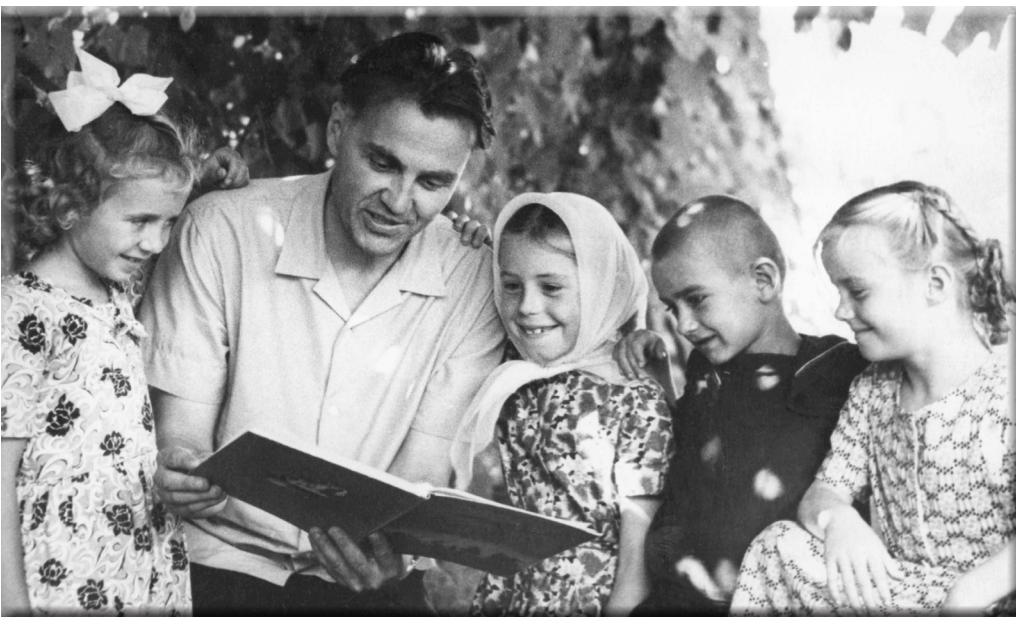


# Sukhomlinsky News

No. 39  
September 2018



## Special anniversary issue

*This month's issue of Sukhomlinsky News is a special one to mark the 100th anniversary of Sukhomlinsky's birth. It is designed to be shared, and to provide an introduction to the work of this remarkable educator. I invite all subscribers to forward it on to anyone who they think might find it interesting.*

*The environment in which teachers are working today is becoming more and more challenging, and it is easy to lose sight of the holistic approaches to education that inspired many of us to take up the profession.*

*Sukhomlinsky provides an inspiring example of a reflective teacher who adopted a holistic approach to the education of every child in his care.*

*This month's newsletter is divided into three sections. The first page introduces Sukhomlinsky to people who have never heard of him. The middle spread contains a short article suggesting grounds for Sukhomlinsky's relevance in the 21st century. The back page offers three examples of Sukhomlinsky's little moral tales for children. Each section contains a link to a more comprehensive source of information.*

*Please celebrate Sukhomlinsky's life on the 100th anniversary of his birth.*

*Best wishes,*

*Alan Cockerill*

## Who was Sukhomlinsky?

Vasily Sukhomlinsky was a Ukrainian school teacher. From 1948 to 1970 he was the principal of a combined primary and secondary school in the rural settlement of Pavlysh. His school was made famous through his many books and articles, which have been read by millions. Thousands of educators, from the length and breadth of the Soviet Union and beyond, travelled to see his school with their own eyes, and millions of educators around the world have been inspired by his example. We celebrate the 100th anniversary of Sukhomlinsky's birth on 28th September 2018.

Sukhomlinsky was born in the middle of a civil war, and survived the famine known by Ukrainians as the *Holodomor*. He was nearly killed on the battlefield during the Second World War, and his first wife and child were brutally killed by a Gestapo officer, aided and abetted by local collaborators. He could easily have become an embittered man, but he found a catharsis for his suffering through his work as a teacher and his love for children. His writings are imbued with the optimism that he believed to be the essence of childhood.

Working in very difficult circumstances, he created a model school, and a holistic educational theory to support it. Despite taking on a heavy work load as a teacher and principal, running a preschool group, and organising parenting classes for all the parents at his school, he found time in the early hours of the morning to write dozens of books, hundreds of articles, and over 1200 little stories for children. Only a very small portion of this legacy has been translated into English, and a veritable treasure trove of knowledge and experience lies waiting to be discovered by English speaking educators. For more information, visit: <http://theholisticeducator.com/sukhomlinsky/>.

# Empathy, curiosity and creativity: Education for the Anthropocene

This short article is based on one that I submitted to a special issue of a Chinese comparative education journal, to mark the 100th anniversary of Sukhomlinsky's birth. The full text can be downloaded at: <http://theholisticeducator.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Empathy-Curiosity-Creativity.pdf>.

The development of science and technology has given humanity great power over its environment, but it has also created serious problems, including climate change and the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The future of humanity will depend on the qualities we educate in successive generations: not just on their knowledge, but on their attitudes, values and strength of character.

Sukhomlinsky's approach to education addressed children's emotional, moral and aesthetic development, as well as their physical, intellectual and vocational development. Figuratively speaking, we may say that Sukhomlinsky's approach engaged children's hearts, heads and hands, through the development of empathy, curiosity and creativity. Sukhomlinsky engaged children's hearts by helping them to develop empathy for all living creatures, including family members, classmates, elderly members of the community, animals, birds and plants. He also taught them to appreciate the beauty in nature, in art and music, in human relationships and in work. Sukhomlinsky engaged children's heads through their emotions, through a sense of wonder and curiosity about the phenomena of nature, and a sense of admiration for human knowledge, skill and heroism. Sukhomlinsky engaged children's hands through constant involvement in work and creativity, in the orchards and fields around his school, in greenhouses and workshops, in

technical clubs and laboratories, in art rooms and in other creative pursuits such as music, literature and puppetry.

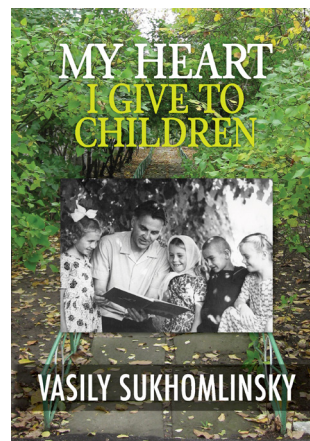
To develop empathy, Sukhomlinsky taught children how to read facial expressions, paying particular attention to the eyes. He put children in situations where they had the opportunity to care for plants, animals, family members, friends, and other members of the community. He told children stories, and shared his own compassionate perception of life. In *100 Pieces of advice for teachers* he wrote:

*'Our work addresses subtle aspects of the spiritual life of the developing personality—the intelligence, feeling, will, conviction, self-consciousness. One may influence these spheres only through like action, through intelligence, feeling, will, conviction, self-consciousness. The most important means for influencing the spiritual world of a pupil are the teacher's words, the beauty of the surrounding world and of art, and the creation of circumstances in which feelings find their most striking expression—human relationships covering the whole emotional gamut.'*

To develop curiosity, Sukhomlinsky took children on frequent excursions into natural environments and to local work places, and exposed them to natural phenomena that aroused feelings of wonder and amazement. He encouraged them to ask questions about what they observed, and to seek answers to their ques-

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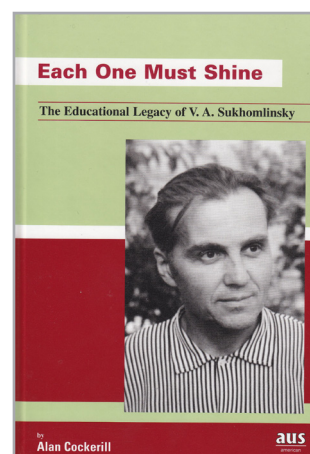
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tions through reflection and reading.

Sukhomlinsky wrote about the importance of curiosity, and how to awaken it, in *Kak vospitat' nas-toyashchego 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.*

In the twenty-first century, we can easily fall into the trap of thinking that all the knowledge we require is available via search engines like Google, and accept whatever information we find online without question. A curious, questioning mind will not be satisfied with pre-digested knowledge, but will seek to incorporate new information into a meaningful world view.

Sukhomlinsky understood that in the second half of the twentieth century (and this is even more true in the twenty-first century) learning must be a life-long pursuit. He knew that a self-motivated learner, driven by curiosity, will make far greater progress at school than one who is forced to learn through a system of rewards and punishments. He also believed that every student's mind is unique, and that each child views the world through a unique pair of eyes, drawn to different aspects of the world that surrounds them.

To develop creativity Sukhomlinsky employed teachers with diverse interests and work skills, and established a program of extracurricular activities that provided children with many opportunities to discover their talents and creative abilities.

Sukhomlinsky took great pride in the diversity of extracurricular activities at his school. A key feature of these clubs was the way

younger children worked alongside older children and learnt from them:

*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. It is on these moral relationships in the collective that vocational self-education is built.*

The clubs that operated after school were an integral part of the educational experience at Pavlysh, having a great influence on the general atmosphere of the school and on children's interest in and success at their studies. They also provided a key avenue for pastoral care. The diversity of extracurricular activities ensured that every child could find some activity in which they could develop their creativity.

Empathy, curiosity and creativity are valuable attributes in any human being, especially in the 21st century, and Sukhomlinsky's insights into how to educate such qualities are still relevant today.



## Stories for Children

### Who the rowan tree was waiting for

The rowan tree shed its leaves. Only bunches of red berries remained. They hung like beads, beautiful, but bitter and tart. Whenever birds came and tried the berries, they found them bitter and flew on.

Then one morning a beautiful song rang out above the rowan tree, as if silver strings were being played. Some wonderful crested birds had arrived. They were waxwings. They had flown from the far north. They were the ones the rowan tree had been waiting for! Joyfully she welcomed her guests with her red berries. None of the other birds knew the rowan tree's berries had become sweet.

People say frost makes the berries sweet, but it was not the frost. It was grief. The rowan tree had waited so long for its dear guests, feeling sad, grieving, worrying that they would not come. And its grief made the berries sweet.

[The illustration for this story is taken from the picture book *Tales from Pavlysh: A World of Beauty*. All the illustrations in the book were drawn by students from Ukraine and Belarus, who entered a competition to illustrate nineteen stories. Around 2000 entries were received. For more information, and for free teaching materials (PowerPoint presentations) go to: <http://theholisticeducator.com/sukhomlinsky/art/>.]

## The Lamplighter

Through green meadows and thick forests, a river flowed. It was deep and free flowing, but quiet and gentle. For many centuries it had brought the gift of its pure waters. Boats and even small ships sailed on that river.

On the shore of the river lived an old lamplighter. Every evening he climbed into his boat, rowed to the middle of the river and lit a lamp. Its light flickered in the middle of the river until dawn, showing the way to travellers. Waves tenderly splashed on the shore. The river was glad: people loved her, and she felt needed by them.

But people needed lots of wood to make tables and chairs, and they cut down the forests by the shores of the river. It seemed to people that the green meadows were an unnecessary luxury, and they ploughed them to grow crops.

The cold springs that fed the river dried up, and the river itself choked with thirst and died. For a few years, where the boats and ships had sailed, a stream babbled in spring, and then it too dried up. The old river bed was used for vegetable gardens. The only reminder of the river that had flowed there was the post where the lamplighter hung his lamp each spring, as he was accustomed to doing. But the rain clouds gathered less and less often overhead. Hot winds blew in from the desert and knocked at people's doors. As soon as dusk fell, the old lamplighter walked through the fields, lit his lamp and hung it on the post. A little boy named Seryozha asked him one day:

'Grandpa, why do you still light your lamp? There has not been any river here for a long time.'

'So people can more easily see their stupidity,' he replied.

### Why do people say 'thank you'?

Two people were walking along a forest road, a grandfather and a boy. It was hot, and they were thirsty.

The travellers came to a stream. The cool water quietly murmured. They bent down and drank. "Thank you, stream," said the grandfather.

The boy laughed.

"Why did you say thank you to the stream?" he asked his grandfather. "The stream is not alive. It won't hear your words and won't understand your gratitude."

"That's true. If a wolf had drunk, he wouldn't have said 'thank you'. But we're not wolves, we're people. Do you know why people say 'thank you'? Think about who benefits from that word." The boy started thinking. He had plenty of time. They had a long way to go...