) General, colored map of Russia --- transparency used for brain-storming session
   (2) Autonomous regions --- may be used to assist teachers in dividing regions or discussing regions
   (3) A map with outlines of autonomous regions but towns and regions not labeled – this map may be used to divide up the five geographic regions
(e) A transparency of the Scorecard, Group Evaluation form, Group Evaluation form, and Tally Sheet – to assist in explaining the grading of this project are enclosed
(f) Allow approximately 3 ½ class periods for group research – this is based on a two week-long lesson

(g) Allow approximately 2 ½ class periods for presentation – this is based on a two week-long lesson

DAY 1:

1. Briefly (the first 10-15 minutes of class) have a brainstorming session on ---- **What do you know about Russia?**
2. You may use the colored map of Russia as an overhead to write down what the students know about Russia. (Located in transparencies section).
3. Give a brief overview of the assignment and explain how it pertains to the video
4. Show "The Power of Place" video (Unit 3) – 7: *Facing Ethnic and Environmental Diversity* (30 minutes).

DAY 2:

Prior to class --- decide who is going to choose the region (teacher or student). Have the map divided and copies made before class.

1. Show "The Power of Place" video (Unit 3) – 8: *Central and Remote Economic Development.* (30 minutes)
2. Break the classroom into five (5) groups
3. Each student in the group will be given a Group Project packet that includes:
   - Directions on how to begin
   - a overall map of Russia
   - list detailing what is expected in the group's presentation
   - examples of information from the Internet
   - example off grading forms and how the lesson will be graded
   - information on the Kola Peninsula --- to use as an example
   - information about the press release
4. Handout to each student a copy of the map divided into five region
5. Have students choose a region or assign regions to the group
6. State the objectives, requirements, and expectations for the project --- put up transparency entitled **Things to Remember**
7. Discuss grading for the project --- put up transparencies on grading.
8. Briefly have each student turn to the Kola Peninsula section of his or her packet.
9. Have students briefly scan the four articles on the region
   (1) Have the students brainstorm on ways to turn this region into a issue-based video

(2) Ideas and suggestions
- conflicting information about a region
- environmental hazards vs. tourism industry
- environmental pollution --- is it effecting the tourism areas

(3) Colored transparences on the Kola region are located in the teacher's section

DAY 3 --- Day 5

1. Have students continue to work in their groups and do research or their region.
2. During group time, the teacher is to move from group assisting if necessary. However, most questions should be directed back to the group to solve if at all possible.
3. **HOMEWORK: ON DAY 5 --- Tell the students that their group evaluation forms (which are located in their packets) need to be filled out and turned in on Monday.**

DAY 6 --- Day 7

1. Group presentations begin today
2. Before starting have students turn in their evaluation forms for the other members of their group.
3. Tell students to turn to their Tally Sheet in their Group packet
4. Briefly, review how each student is to vote on each group's performance --- (Rank each group according to the criteria --- on a scale of 1 to 5) transparencies located in transparencies section
5. Before each group begins their presentation, ask them to turn in their press release with a copy of the Scorecard attached to the front.
6. Each presentation should be limited to **20 minutes**
7. During group presentations --- the teacher is to use the Scorecard to grade the presentation performance of the assignment.
8. Briefly after each presentation allow a few minutes for students to fill in their tally sheet on the group's performance.
9. The teacher is to attach the group's evaluation forms to the group's report for later evaluation and grade assessment.

DAY 8:

1. Complete group presentations
2. Collect the Group Tally sheets from the class

3. After presentations are completed --- have students write a brief one-page essay answering the question --- **How has your perception of Russia changed throughout the week?**
4. Have a **class discussion** on how the students perceptions have changed

DAY 9:

> **Make sure the student's tally sheet is calculated and you know the first and second place winner - The first place winner (*The Emmy*), second place (*The Katy*)**

1. Announce the winner of *The Emmy* and *The Katy* award.
2. Present the awards --- this may be as elaborate as you wish
3. Begin watching the tape of their own performances

DAY 10:

1. Students will continue watching the tape of their performances

EVALUATION

In this lesson, students will be evaluated in several different ways.
1) The teacher may evaluate the success of this project by comparing and contrasting the student's knowledge prior to starting the lesson (brainstorming activity), and comparing this knowledge to the written essay produced at the end of the week. This comparison should assist teachers in determining the overall success of the project.
2) A rubric will be provided to assess the group's overall performance. The group's completed project will be assessed according to the following rubric:

SCORECARD

Use this as your cover sheet when your group turns in your assignment – your project is due 24 hours after your presentation.

	Possible	Your
Points	Points	

Research on the group's region (30 points)

	Possible	Your
❏ Climate	3	_____
❏ Predominant physical characteristics	3	_____
❏ Ethnic groups	3	_____
❏ Predominant language of the region	3	_____
❏ Predominant religion of the region	3	_____
❏ Economic factors – industry, farming, mining, etc.	3	_____
❏ Environmental conditions	3	_____
❏ Brief historical facts (if relevant)	3	_____
❏ Current events about the region (if relevant)	3	_____
❏ Other pertinent information	3	_____

Map (5 points)

	Possible	Your
❏ TOADLS (title, orientation, authors, date, legend scale)	3	_____
❏ Neatness	2	_____

Data Table (5 points)

	Possible	Your
❏ Table, chart or graph	5	_____

Visual Aids (15 points)

	Possible	Your
❏ Organized	5	_____
❏ Neat	5	_____
❏ Easy to read and understand	5	_____

Predictions about the future (15 points)

	Possible	Your
❏ Reasonable predictions about this region	15	_____

Bibliography (5 points)

	Possible	Your
❏ Newspaper and/or magazine sources	3	_____
❏ Internet sources with addresses	2	_____

Presentation (10 points)

	Possible	Your
❏ Organized	3	_____
❏ Neat	2	_____
❏ Concise and Clear ·	5	_____

Group's Evaluation (15 points) 15 _____

TOTAL 100

YOUR SCORE _____

3) A rubric will be provided to each student so they may assess the group's performance and the individual performances of each member of the group. The student's evaluation form will be evaluated according to the following rubric:

> **This is the form that is to be handed out to each student so they may rate the performance of the group as a whole and the performance of each group member.**

GROUP EVALUATION FORM
(Worth 15 points total)

Please circle the number that best reflects your opinion. Grades will be based on the average score for each question. Each question is worth five (5) points.

1. Overall performance of the group -

5 (outstanding)	4 (good)	3 (fair)	2 (poor)	1(failure)

2. Overall quality of work produced -

5 (outstanding)	4 (good)	3 (fair)	2 (poor)	1(failure)

3. Individual performance within the group -

Name: _____

5 (outstanding)	4 (good)	3 (fair)	2 (poor)	1(failure)

Name: _____

5 (outstanding)	4 (good)	3 (fair)	2 (poor)	1(failure)

Name: _____

5 (outstanding)	4 (good)	3 (fair)	2 (poor)	1(failure)

Name: _____

5 (outstanding)	4 (good)	3 (fair)	2 (poor)	1(failure)

Name: _____

5 (outstanding)	4 (good)	3 (fair)	2 (poor)	1(failure)

Name: _____

5 (outstanding)	4 (good)	3 (fair)	2 (poor)	1(failure)

Comments:

4) Grade calculations for the Group Evaluation form will be as follows:
   - Each question is worth a total of five points
   - For question 1 --- combine everyone's score in the group and find the mean --- this is everyone's total points in the group for question 1.
   - For question 2 --- combine everyone's score in the group and find the mean --- this is everyone's total points in the group for question.
   - For question 3 --- combine the numbered score for each individual and come up with an individual mean for that student
   - Then add the means and this is their total points out of 15.
   - Please see the following example ---

Example of methods used to calculate for the Group Evaluation form.

NAME: _____

GROUP EVALUATION FORM – SUMMARY
(Worth 15 points)

Based on the average response of members of the group

1. Overall performance of the group -   Score: _____4_____
(Grades given by members of the group – 4, 3, 4, 5, 4)
Add the scores = 20 divided by 5 = 4 Each person in the group would get four points for the 1ˢᵗ question

2. Overall quality of work produced -   Score: _____4_____
(Grades given by members of the group – 4, 3, 4, 5, 4)
Add the scores = 20 divided by 5 = 4 Each person in the group would get four points for the 2nd question

3. Individual performance within the group –   Score: _____2____
(Grades given by each members of the group on this student's individual performance – 2,2,3,2,3)
Add the scores = 12 divided by 5 = 2 This individual would on get 2 points for the 3rd question

TOTAL SCORE _____10_____

*** This student would receive 10 points in the Group Evaluation section of their Scorecard.

5) The teacher then fills out the following Group Evaluation Summary form so the students will know how their peers evaluated them.

NAME: _____

GROUP EVALUATION FORM – SUMMARY
(Worth 15 points)

Based on the average responses of each members of the group

1. Overall performance of the group -   Score: _____

2. Overall quality of work produced -   Score: _____

3. Individual performance within the group –   Score: _____

TOTAL SCORE   _____

Comments:

6) The students to rank each group's performance may also use the above rubric. During the group's presentation --- fellow students are to rank or evaluate their peers' presentation or performance --- this tally is to be used later in determining who wins the *Emmy* and *The Katy*.

EXTENSIONS

1. The teacher may wish to put the students back into groups to review their project and assess the group's performance.
2. This unit could be extended to include all republics located in the Former Soviet Union
3. This unit could be extended over several weeks so that students could have more time to collect information on current events about their regions
4. The teacher may wish to establish a link to Russia via a pen-pal (pen-pal sites listed under Internet site)

SOURCES THAT YOU OR THE STUDENTS MAY FIND
USEFUL --- ANNOTATIONS LOCATED IN APPENDIX

INTERNET SITES:

1. **THE FACE OF RUSSIA:** http://www.pbs.org/weta/faceofrussia/text-only.html
2. **RUSSIA TODAY:** http://russiatoday.com/
3. **NEW RUSSIA:** http://www.russia-travel.com/index.html
4. **THE RUSSIAN CULTURE --- OPINION FROM THE MINING COMPANY ---** http://russianculture.miningco.com/msub8.htm?pid+2745&cob=home
5. **ALL PERIODS OF HISTORY BY PICTURES:** http://www.cs.toronto.edu/~mes/russia/history.html
6. **RUSSIA ON THE NET:** http://www.ru/
7. **RUSSIA – CONSULAR INFORMATION SHEET:** http://travel.state.gov/russia.html
8. **RUSSIA AND THE FORMER SOVIET REPUBLICS MAPS – THE PERRY-CASTANEDA LIBRARY MAP COLLECTION – FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS:** http://www.lib.utexas.edu/Libs/PCL/Map_collection/commonwealth.html
9. **STUDENTS FROM CHITA REGION OF RUSSIA ARE LOOKING FOR PEN-PALS** : wysiwyg://59http://www/geocities.com/CapeCanaveral/5082/penpals.htm
10. **THE BALTIC-RUSSIAN RELATIONS IN THE NEW GEOPOLITICAL FRAMEWORK: NOVGOROD, RUSSIA:** http://www.websp.com/~ethnic/novgorod.htm

Chapter VI

CONCLUSION

According to its proponents the collaborative learning instructional model has the potential to assist students in developing higher-level thinking and leadership skills. Collaborative learning is perceived by some to be a much more effective method for teaching and learning compared to the more traditional approaches currently being used in the classroom. Proponents believe collaborative learning may assist students in becoming independent thinkers and problem-solvers by providing them with the necessary skills that they must have in an ever-changing world.

In reviewing the arguments surrounding the various aspects of collaborative learning, it is clear that many challenges await educators wishing to use this learning methodology. The implementation of a collaborative learning classroom is not an easy process. It requires a great deal of time and planning on the part of the teacher/educator to make the experience useful and productive for the students.

As a result from this study, it appears that several key factors have emerged. First, at this current time, limited geography curriculum exists that models effective collaborative learning techniques. Only been in recent years has geography education has re-instituted as a core subject because of its incorporation into Goals 2000: Educate America Act (Boehm 1997). Since that time, geography educators have focused on what is essential for students to learn in geography and not instructional methods for doing so. Both the Five Fundamental Themes and the National Geography Standards provide educators with ideas and concepts that students should

learn about geography. However, at this time, very little attention has focused on effective instructional methods for doing so.

Also from this study, it appears that many Social Studies/Geography teachers are incorporating collaborative learning techniques within their lessons, and that the majority feel that this method may be more method for students to learn an assignment. Teachers surveyed suggested they felt the collaborative learning instructional model assisted students in becoming more individualized thinkers and problem-solvers. Furthermore, teachers agreed with the literature that more time is required for planning collaborative learning activities rather than the more traditional lecture method.

However, the results of this survey also contradicted some of the proponents suggested disadvantages. For example, this survey concluded that teachers did not feel that group time was more difficult to control than the more traditional lecture-based class. This finding is in direct contrast to Tinzmann's (1990) suggestion. Also, this study was inconclusive in its findings that collaborative learning techniques may make students insecure and not learn as well as others.

It is difficult to suggest whether the findings of this survey actually reflected the overall opinions of Social Studies/Geography teacher in Texas. It could be argued that the teachers who participated in this study were not a random selection of Social Studies teachers in Texas. The teachers who cooperated in this study were either taking part in a Geography Conference or a Masters' level distance learning project. Therefore, the results of this study may have been biased in that it only reflects the opinions of a few innovative teachers who are willing to try more creative teaching

strategies in their classroom. Also, because of temporal and financial limitations, it is difficult to determine if the survey conducted is an actual representation of teachers' view as a whole on collaborative learning. Also, it is difficult to assess whether or not teachers actually knew the difference between collaborative learning techniques and cooperative learning techniques. Since there is some confusion even within the literature of these two different instructional methods, it is difficult to assess whether teachers were actually evaluating collaborative learning or the overall concept of collaborative/cooperative learning techniques. Future studies are needed to determine whether the findings of this study actually reflect teachers' opinions about collaborative learning or rather their opinions about group learning in general.

Furthermore, this study did not compare or evaluate the traditional lecturing format of teaching against the collaborative learning instructional model. This study only examined how teachers felt overall about using collaborative learning techniques within their classroom. The study did not explore how often teachers used this method within their classrooms or whether they preferred collaborative learning over the more traditional lecturing methods. Further studies are needed to determine how often teachers are using collaborative learning techniques in their classroom and whether they prefer collaborative learning to the more traditional learning style. This study also did not attempt to determine whether or not collaborative learning was a more effective approach for students to learn new material compared to other instructional methods. Future studies could use a control group environment to evaluate whether or not collaborative learning is a more effective teaching method by comparing it to a more traditional learning method.

As a final note, additional work could focus on the use of collaborative

approaches to teaching and learning on the Internet.

Do You Use Collaborative Learning Techniques in the Classroom

1. What grade level do you teach?
    k-4   5-8   9-12

2. What courses do you teach?

3. How long have you been teaching within your district?
    0 – 5 years   5-10 years   10-15 years   15-more

4. Describe what type of district that you are from?
    Low income   Middle Income   High Income

5. Is your school considered an exemplary school?
    Yes   No

6. In your classroom --- do you encourage students to work together in groups or individually when trying to solve problems or assignments?
    In Groups   Individually

7. Do you incorporate group learning activities within your lesson plans ---

    Frequently   Sometimes   Occasionally   Never

8. In designing group learning activities --- do you incorporate cooperative/collaborative learning techniques?

    Frequently   Sometimes   Occasionally   Never

9. Do you believe that cooperative/collaborative learning is more beneficial or less beneficial for students to learn an assignment?

    More Beneficial   Less Beneficial

10. When creating groups for an assignment --- do you find that groups function better when the teacher select the members of the group or when the students themselves choose their own groups ----

    Teacher selects group members   Students select group members

11. Do you believe students needs assistance and direction on how to work in groups more effectively?

    Need Assistance   Does Not Need Assistance

12. Do you feel that teachers can easily lose control of their classroom during group work/discussion?
    Yes   No

13. Do you feel that more time is required in planning for group learning activities than the more traditional lecture methods?

    More time is required   No difference in time   Less time required

14. Do you feel that by turning over some of the learning to groups that some students may be insecure and not learn as well as others?

    Yes   No   Unsure

15. Do you believe that group learning allows students to become more individualized thinkers and problem-solvers?

    Yes   No   Unsure

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