

## Student Cognition

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One of the most rewarding moments in teaching, I'm sure all teachers will agree, comes on one of those rare occasions when the teacher, standing in front of the class lecturing, happens to see a look of cognition on the face of one of the students sitting in front of him/her. I had such an experience when I taught English and American history at Vladivostok in the Russian program during the academic year 1994/95.

One of the methods I used in the English class was to photocopy essays that students had submitted and then pass them out for discussion and constructive criticism in a subsequent class. On one occasion, a student had described Russian people as being "people of mood." I told the student that I knew what she meant, but that a native speaker of English would not use the noun "mood," but would rather use the adjective form of the word. I asked her if she knew the adjective form. She replied tentatively "moodic?" I told her that wasn't quite it, and then I asked her if she answered that way because a number of adjectives in English end in "ic." She said that was the reason, and I complimented her on her reasoning, but pointed out that this was one of those occasions when the adjective form didn't end in "ic," and that the correct form was moody.

When I said that, the whole class started laughing. It wasn't a loud, uproarious laugh; it was more a heads-down, mischievous giggle. When I asked them why they were giggling, they wouldn't tell me. (The Russian students talked a lot in class, except for the occasions when they just didn't want to say anything, and then they really clamed up.) I had to prod them a bit, and finally one of them said it was a curse word in Russian. Naturally, I asked what it meant, and they wouldn't tell me. So, I said "Well, moody is not a curse word in English. We can say moody all we want in English because there is nothing wrong with moody.

We can say moody, moooooody, mooooooooooody all we want, and it's OK." This time they were laughing uproariously. But they still wouldn't tell me what it meant.

A few hours later, I taught another section of the same course. Once again, when I explained that in the sentence we were considering, "moody" was better than "mood," the class responded with mischievous giggles. After asking them a few times what it meant, one of the students, in an embarrassed sort of way, finally muttered "It means balls." I said, "Balls? As in the American slang expression for testicles?" He shook his head in the affirmative. I did my "moody, moooooody" thing again, and they had a good laugh and we moved on.

Two days later, when I met with the first class again, I didn't say anything about the matter at the beginning of class. But later, in the middle of the lecture, I interrupted myself and said "Oh, by the way. I found out what moody means." All of them had curious, quizzical looks on their faces. I said, "Yes, I know what it means," and then I turned to face the board as if I were dropping the matter. But then I turned back toward them abruptly and spread my arms and exclaimed "'Moooooody said the queen!!! If I had them, I'd be king.'" Once again, I was looking into a sea of quizzical expressions. And then it happened! Cognition. Student cognition front and center and as plain as day on the face of Julia P..... Her jaw dropped, and she turned beat red, and when she recovered, she turned to her left and with a hand covering her mouth she whispered in the ear of Anna T.....Anna's jaw dropped and she turned beat red, and she turned to her left as Julia turned back to her right, and with cupped hands both of them whispered in the ear of the person next to them. Those people turned to the person next to them and ..... and ..... on and on it went. Over the next 20 seconds, the knowledge of what I had said spread by whispers through the class. And when it was over, I was left with one of the rarest of pedagogical rewards: Full-Class-Student-Cognition! It was unmistakable. The girls were all beat red and dropped-jaw, and the boys --- well --- the boys were all laughing their moodies off.