


Sukhomlinsky News

OUR SCHOOL IN PAVLYSH
by Vasily Sukhomlinsky



Vasily Sukhomlinsky (1918-1970) was the principal of a combined primary and secondary school in the Ukrainian village of Pavlysh from 1948 until his death in 1970. Together with his dedicated staff, he created a holistic system of education that addressed multiple aspects of a child's development: physical, emotional, moral, intellectual, aesthetic, and vocational. Sukhomlinsky wrote extensively about his experience, and his inspirational writing attracted thousands of visitors to his school. His works have been translated into over fifty languages and read by millions of educators.


Our School in Pavlysh describes the inspirational work carried out at Pavlysh Secondary School during the 1960s. For Sukhomlinsky's readership of teachers and school principals, the word 'Pavlysh' stood for creative thought, inspiration, and the hope of finding answers to troubling questions. Raising his school from the ashes of World War Two, Sukhomlinsky created a system of education that was deeply embedded in the natural environment and that fostered the qualities of curiosity, empathy and creativity. One of the thousands of visitors to Pavlysh, a school principal from Armenia, wrote:

'I have spent only one day in this remarkable school where so much is happening, but I have gained as much as I did in four years at the institute.'

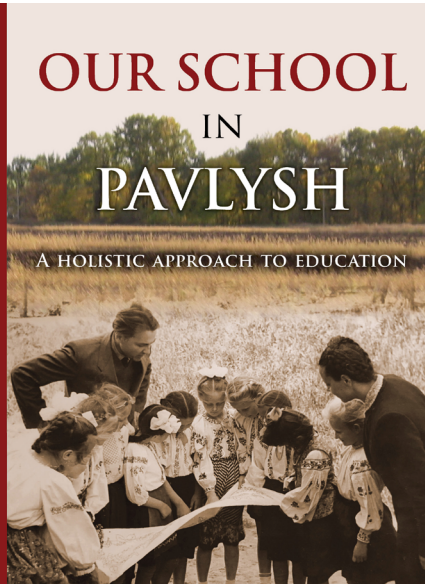
Students enrolling in Sukhomlinsky's school became part of a vibrant learning community in which teachers, parents, community members, and the students themselves all played a role in educating each other. Dozens of clubs operated after school, most attended by children of varying ages, and the older children played a significant role in educating younger children. These informal, extracurricular activities were extremely important in developing children's talents, building their self-esteem, and providing an experiential background for formal studies. In this environment, students became autonomous, lifelong learners.

Sukhomlinsky's approach can still offer inspiration to educators in the twenty-first century, as we face the challenges of the Anthropocene.

This new translation complements Alan Cockerill's earlier translation of Vasily Sukhomlinsky's *My Heart I Give to Children*.



EJR Publishing



**OUR SCHOOL
IN
PAVLYSH**

A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO EDUCATION

VASILY SUKHOMLINSKY

EJR



American book launch

Dear reader,

I hope you are keeping well.

*On 20 December I held the Australian launch of **Our School in Pavlysh: A Holistic Approach to Education**. The launch was at 6.30 pm Brisbane time, which was not a suitable time for people in North America, so together with Tatyana Tsyrlina-Spady I have organised a separate event to suit subscribers in North and South America. (See details on this page.) This event will also be facilitated by Darcia Narvaez, an eminent Professor of Psychology at the University of Notre Dame who has written extensively on issues of character and moral development. If you are not familiar with her work, I recommend checking out her website at:*

<https://darcianarvaez.com/>

This month's edition of Sukhomlinsky News contains some of the main ideas from my presentation at the book launch in Brisbane, and some previously untranslated stories from Sukhomlinsky's Ethics Anthology.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill



ONLINE BOOK LAUNCH

Especially for North and South America

Education for Life: Sukhomlinsky's *Our School in Pavlysh*.

Sunday 23 January

1:00 pm Pacific Time 4:00 pm Eastern Time

6:00 pm Brasilia Time 9:00 pm UK Time

(8.00 am on 24 January in Sydney and Melbourne)

Presentation by Alan Cockerill

Facilitated by Darcia Narvaez and Tatyana Tsyrlina-Spady

Register for this free online seminar at

<https://www.eventcreate.com/e/sukhomlinsky>

to receive a Zoom link and password.

Learn about Sukhomlinsky's prophetic blueprint for education in the 21st century.

'I have spent only one day in this remarkable school where so much is happening, but I have gained as much as I did in four years at the institute.'

M. Manukanian (visiting principal)

What made Sukhomlinsky's school special?

The following ideas are drawn from a reading of *Our School in Pavlysh*.

1. The length of tenure of principal and staff

Most of the teachers had been at the school for over 15 years, despite an average age of only 39. This had a number of benefits:

- The staff members were well-known members of their rural community and knew students' families very well. In many cases, they had taught the parents of their students.

- The staff had worked together for a long time and had a shared philosophy.

2. The close cooperation between the school and families

- Sukhomlinsky and other senior staff ran a program of twice monthly parenting sessions for all the parents, to give them a thorough understanding of their children's development and psychology. These groups were conducted in five groups, corresponding to the age of the parents' children, commencing two years before the children enrolled in the school, and continuing until they graduated. Sukhomlinsky also conducted classes for senior students at the school to prepare them for parenthood.

- Staff at Sukhomlinsky's school worked with parents to help students establish healthy routines. Children were given health check-ups by a doctor two years before they commenced school, and any health issues were addressed through lifestyle adjustments and the supply of supplementary diet, funded by the local collective farm and local trade unions. Outdoor living was recommended, and families were assisted to construct outdoor shelters where children could complete homework in the open air. Senior students were sometimes involved in giving assistance to families. Children were trained from an early age to use an alarm clock and to rise early and complete their homework before school. They were strongly discouraged from doing homework late at night, as this had an adverse effect on their sleep.

- Students were encouraged to show love and respect to their parents and grandparents. One of their first activities upon enrolling in grade one was to plant an apple tree for each of their parents and grandparents. They cared for these trees until they bore fruit and presented the first fruit to the parent or grandparent for whom the tree had been grown.

3. The extracurricular program

- Doing homework in the morning before school meant that children had a great deal of free time after school to pursue their own interests. A lot of this time was spent in extracurricular activities after school, which in effect provided a second curriculum. This extracurricular program was very extensive, and brought a multitude of benefits:

- It gave children a chance to apply knowledge they had gained in lessons.

- It gave children background experiences that facilitated the introduction of new material in lessons.

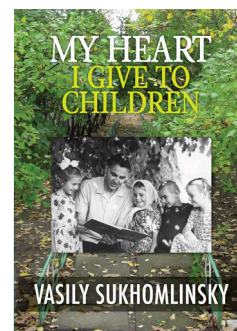
- It gave children the opportunity to discover and develop their talents and abilities. The activities on offer included flower growing, horticulture, plant breeding, soil science, making fertilisers, agriculture, animal husbandry, beekeeping, carpentry, metal work, electronics and design, making model aeroplanes, painting, singing, instrumental music, creative writing, studying local history, ceramics, puppetry, pokerwork, drama, embroidery, a society for nature conservation, and clubs where students could go more deeply into academic subjects such as mathematics, biology and foreign languages. As most children participated in several clubs at once, they developed a very broad range of skills and abilities. Sukhomlinsky writes:

"Thanks to the diversity of work in the clubs, by the time they progress to Grade 8, all of our students have already acquired a broad range of skills

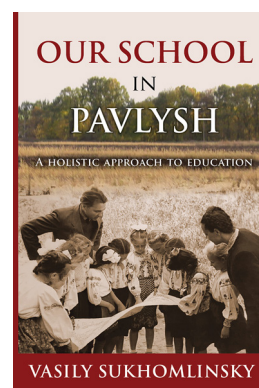
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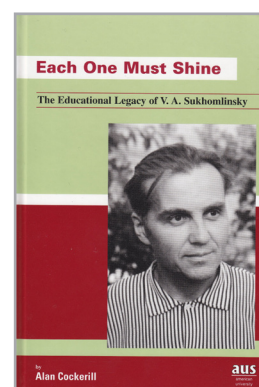
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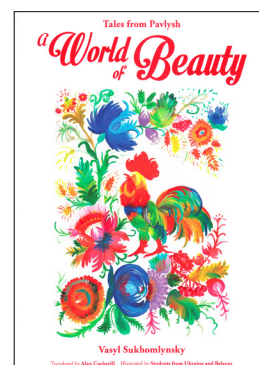
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and are able to find a pursuit to their liking. Students completing Grade 8 are able to work with metal using metalworking hand tools and machine tools; turn wood on a lathe; make simple wooden objects (frames, stools, rulers, compasses); assemble models of machinery from pre-made parts; make metal parts for such models; make tools for working with wood and metal; assemble metalworking machine tools; install electrical cabling, electrical equipment and installations combining an electric motor and working machinery; assemble radios; cultivate soil; sow crops and manage them; harvest a crop; manage animals; drive a car and a tractor; prepare grafted cuttings of fruit trees; and grow grapes and fruits. The mastery of such a broad range of skills enables students in the senior years to master comparatively complex skills within a relatively short time."

- Another benefit of the extracurricular program was the way it facilitated peer tutoring. Workshops were equipped in such a way that students in the primary classes often worked alongside children in the secondary classes and learnt from them. This allowed the younger children to acquire knowledge and skills that were exceptional for their age, and also had a very beneficial effect on the moral development of the older children, who saw their own virtues reflected in their younger friends.

- The extracurricular program allowed staff to mix informally with students and develop close relationships with them, facilitating pastoral care. Sukhomlinsky viewed this as one of the most important aspects of life at his school.

- The extracurricular program allowed students to go far beyond the curriculum in the subjects they were most interested in. And because the intellectual life of the community was an integrated whole, some of their knowledge rubbed off on all the other students, raising the general level of intellectual development.

4. The extent to which the whole school program was integrated with the natural environment surrounding the school

- Sukhomlinsky was personally involved in a preschool program that was run almost completely outdoors in nature. Sukhomlinsky viewed nature as the 'wellspring of living thought' and believed that the most effective way to develop language and thought was to teach children to describe their direct observations of nature, and to think about the cause and effect relationships in nature. He also taught children from an early age to appreciate the beauty of nature, and educated them in a "spirit of heartfelt care and concern for all that is living and beautiful, for plants, flowers, birds and animals..." He educated a community of environmentalists.

- Students at Sukhomlinsky's school did not just learn to appreciate the beauty of nature. They took a hands-on approach to protecting the natural environment and improving soil quality. Over a period of twenty years the school community completely transformed an area of 40 hectares around the school, converting it from barren

clay soil into lush meadows and flowering orchards.

Children in grade 1 collected seeds from trees which were raised and planted to prevent erosion in fields. They selected the best seed from grain crops for use in plant breeding trials. They rescued injured wildlife and cared for it in an 'animal hospital'. As they moved through the school their projects gradually became more ambitious, and their range of skills more complex. By the time they were in the senior classes they were studying the microflora of the soil and working on ways of enhancing the microflora to improve soil fertility.

5. The cultural breadth of students' learning and the extent to which students were encouraged to become autonomous, life-long learners

As students progressed through the school, they were encouraged to become more and more independent in the way they studied. In senior classes Sukhomlinsky's staff utilised what he called a 'lecture laboratory system of lessons', and some sections of the senior curriculum were set aside for independent study. Throughout their school years students were encouraged to read widely and to go far beyond the curriculum. All students were expected to independently read an extensive selection of classics from national and world literature that includes over 250 works from antiquity up to the time that Sukhomlinsky was writing, from Homer and the Ramayana to Steinbeck and Salinger. Work in the extracurricular programs also encouraged self-directed learning.

6. The extent to which the school promoted health and resilience

- Students spent a great deal of time outdoors in physical activity, and much of the summer in the fields and forests around the school.

- Students were trained from an early age to be self-disciplined, to rise early and complete a set of gymnastic exercises.

- The whole school program was structured with student health in mind, the most demanding classes being held in the mornings, when students were fresh, and the intellectual intensity of lessons gradually diminishing through the day.

- Students were given regular medical check-ups and any health issues addressed. Special arrangements were made for students who experienced eye strain, with some students being given breaks in the middle of lessons. Regular checks were made to ensure each child had a suitably sized desk, conducive to good posture.

7. The extent to which students were trained from an early age to be empathetic, and to care for their friends and families

Empathy was considered to be the foundation of morality, and the inculcation of empathy was at the very core of Sukhomlinsky's approach to education. Children were explicitly taught to read the body language and eyes of those with whom they came in contact.



Stories

The corncrake and the swallow

Autumn came. Clouds of milky mist swirled over the cold earth. The water turned chill. Even the blue sky seemed cold. A swallow was flying to warmer lands. It had been left behind by a wedge-shaped formation of swallows and was trying to catch up. It landed in a meadow to have a short rest. It noticed a corncrake walking across the meadow. It did not seem to be in a hurry.

The swallow asked, 'Where are you going, Corncrake?'

'To warmer lands,' answered the bird.

The swallow did not believe this was possible. It flew on to warmer lands. A week later the corncrake arrived.

'Don't look so surprised, Swallow,' said the corncrake. 'I walked day and night.'

Sergei and Matvei

Two young men, Sergei and Matvei, came to a flowering meadow.

'What beauty!' whispered Sergei. 'Look! It is as if someone has woven pink, red, white, and blue flowers into a green carpet.'

'The grass really is lush here,' said Matvei. 'If we bring our cow here, we'll have two buckets of milk by evening.'

'And the sound of the bees is like a harp,' whispered Sergei, uplifted by the enchanting music.

'We should bring the beehives here as well... Think how much honey they would give us!' said Matvei with excitement.

'And there are some people who cannot see this beauty,' whispered Sergei.

'I'll go and drive the cow here. And I'll bring the beehives...' said Matvei, and headed back to the village.

Fox lights

Once a cunning fox was returning to her home. She was walking through the forest. It was nighttime, and very dark. You could not see anything. The fox bumped her head on an oak tree, and it really hurt. So she thought, 'I need to work out how to light my way in the forest.' She found a tree stump covered in glow-worms, shining in the dark. She took fragments of the stump with glow-worms and laid them along her path. They shone like little lamps in the dark. Now she could see where she was going. Even the little owl was surprised.

'What is that,' he wondered. 'Is day coming in the middle of the night?'

The cunning fox padded through the night and smiled.

But a hare hid behind an oak tree and kept a lookout.

The oak by the window

A young forester built a big stone house in the forest and planted an oak by the window.

The years passed, the forester's children grew up, the oak grew wide, and the forester became an old man.

After many years, when the forester was a grandfather, the oak had grown so big that it covered the window. It became quite dark in the room where the forester's beautiful young granddaughter lived.

'Please cut that oak tree down, grandpa,' begged the granddaughter. 'It's dark in my room.'

'Tomorrow morning we'll make a start,' answered her grandfather.

Morning came. The grandfather summoned his three sons and nine grandsons, and his beautiful granddaughter, and said, 'We'll move the house.'

And he began to dig under the foundation with a spade. His three sons, nine grandsons, and his beautiful granddaughter, all followed his example.

The lone willow

On the bank of pond grew a lone willow. It shed its leaves. Three bare withies reached into the water. The willow looked into the mirror-like surface of the pond, and wondered, what were those three twigs.

'What are you bare twigs doing here?' asked the willow. 'Why are you sticking into the water?'

'That's you, Willow. You're looking at your reflection.'

'Oh, what beautiful branches!' said the willow. 'I didn't know I was so beautiful.'