

Perceptions of Sukhomlinsky in the English-speaking world: My personal experience

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Why Translate Sukhomlinsky?

I have set myself the goal of translating several of Sukhomlinsky's major works into English. Why do I think this is a goal worth pursuing? And which works have I chosen to translate? The first part of my talk will be devoted to these two questions. Then I will describe my translation activity up to the present time.

As a species, humankind has achieved spectacular success in dominating the planet. The human population has multiplied to such an extent that it threatens to exhaust the resources it needs for survival. This has led to awareness of the issue of "sustainability", which is one of three central, cross-curricular priorities in the current Australian national curriculum for schools. Spectacular success in science and technology has given humanity the ability to send people to the moon, and to send probes into the deepest recesses of our solar system. We are developing the knowledge to combat diseases that have plagued humanity for millennia. However, this spectacular advancement in science and technology is accompanied by significant risks. Knowledge must be accompanied by wisdom, and a concern for the future of humanity.

The process of technological development that began with the industrial revolution and the harnessing of fossil fuel now creates environmental pollution and threatens global warming. The growth in scientific knowledge that led to Einstein's theory of relativity also led to the development of the atomic bomb. Intellectual development needs to be accompanied by the refinement of human nature, or it may lead to death and destruction.

Even at a personal level, intellectual knowledge does not in itself bring happiness. Without self-control, without emotional and moral development, happiness will elude us. Human beings have enormous capacity for both good and evil. Sukhomlinsky was aware of this, both intellectually (in his youth he read widely, including the novels of Dostoevsky), and through his life experiences (he and those closest to him suffered dreadfully from the fascist invasion of their country).

Throughout 22 years working at Pavlysh Secondary School Sukhomlinsky tried to understand the origins of good and evil in the human soul. He even visited young people in prison and tried to understand what had led them to commit crimes.

It is in this context that I consider Sukhomlinsky's educational legacy to be important. Sukhomlinsky developed a holistic system of education. He considered that educating the heart was every bit as important as educating the head. He also considered that children's health, emotional development and moral development provided a foundation for all further human development, and that

intellectual development, while essential to human self-respect, and for the development of society, was just one aspect of education. In *My Heart I Give to Children* he wrote:

Studies are just one of the petals of that flower which we call education in the wider sense. In education there is nothing major or minor, just as there is no main petal among the many petals which create the beauty of a flower. In education everything is important—the lessons, the development of diverse interest outside lessons, and the relationships between students in the group.¹

The quality of life of each individual depends to a large extent on the quality of their relationships with the other people who surround them: family, friends and colleagues. Where there is mutual respect, love, understanding and support, people have the opportunity to flourish and find happiness. Sukhomlinsky recognised this in his work, and consciously taught the children in his care to empathise with others. In one of his articles he wrote:

How important this is—to teach small children to recognise, from the eyes, movements and speech of the people around them, grief and joy, disappointment and concern, anxiety and confusion. If we do not carry out this work, a person may grow up to be an insensitive blockhead.²

An excellent scholar may not make an excellent teacher. A person to whom study comes easily may find it difficult to appreciate the difficulties of children who are less gifted than themselves. A sensitive intellectual may find it difficult to manage a class full of lively children. Sukhomlinsky was both a highly intelligent and sensitive human being, and a masterful teacher. He retained the capacity to be a child and to relate to children, and earned children's respect through his consistent kindness towards them and faith in them. He also had an exceptional capacity to reflect and write about his educational experience. Sukhomlinsky's personal, artistic and intellectual attributes made him an exceptional educational authority of world significance.

In my doctoral dissertation about Sukhomlinsky³, I argued that he belongs to a humanistic tradition that traces its roots to ancient Greece and Rome, and that educators in English speaking countries can find inspiration and food for thought in his writings. I still believe this to be the case. I believe Sukhomlinsky offers us understanding that can help us educate responsible and caring global citizens, capable of meeting the challenges of the 21st century.

The question then arises, which of Sukhomlinsky's works should a translator select to begin with? Sukhomlinsky himself has given us some guidance on this question. During the final years of his life, Sukhomlinsky knew that he did not have long to live, and tried to record for posterity all the knowledge he had gleaned during his remarkable educational career. He considered the works written during the last years of his life to be the most valuable, as shown in a letter to A.E. Boim in 1967.⁴ I believe it is the works written during the final years of Sukhomlinsky's life that provide the most comprehensive account both of his mature educational philosophy, and of his educational experience.

The three works from Sukhomlinsky's final years that I consider most important to translate and publish into English are: *My Heart I Give to Children*, *The Birth of a Citizen*, and *Pavlysh Secondary School*. I believe these three books together give a reasonably comprehensive picture of

Sukhomlinsky's educational methodology, and of his educational principles. Other books from this period that I would like to translate include: *An Ethics Anthology*, *How to Educate a Genuine Human Being*, *100 Pieces of Advice for School Teachers*, and *Letters to My Son*. Most of these works I will translate after I retire in 2018, but I have already made a start, and will talk about that during the rest of this paper.

Research Activity

I began my doctoral study of Sukhomlinsky in 1987, and spent 10 months in Moscow during 1987 and 1988. In 1987 I met Sukhomlinsky's daughter, Olga Vasilievna Sukhomlinskaya, at a conference, and since then she has supported my research and sent me many valuable books and journals. I completed my doctoral study of Sukhomlinsky in 1994. From 1994 to 1996 I taught Russian language at the University of Queensland, and during that time I prepared the manuscript of a book about Sukhomlinsky, based on my doctoral thesis. This book was published in 1999 by Peter Lang in New York, and contains quotations from many of Sukhomlinsky's works, translated into English.⁵ My book is an attempt to explain Sukhomlinsky's legacy in a way that is accessible for western educators.

Since 1997 I have been working as a school teacher, and have found it much harder to find time for translation or research. I am in awe of Sukhomlinsky's capacity for work, and his ability to write books and articles while fulfilling his responsibilities as a teacher, school principal, husband and father.

In 2009, while working as a teacher in Sydney, I became an honorary research fellow at Monash University in Melbourne. I made a trip to Ukraine at the invitation of Professor Olga Sukhomlinskaya, and collected material at the school in Pavlysh, the Sukhomlinsky Ukrainian College, the Sukhomlinsky library and state archives. After this trip, I wrote two articles about Sukhomlinsky, which were published in refereed journals in 2010⁶ and 2011⁷.

Tales from An Ethics Anthology—the Glade of Dreams Project

In 2012 I began translating tales from *An Ethics Anthology*, from a 1990 edition edited by Olga Sukhomlinskaya⁸. This work consists of many short tales, narratives and fables, and I was able to translate some of these during the limited time that was available to me. I thought it might be possible to publish a small selection of these tales in a children's picture book.

In August 2012 I received an email from Svetlana Fesenko, a specialist from the Donetsk Regional Institute for Post-Graduate Education, in Ukraine. She invited me to a conference in Donetsk devoted to Sukhomlinsky, but at that time I was unable to attend. Instead of travelling to Donetsk, we recorded a short greeting to the participants by Skype. I told Svetlana of my intention to publish some of Sukhomlinsky's tales for children, and that I was looking for an illustrator, and she suggested using illustrations by Ukrainian school children. We worked together on this idea, and which culminated in the organisation of a Ukraine-Australia joint project entitled: "Glade of Dreams: Sukhomlinsky's ethics in children's drawings". We invited school students from various countries to enter a competition to illustrate 19 tales from *An Ethics Anthology*. Svetlana did the lion's share of work on this project, which resulted in 2000 children from Ukraine, Belarus, Russia and Kazakhstan

submitting illustrations. You can see the pictures of the winners of the competition on the screen. (Show the illustrations to the stories.)

All 2000 entries were posted on a Facebook page devoted to the project entitled “Polyana mechty: etika Sukhomlinskogo v detskikh risunkakh [Glade of Dreams: Sukhomlinsky’s ethics represented in Children’s Drawings]”⁹. I viewed all the pictures and selected a short list of pictures for each story. The Australian illustrator Cassandra Allen agreed to assist me with the judging of the pictures, and together we selected 23 pictures to use for publication. In August 2013 the children’s picture book *Tales from Pavlysh: A World of Beauty*¹⁰, was published in Australia. The children with the winning entries each received a copy of the published book, an Australian picture book containing pictures by famous Australian artists, art materials, and a certificate. Nearly all the winning entries came from the Donetsk region of Ukraine.

I have great admiration for these young artists from the Donetsk region. Their beautifully coloured pictures really do reveal a world of beauty. I would like to produce an electronic edition of this picture book with Chinese language translations, so that everyone at this conference could show their students, children and grandchildren these beautiful pictures by Ukrainian children.

My Heart I Give to Children—a new reading

In 2013 Olga Sukhomlinskaya sent me a remarkable new edition of Sukhomlinsky’s most famous work: *My Heart I Give to Children*, which she had personally prepared for publication. This is a new version, based on Sukhomlinsky’s original 1966 manuscript. The book also includes variations introduced in the first Russian language edition of 1969, and a significant amount of background information, including letters to publishers, and photographs of notes for the book. It is an even more personal account than the 1969 edition, containing more detailed information about Sukhomlinsky’s students, and some material that was cut due to editorial intervention.

Two previous English language translations of *My Heart I Give to Children* have already been published. Progress Publishers released Holly Smith’s translation in Moscow in 1981, and Robert Weiss produced an abridged translation in 2003, which was published in America. For this reason, I had not intended to begin my translation of Sukhomlinsky’s work with *My Heart I Give to Children*, but rather with *Pavlysh Secondary School*. However, when I read this new edition of Sukhomlinsky’s signature work, I changed my mind. It seemed to me that a translation of this new reading of *My Heart I Give to Children* had the best possible chance of captivating the minds of English speaking educators, and that I should translate it as soon as practically possible. I arranged to take two months long service leave in March and April of 2014, hoping that this would allow me to translate most of the book in one sustained effort. Over a ten week period from 10 March to 18 May I translated approximately 75% of the book (91,000 words of English text). Since then I have worked more slowly, but I still hope to complete my translation by the end of this year, and to publish an English language edition in 2015.

In *My Heart I Give to Children* Sukhomlinsky discusses many issues that I believe are important for educators in Australia, the UK and the USA. In all these countries schools are becoming more and more focussed on the results their students achieve on national standardized testing regimes that focus on basic literacy and numeracy skills. This means teachers are pressured to focus their efforts

on preparing students for standardized tests, and in consequence the implementation of the curriculum may be narrowed. At the same time, teachers are aware of the need for holistic approaches that focus on the whole child, and that prepare a child for life in society.

Sukhomlinsky's ideas can support more holistic approaches to educating children: the education of strong character, of empathy and kindness, of a love for work, and a sense of duty. I showed my translation to some of my colleagues at the school where I work, and one of them told me, that it reminded her of why she became a teacher. I will be very happy if my translation of Sukhomlinsky's works has that effect on teachers.

Conclusion

In 2009 Xiao Su wrote an interesting article on the spread and influence of Sukhomlinsky's ideas in China.¹¹ In her article she suggested that this progressed in three phases:

1. The translation and publication of Sukhomlinsky's major works during the 1980s and early 1990s.
2. The analysis, discussion and trial implementation of Sukhomlinsky ideas during the 1990s, and the building of networks between those interested in implementing Sukhomlinsky's ideas.
3. The mass publication of Sukhomlinsky's works in translation, detailed study of his works by scholars, and widespread implementation by teachers during the 21st century. During this third phase, many teachers are not only implementing Sukhomlinsky's ideas, but are writing about their experiences, and providing inspiration to other teachers.

In English speaking countries we are at the very beginning of phase 1 in this process. We are only just beginning to translate Sukhomlinsky's major works. It is during this phase that I hope to make a significant contribution by translating some of Sukhomlinsky's key works. However, it is not enough to translate Sukhomlinsky's books. The translations need to be published, and to be read by educators. Attracting attention to the work of a foreign educator is not a simple matter. Teachers are very busy, and feel pressure from all directions. To promote Sukhomlinsky's ideas in English speaking countries we need an association of like-minded people.

It would be good to renew the activities of the International Sukhomlinsky Society, which during the 1990s had its headquarters in Marburg, Germany. I would certainly like to be part of such a society.

¹ Sukhomlinsky, V.A. (1979-1980) "Serdse otdayu detyam", *Izbrannye proizvedeniia v pyati tomakh* [Collected Works in Five Volumes], Kiev, Radyanska shkola, Vol. 3, p. 13.

² Sukhomlinsky, V.A. (1989) "Idti vpered! [Let us go forwards!]", *Narodnoe obrazovanie* [National education], No. 8, p. 77.

³ Cockerill, Alan (1994) "V.A. Sukhomlinsky: Humanism in a Soviet School", Ph.D. Thesis, University of Queensland.

⁴ Sukhomlinsky, V.A. (1988) "Uchitel'—sovest' naroda [A teacher is the nation's conscience]", *Narodnoe obrazovanie* [National education], No. 9, pp. 73-79.

⁵ Cockerill, Alan (1999) *Each One Must Shine: The Educational Legacy of V.A. Sukhomlinsky*, New York, Peter Lang.

⁶ Cockerill, Alan (2010) "Sukhomlinsky in the 21st Century", *Beliefs and Values*, Vol 2, Issue 2, Springer Publishing Company, USA, pp. 164-174.

⁷ Cockerill, A. (2011) "Values education in the Soviet State: the lasting contribution of V.A. Sukhomlinsky", *International Journal of Educational Research*, Vol. 50, Issue 3, Elsevier, United States, pp. 198-204.

⁸ Sukhomlinsky, V.A. (1990) *Khrestomatiya po etike* [An Ethics Anthology], Moscow, Pedagogika.

⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/polyanamechty>

¹⁰ Sukhomlinsky, V. (2013) *Tales from Pavlysh: A World of Beauty*, Brisbane, EJR Language Service Pty. Ltd.

¹¹ Xiao Su. (2009). "Rasprostranenie i vliyanie pedagogicheskikh idei V. A. Sukhomlinskogo v Kitae [The spread and influence of V. A. Sukhomlinsky's educational ideas in China]". In *Istoriko-pedagogichnyi al'manakh* [A historical education almanac] (pp. 64 –69). Uman': Uman' State Pedagogical University. Retrieved from www.nbu.gov.ua/portal/Soc_Gum/Ipa/2009_1.pdf