

# Sukhomlinsky News

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## Educating teachers

*in the last two newsletters I have focused on Sukhomlinsky's approach to recruiting new teachers for his school. In this month's extract from Pavlysh Secondary School, Sukhomlinsky describes how he assisted a new teacher to develop his pedagogical approach.*

*I have translated two more of Sukhomlinsky's little stories for children. As is often the case with Sukhomlinsky, these stories foster the development of empathy for others.*

*Best wishes,*

*Alan Cockerill*

## Teacher training on the job

**In this month's extract from Pavlysh Secondary School, Sukhomlinsky describes how he assisted the professional development of one of his staff.**

It is a principal's job to help every teacher establish their own creative laboratory.

Individual work with teachers encompasses both the study of the educational methods they are using, and the rendering of practical assistance. The content, methods and character of this work depends on the level of teachers' pedagogical expertise, their outlook, interests and motivation. At the beginning of the academic year we come to an agreement about whom I will work with, and whom the director of studies will work with. As a rule, such work is conducted throughout the year in parallel with the analysis of a sequence of lessons. Each of us passes on to teachers not only our own experience, pedagogical views and convictions, but also the experience of other teachers. Each of us is mentoring particular teachers. The most important element of this work is to reveal to teachers the dependence of the results of their work on their knowledge and culture, on what they are reading and studying, and how they are enriching their knowledge.

An example of this work is provided in the following description of how I worked with the physics teacher A.A. Filippov. Mr. Filippov became acquainted with the pedagogical views and convictions of our staff even before he was appointed to our school, through involvement in our extra-curricular programs.

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## From Pavlysh Secondary School [cont.]

I had several conversations with this future teacher about instructional methods and types of lessons, about children's independent work, and about taking an individual approach to students. I was convinced that the young teacher could only become a master of his craft if he developed common spiritual interests with his students—intellectual, vocational and creative interests—as this is the only way to get to know a child.

I helped the teacher to study several books on pedagogy devoted to lesson formats, and then he began a didactic analysis of text books used in the subjects he was intending to teach: physics in years six and seven, and mathematics in year eight. He visited the lessons of experienced teachers, sometimes accompanied by me. On these occasions particular attention was given to the didactic analysis of teaching programs and text books.

When analysing the programs, we formulated the following important questions:

1. When studying physics in years six and seven, what role did the observation of natural phenomena play in preparing students to understand theoretical principals taught in this subject in the senior classes?

2. What concepts from the elementary course in physics was it essential for students to deeply understand deeply, in order for them to successfully study and fully comprehend the laws of physics in subsequent years?

3. What rules, laws, formulas and numerical data was it essential for students to commit to long term memory, in order to facilitate active thought processes?

4. What relationship should there be between theoretical knowledge and practical skills?

What skills do children need in order to study well, to analyse, understand and make sense of the phenomena of the surrounding world?

5. What sorts of tasks should be assigned for homework, and how can such tasks activate intellectual processes, and develop curiosity and a thirst for knowledge?

6. What practical work should students carry out with their own hands?

7. What popular scientific literature should children read and how can this contribute to the broadening of their outlook? How can we assist them to develop their individual interests and talents during extra-curricular activities?

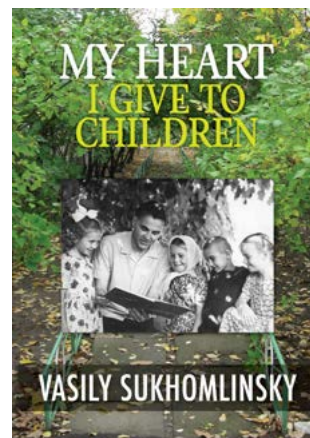
Then we went through the text books paragraph by paragraph, paying particular attention to those important sections that were most challenging for the students.

Every teacher in the school studies the program and text books in this way, with assistance from me, or from the director of studies. During this process, teachers in the primary school pay particular attention to ensuring they give students a tool without which further study will be impossible: the ability to study. This tool has five 'blades'. It means being able to do five things: 1) to read, 2) to write, 3) to think, 4) to observe the phenomena of the surrounding world, 5) to express in words what the student sees, does, thinks and observes. Teachers compile lists of the spelling words that children must master during the primary classes. The training of teachers to work in the primary classes incorporates an analysis of how to prepare children for further study in years five to ten.

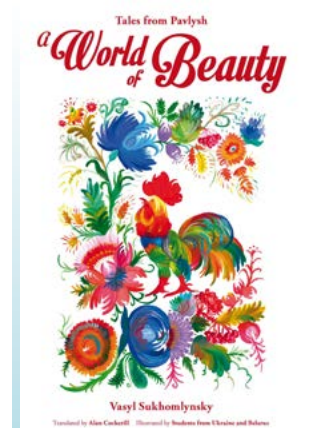
The next stage of this individual work with teachers is assistance

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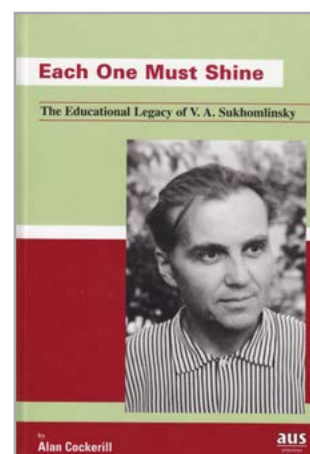
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in preparing their first lessons. To visit the first lessons of a beginning teacher is counter-productive: you need to give them time to get to know the class and find their feet. But at the same time it is important to help prevent possible errors. When discussing the content of the first lessons with Aleksandr Filippov I posed the following questions:

1. What facts from the surrounding world will you use to develop concepts relating to physical phenomena, motion and the relativity of motion?

2. How will you structure the study of new material, so that students are able to make conclusions and generalisations, analysing, finding meaning, juxtaposing phenomena they encounter in life?

3. What prior knowledge should be developed and deepened during the process of studying new material?

4. What phenomena from surrounding life, and from workplaces, will you direct the children's attention to when setting homework?

Reflecting on these questions should lead the teacher deeper and deeper into the lesson content.

During the first two weeks of lessons Mr Filippov told me about his lessons at the end of each working day. Discussing lessons that I had not yet visited helped me to clarify the extent to which he was able to analyse the dependence of students' knowledge on his preparation for the lesson. I was pleased that Mr Filippov spoke openly about both the positive and negative aspects of his lessons, and tried to understand the reasons for any failures. From our conversations it became clear that most of his difficulties arose during the study of new material. In only their second lesson, students in the year seven

physics class had already forgotten the material studied during the first lesson.

I explained how to gather information about the work of the whole class and of individual students in the process of studying material, how to observe and analyse the effectiveness of the students' intellectual work. The first, and most important, stage of instruction—the deep understanding of the essence of the phenomenon, rule or cause and effect relationship that has just been explained—should be clearly observable by the teacher during the lesson. Homework is only for deepening, developing and applying knowledge acquired during the lesson.

Later conversations showed that Mr Filippov was now trying simultaneously to instruct and to get students to demonstrate their knowledge, so as to avoid gaps in knowledge or understanding, and to observe how individual students worked. But it was obtaining feedback that was proving most difficult for the teacher. It was now clear to me what I needed to focus my attention on at his lessons, and in what areas he needed more help. The time had come to begin visiting and analysing his lessons.

The very first lesson I visited showed me that Mr Filippov had difficulty combining exposition, discussion, or practical activities, with assessment of students' knowledge and observation of the process of students' intellectual work. He had to simultaneously think about the content, and about what unforeseen variations it was necessary to introduce into the lesson plan, so as to avoid a lack of comprehension on the part of the students, and to overcome their inability to reflect upon and analyse the facts.

In analysing the first lesson, I directed most attention to the

way in which students were taking steps on the path to knowledge. .... But in such cases even the most thorough analysis is not enough. The teacher needs a demonstration of what you are talking about and advising. We agreed that Mr Filippov would visit my grammar lesson, and that I would then visit his physics lesson, and that we would continue visiting each other's lessons in turn.

I spent a long time preparing the lesson the young teacher was to visit. It was very important that he should see and understand how to observe and analyse the process of acquiring knowledge.

At my lesson students were studying the classification of simple sentences, and revising some spelling rules. Each student worked independently on an individual card with sentences and spelling words. The children's responses took the form of reflections that led the students to go deeper into the facts. Through reflection, each student came independently, on the basis of their own data set, to an understanding of a grammatical rule. The assessment was not a separate part of the lesson, but took place during the course of the lesson.

Our conversation after the lesson showed that the young teacher had understood the main point. To observe the process of intellectual work it is necessary to skilfully organise independent work (in the broad sense of the word) in which the children make sense of facts and phenomena. I discussed my lesson in detail, directing particular attention to the fact that deep knowledge is only possible if a student is conscious of many facts, and discovers the truth through an analysis of those facts.

We visited each other's lessons for a year, and also visited the lessons of other teachers.



## Stories for Children

### A cardigan for Nastya

Grandma Lena was knitting her granddaughter a cardigan. Nastya was two years old, so the cardigan had to be small.

The back was already complete, as were the sleeves and on the front there was a golden autumn-coloured maple leaf.

Grandma was old, and could not knit quickly. She often became tired and had to rest.

Nastya helped her grandmother, holding the ball of wool in her hands.

But one day Grandma fell ill. She did not get out of bed for several days. The ball of wool lay on the table, cold and motionless, and next to it lay the unfinished cardigan.

Grandma died. Nastya did not understand what had happened to her, why she was lying there and not getting up. When the coffin was carried out of their house the little girl cried.

'Where have they taken grandma?'

Her mother said, 'They have taken her to the hospital. When she gets better she will come home.'

'What if she does not get better?' asked Nastya searchingly.

Her mother was silent. She took the unfinished cardigan and began to unravel it, winding the wool back on to the ball. The cardigan got smaller and smaller, and the ball got bigger and bigger.

'Why are you undoing the cardigan, mum?' asked Nastya. 'Grandma knitted it for me...'

'Never mind, Nastya, we will buy you a cardigan...'

'I don't want you to buy me a cardigan!' shouted Nastya, and began to cry bitterly. 'I don't want one. Let's buy a grandma instead!'

### The deaf girl

At the hospital there is a children's ward. Seven girls were being treated there, each with their own illness. They had all recovered well, and now they were bored.

The oldest girl, thirteen year old Tanya, felt herself to be the leader of this group of children. She opened the window and looked out at the flowering garden.

'The lilac is already in flower...' she said thoughtfully, 'And the tulips have flowered. Girls, let's bring a flower into our ward and put it in a glass of water. That would be really nice!'

'That would be great!' agreed everyone with joy.

Only one little girl remained silent—eight year old Nina. She was deaf.

Nina understood very well what they were talking about. She was also happy at the thought of bringing a flower into the ward. She wanted to nod in agreement and smile joyfully, but she sensed that Tanya's question was not addressed to her.

'What flower will we choose, lilac or tulip?' asked Tanya again.

'Lilac!' said some of the girls.

'A tulip!' said others.

'We are not in agreement,' sighed Tanya. 'We'll take a vote. Each of us can say which flower we want to put on the table, lilac or tulip. Three wanted lilac and three wanted a tulip.'

'What are we going to do now?' asked Tanya thoughtfully. Her eyes sparkled with mischief. She loved to play games. The other girls were also caught up in the game.

'What will we do? Three want a tulip and three want lilac...' Tanya murmured again, as if thinking aloud.

Suddenly her gaze fell on Nina. The deaf girl sat by the window and tears were trembling in her eyes. They were tears of hurt and injustice. They had forgotten about her, and did not ask which flower she preferred.

'Oh!' exclaimed Tanya. 'We forgot about Nina... What flower would you like, Nin, lilac or tulip?'

Nina smiled and with her delicate finger she drew a tulip in the air. Tanya went out and picked a tulip.

Nina watched from the window, smiling.