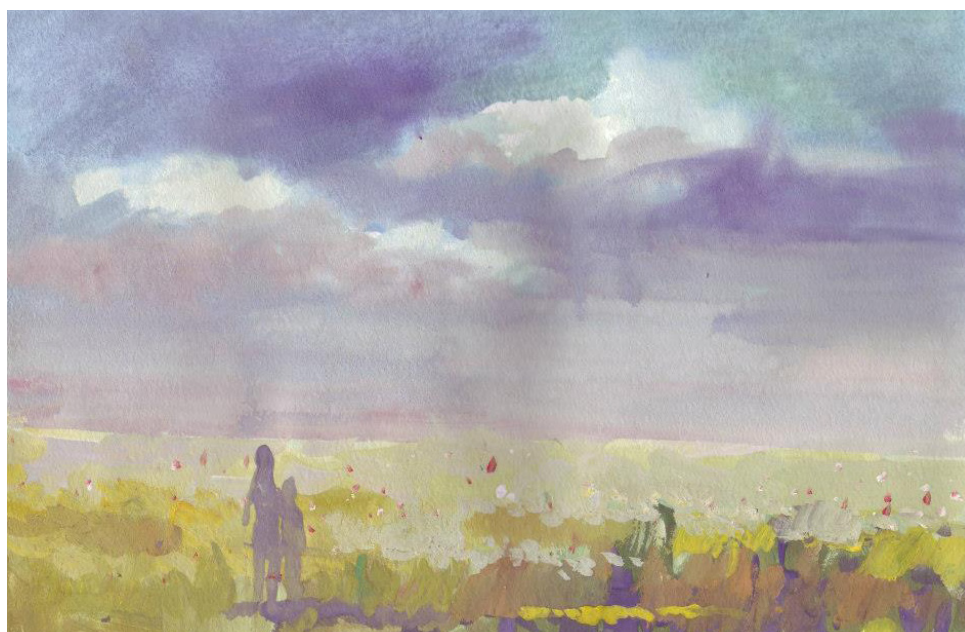


Sukhomlinsky News

No. 55
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Intellectual education

Dear readers,

Wherever you are in the world, I sincerely hope you are keeping well at this critical time.

Here in Australia, the situation is not yet as dire as in some countries, but the impact of the new coronavirus on many people's lives is already devastating, with huge numbers losing employment overnight.

The months ahead are going to be a truly testing time.

For this month's newsletter I have not attempted to select material relevant to the health crisis (though some of the stories relate to health and hospital admissions), but have simply continued to translate material from 'Pavlysh Secondary School' and Sukhomlinsky's 'Ethics Anthology'. I decided to keep focussed on completing the task of translating a few key books, with a heightened awareness that time is precious.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill

Intellectual education

In this issue we continue to translate extracts from the fifth chapter of Pavlysh Secondary School, on intellectual education.

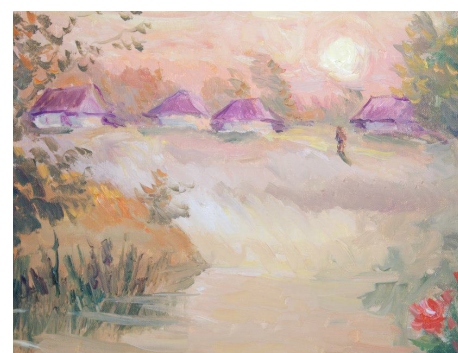
Intellectual education and a philosophy of life (continued)

People who in adolescence and youth have carried out work tasks with a philosophical orientation are distinguished in their mature years by having independent views about the important laws that govern nature and work. These people work creatively. In their work they are proving something or testing something. For example, our former student, a young agronomist named Victor Shch., is demonstrating in his experiments that the germination energy of wheat seeds is dependent upon introduction into the soil of micro-fertilisers. At his suggestion, others have begun introducing micro-fertilisers into the soil at germination sites in order to accelerate the maturation of the seeds.

Such people are inquisitive and curious. They strive to understand the complex interweaving of cause and effect relationships in natural phenomena. They love physical work and try to introduce an intellectual basis for it (keeping diaries of observations, comparing results of work activity over several years). They convince their work colleagues that not a single phenomenon should remain unknown, unstudied.

To teach children to have an active vision of the world, to be governed in their work by convictions, is one of the main prerequisites for ensuring that knowledge truly educates. We consider that one of our most important educational tasks is to ensure that philosophical convictions are formed through practical activity.

[Continued on the following page]



Intellectual education (continued)

One of the most important convictions that gives rise to an active vision of the world is that people not only come to know the surrounding world, but through their reason, through their creative ability and work, they harness the forces of nature and transform life.

There are many ways to show the truth and validity of this idea. Children listen with interest to accounts of the lives of eminent scientists, who demonstrated through their research and discoveries the enormous power of reason, thought and will. They see a flourishing meadow, created by their older schoolmates where before there was barren wasteland. The teacher shows them how to grow vegetables in a laboratory without soil, using a solution of mineral fertilisers. But finding out about all these things is not yet a conviction. An active vision of the world requires that a child not only attain knowledge through their own efforts, but also interpret that knowledge, and experience the joy of discovery and of overcoming difficulties. Then the truth becomes something precious.

The younger a child, the more brightly and spontaneously their feelings colour their thoughts in the process of work. That is why we give such significance to early childhood in the formation of philosophical convictions. The active formation of philosophical convictions begins simultaneously with the discovery of the first laws of nature. We see the formation of a philosophy of life being integrated with intellectual education when a child, learning about the laws of plant growth, and of the creation of organic matter, at the same time becomes convinced that people can influence living processes in the soil and in the living organism of a plant. And they become convinced of this

because of their own work and learning.

Our students prove through their work that it is possible to harvest high yields of grain and commercial crops, to achieve yields several times what is normal on a collective farm, to harvest mature maize twenty days earlier than normal, to grow wheat with a protein content 2-3% greater than the best existing varieties, to get an apple tree to bear fruit not in the sixth or seventh year, as is normal, but in the third year, to grow sunflowers with an oil content 5% greater than the best varieties in our area, and to enable a winter wheat crop to survive a 30 degree frost.

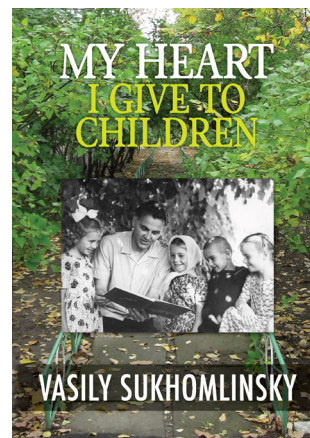
To prove while learning, and to learn while proving; in this integration of thought and work is the integration of intellectual education and the formation of a philosophy of life. As a result of their work children see not only material results, but also themselves, their persistence and strength of will. It is very important that an active vision of the world begins at an early age, that children enter young adulthood having already established a strong foundation of philosophical convictions.

The older students are, the more significant their strength and abilities, the more necessary it is for their moral development to be engaged in activity that affirms their philosophical convictions. We give great significance to the activities of young men and women in which their inner resources are tested and strengthened. It is very important to direct their young energy in such a way that it is not squandered.

'On these three hectares of land we have never harvested more than 1.2 tonnes of grain', we tell the our senior students. 'But it is possible to make this poor soil fertile, just as a skilful tradesman

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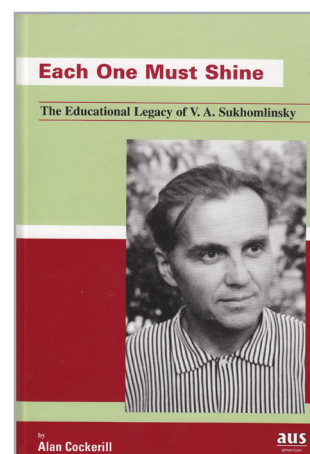
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can make a fine tool from a scrap of rusty metal. Let's take on that challenge.' The young men and women take on the challenge and are victorious. They grow a crop with a yield of 3.6 tonnes per hectare. In meeting this challenge they are inspired by a lofty goal: to show that human beings are not just grains of sand in the universe. They create a fertile soil. We manage to ensure that every student in young adulthood passes through a school of fighting for the common good, for an ideal.

The process of forming a scientific world view. Mastering the foundations of science

Having a scientific world view means that a person has an active relationship to what they see, know and do. Knowledge contributes to a philosophy of life only when a person takes a personal stance in regard to that knowledge, when acquired knowledge is reflected in their practical living, when it determines how they behave. A person's personal attitude to the knowledge they have acquired: this is their conviction.

One of the main tasks of a process of instruction which truly educates is to guard against apathy and indifference on the part of the student towards the knowledge acquired, where they feel that the content has nothing to do with them. The formation of a philosophy of life informed by knowledge involves the educator's reflective insight into the soul of the child and skilful pedagogic management of their thinking, of the process of getting to know the surrounding world, of their work activity. Knowledge only contributes to the formation of a philosophy of life when the process of study is a part of a student's multifaceted intellectual life, when the 'play' of their intellect and will is initiated, when study opens a window on the world, when they discover many interesting and engaging

things in that world, when they seek answers to questions that excite them in books, in nature and in the surrounding world. The thirst for knowledge is not only the result of skilful teaching, but is also the very essence of the process of forming a philosophy of life.

The mastery of scientific knowledge begins from the first days a child attends school. And although in the primary school the knowledge that is mastered by children seems to adults to be extremely elementary, none the less, it is this stage in education that experienced teachers regard as especially important in the formation of a scientific world view. It is in early childhood that students first discover many aspects and phenomena of the surrounding world. They learn about many things for the first time, and the attitude to the surrounding world, with its mysteries and natural laws, that the teacher manages to equip them with, determines each child's attitude to knowledge.

Experienced primary teachers encourage students to become active participants in the quest for knowledge from their first days at school, so that the process of discovering the world brings children deep, incomparable feelings of joy, excitement and emotional uplift. This state is important for the development of a desire to know, a thirst for knowledge.

Children arrive at school. The teacher acquaints them with the surrounding world and the phenomena of nature, living and non-living. The teacher takes the children to the forest, to a field, to a meadow, to the riverbank. The children see lush meadows, and lifeless clay on the slope of a gully. In one place grapevines are growing and 'sunny grapes' are ripening, while a short distance away is a barren patch of clay, stony ground, on which nothing is growing. 'Why is nothing

growing there?' the children ask. The teacher explains it to them, and the children understand the cause and effect relationship between the phenomena they observe, but this has not yet led to the formation of a conviction. It only provides a basis, a foundation. One warm autumn day the children return with their teacher to the patch of infertile soil. The children clear several square metres of wasteland, bring baskets of fertile soil and fertiliser, dig a hole, prepare a fertile site for plants, and plant their first grape vine. Thus begins the connection between theoretical knowledge and practical activity, and we consider it our most important educational task to ensure that this connection is never broken, not for a single day. Learning from their own experience the transformative power of knowledge, seeing the grapevine flourish in a lifeless wasteland, the children adopt an active position in relation to knowledge. They want to learn more about how to prepare soil for the cultivation of useful plants, how to increase its fertility, how to protect plants from harm. It is more interesting to work when you are armed with knowledge. Children feel pride in the fact that, having acquired knowledge, they are doing something necessary for others and beautiful.

Feeling is like a fertile soil on which fall the seeds of knowledge. The seeds sprout: the more children do while learning, the more they experience excitement and joy in work, the more they want to know, and the more deeply they experience a thirst for knowledge, curiosity, inquisitiveness. That is why it is very important that this feeling of joy in creativity should never wane, but on the contrary, should become ever stronger, supported and fed by continual new success in work.





Stories

If I had a magic carpet

Far, far away, on the other side of the sea, in the mountains, grows a wonderful flower. It blooms in early spring, and flowers all through the summer until late autumn. This flower has a wonderful property: it cleans the air. Whoever breathes the air near this flower never falls ill.

If I had a magic carpet, I would fly across the sea, land in the mountains, and find that wonderful flower. I would collect its seeds and bring them home. I would give every person one seed, so they could all grow that wonderful flower, so that there would not be a single sick person. So that people could live till they were very old without getting ill.

My grandmother is often ill. I would take her to that wonderful flower. She would breathe its healing air and get better for ever.

And didn't your heart tell you anything?

Andreika came home from school and saw his mother had been crying. He put his bag down and sat at the table, waiting for his dinner.

'They've taken dad to hospital', said his mother. 'Your father is very sick.'

She expected her son would be startled and anxious. But the boy remained calm and unaffected.

The mother looked with amazement at Andreika.

'We have to go to the forest tomorrow', said Andreika. 'Tomorrow is Sunday... The teacher told us all to come to school at seven in the morning.'

'Is that so. And where will you be going tomorrow?'

'To the forest... The teacher told us.'

'And didn't your heart tell you anything?' asked his mother, and burst into tears.

A letter to her father

Three-year-old Zina's father fell ill. He was taken to hospital. The little girl was sad.

There was a bitter January frost. Mum was getting ready to go to the hospital to see dad. Zina also wanted to see her father, but her mother would not let her. It was too cold.

'You can write a letter to dad', said mum, 'And I will give it to him.'

Zina could not write, but she could draw, so she drew her father a letter.

She drew herself in bed with eyes wide open. That meant: 'Dad, I can't sleep at night, because I keep thinking about you.'

Then she drew a picture of herself and her father in the forest. There were trees all around, and they were picking flowers. That meant: 'Dad, come home soon, so we can go together to the forest and pick flowers.'

Then she wanted to write: 'Dad, I love you very, very much.' Zina thought about how to draw that for a long time. Then she drew the sun. That meant: 'I love you very, very much.'

They tramped a path

During the night there was a blizzard. It swept up snowdrifts.

Early in the morning three children were walking to school: Yura, Misha and Nina. In all the yards, men, women and children were shovelling snow to clear paths.

They came to Grandma Maria's house. She lived all alone. The children stopped by her yard. They could not see anybody.

'How will Grandma get to the well?' asked Yura. 'There is so much snow...'

'Let's tramp a path from her hut to the well', suggested Misha.

The children walked across Grandma Maria's yard through the deep snow. It was very hard to walk from the gate to the house, but coming back from the house to the gate was a bit easier. They walked back and forth two, three, four times. They tramped a path from the gate to the house, and from the house to the well.

Sweaty, tired, and happy, the children walked to school. They thought, 'Grandma Maria has probably come out of her house by now and seen the paths. She will be pleased and will thank us...'

This thought made the children feel good.