

Performance Learning in the Global Haiku Traditions Course at Millikin University by Dr. Randy Brooks

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Millikin University has embraced "Performance Learning" as a distinctive approach to teaching and learning. In this brief essay, I review the ways that my course on Global Haiku Traditions is enhanced by strategically employing performance learning.

Performance learning is often described as students "doing the discipline" which generates confidence and identity as someone who knows how to "do the discipline." For example, instead of merely studying history, Millikin students conduct historical research and *write* and *present* history. Through this work for museums, local organizations, and others interested in history, they learn what it means to be an historian.

For the Global Haiku Traditions course, I deliberately invite students to join the contemporary international haiku community by reading, writing, editing, sharing and publishing haiku. For a semester my students are immersed in the life of being a haiku poet. I want my students to fully engage in the art of reading and writing haiku—bringing their memories, associations, experiences, and unique perspectives into the public sphere of this social literary art. I want them to be aesthetically serious and to have a lot of fun. For a semester I want them to fall in love with haiku—how it is intended to touch others—what it is like to be immersed and engaged in the necessarily connected literary arts of reading and writing haiku.

Performance learning at Millikin University is also characterized as students performing for some intended audience or "third party stakeholders" who respond or benefit from and recognize the value of student performances in some way. In the Global Haiku Traditions course, I stress the importance of community in the classroom and beyond the classroom because art, especially the literary art of reading and writing haiku, is a very collaborative, social process. I deliberately construct the classroom as a space for performance—reading haiku out loud, discussing and sharing reader responses to favorite haiku, reading and competing with each other with original haiku, sharing original haiku with others beyond the classroom, and inviting others into creative collaboration. The course concludes with a final haiku poetry reading and submissions to (and subsequent publications in) haiku journals around the world.

The pedagogical goals of the course are: (a) students will read and enjoy favorite haiku as gifts of being fully alive, (b) students will experience the co-creative process of integrating the art of reading with the art of writing haiku, (c) students will learn the history of haikai arts and haiku aesthetics, and (d) students will experience the social nature of haiku in collaborative teams as well as through direct contact with contemporary writers who are active in the international haiku community.

Here is a description of the course:

English 340 - Global Haiku Traditions. This is a three-credit junior-level course which fulfills a general education requirement at Millikin University in creative arts or international cultural studies or counts as an advanced studies in poetry class for English majors. In this course, students study the origins and history of haiku and related haikai arts, and they immerse themselves in the art of reading and the art of writing contemporary haiku. The course begins with extensive reading and response to books of selected haiku by contemporary Japanese and English haiku authors. As homework before most class periods, students write imagined responses to favorite haiku, and they write original haiku attempts based on a variety of perspectives. After getting a strong experiential sense of the art of reading and writing contemporary haiku, students explore the origins of haiku and the history of related Japanese haikai arts, such as *renku*, *haiga*, *senryu*, and *haibun*. Each student completes an individualized project deliberately connecting haiku with another art or area of expertise. It is evident from our study of the Japanese traditions that there is no great divide between the visual arts and literary arts, so students often explore an interesting mix of interests in their individualized projects. Each student writes an in-depth study of a contemporary haiku writer, based on extensive reading of their haiku publications as well as email exchanges or personal interviews. The best of these reader

response essays are published online at the *Millikin University Haiku* web site <<http://performance.millikin.edu/haiku/>>. The course concludes with a public haiku reading with students celebrating the best haiku from their individual collections. All students also select five to ten of their best haiku to submit to contemporary haiku magazines. Many of the haiku published in journals and subsequent haiku anthologies.

How is performance learning employed in this course?

(1) We read haiku in private, write responses and publicly read haiku out loud and share responses by discussing haiku together in the class.

If we are reading Japanese haiku, we read the Japanese version out loud and the translation before discussing a haiku. The haiku enter the public space of our voices with shared responses helping each other enjoy and appreciate favorite haiku more than through private readings.

(2) We write haiku in private and share them publicly through class competitions. Students are invited to share their responses to favorite haiku written by classmates. These responses are both oral discussions as well as written feedback.

Throughout the course, students select and respond to favorite haiku submitted to each other through anonymous *kukai* contests. Two approaches to *kukai* are used—traditional and matching contest. In traditional *kukai*, original haiku based on a particular approach are submitted to the editor (me) who selects the best attempts for inclusion in the competition. These are placed on a page with no names, then students read and select a certain number of favorites. I often ask the students to write an imagined response to one or two favorites before the class meets to “give birth” to new haiku. During the *kukai* session, the students are directed to a favorite haiku which is read out loud and then all students talk about what they love about that haiku. *Kukai* is not an editing session, so edit suggestions or comments about why someone does not like a haiku are not allowed. The point of *kukai* is to find haiku that are loved. We say that when the haiku finds a reader who loves it, that is the moment it is born. And after everyone has talked about why they like that haiku, a vote is taken to determine how many students chose that haiku as a favorite. After the haiku is born, and only then, do we ask who wrote the haiku. When the newborn haiku is claimed by its author, we applaud (or snap fingers or tap pencils) to thank the writer for their gift. Then we look for another haiku waiting to be born. Authors of favorite haiku with the most votes receive awards of haiku books or recent issues of haiku magazines.

Matching contests work in a similar way—with the selection of matched pairs of anonymous haiku arranged in a tournament format. Each pair of haiku are discussed and fully appreciated, with one being voted on as the favorite between the two. The favorite haiku moves on to the next level of matched pairs in the contest until a grand champion is found. Then haiku authors are revealed so that all of the newborn haiku may be claimed by their creators. Many of the haiku in this anthology were first born in *kukai* and matching contests. If not, the editors declare that we are pleased to give birth to them by including them in this collection.

Receiving feedback on how their haiku work for readers is an important part of being a member of the haiku community. The readers sharing their imagined responses “closes the loop” for the haiku writer who learns how effective or powerful or meaningful their work was for readers.

(3) We share the students’ performances (their writing original haiku and their critical responses to haiku) with others beyond the class.

Sometimes this takes the form of simply asking others, such as family members or friends, to read and respond to the students’ original haiku. Especially when students are going home for fall break, Thanksgiving break or Easter break, I ask them to put together a sheet of their best haiku and ask friends and families to pick out favorite ones.

As students share their work with friends on campus, and especially as they learn the collaborative art of renga (linked verses), they invite friends to become co-writers. They ask friends to help write haiku sequences or linked verses where a group takes turns adding links to a series of haiku.

The course ends with a public reading with family, friends and the Millikin University community invited to hear the best of their original haiku. In addition to this tradition, students in the course often compete with public “haiku cut” slam poetry competitions in locations such as the Decatur Area Arts Council or on campus. These playful competitions invite audiences with little knowledge of haiku to serve as judges, resulting in recognition of a winning team of writers.

(4) We write about contemporary haiku and publish the best essays on the Millikin University performance learning web site.

Students write reader response essays or other essays on contemporary haiku in this course. The best of these essays are published on the performance learning web site. Each semester some students interview current haiku poets and editors for their research studies, and many of these interviews have been published in journals or as introductions in books by haiku authors. Sometimes the student essay is one of the first essays published on a contemporary writer, resulting in subsequent citations by other haiku scholars.

Here is an excerpt from an email from a “third party stakeholder” who read and responded to one of the essays written by a PACE student in Global Haiku Traditions, Karen Reed:

Dear Dr. Brooks,

*When searching online yesterday to buy my father's book, *The Circle*, for my daughter (who is enrolled in California University of Pennsylvania and taking a poetry course), I serendipitously happened across Karen Reed's essay regarding my father. I'm assuming Ms. Reed was enrolled in a class of yours and that the link provided below may have been an assignment she prepared for your class. I'm also assuming that you're familiar with my father's work and just may have in some way known him. My father passed away three years ago, 24 hours after my brother died, and I just lost my older sister last month to uterine cancer.*

Taking all of this into consideration, I have interpreted these findings from Millikin University regarding my father as a visitation of sorts and wanted to thank you for paving the way for me to make these discoveries. If you will read the forward in my father's book, he mentions his children; there were six of us and now only three remain; but to have been able to be so moved once again by my father's presence in my life, I am most grateful. As life goes on, family becomes more meaningful, and education more important.

*It is my hope and prayer that the Lord would bless you richly for being a catalyst in my life to knowing my father in a deeper way. As we age, we find that leaving a legacy is crucial. *The Circle* is the priceless legacy my father left to me and, as is obvious from Ms. Reed's essay, apparently to many others. May you find peace in the perpetual words my father wrote so many years ago and in reviewing the same with your students. May you experience an impact from his life as you continue in your teaching endeavors. Once again, may the Lord richly bless you ... serendipitously!*

Thank you again from the depths within!

<http://performance.millikin.edu/haiku/writerprofiles/ReedOnLloyd.html>

Sincerely, Susan Lloyd

This kind of unsolicited feedback from a reader demonstrates the value of performance learning—where students work is made public, so it can have impact and significance beyond the classroom.

In addition to establishing a community of haiku readers and writers in my courses, I have sought to build connections between the Millikin haiku community and the broader contemporary haiku community. Millikin hosted the “Global Haiku Festival” which brought about 80 of the leading contemporary haiku scholars, editors and writers to Millikin for a symposium on haiku as a global literary art. Lectures and readings on the history of haiku in France, Germany, United States, Eastern Europe and Japan were presented. Of course, there was also several opportunities for writing haiku together during a *ginko*, and sharing haiku through several public haiku readings. Millikin students participated in all of these events and interviewed many of the visiting poets. With growing interest in English-language tanka evident, the Tanka Society of America called a seminal meeting to form as a

new organization that weekend at Millikin. Visiting haiku poets, editors and scholars often read or present workshops at Millikin, and so Millikin has become part of the international haiku community with scholars often citing Millikin student essays and editors routinely publishing student haiku.

(5) We publish student haiku for readers.

Every semester students create a small chapbook of their very best haiku. These chapbooks include a short introduction on their haiku poetics—how to write haiku. These chapbooks are shared at the final haiku reading and then kept by the students to share with friends, families and other readers in the future. A selection of each student's best work is published on the haiku class web site, available to all readers on the web.

The students also create "signature gift exchanges" for each other in class, creating a bookmark or other small gift featuring a favorite haiku they have written. A copy of each of the signature haiku is exchanged with each other in the final class of the semester.

At the end of each semester, students prepare a submission of haiku for a haiku journal. Following traditions of professional submissions, these haiku are submitted to journals. The editors of haiku journals around the world know about the Millikin University Global Haiku Traditions course and frequently publish the students' work. This course and the haiku written by Millikin students has gained ongoing recognition and reputation for excellence. For example, Cor van den Heuvel, editor of *The Haiku Anthology*, published by W.W. Norton & Company, wrote that Randy Brooks "oversees what is undoubtedly the best English-language haiku program of any school in the country."

Bronze Man Books, the student publishing company at Millikin, published the *Millikin University Haiku Anthology*, which is the natural consequence of an ongoing performance learning with the art of haiku at Millikin University. The student haiku published in this collection have been selected as favorites by a wide variety of readers. First the student writer selected haiku attempts to be considered for competition, then the best of their attempts were placed into anonymous *kukai*, where students in classes selected favorites. At the end of each semester each student writer gathered his or her best haiku into a small collection to share with others. And at the end of each semester, I selected a few of the best of each student's haiku to be added to the Millikin University Haiku web site. Editors of contemporary haiku journals and anthologies choose to publish some of the student haiku. And finally, the editors of the collection read through all of the known and submitted haiku by Millikin students and alumni to nominate about 1,800 possible haiku for the anthology. All nominated haiku were put into an anonymous alphabetical first-line order, then the editors had a final *kukai* for this anthology—seeking out those haiku that all four editors could say yes, this haiku needs to be in the *Millikin University Haiku Anthology*.

This anthology of haiku by former Millikin students and alumni is used each semester in the Global Haiku Traditions class, forming another closed loop from students as creators to recipients of former students' work.

Performance learning is alive and thriving in the Global Haiku Traditions course at Millikin University.

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