

# DIOGEN

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„U zemlji mržnje najviše mrze onoga ko ne umije da mrzi.“ Ivo Andrić

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MI OBJEDINJUJEMO RAZLIČITOSTI...WE ARE UNIFYING DIVERSITIES



## HAIKU POETRY AS ONE OF THE MODES OF SPEECH AND LANGUAGE REHABILITATION IN A POPULATION OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIFIC LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES

WHF2005 in Romania  
Zrinka Simunovic, RO

This address is about my experience in working with children on the rehabilitation their speech and dealing with their language difficulties through haiku.

I am a teacher in school for children that have speech and language problems. They come from regular schools and stay in ours until their language problems are solved after complex rehabilitation (through a special method invented and developed by Petar Guberina). After spending some time in our school, most of them go back to their regular schools. They still need the help of a speech pathologist and are treated individually twice a week. In this way, they are continuously in the process of rehabilitation. Some children with speech and language disorders finish their education in our own primary school, and are integrated after that in regular grammar schools. The curriculum in our school is the same as in regular public schools, but adjusted to children's' abilities, and to a rhythm that is appropriate to a group of children with similar problems. The classes typically contain 7-10 children so that the teacher/speech pathologist can pay attention to each one individually. Their problems are:

- dyslexia – problems in reading and spelling (a problem in the phonological coding of the written language),
- slow reading or writing speed,
- poor reading comprehension,
- letter and number reversals,
- reduced speech, word-finding difficulties, language expression problems,
- *attention deficit hyperactivity disorder* (ADHD syndrome)—
- in general, language weakness.

If these problems are not recognized in time—by the first or second grade—and treated properly, they lead to other learning problems and difficulties in communication. These children are not mentally handicapped; IQ scores in non-verbal tests are in the normal range, sometimes very high!

Two years ago, two girls from the elementary school at the SUVAG Polyclinic won first prizes for their haiku. This happened again this year in March at the 8<sup>th</sup> Festival of Children’s Haiku Poetry 2005 in Zagreb. Their specific language difficulties obviously and in no way interfered with their ability to write haiku that were evaluated by the judges (Devide, McMaster and Ziljak) as very good ones and worthy of winning first place.

Children are introduced to haiku in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade (aged 10) in the subject “Croatian language and literature”. Even at first sight, the short haiku form is attractive to them. They are able to read and understand this poetic form without problems. For their homework, they then try to write haiku of their own. In our school, this leads to the creation of several interesting observations in verses; I wholeheartedly supported and encouraged their efforts to express themselves poetically.

It has been noticed that in children with language difficulties, the short and simple haiku form of expression is very close to their own language expression, which is sometimes terser in everyday communication, but, when oriented to a particular motif/motivation, can have the effect of a poetic image. During 3 school years, our children created numerous haiku inspired by the seasons of the year, certain changes and phenomena in nature, and by some specific situations in life which stimulated them to express their observations and emotions. At the “literary group”, we read haiku poems and talk about the sensations that arise. Mrs. Visnja McMaster introduced us to “haiku cards,” which are excellent didactic material and a good way to introduce children to an understanding of poetry, in general. Encouraging children to imagine the “poets’ words” (images) by the senses of hearing, smell, taste, touch and even movement in space produces a polysensory

experience of the “poetic image”. In this way, the children “easily live in the poem” and have the poetic experience.

This way of “living in the poem” is very close to them; they are young and still live a great part in the world of the imagination. It is the first big step on the way to showing children how poetry is close to them, and how easily they can become direct participants in a poem. They like this method of “getting into the poem” very much, and enjoy talking about experiences they have had. Usually, these children don’t talk very much because of expressive language problems, but want to speak about haiku experience, because they are quite certain about what they have felt. Some of the children with language difficulties have problems in understanding longer sentences (especially, longer sentences with abstract nouns, prepositions and adverbs which modify the meaning of the words). In the very beginning of rehabilitation, it is very important to take care of the length and syntactic complexity in communication. That is why the short, simple haiku form is an ideal form for these children to express themselves; they memorize it easily and can use simple grammatical structures (subject, verb, object) as a pattern to express themselves in everyday communication. A haiku is a very good ground on which the language structure can be built gradually.

This school year, we began to write haiku motivated by the [drawings](#) of the “art group”, of children that are hearing-impaired (in one department of our school there are classes for such a population of children, who learn to speak oral language, without gestures). These haiku inspired by drawings are excellent and are a new experience for us; at the same time children look at the same drawing and create different observations, through different perceptions and sensations.

Reading and writing haiku has become an integral part of the process in which effective attention is paid to insufficiently developed language expression in this group of children. However, this does not involve bald and monotonous special-purposes language material, but evokes creativity that confirms the children’s own abilities, which is a crucial prerequisite. At the same time, the children develop their attitudes towards the environment and their awareness of the world and the phenomena of life and its manifestations. Hence it seems incontrovertible that writing haikus is one of the most creative ways of helping children with language difficulties to find their own means of expression.

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