

# Sukhomlinsky News

No. 36

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## 100th Anniversary

*As we approach the 100th anniversary of Sukhomlinsky's birth on 28 September this year, I invite you to think about ways you could honour the occasion in your own setting. I have made a few suggestions on the first page of this month's newsletter, but I would love to hear your suggestions as well.*

*If you do decide to organise some sort of gathering of friends or colleagues, please let me know by emailing me at [ejr.cockerill@gmail.com](mailto:ejr.cockerill@gmail.com). I may be able to supply you with some materials to support the occasion.*

*One potentially powerful thing you can do is to send an email to [proposals@google.com](mailto:proposals@google.com), suggesting they produce a doodle to honour Sukhomlinsky on 28 September.*

*This month's translations are taken from an article I prepared for a Chinese journal, and from Sukhomlinsky's Ethics Anthology.*

*Best wishes,*

*Alan Cockerill*



## 100th Anniversary Approaches

In three months time, on 28 September, we will celebrate the 100th anniversary of Sukhomlinsky's birth. There are quite a number of celebratory events planned in Ukraine, including a conference being held in Kropyvnytskyi (formerly Kirovograd) on 4 & 5 October. The occasion will also be celebrated in China, where Sukhomlinsky's works are very popular. A special issue of the Chinese journal *International and Comparative Education* will be dedicated to Sukhomlinsky's legacy, and I have submitted an article to that journal, which will be translated into Chinese.

I would like to invite subscribers to this newsletter, who live in Australia, the USA, Canada, England, India and other countries, to consider ways you could celebrate the 100th anniversary in your own setting. I have made some suggestions below.

### Ideas for celebrating the 100th anniversary

1. Send an email to [proposals@google.com](mailto:proposals@google.com) and suggest they produce a doodle to acknowledge the 100th anniversary of Sukhomlinsky's birth on 28 September this year.
2. Invite some friends to meet and celebrate the event by reading an extract from Sukhomlinsky's work and discussing it. Alternatively listen to the Richard Fidler podcast at: <http://www.abc.net.au/radio/programs/conversations/conversations-vasily-sukhomlinsky/7886808> and discuss the content.
3. If you work in an academic or school setting, organise a seminar or workshop dedicated to Sukhomlinsky's work.

# Empathy, Curiosity and Creativity

I recently submitted an article to the Chinese journal *International and Comparative Education* in which I discuss the relevance of Sukhomlinsky's legacy in the 21st century. The following translated passages are among those cited in the article.

## On Empathy

In *Methodology for educating the collective* Sukhomlinsky writes that we must educate people of whom folk wisdom says 'he would not hurt a fly'. He writes:

'Socialisation... is quite inconceivable, if a child has not been brought up to have elementary feelings of empathy. Children come to school with varying levels of development of empathy ....

... Educating the heart's capacity for empathy is one of the most subtle and difficult tasks facing families. The ability to put oneself in another's shoes, to mentally become that person, this is what wise parents teach their children from the first steps of their conscious lives. In my opinion, the emotional state of empathy is the most subtle and demanding sentinel of our conscience. When we conduct educational work with parents we strive to ensure that, from early childhood to the awakening of first love, a young person experiences compassion for all living creatures. How a person relates to a flower or a butterfly, to a homeless puppy or a baby sparrow that has fallen from its nest, to a stray dog that has made the school its home, or to a kitten that has been abandoned, all of these things determine the human beauty and culture of our future citizens, workers and family men and women.' (*Methodology for educating the collective*, 1981, pp. 107-108.)

In *My Heart I Give to Children* Sukhomlinsky writes:

'I was very concerned about

the indifference of some children towards living things and to beauty in the surrounding world. I worried about actions that seemed, at first glance, to provide evidence of children's senseless cruelty....

...How could I awaken pure, kindly feelings? How could I encourage heartfelt benevolence, a caring attitude towards the living and the beautiful? On one of our walks in the fields we found a lark with a damaged wing. The bird was fluttering from one spot to another but could not fly. The children caught the lark. The little bundle of life shivered in their hands. Its frightened eyes, like beads, looked up at the blue sky. Kolya squeezed it in his hand and the bird cheeped pitifully. 'Is it really possible that none of them feel compassion for this bird left behind in an empty field?' I wondered, and looked at the children. Tears appeared in the eyes of Lida, Tanya, Danko, Seryozha and Nina.

'Why are you tormenting the bird?' Lida asked Kolya, with pity in her voice.

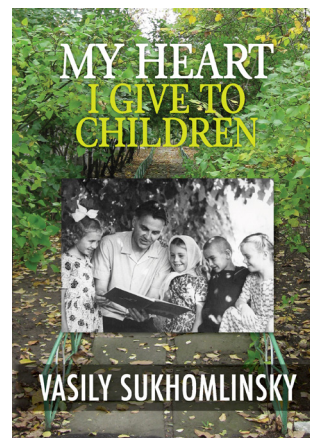
'Do you feel sorry for it?' asked the boy. 'Then take it and look after it.' And he threw the bird to Lida.

'I do feel sorry for it, and I will look after it,' said the girl, caressing the lark.

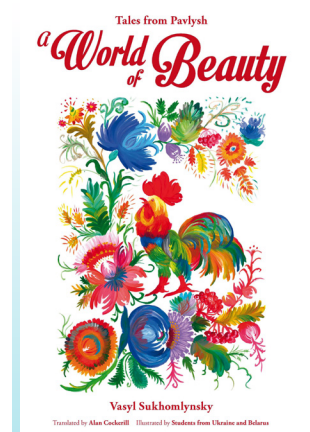
We sat down on the edge of the forest. I told the children how, in autumn, migratory birds head off on a long flight. In the empty fields a few lonely birds remain. One might have a clipped wing; another might be crippled, having escaped from the claws of a

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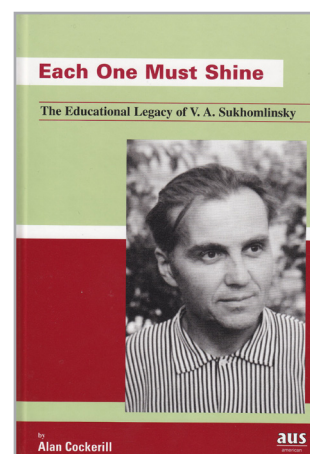
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predator ... 'A harsh winter awaits them, with blizzards and frosts. What will happen to this lark? The poor thing will freeze. And it sings so beautifully in spring and summer, filling the steppe with enchanting music. The lark is a child of the sun. It says in the fairytale that this bird was born from the sun's fire. That is why our people call it *zhavoronok*... And we all know how much it hurts when a heavy frost makes your fingers numb and a searing wind chokes your breath. You hurry home, to a warm hearth, to a friendly fire ... But where will this bird go? Who will give it shelter? It will turn into a frozen ball.'

'But we won't let the lark die,' says Varya. 'We will find a warm place for it and make it a nest. Then it can wait for the spring ...'

The children began to vie with each other, suggesting how to build a shelter for the lark. Each one wanted to take the bird home for the winter. Only Kolya, Tolya and a few other boys remained silent.

'Why take the lark home, children? We can make a warm nest for it at the school. We will feed it and treat it, and in spring we will set it free.'

We took the lark to school, put it in a cage, and placed it in a room we had set aside for the little ones. Each morning one of the children came to feed the lark.' (pp. 63-65)

### **On Curiosity**

Sukhomlinsky wrote about the importance of curiosity, and how to awaken it, in *Kak vospitat' nastoyashchego chelokeka* (How to educate a genuine human being):

'In the very notion of curiosity is hidden a deep meaning: it is a growing, ever intensifying need to know, to find out, to explain. The more actively people interact with the surrounding world, the more they see connections between things, facts, nuances,

characteristics and the peculiar features of things, facts and phenomena, and the more they are filled with wonder and amazement. They discover many incomprehensible things, thousands of riddles that they must solve, no matter what. In this appearance of riddles and their solution is the essence of curiosity. Our task is to ensure that in early childhood all children become little thinkers, that their activity should lead to an irresistible avalanche of discovery. The only way to achieve this is through work, in the broadest sense of the word. Children's work does not mean giving them a shovel and letting them dig till they are exhausted. Curiosity is a very delicate personal quality, and it is very easy to destroy it, awakening an aversion to work, if that work is beyond a child's strength or is too monotonous. I am talking about the work of a thinker. Children's work is an active vision of the world, a vision through which children become active participants in natural processes, and custodians of nature.

For two years before they join the compulsory school program, I work with little children in a preparatory group. I would call this period a school in curiosity. This is first and foremost an educator making contact with a child's brain, which is so plastic and responsive during the preschool years. The main method employed in making this contact is to inspire children with wonder and amazement. The main instrument is a teacher's words, and the main form of activity is excursions to the source of thought and language, in the midst of the inexhaustible richness of nature. My aim is that a growing curiosity should become an autonomous force, governing the interests and aspirations of children. If I manage to establish

curiosity as an inextinguishable flame, I know that children will never lack ability. (pp. 85-86)

Sukhomlinsky explains why this is so in *My Heart I Give to Children*:

'Observation of the children's intellectual work convinced me more and more that the emotional impulses flowing from the sub-cortex to the cortex (feelings of joyful excitement, wonder and amazement) have the effect of arousing the sleeping cells of the cortex and triggering their activity. Experience showed that a central focus for the intellectual education of little children must be the development of a thirst for knowledge—curiosity, inquisitiveness.' (p. 150)

### **On Creativity**

In *Pavlyshskiyaya srednyaya shkola* (Pavlysh Secondary School) Sukhomlinsky writes:

'The first thing that catches the eye of a child who enters our school in grade one is the array of interesting things that all, without exception, are busy with. Each pupil has a favourite workplace, a favourite hobby, and an older friend whose work serves as a model. The overwhelming majority of pupils are not only learning something, mastering something, but passing on their acquired skills and knowledge to their friends. A person is being truly educated only when they pass their knowledge, experience and mastery on to someone else. One only begins to sense one's creative powers and abilities when one enters into moral relations with another person, becomes concerned about increasing their spiritual wealth. This is how a vocation is born and how self-education occurs. In the work process moral relations between personalities arise from the moment when one begins to see in another their own virtues, when the other person becomes as a mirror to them.' (pp. 358-359)



## Stories for Children

### Mum doesn't have time

One day Tolya, a slow, placid grade three student, had a visitor, his classmate Sashko. Tolya handed Sashko a picture book, sat him on the sofa, and went to the fridge. He knew that his daily treat would be waiting there for him—a tub of ice cream.

Tolya opened the fridge, found his ice cream, took a small spoon, and sat down to eat.

When Tolya is eating ice cream, he forgets about everything else. He even forgot that Sashko was sitting on the sofa.

Tolya finished eating his ice cream, and then looked at Sashko. His face seemed to have a strange expression. He had never seen his friend looking like that, as if he was very, very ashamed of something, so ashamed that at any moment he would burst into tears.

Tolya was very surprised. He went over to his guest and asked, 'What's the matter, Sashko?' 'Nothing. I need to go home,' answered Sashko quietly, and he got up and quickly left the room.

Tolya was even more surprised. He could not understand what had happened.

'Mum, why did Sashko go home?' Tolya asked his mother, who was working in the kitchen. 'I haven't even got time to look after you, let alone Sashko,' answered his mother irritably.



### Casting words to the wind

One spring day a detachment of pioneers planted some rose bushes near the graves of some fallen soldiers. They conducted a ceremony near the war memorial. They spoke beautifully about how they would honour the memory of the war heroes.

Then they watered the roses and went home. Buds opened on the roses, and they grew beautiful green leaves. But there was no rain, and the ground in which the roses were planted dried out and cracked. The roses withered, and weeds grew around them.

The pioneers forgot about the roses, and the beautiful words they had spoken. They often walked along a path past the place where in the spring they had planted the roses, but not one of them thought of their duty.

Why does this happen? Because the children had got used to casting words to the wind. They forgot what great and sacred words they had uttered, when they promised to honour the memory of heroes. But you should not take sacred words so lightly.

### Beautiful words and beautiful deeds

In the middle of a field is a small hut. It was built so that in bad weather people could take shelter there and sit in the warmth. One summer day the sky clouded over, and it began to rain. At the time three boys were out in the forest. They took shelter in time to escape the rain and watched as the rain poured down from the sky.

Suddenly they saw a young boy about ten years old running towards the hut. The boy was from a neighbouring village, and they did not know him. He was soaked to the skin and shivering from the cold.

The oldest of the boys who had escaped from the rain, and was sitting in dry clothes, said, 'What a shame, boy, that you got caught in the rain. I feel sorry for you...'

The second boy also said some beautiful, sympathetic words. 'You must have been scared to be out in the middle of the field in weather like this. I can just imagine...'

The third boy did not say a word. He quietly took off his shirt and gave it to the boy, who was still shivering from the cold.

What is really beautiful is not beautiful words, but beautiful deeds.