

Sukhomlinsky News

No. 5

November 2015



Welcome to another issue!

Thank you for showing an interest in the educational legacy of Vasily Sukhomlinsky. The aim of this newsletter is to make Sukhomlinsky's name better known amongst English-speaking educators, so I hope you will forward it on to anyone who you think may be interested. New readers can subscribe to the newsletter and access archives at: <http://ejr.com.au/sukhomlinsky/newsletter.html>.

This month we are including a report from Ukraine, and we expect this to become a regular feature of the newsletter.

We are also featuring the first installment of our translation of an article by the late Simon Soloveichik, a journalist who played a major role in drawing attention to Sukhomlinsky's work. It is hoped that his article, entitled 'Tell People about Sukhomlinsky', may also prompt readers of this newsletter to tell others about Sukhomlinsky.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill

News from Ukraine

The following is a report from Ukraine, forwarded by Sukhomlinsky's daughter, Professor Olga Suchomlynska.

November 2015 marks the 25th anniversary of the formation of the Ukrainian Vasily Sukhomlinsky Association, a group of teachers, university lecturers, researchers and parents who have voluntarily come together to study his work and its creative development in contemporary conditions, in ways that are important for the organisation and functioning of the Ukrainian system of education. Since its formation, the Association has held twenty-two educational conferences, round tables and seminars. They have been devoted to various aspects of the education and upbringing of children, to teacher training, and to themes that have included the ecology of childhood, individually oriented instruction, parental pedagogy, cultural aspects of school and pedagogical education, and the development of children's creativity.

This year the all-Ukrainian pedagogical conference took place on 24th and 25th of September in the city of Kherson, in the south of Ukraine. It was devoted to the issue of refining motivation in developing personalities. Sukhomlinsky reflected on this theme a lot in his works and in his own practice, and his ideas have not lost their relevance and attraction. Today it is especially important to give attention to the development of young people's spiritual requirements, to the formation of children's motivation and self-control.

Educators from all corners of Ukraine participated in the conference, and there were also guests from China and Poland.



The following article about Sukhomlinsky by Simon Soloveichik, a journalist who wrote many articles on education, was published in the journal *Yunost'* in April 1971, just months after Sukhomlinsky passed away.

Tell People about Sukhomlinsky

There are common expressions: 'well known', 'widely known', 'known to everyone'. I will be up front about the aim of this article, however audacious it may seem. Its aim is that the educator Sukhomlinsky, whose name is widely known in our country, should become known to everyone. Of course a journal article cannot fulfil such an aim. That is why I am urging you, the reader, to tell people about Sukhomlinsky.

A year and a half ago, when Vasily Aleksandrovich was still alive, I wrote in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* that one day all educational text books would mention Sukhomlinsky, and that the name of Pavlysh, the Ukrainian village where he taught, would be known to every educated person. Many accused me of exaggeration, including educators. At one meeting I had to convince people that my article about Sukhomlinsky was not just nonsense (that is what someone said: 'stuff and nonsense'). Alas! For a long time it seemed to all of us that Sukhomlinsky was just a good teacher, like many others. We did not immediately understand his significance, and that is natural. There is nothing shameful in that fact for us or for Sukhomlinsky. This is an eternal human drama. We are not able to recognise greatness, when it is too close to home. We are reluctant to crane our necks to see beyond the clouds, and we cannot see clearly enough to discern what is at such heights...

Not long ago I received a letter from a woman in Khabarovsk, whom I have never met, and who asked me not to reveal her name due to the personal nature of the letter's contents:

'Sukhomlinsky's life and his creative work are a national treasure that we need to preserve as something precious. When will another Sukhomlinsky appear? In 50-100 years? And perhaps not even then.

I could not find his book *My Heart I Give to Children* in the Far East, though we wrote to Kiev, Kharkov and Odessa, through personal contacts and through official channels. The book was not available. In the middle of October (1969), I found a copy of Sukhomlinsky's book *Pavlysh Secondary School*. I read it, and I had not experienced such a strong impression from a book since I first read Tolstoy's philosophical works. Believe it or not, I could not sleep. How can it be, I thought, that such a man

exists, and he is not promoted? The general public does not know about him. I discussed it with my husband, and we decided that, at least in our own family, we would apply Sukhomlinsky's advice in our daily lives...

[The writer of the letter goes on to describe how they applied Sukhomlinsky's advice, and how it helped their sons, who were in years 9 and 10 at school.]

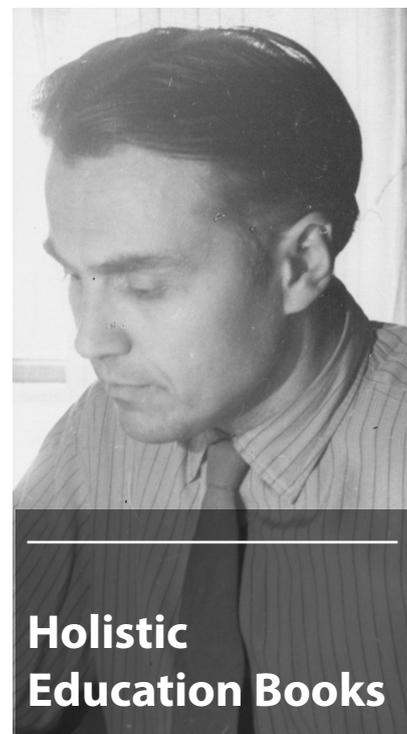
...Every day that year I considered writing a letter to Vasily Aleksandrovich, expressing my gratitude. After all, he practically saved my children at a time when things seemed hopeless. But I could not muster the courage...

And now... I consider myself so ungrateful... It turns out you should never put anything off...'

Well, we have an even greater responsibility now. Like that wonderful woman from Khabarovsk, we must tell people about Sukhomlinsky, realising that his work is a national treasure.

Tell people about Sukhomlinsky. Tell them about his school. Tell them that the school in Pavlysh, in its external appearance, is like any other country school, unless it is perhaps a little poorer. Most collective farms will extend a little financial assistance to local schools, but the school in Pavlysh survives on a normal budget allocation.

Sukhomlinsky was a corresponding member of the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences, a decorated teacher, a Hero of Socialist Labour. Everyone understands that it would not have been difficult for him to obtain some special privileges for his school. But on principle he would not take any more that he was entitled to. They added an extra wing to the old pre-revolutionary school, and used the annual maintenance budget to build a small module each year, capable of housing one or two classes. In this way they managed to ensure that all the children could attend school in a single shift, and not in three shifts, as it was when Sukhomlinsky first took on management of the school in 1947. And the school also has a greenhouse, a rabbit farm, an apiary, a meteorological station, four workshops, an orchard, a vineyard and a dovecote... Sukhomlinsky only did what it is possible to do in any school, no matter how far from the city and how impoverished it is. When you are telling people about



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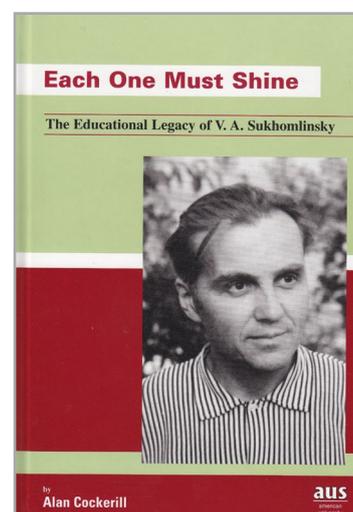
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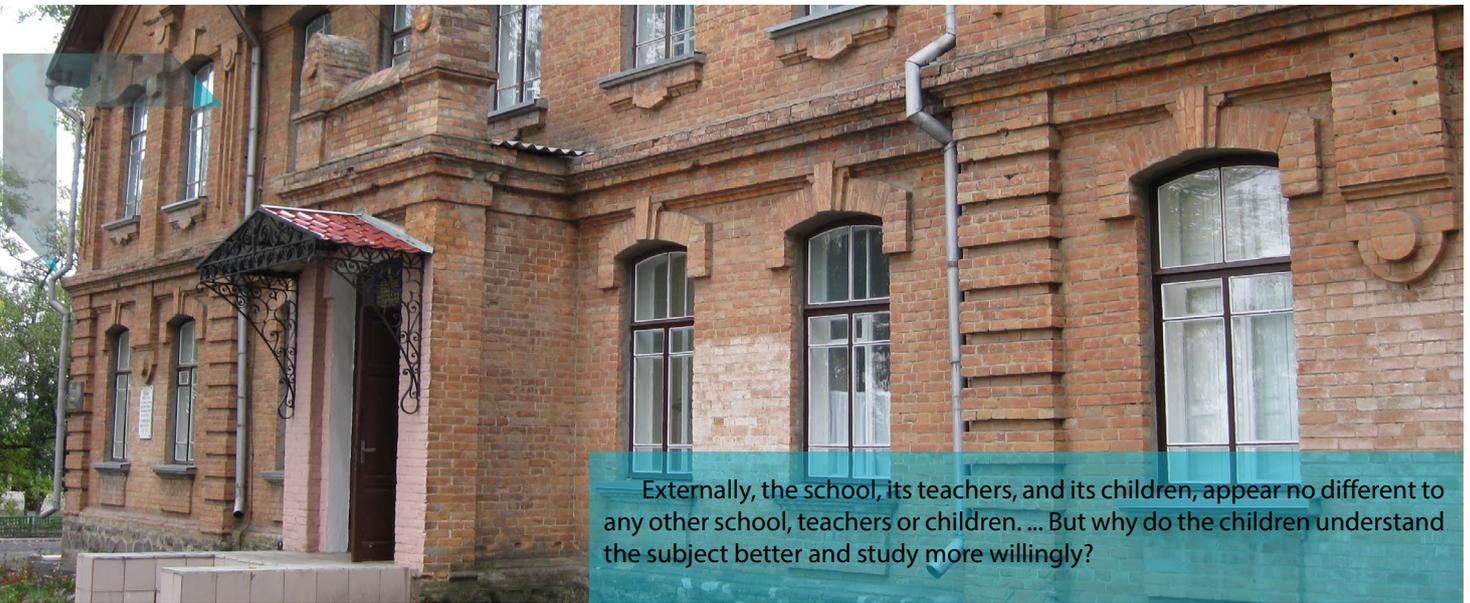
Vasyl Sukhomlinsky

Translated by Alan Cockerill. Illustrated by Students from Ukraine and Belarus

AUS\$14.95, pdf AUS\$9.99



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Externally, the school, its teachers, and its children, appear no different to any other school, teachers or children. ... But why do the children understand the subject better and study more willingly?

Sukhomlinsky, and you are greeted with the sceptical response, "But of course, he was a Hero of Socialist Labour. He had access to anything he wanted..."; do not forget to mention that although he may have had access to special treatment, he did not take advantage of it.

Externally, the school, its teachers, and its children, appear no different to any other school, teachers or children. When guests visit lessons (and there is a constant stream of guests at Pavlysh), if they are teachers, they leave puzzled: "I don't understand. The same lesson, the same plan... We give lessons like that... But why do the children understand the subject better and study more willingly?"

The same lessons, the same programs, no innovative methods,

nothing that could be promoted as 'Sukhomlinsky's experience', and then forcefully implemented in all schools, with reprimands for failing to implement it.

...In this school everything is 'the same', except...

Except that, after the last bell, the classrooms and corridors fall silent. Not a single student or teacher is allowed to stay five minutes in the school buildings. Go home! Rest! Read books! Work in the orchard! Prepare for the clubs and extra-curricular activities! Supplementary lessons? There are none. They have been reduced to non-compulsory consultations before lessons. Staff meetings? No more than once per week. A school thrives on the free time available to teachers and students.

That is one of Sukhomlinsky's ideas that provided access to all his other discoveries. For teachers to teach well and for children to study well, they both need as much free time as possible. Students' success depends not on spending four or five hours a day studying, but on their general level of development, how much they read, how much time they have for their favourite subjects. Less time spent on lessons, and more on study that is motivated. Sukhomlinsky never tired of persuading his students not to do any study after lessons ended. Leave the rest of the day free! Get up at six in the morning, he would say, and in two morning hours you will do your homework more successfully than in four hours in the evening.

[to be continued next month]

Readers interested in previewing the manuscript of *My Heart I Give to Children* should email Alan Cockerill at: ejr.cockerill@gmail.com .





Stories for Children

The bird pantry

During early autumn the twittering of the birds was constant. The birds descended on a field that had been harvested, pecking at grains that lay on the ground. On the edge of the forest a rowan-tree stood. Its red berries had ripened, and the rowan-tree was surprised the birds did not come to eat them.

A thrush flew by, and the rowan-tree asked it, 'Thrush, why don't you want to try my berries?'

'Wait a little, dear rowan-tree. Your berries will come in handy during hard times. Your branches are our bird pantry.'

Snow fell. The fields were covered in a white carpet. The grasses were buried under snow drifts. The cold winds sang their mournful song day and night.

In the morning the rowan-tree was wakened by the sound of birds twittering. She looked and saw that thrushes and woodpeckers had settled on her branches.

'You see, now we need our bird pantry,' twittered the thrush. 'Please treat us to your berries, dear rowan-tree.'

The acacia told us

We were planning a walk into the forest. Our teacher said, 'First we must find out if it is going to rain today.'

'How will we find out?'

'We will ask the yellow acacia,' said our teacher. 'If there are lots of bees on its flowers, there is no point in us going.'

We went to the acacia and looked at its flowers, and all we could hear was the humming of the bees. We would not be going to the forest today.

'Before it rains a sweet nectar oozes from the yellow flowers of the acacia,' explained our teacher. The bees are attracted to that nectar. And from that we learnt that it is going to rain.'

Dawn

I get up before sunrise. The morning chill wraps itself around me. The sky in the east is a pale navy blue. Drops of cold dew glisten on the leaves and grass. Somewhere high above me a lark flickers. It is golden, and seems to float in a pink ocean. What has turned it to gold?

It is the sun, caressing it in its tender embrace.

The edge of the sky flushes scarlet. A starling wakes in its bird-house, and

breaks into song, rejoicing at the approach of the sun. It flies off somewhere, and returns to its nest. In its beak is a treat for its nestlings.

The dawn fills the heavens with fire. Golden streaks spread across the sky. Mist rises above a pond in the valley. Soon the sun will rise.

The squirrel and the kind person

A kind person was walking through the forest. He gazed at the grass and the flowers with tender eyes. He did not tread on the flowers, because he noticed them. The kind person approached a tall pine tree, and saw a squirrel. The squirrel was leaping from branch to branch, and a red-haired animal was chasing it. The kind person saw that it was a marten, a squirrel's worst enemy. At any moment the marten would catch up to the squirrel and tear it to pieces with its sharp claws. With pity, and with pain in his heart, the kind person watched the poor creature. The squirrel noticed the kind person's eyes, jumped from the tree, and landed on his shoulder. The wicked marten ran away into the dark forest. The kind person stroked the squirrel and said, 'Now you can take shelter in your hole in the tree.'

With gratitude the squirrel gazed into the kind person's eyes, and quickly jumped into its hole in the tree. Her babies had been waiting for her for a long time. She told them about the kind person.

