

Critical and creative ways to teach Religion and Philosophy .....

# Dialogue

Australasia

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# Dialogue

..... Australasia

## Contents

### **Spirituality, Art and Innocence**

Michael Leunig – Melbourne

### **Religion as Metaphor; or, Faith Without Belief**

David Tacey – Melbourne

### **Child Mind – Teaching the Way of Haiku**

Gary Gach – San Francisco

### **'Yes, but what is your Pedagogy?' – What can Artists**

### **Teach us about Pedagogy in Religious Education?**

Peter Mudge – Broken Bay

### **K(no)w Spirit, K(no)w God –**

### **RE & the Art of the Spiritual Journey to God-Realisation**

Nicholas Coleman – Melbourne

### **Memory, Learning and Story**

Nicky Hansell – Yorkshire

### **Burrawja –Teaching about Aboriginal Religion**

Jack Egan – Katherine

### **Enhancing Bible Literacy and Learning Using**

### **Artful Thinking Protocols**

Malcolm Woolrich – Melbourne

### **Film in the Classroom: A Powerful and**

### **Valuable Teaching Medium**

Carol Hebron – Brisbane

### **Teaching Ethics through Movies**

Peter & Charlotte Vardy – Yorkshire

### **Using Minecraft in RE**

David Shapland – Mudgeeraba

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*Summer Song*, Michael Leunig, 2014.

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#### **Editorial Policy:**

*Dialogue Australasia Journal* is a twice-yearly publication committed to fostering and promoting critical and creative approaches to teaching Religion and Philosophy in Australasia. It is intended that articles for the journal should:

- Be broadly representative of the 'Five Strands' and consistent with the aims and purposes of DAN
- Contain material that is academically rigorous, has contemporary relevance and can be *applied* in the classroom
- Be non-confessional and non-denominational
- Focus on secondary teachers with scope for primary focused articles
- Stimulate readers and equip them with practical teaching resources

## **From The Editor:**

To continually create, and re-create ways of engaging with our students is surely a high priority for every RE teacher. The 2015 DAN Conference: *REcreate: Teaching RE through the Arts*, 10-12 Brisbane, explored the powerful capacity of the Arts to imaginatively engage our students, to 'disturb' their ways of seeing and knowing, and to help them discover and explore deeper, less familiar realities. Thus so with this 33<sup>rd</sup> Issue of *Dialogue Australasia*, which contains articles redacted from presentations at the 2015 DAN Conference and other contributions that blaze illuminating, albeit challenging trails for us to follow.

Posing hard questions to us all, Michael Leunig and David Tacey take us to the very heart of what provokes the 'resistant Adam' in our students, and then suggest answers that are both unsettling yet profoundly insightful.

Leunig asks whether the speed and the madness of our times, driven by greed and fear, might not be seriously destabilising factors, with tragic consequences for our dear unhappy blue planet. Spirituality, art and innocence - Leunig's guardian angels - may seem strange companions sent to help us. But the large audience at Leunig's public talk welcomed those angels with rapt attention.

Emeritus Professor Tacey - whose newly launched book, *Beyond Literal Belief: Religion as Metaphor*, has already been the subject of great media interest - identified the 'literalism' of much religious discourse as one of the great stumbling blocks of our times:

Today teachers of religion hear their students say, 'You can't believe half of it, so why believe any of it?' I don't know how teachers with a clear conscience can contradict their students because the students are right.

Citing Karl Jaspers, 'Only he or she has the right to demythologise who retains the truth contained in the symbolic expression,' Tacey assures us that this is not gratuitous myth busting:

The first act of questioning looks like atheism and has much in common with it, the second is an exercise in vision and imagination. Demythologising must be a preliminary act, and after it there needs to be something redemptive, a new appreciation of myth. As an American school boy once said to his teacher: 'A myth is something that is true on the inside, but not true on the outside.'

Religion and spirituality are replete with imagery, and in his article *Child Mind*, Gary Gach suggests there is no better medium for discovering this than the haiku poetry of Zen Buddhism - the most universal poetic genre of our century. It's also a sublime fusion of culture and religion, and as such, offers rich possibilities for a study of Buddhism as part of a World Religions module where:

- On the surface there is intentional reference to some *figure, historical or mythological, some festival or rite,*
- On the second level, allusion is made to some traditional *doctrine or practice, such as 'enlightenment' or satori,*
- And on the third and deepest level, there are inferences derived from the *cultural and natural environments, themselves moulded by tradition, shared by the poet's readers – symbols, objects, events with metaphysical implications.*<sup>1</sup>

The visual arts, film and literature, have much to teach us as Peter Mudge, Nicky Ansell, Carol Hebron, Malcolm Woolridge, Peter and Charlotte Vardy and David Shapland attest. The importance of the Arts' place in religious and philosophical discourse is beautifully captured in Leunig's summation:

In essence spirituality and art are interwoven in their raw searching, in their expression, in their courageous unknowing, in their joy and darkness and in their radiant innocent strength which finds its way into the human heart.

Finally, Nicholas Coleman and Jack Egan, in their exploration of the art of the spiritual journey and Aboriginal *Dreaming* respectively, remind us that words and reason alone will not suffice in our search to understand spirituality and religion. Ingmar Bergmann, the great director, knew that better than anyone. In an interview cited by Donald J Drew, he contends that:

Art lost its basic creative drive the moment it was separated from worship. It severed an umbilical cord and now lives its own sterile life, generating and degenerating itself. In former days the artist remained unknown and his work was to the glory of God.

What a rich field of inquiry the *Arts* open up for us in Religious Education!

### **Nikolai Blaskow, Editor**

<sup>1</sup> *A Chime of Windbells: A Year of Japanese Haiku in English Verse* (Translation with an essay by Harold Stewart), Charles E. Tuttle Company: Publishers Rutland, Vermont & Tokyo, Japan, 1975 is recommended as a wonderful companion text to teaching haiku, and includes beautiful art work.

# Child Mind: *Teaching the Way of Haiku*

Gary Gach

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Get rid of words and get rid of meaning:  
poetry remains.

Yang Wan-li, Sung dynasty

Haiku is the most universal poetic genre of our century. It's also a sublime fusion of culture and religion. As such, it can serve as a tool for teaching Religious and Values Education (RaVE), interweaving the Five Strands approach encouraged by the Dialogue Australasia Network into one, simple, golden thread.

I've introduced haiku for a couple of decades now, and children clearly get it best. The initial course I offer whether to adults or children is virtually the same – except for one thing. In addressing children, early on I ask them to recall when they were around 6, 7, or 8. (If they're 10, or 12, or 14, this isn't such a stretch; when you're over 20 or 30, it's a reach.) I ask them to remember how life 'flashed' at them: when it seemed moments were one with nature and the universe, unexpectedly and wordlessly glimpsing something bigger, or beyond.

At this juncture, the children invariably wonder what I'll say next. So, I continue, haiku is a way of keeping that sense alive – that 'child mind' – but in an adult, responsible way. Childlike, not childish (Matthew 18:2-4). By this point, most of them are taking the bait. I then reel them in, get them on board, and – best part of all – leave it up to each to make of haiku what they will. Since haiku (like all poetry and spiritual work) has a subjective as well as objective aspect, this demands a different approach than 'I chalk and talk – you memorize and repeat.' After introducing the topic and the lesson plan, teachers can step

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**Haiku cannot be taught.  
Haiku...can barely even be  
written.**



back and play Guide Along the Side, rather than Sage on the Stage.

I'd come to this pedagogical re-evaluation after I'd been teaching haiku from time to time at a Zen temple. Before dinner one night, one of the senior monks declared, *Haiku cannot be taught*. Why not?, I asked. Haiku, he explained, can barely even be written. Putting into words what's a fleeting taste of the ineffable already takes it a razor-thin slice away from the source. When read by others, it is yet another razor-thin slice further away. Teaching is another step back.

Each haiku is just such a very personal, intimate encounter with the core of life. Over time, I've come realize haiku is an opportunity to mentor native intuition, innate spiritual capacity, and the spontaneity of creativity. Discovering that, yes, they can write haiku, it is especially empowering for children to be able to realize these valuables for themselves, on their own.

I begin class with a definition. Haiku is like a light, breezy sketch, in words. It presents two images, often of uneven length (and often with a seasonal reference) – so brief and

**Haiku invites us to participate  
in the unfolding of the universe  
as a living text.**

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minimal it's up to the reader to co-create. Both singular and plural, the word haiku can be a verb as well as a noun; just as God is a verb. Reading haiku is haiku, as is writing – as is seeing and experiencing haiku occurring in life itself. Haiku invites us to participate in the unfolding of the universe as a living text .

From there, my lesson plan consists of 1) exploring some examples, and noting a) lifelikeness, b)nowness, c) hereness, d) formal shapeliness, and e) particular modes of feeling and perception. Each of these rubrics have spiritual dimensions.

*Lifelikeness* is another way of saying naturalness; close to nature.

sudden rain –  
rows of horses,  
twitching rumps.

Shiki

## Nowness refers to haiku being a spot of time reflecting the eternal present.

Nowness refers to haiku being a spot of time reflecting the eternal present. A unique feature of haiku is the frequent reference to the four seasons.

the spring day not long enough  
for the lark to sing its full

Basho

The art of seasonal reference (*kigo*) is, like haiku, often indirect. A haiku about fireflies or geese would be understood to be about autumn; butterflies would be a clue for spring. Dragonflies or frogs for summer. Given the space-time continuum, life happens in a particular time with a specific location: as accurate as a GPS, haiku have a sense of *hereness*.

the scent of new-mown hay  
raked into rows ...  
horse-tail clouds

Rodney Williams

Taking these three components together, we see the Tao: that which is naturally happening at this time in this place. I've saved *formal* considerations for later, since so many people have a misconception that anything parsed in three lines of five, seven, and five syllables is automatically a haiku (the affliction of a society obsessed with quantity and packaging, rather than quality and essence).

So long as you evocatively join two vivid images, separated clearly by pause, in a brief package of 17 syllables or less, that can cover the form, for beginners. But it's worth pausing here to consider one tremendous spiritual implication of haiku form. Consonant with the Fifth Strand, haiku are intimate with silence. As such, they illustrate the wisdom in Buddhism, which equates form (phenomena, events, shape) with blank infinite possibility (*sunyata*). So while they're remarkably vivid, they marvelously point to the immeasurably abundant, vital source of creation, beyond all conceptualization, the Ground of All Being and Nonbeing.

old pond ...  
frog leaps into the  
sound of water

Basho

From the form, we can proceed to consider the last rubric, *modes of moods*, Japanese aesthetics. In the austere brevity of haiku we can see the ascetic, monastic quality of *wabi*. Its minimalist simplicity evokes *sabi*.

winter stillness ...

the least leaf on the bush  
curling into itself

Jeanne Emrich

Two more primary classical Japanese moods, or modes of awareness: *mono no aware* and *yugen*. *Aware* is the touchingness, the *Ah*-ness of things, a pathos prompted by the impermanence of things. (*Summer grasses ... all that remains of the warrior's dreams*. Basho) *Yugen* is elegant, elusive, enigmatic. (*The winter storm hid in the bamboo grove, and died away*. Basho) There are many more (*furyu, hisome, sono mama*, etc), but three or four are enough.

After such introduction, 2) we spend an equal amount of time going outside, strolling slowly and silently, with notepads and pencil, attuned to encounters with haiku in the wild. Experiencing haiku moments for ourselves. In Japanese, such a walkabout is called *ginko*. This harmonizes with the Pali word *ehipassiko*, encouraging each person to investigate and witness Buddha's teachings through direct experience. (*Taste and see*. Psalm 34:8)

After returning to the classroom, 3) we share our haiku. Using the blackboard, I show how



editing can be part of haiku. We might vote on our favorite haiku of the day. Given an hour for each phase, all this takes three hours.

Studying haiku examples, our *reading* is not mere rote, but a creative interpretive process (ie., exegesis and hermeneutics). Each haiku comes alive for each reader engaging with it. As we explore what's said, and what's unsaid, we're practicing the deep listening necessary as part of our spiritual career. Indeed, many haiku can be a wonderful basis for *lectio divina*, for those who wish.

Here are five specimens.

A bitter morning:  
sparrows sitting on a fence  
without any necks.

J. W. Hackett

panicking children flee  
out of the tiger cage  
a wasp

David Cobb

drip  
by  
drip  
the moon lengthens  
in the icicle

David Cobb

my head in the clouds in the lake

Ruby Spriggs

a flash of lightning  
the jagged screech of geese  
flying through the night

Yosa Buson

The longer we linger, reading haiku yields further depths and grace. Consider the fifth example, lightning and geese. So what!? Well, both limn a similar shape. Not straight like a city street. More like a flag flapping in the wind, or the contour of a shoreline, or a cloud: jagged, fractal, wild. Lightning zigzagging like how a pane of glass shatters into slivers. The voices of birds not in perfect pitch or rhythm, but rather sounding as random notes, some nearer some farther off. Irregular.

Now look deeper.

Not a story... but distinct images, side by side, draw a resonance between them. *Lightning*, spanning up and down, from way on high to us down here. Geese, migrating from far behind to way ahead, father than our eye

can see. Both measuring vast sky, its wide-openness, sheer possibility.

And the length of these two images aren't a neatly symmetrical matched pair, as in Biblical apposition. One line's short, *Shazam!*, lightning. One's longer, a chorus of geese voices, spilling over (enjambment) into the next line.

Both seemingly separate images side by side link together, to point to something bigger and subtler than either of them could say on their own. It's so real it's occurring beyond the frame of the poem.

*Look deeper.*

Sense your senses. Lightning is visual, yet implies sound. Seeing lightning, and knowing thunder will follow. Meanwhile, there are already sounds, also dropping down from the heavens. Perhaps this too involves sight, hearing then looking up and seeing a gaggle of geese. Or maybe unseen, vividly imagined in mind's eye.

How many other senses can you *feel*?

If you were here, might you be thrusting your hands deeper into your pockets, for warmth? Sense that nice feeling of cozy warmth? (You score extra points if you feel the pockets have a soft, fuzzy lining.)

Beyond the five senses, is there perhaps a sharp tang to the air, like sailing into a cove of fresh ozone? You don't need a barometer to sense this atmosphere. I note 'atmosphere' has an affinity for the Sanskrit word for deepest soul, *atman*, which is, in turn, inseparable from Godhead. This may not be too peripheral here, as primal spirituality appreciates the correspondences between inner and outer weather; breath-wind-spirit, say.

In this tang, there's an instinctual, primal, atavistic sense, as of tracking an animal deep in the wilderness, or a shaman leading a tribal ceremony, or a communion with profoundly intuitive Child Mind. We've noted geese imply autumn. You don't need a weatherman to see this haiku's about to rain. It's implied from the very get-go. Lightning. But, with an almost theological precision, this haiku's not about rain, per se – but that about-to-rain feeling.

Like the almost imperceptible shift from summer to autumn, or from one moment to another. Like the pause between in-breath and out-breath. An immeasurable fractional

instant pregnant with the precious, nourishing waters of the heavens.

Haiku shows us how reading is itself creative. Haiku is an invitation to a process, not a fixed, finished product. Work-in-progress, haiku needs us to bring them fully to life, enlisting our participation as co-creators.

Looking still deeper, we can see a whole picture develop beyond the words. Where are we? Looking out a window? Indoors? Outside? Maybe both. (Japanese architecture favors bringing the outside indoors.) I don't think we're in a city apartment here, noticing the tapping sound of radiators and suddenly knowing it's about to rain. Feeling it in our bones. Maybe we're on an open front porch, or in the front yard; maybe the middle of a meadow, or field. We're part of that big sky (the heavens). That immensity about to drench everything in sight, and beyond. An enormous stillness – a hushed pause – before a rainstorm's symphony.

Pausing there, we can return to where we came in. (Haiku are recursive, circling back on themselves, over and over.)

There is almost a story here (an inkling of 'flash fiction'): stopping what we were doing, putting a bookmark in our personal story and peering out, looking up, in anticipation of something else. More than just a random perception, this moment is priceless. Deeply felt, we feel it too: in our soul. As if we're there too.

Its introspection draws us inward to the highly personal as it looks outward to the universal commonplace, imparting a sense of something vaster than ourselves, of which we're intrinsically a part.

Seeing how a dozen words can prompt such a unique deep reading, we can also appreciate how haiku can open doors of *world religion*. Originating in Japan, haiku distill universal insights of Buddhism (chiefly the Zen and Pure Land sects). When Japanese took to Buddhism, they found myriad ways of expressing it – rock gardens, shakuhachi flute, ikebana flower arrangement, chado tea ceremony, haiku, etc. As the second largest religion in Australia, Buddhism's worth a bit of class time. Trying to understand it in Christian terms is natural, but better to bracket out our native framework and delve in on its own terms. Here's a quick sketch of some of the *philosophy*.

## Grounded in a wisdom tradition and an ethical path, meditation then becomes authentically viable.

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Buddha (awakening) sits on a three-legged stool, supported by 1) wisdom, 2) ethics, and 3) meditation. (A more detailed map of these three is known as the Eightfold Path.) All three are interconnected, because all things are impermanent and intrinsically interconnected. This applies to us too, as not separate from all beings. (These are key themes in haiku, as well). Attention given to such a view of reality engenders compassion, for ourselves and others; even if we cannot perfectly map 'salvation' onto a Buddhist equivalent (Enlightenment?), we can joyfully share Buddhism's emphasis on wise compassion.

On a branch  
floating downriver  
a cricket, singing.

Kobayashi Issa

Such a philosophy isn't handed down from on high, but tested through our own ethical behavior. Yet the Buddhist moral code is quite similar to the Decalogue; the Golden Rule. It manifests in haiku, as well, as reverence for life, generosity of spirit, true love – through first-hand knowledge, direct experience. This is why newspapers running 'headline haiku' competitions misunderstand haiku, as mainstream newspaper headlines tend towards the violent or salacious (blood, fear, greed, sex, etc) – and are second-hand sources of information. Actually, haiku are an antidote. (*Drinking a cup of tea, I stop the war.* Paul Repts)

Grounded in a wisdom tradition and an ethical path, meditation then becomes authentically viable. Buddhism extends and expands the silent meditation of a church service, 'a quiet moment,' into a longer, deeper stretch of *silence and stillness*. ('Be still and know.' Psalm 46:10) A contemplative awareness is necessary for haiku, too – whether as readers or writers. (Not an art for divas hooked on the limelight, proclaiming 'I, me, mine' – the haiku point of view points to A Bigger Container (ABC). There is an author to the geese / lightning haiku, but she/he isn't wearing his heart on his/her sleeve; not even saying I. Yet we feel the author's heart, and our own, deeply, as one.)

Just as architecture shows off sunlight, haiku depend upon silence. They are an art of silence. Through them we hear the silence before and after, from which haiku emerges and back into which haiku dissolves. Moreover, each haiku (being composed of two images) contains space in the middle, a caesura or pause. Consider this haiku by Moritake: *Is that a flower returned to the branch? – No, it's a butterfly.* The question prompts a moment of reflection. After the pause (the dash), then the answer – we next circle back to the beginning again, now in silent wonder. Each haiku is a balance and coordination of silence and speech, the ultimate dimension and the historical dimension, blank essence and vivid phenomena. (In nondual awareness, true speech and true silence are not two separate items.)

A heavy snowfall disappears into the sea. What silence!

- Zen saying

As poetry, we sound them out, aloud. A poem is like a piece of sheet music, waiting to be played. Teaching haiku in class thus also encourages students to speak from their heart. And they're welcome to learn more and find their voice at haiku societies and affinity groups which demonstrate the spiritual value of beloved community. (In Buddhism this is known as *sangha*.)

But I'm not sure if haiku are properly poems. Unlike most poetry, there's no title; no meter (except a Japanese quantitative one, which doesn't really map onto English); no metaphor. If poetry puts a magnifying glass to language, haiku puts poetics into a cyclotron. Please consider these portals of the immeasurable an art unto themselves.

the stillness --  
the chirr-chirr of crickets  
sinking into the stones

Basho

**Gary Gach** was a Keynote Speaker at the 2011 DAN Conference in Sydney, and has been a guest lecturer at numerous venues around the world. He's hosted a weekly mindfulness sangha, in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh, for six years and recently taught in the global online doctoral program at Sofia University. Visit him online: <http://word.to>

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### 12 Inklings of Zen in Haiku

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. being present ['now thyself']                           | 7. nonseparation / interbeing [pratyasamutpada]                     |
| 2. non-metaphoric, direct seeing ['show, don't tell']      | 8. intuition, creativity, imagination                               |
| 3. mindfulness [intelligent alertness]                     | 9. spontaneity, nonintentionality / [selflessness; <i>anatman</i> ] |
| 4. form = emptiness / emptiness = form                     | 10. community / sangha [haiku society]                              |
| 5. suchness [ <i>tathata, mono aware</i> – as is, just so] | 11. child mind, beginner's mind [ <i>mushin</i> ]                   |
| 6. change, metamorphosis [ <i>annica</i> ; impermanence]   | 12.   |

