

Sukhomlinsky News

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School and family working together

This month's extract from Pavlysh secondary school focuses on the development of healthy routines. Sukhomlinsky thought that it was important not to expect students to undertake intense intellectual work in the evenings, before sleep. Instead, he recommended that students rise early and complete homework before school.

What this month's extract also highlights is the degree of cooperation between teachers and parents at his school, as many of the measures he recommended could only be implemented with the cooperation of parents. The twice monthly parenting classes attended by parents at the school provided an opportunity for fostering cooperation between home and school.

As well as suggesting that homework be completed in the mornings, Sukhomlinsky ensured that intellectually demanding lessons were scheduled early in the day, leaving the afternoons for less intellectually demanding activities, such as art, physical education and manual work.

Behind all Sukhomlinsky's efforts was an attempt to make sure that schooling supported optimal health, and did not undermine it.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill

Healthy routines

In Pavlysh secondary school, Sukhomlinsky goes into considerable detail when describing the importance of healthy routines.

A key feature of healthy routines is a judicious rotation between work and rest, waking and sleeping. Studying children's work patterns showed that this area is fraught with hazards that can adversely affect children's health and state of mind. Irregular work patterns, where periods of idleness alternate with periods of extreme, unacceptably stressful work are a serious threat not only to health, but also to moral development. At our parenting classes and in conversations with parents we had to spend a lot of time convincing parents of the unacceptability of children going to bed late. Lack of sleep, sluggishness, leading to chronic indisposition, have a negative impact on how the child feels and on their intellectual development.

The restorative role of sleep depends not only on its duration, but also on which part of the night is spent in sleep, and how a child works during the day. Those children feel the best who go to bed early, sleep sufficiently, rise early, and complete any intense intellectual work during the first five to ten hours after waking (depending on their age). During the waking hours that follow, the intensity of any intellectual work should be lowered. It is quite unacceptable to carry out intense intellectual work, especially memorisation, during the five to seven hours before sleep (and for those who are weakened or recovering from illness such work is unacceptable during the eight to nine hours before sleep). To use the hours before sleep for intense intellectual work leads not only to a sharp drop in productivity, but also to unhealthy sleep, which in its turn makes it impossible to engage in intense intellectual work upon waking.

[Continued on the following page]

Healthy routines (continued)

We were convinced by many cases that if children sit studying their lessons for several hours before sleep, they begin to fall behind in their studies. A lack of engagement in intellectual work during lessons is most often attributable to children sitting over their books when they should be out in the fresh air, in the garden or throwing snowballs.

If a young child rises, for example, at six a.m., after twelve or one in the afternoon intense intellectual work should not be expected. During the middle and senior years of school, given the same hour of rising, the duration of intensive intellectual work may be extended by another two or three, sometimes four hours.

We have come to these conclusions after thirty years of observations. Observing the effectiveness of intellectual work during various times after waking, we became convinced that intense intellectual work has a detrimental effect on the health and intellectual development of young children if undertaken after twelve or one in the afternoon, and for middle and senior students if undertaken after two to four in the afternoon. There is a weakening of the memory and of clarity of perception, thought processes are retarded, appetite and quality of sleep are adversely affected. We have observation notes covering the intellectual work of 32 students, who, as was subsequently demonstrated, for a long time lagged behind in their studies for the simple reason that, having weak health, they sat over their textbooks until late in the evening. The removal of this abnormality, the establishment of a healthy diet, and increasing the time spent in the open air, resulted in these children being able to cope with their studies. (Eight of them completed the seven- and

eight-year school programs with excellent marks, and twelve with a combination of excellent and good marks. All of them successfully completed their secondary schooling. Of nineteen who completed the full secondary program, four were awarded medals for excellent marks, and five received a combination of excellent and good marks.)

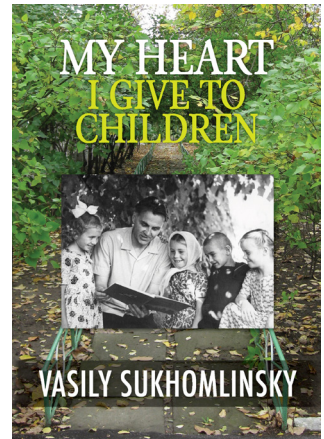
We try to ensure that young children (aged seven to twelve) sleep for ten hours, and children in the middle and senior years sleep for eight and a half hours, and that 40-45% of that time should be during the hours before midnight.

Such an allocation of rest, combined with intensive intellectual work during the first seven to eleven hours after waking (as long as that intellectual work is conducted properly! We will come to that question later), is an important precondition for healthy sleep the following night and the complete restoration of strength. To go to bed early and rise early, and to start work as soon as soon as one completes one's physical exercise routine, without sitting idle, this is one of the main requirements of our system of character education. We consider it very significant that sleep, which plays such an enormous defensive role for the nervous system and for the organism as a whole, has throughout the history of human development been assigned by nature itself to night-time. To interfere with this adaptation is to do great harm to a child's organism.

Two years before a child begins studies, we recommend to parents at our parenting school that they establish a routine for their child of going to bed early and rising early. In this way children enrolling at our school are already prepared to some extent for our

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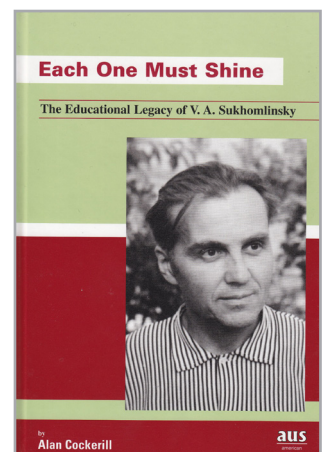
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routines. Our work with parents continues. We encourage them to make the children independent in going to bed and rising. Little children find it interesting to get up at the sound of an alarm clock. This is not difficult if sleep has been of sufficient duration, and if 40-45% has taken place before midnight. Then early rising becomes a habit. We have observed the intellectual work and health of many students who have risen early, at the same time every day, throughout the eight or ten years of studying at our school. They feel bright and cheerful and actively engage with material during lessons.

Our early years students usually go to bed at eight in the evening and rise at six in the morning. (During school holidays these hours are advanced to an hour later.) Students in the middle and senior years go to bed at nine and rise at half past five. (During holidays this routine may vary depending on circumstances and involvement in work and recreation, but the principle of early rising remains.) After morning ablutions, exercise and breakfast (which take no more than 20 minutes) students commence work. For the one and a half to two hours before setting off for school (and for two and a half hours for those who live close to the school) they do their homework. In this way their working day begins with the most challenging task. In completing homework tasks, the emphasis is not on memorisation, but on reading, reflection and analysis. The overwhelming majority of homework assignments involve creative work. Morning is the optimum time for this. The intensity of intellectual work over the ensuing hours of the working day gradually diminishes. This is a most important requirement that facilitates the maintenance of good spirits. Periods of intense work alternate with periods of

rest. The first significant break is the walk from home to school, which takes between five and thirty minutes. Those who live close to the school are encouraged to take a walk for 10-15 minutes before classes begin.

Varying the nature of intellectual work and alternating work and rest are especially significant for the health and intellectual development of students in the early years. [At the time of writing children at Sukhomlinsky's school entered grade one aged seven, so by the early years he means from seven to nine.] The length of a lesson in grade one is the same as in other classes: 45 minutes, but during a lesson children are involved in a variety of activities such as writing, counting and reading. In the middle of the lesson the teacher sets an activity that requires them to get up from their desks and come to the front of the classroom or go outside to observe something. In grade one there are no lessons devoted completely to writing or completely to arithmetic. The transition to 'pure' lessons in arithmetic, writing or reading is made gradually at the end of the first semester. Periods devoted to acquiring knowledge, requiring memorisation, alternate with periods of actively applying knowledge. After solving a problem, students will measure something, count, calculate, define. After several hours of intense intellectual work during lessons students do not pick up a textbook for the rest of the day. Homework is only completed in the morning, before school. Experience has convinced us that if lessons are conducted properly (especially the introduction of new material during lessons) children can complete twice as much work in one and a half to two hours (sometimes two and a half hours) in the morning as they would complete during the same time after lessons.

Students in grades one and two complete all their homework in 20-25 minutes, while students in grades three and four take 40-45 minutes. Practice has shown that we cannot manage without some homework. Several days are allowed for work that requires considerable time, such as essays or complex drawings. Teachers advise students on how to do this. A child's intellectual work in the morning begins with reviewing material that has to be memorised and consolidated in long term memory.

Among the requirements of our routines it is very important to allocate lessons according to the level of difficulty and nature of the intellectual work. Lessons late in the day are generally reserved for drawing, singing, physical education, manual work, work in our workshops or agricultural plots. Work lessons are held at the end of the week. Lessons in reading comprehension and literature, which differ significantly from lessons in other subjects, are held in the middle of the day. Lessons early in the day are allocated to subjects in the natural sciences: mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, and also to grammar.

During a thirty-minute break in the middle of lessons students have lunch and spend time in the open air.

During the second half of the day, after lessons, the children spend most of their time in the open air, and take part in interesting, intellectually stimulating creative work that satisfies their individual needs. Equipment for fitting and metalwork is often taken from workshops outside. The children all have an outdoor working area at home as well. During holidays and days off the routine does not change significantly. The main difference is that the children spend the whole day (and in summer days and nights) in the fresh air.



Stories

Who takes who home?

At the kindergarten are two five-year-old boys, Vasya and Tolya. Their mothers work at the animal breeding farm. At six o'clock in the evening the women come to the kindergarten for their children. Vasya's mother dresses him, takes him by the hand, and leads him, saying, 'Let's go home, Vasya.'

But Tolya dresses himself, takes his mother by the hand, and leads her saying, 'Let's go home, mum.'

The road is covered in snow, through which there is just a narrow path.

Vasya's mother walks in the snow, while her son takes the path. After all, she is taking him home.

Tolya walks in the snow, while his mother takes the path. After all, he is taking her home.

Twenty years pass. Vasya and Tolya are now both strong, well-built, handsome young men.

In winter, when the roads are covered with thick snow drifts, Vasya's mother falls seriously ill.

The same day, Tolya's mother also falls ill.

The doctor lives in a neighbouring village, five kilometres away.

Vasya goes out on to the street, looks at the snow, and says, 'How can anyone walk through snow like that?' He stands for a while and goes back inside.

But Tolya walks through the deep snow to the neighbouring village and comes back with the doctor.

The curious poppy seed

A grandmother was carrying ripe poppies from the town in a basket.

'Where are we being carried?' whispered the Curious Poppy Seed in a frightened tone from the depths of a poppyhead.

The Curious Poppy Seed stretched out its tiny head to take a look around and fell out of the basket onto the ground. The Curious Poppy Seed shouted from behind:

'Oh Grandmother! Take me with you...'

But the Grandmother was busy with her own thoughts and did not pay attention to the shouts of the Curious Poppy Seed.

A wonderful world opened up before the Curious Poppy Seed. Above its head, somewhere far away beneath the clouds, the tops of giant plants were rustling. And above those - even higher plants, and beyond them - such tall plants that it was impossible to see their tops.

The Curious Poppy Seed became frightened. It felt as though it was completely alone in the world.

The Curious Poppy Seed began to cry. Then it fell asleep. It dreamt heavenly dreams of giant white blankets falling onto the earth...

The Curious Poppy Seed awoke feeling warm. It was lying on a warm pillow. Everything around it was singing. The Curious Poppy Seed wanted to see who was singing. It raised its head and saw that instead of a head it had a green sprout. The sprout raised itself from the ground and divided into many small leaves. There were more and more leaves by the minute.

The Curious Poppy Seed became a tall, branched, slender plant. At its very top, a pink flower was blooming.

Everything was strange and joyful. However, the greatest joy the Curious Poppy Seed felt was when it saw next to it a pink flower just like itself. And then it saw another flower. And another. And behind those an entire sea of pink flowers.

'So, I am not wholly alone in this world after all!' cried the Curious Poppy Seed and laughed.

And everything around the Curious Poppy Seed was laughing - the sun, the blue sky, the green field, the deep blue forest. The whole world was laughing.

