An education under the open sky

THE SCHOOL *of* JOY

Vasyl Sukhomlynsky

A teacher in advance of his time

THE SCHOOL OF JOY

The School of Joy

being Part I of

My Heart I Give to Children

by Vasyl Sukhomlynsky

Translated by Alan Cockerill

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Alan Cockerill, translator

Translator's introduction

VASYL SUKHOMLYNSKY WAS A UKRAINIAN school teacher and principal who, through writing about his personal experience, became the most influential Soviet educator of the 1950s and 1960s. His school in the small rural town of Pavlysh was visited by thousands of school teachers, principals and academics, and his books have been read by millions. His books and articles were written in both Ukrainian and Russian, and up to the present time all translations of his work into English have been made from Russian. My own doctoral study of his work was based on Russian language sources. When transliterating his name from Russian, Progress Publishers spelt his name as Vasily Alexandrovich Sukhomlinsky, and I adopted a similar transliteration when I commenced studying his work in 1987. His name appears differently when transliterated from Ukrainian, and a more appropriate transliteration is Vasyl Oleksandrovich Sukhomlynsky. This latter transliteration is the one used in this book, in recognition of the fact that Sukhomlynsky was Ukrainian and not Russian, though readers may come across other transliterations of his name in some of my previous publications, and in other translations. This reflects the fact that Sukhomlynsky often used the Russian language.

Sukhomlynsky's *My heart I give to children* is an educational classic. First published in a German translation in 1968 and published in Russian (the language in which it was written) in 1969, by 1998 it had been published at least fifty-five times in thirty languages, in print runs that numbered millions.[1] Since then, other editions

1 Sukhomlynska, Olga, 'V poiskakh nastoyashchego' [In search of the genuine], an editorial preface to Sukhomlinskii, Vasilii, *Serdtse otdayu detyam* [My heart I give to children], Kyiv: Akta, 2012, p. 22.

have appeared, including an abridged English language translation by Robert Weiss published in the United States, and a new Russian language edition prepared by Sukhomlynsky's daughter, published in Ukraine in 2012. It is this remarkable new Russian language edition that prompted me to undertake a fresh translation.

The work was written in a Ukrainian country school during the 1960s at the height of the Cold War. It bears many marks of the time and place in which it was written, but at the same time transcends them. More than anything this book is a narrative, a story of a teacher's work with a specific group of children over a period of five years. In 1951 Sukhomlynsky took the highly unusual step for a school principal, of asking parents in his district to send their children to school a year early so he could personally work with them. This gave him the freedom to work extremely creatively, unfettered by the prescriptions of the official curriculum. He continued to work with this group of children until they graduated from year eleven in 1963, and subsequently wrote about his experience. This book is the first in a planned trilogy. It describes Sukhomlynsky's work during the experimental preschool year, and the following four years (in the Soviet system) of primary schooling. It is a fascinating narrative set against the backdrop of the Second World War, whose shadow still lay over the lives of everyone in that rural community. Sukhomlynsky first describes each of the families his students came from and the impact of the war, and then goes on to describe a uniquely creative and therapeutic pedagogy he developed to meet the needs of the children in his care.

The new Russian language edition of the work, prepared by Sukhomlynsky's daughter, is based on a 1966 manuscript, which differs in significant respects from previous editions of the work. In Professor Sukhomlynska's introduction to this new 2012 edition she writes:

> The content of the book, the methodology it puts forward, the manner of its exposition, while they may not align Sukhomlynsky

with the ideas of free education, most definitely distance him from Marxist-Leninist, Soviet educational thought. And although in his preface he refers to NK Krupskaya and AS Makarenko as the highest authorities, it seems to me that his book owes very little to the educational views of those authors. It is not to them that Vasyl Oleksandrovych refers constantly in the text of the book, but to Leo Tolstoy, the founder of the idea of free education, who held that a school's main task was to stimulate interest in study, that study should respond to the questions posed by life (and above all by children themselves), rather than to those posed by the teacher.

In support of his argument Sukhomlynsky cites, on more than one occasion, the words of Konstantin Ushinsky about the characteristics of children's thought, about the necessity of developing a child's investigative thinking, and also about the fact that study involves work and will power, and is not just an amusement or a pleasant way of spending time.

My heart I give to children shows that Janusz Korczak exerted a major influence on Sukhomlynsky's personality and on his educational philosophy, and Sukhomlynsky refers to Korczak often in the book. He was inspired by the genuine humanism of the Polish educator, and he aligns himself with Korczak's ideas about the value and uniqueness of childhood, and the need to 'ascend' and not 'descend' to a child's level of understanding … Respect for children and unconditional support for childhood is an absolute educational truth for Vasyl Oleksandrovych, as it is for Korczak. Sukhomlynsky's special attentiveness to unfortunate children, who have difficult lives, and to those with various peculiarities in their development, can also be traced to Korczak.

If we look more widely at the educational context of this book, not limiting ourselves to references and quotations, we can see it has a lot in common with tendencies and directions existing at

that time beyond the field of Soviet educational discourse. For example, one of the educators with whose ideas the book is in harmony is Rudolph Steiner, who promoted a phenomenological approach to the instruction and education of children, more specifically: living experience, observation, description, reflection, work of an investigative nature, the use of stories as a vital and graphic way of coming to know the world, and the view of a teacher as a spiritual mentor.

We could add to the list the name of Célestin Freinet, who created the 'modern school movement' (activity, initiative, cooperation, creativity) for poor and deprived children.[2]

Much of Sukhomlynsky's educational writing (he wrote around thirty books and 500 articles) can be seen as a heroic attempt to redirect the course of Soviet education towards a greater focus on the individual, as opposed to the 'collective'.

This new English language translation is made on the basis of the 2012 edition. The main difference between it and previous editions is that it contains less material of an ideological nature (which was included in the first edition in response to editorial pressure), more information about the real children that Sukhomlynsky was working with, and more of his personal views, which were to some extent censored in the first edition in order to secure publication of the work in the Soviet Union. In the 2012 edition, Professor Sukhomlynska also presents the material that was incorporated into the first Russian language edition in 1969 due to editorial pressure, but she places these revisions in footnotes. I have included a small part of this additional material in my translation where I thought it would be

2 Sukhomlynska, Olga, 'V poiskakh nastoyashchego' [In search of the genuine], an editorial preface to Sukhomlinskii, Vasilii, *Serdtse otdayu detyam* [My heart I give to children], Kyiv: Akta, 2012, pp. 8–10.

of interest to English speaking educators. I have also cut out a small amount of text from the 1966 manuscript that I thought too overtly ideological for readers in western democracies. This amounts to no more than a page or two of text and does not in any way change the general thrust of the book.[3] Some ideological material does remain in the book. This is partly due to the fact that in order to be published at all, some deference had to be paid to communist ideology. It also reflects the fact that communism was the faith in which Sukhomlynsky had been raised, and which, almost at the cost of his life, he defended against Nazism.

Every translator has to make choices when trying to translate words that have no exact equivalent in the target language and when translating words whose precise meaning depends on knowledge of social and cultural context. Specialists in Soviet education (and even some non-specialists) may be interested in knowing about some of the choices I have made.

Two words that crop up again and again in Sukhomlynsky's writing are *vospitanie* (воспитание) and *dukhovnyi* (духовный). The first of these words (*vospitanie*) may refer to education that takes place in the family and in early childhood learning centres, to the broad education of character and to education considered from a more holistic perspective. In spite of the fact that many have previously translated this word as 'upbringing', I have nearly everywhere translated it simply as 'education'. This is partly due to my own belief that education should be viewed as a holistic process, and also because Sukhomlynsky often combines the word with a qualifier to produce expressions such as 'work education', 'aesthetic education' and 'intellectual education', and the use of 'upbringing' in such expressions seems awkward.

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3 Where I have cut a short passage of text, I have indicated the hiatus with three asterisks: * * *.

The second of these words (*dukhovnyi*) I have nearly always translated as 'spiritual', despite being fully aware that usage of the Russian word does not correspond fully to usage of this word in English. In an earlier work, *The spiritual world of a school student*, Sukhomlynsky writes:

> People's spiritual life encompasses the development, shaping, and satisfying of their moral, intellectual and aesthetic needs in the process of activity.[4]

There were many occasions when I thought it might be more appropriate to translate this word as 'inner' to more closely correspond with English usage. When Sukhomlynsky writes about 'the spiritual world of a child', I might have written 'the inner world of a child'. However, there were occasions when 'inner' did not seem adequate or appropriate. Sukhomlynsky also writes about the 'spiritual life of a collective', and neither 'inner' nor 'psychological' seemed to convey his meaning as well as the world 'spiritual'. As the reader progresses through this book, it becomes evident that Sukhomlynsky is deeply interested in aspects of the human psyche that may indeed be referred to as 'spiritual': the development of empathy and altruism, and of a close bond with nature. So I ask the reader to accept that the words 'spiritual' and 'spirituality' are used in this translation in a non-religious sense and refer to the inner life and values of a human being. Sukhomlynsky saw this inner world as providing the motivating force for the outer manifestations of behaviour. He was wary of any methods that promoted good behaviour without addressing the psychological motives behind good behaviour, without paying

4 Sukhomlinskii, VA, *Dukhovnyi mir shkol'nika* [The spiritual world of a school student], in *Izbrannye proizvedeniya v pyati tomakh* [Selected works in five volumes], vol. 1, Kiev: Radianska shkola, 1979, p. 224.

attention to the development of empathy, compassion, the appreciation of beauty, and an aspiration for truth and justice.

Some other words I wrestled with are those used to describe various groupings of children within the Pioneer movement: the Soviet version of the Boy Scout and Girl Guide movements. During Sukhomlynsky's time this movement was based in every school and had a semi-military nomenclature. The equivalent of a scout troop was the *otryad* (отряд), which may be translated as 'detachment'. This normally included all the students in one class, from late in grade three up until about grade eight (children aged ten to fifteen). Within each class there were normally something like three groups of approximately a dozen students, each of which was called a *zveno* (звено), which can be translated as 'link' or 'group'. All the class detachments in a school combined to form the Pioneer *druzhina* (дружина). This term can also be translated as 'detachment', but I felt that would create some confusion. Given that the Pioneer movement had its origins in the Russian scouting movement and that English-speaking readers may be familiar with the structure of the scouting organisation, I have adopted English scouting terms to translate each group. The class detachment has been called a Pioneer 'troop'. The smaller groups within a class I have referred to as Pioneer 'patrols', and the gathering of all the class troops for a whole school is called a Pioneer 'group'.

Where a footnote is preceded by the words 'Translator's note', it is one I have added to explain something to the reader. Where no such words precede the footnote, it is a translation of Sukhomlynsky's own footnote.

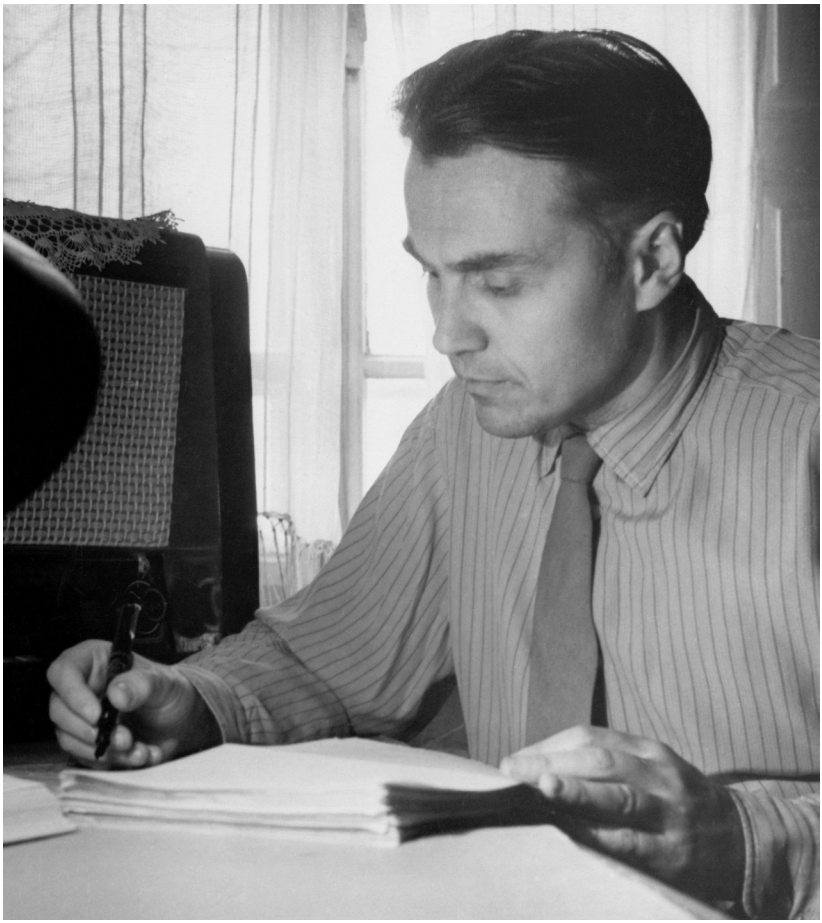
I have tried to make my translation as accessible as possible, and to render Sukhomlynsky's attractive prose in a way that is fluent and readable. Sometimes I have divided very long sentences into two, and sometimes, when Sukhomlynsky has used a string of synonyms, I have omitted one of them. Sukhomlynsky makes very extensive use of the historic present tense. Where it was possible to do so without

sounding unnatural, I have retained this use of the present tense to describe past events as it results in a more vivid narrative. Where Sukhomlynsky switches rather rapidly between past tense and historic present, I have opted for one or the other.

In Sukhomlynsky's time there was no consciousness of gender equality in the use of pronouns, either in his society or in ours. The situation is further exacerbated by the fact that in Russian all nouns—animate or inanimate—have grammatical gender and the words for 'person' and 'child' are masculine due to ending in a consonant. However, in making this translation I have tried to be gender-neutral in the use of pronouns. In many cases I have used the plural in place of the singular to avoid using a singular pronoun of one gender or the other. Where any remnants of older usage remain, I beg the reader's forgiveness and ask them to accept this work as a historical document that describes Sukhomlynsky's experience during the 1950s and 1960s.

In spirit, however, I believe the work to have been far ahead of its time. It addresses issues such as our relationship with nature, how to nurture children's souls in the face of the sometimes negative influences of mass media, how to help children develop empathy for others, how schools can develop strong relationships with families, how children's brains function and develop, and how to support children who struggle to acquire early literacy skills. These are all vital and contemporary issues.

I hope the reader will find Sukhomlynsky's narrative, and his accompanying reflections, both thought provoking and inspiring.



Vasyl Sukhomlynsky

Preface

DEAR READERS, COLLEAGUES, TEACHERS, EDUCATORS, school principals!

This work, consisting of three separate books,[5] is the result of thirty-two years working in schools: the result of reflection, concern, anxious moments, and times of deep emotion. My whole educational career has been spent in rural schools. I rarely travelled beyond my village, although I could have travelled a lot and seen more of the world both in my own country and abroad. Each time I had to leave my school for a few days my heart was troubled: what about the children? How could I leave them alone? And if it was at all possible to excuse myself from the trip, I would, and I would remain with the children. I would walk with the little ones to the forest, to the river bank, to a distant ravine in the steppe overgrown with bushes, or we would make our way in a boat to a quiet little island on the Dnieper … Something interesting would happen; some new facet of childhood would reveal itself and I would wonder to myself: perhaps I would never have become aware of this aspect of childhood if I had gone away and left you, my dear children, if I had not been with you at this moment.

I am not making any generalised conclusions, dear reader; I am not imposing my thoughts on anyone else. I only want to say that thirty-two years of uninterrupted work in rural schools has brought me great happiness, incomparable happiness. I have given my life to children, and after considerable reflection I have named this work

5 Translator's note: The three books Sukhomlynsky is referring to have been published under the following titles: *My heart I give to children*, *The birth of a citizen* and *Letters to my son*.

My heart I give *to children*, believing I have a right to do so. I want to tell teachers—both those who are working in schools now and those who will come after us—about a lengthy period in my life, a period of a decade. From the day when a little unwitting child arrives as a preschooler, to that solemn moment when a young man or woman receives their graduation certificate and embarks on an independent working life. This is a formative period for a human being, but for teachers it is also a huge part of their lives. What was the most important thing in my life? Without hesitation I reply: love for children. I repeat again, my dear reader: I am not imposing my thoughts on anyone else; I am not calling on teachers to work only as I have described in these books; I only want to share my thoughts about love for children. If my editor advised me to change the title of this book, I would call *How I love children*.

Perhaps, dear reader, you will disagree with some things in this work; perhaps some things will seem strange or surprising. I beg you, in advance, not to view my work as some sort of universal manual for educating children, adolescents, young men and women. Schools have programs, lessons, students, teachers with their knowledge, and school routines … but there is also such a thing as a teacher's heart, the heart of a living human being who, like a mother or father, takes a keen interest in a child's every word, every step, every act and every change in expression. To use educational terminology, this book is devoted to extracurricular education (or education in the sense of character development). I did not attempt to describe regular lessons, or to detail the processes of instruction in the foundations of knowledge … To use the language of human relations this book is devoted to the heart of the teacher. I have attempted to show how to lead young people into the world of discovery of the reality around them; how to help them to study, lightening their intellectual load; how to awaken and establish noble feelings in their souls; how to educate human dignity, faith in fundamental human goodness, and

boundless love for our native land; and how to sow the first seeds of lofty communist ideals in the sensitive heart and mind of a child.

The first book in this trilogy, the book you are holding in your hands, dear reader, is devoted to educational work with primary classes. In other words, it is devoted to the world of childhood. And childhood, a child's world, is a special world. Children live with their own conceptions of good and evil, honour and dishonour, and human worth. They have their own criteria of beauty and even their own perception of time. In childhood a day seems like a year and a year seems an eternity. Having access to that fairytale palace called 'childhood', I always considered it necessary, to some extent, to become a child myself. Only then will children not regard you as some creature who has accidentally found a way past the gates of their fairytale kingdom, as a watchman guarding that world, but indifferent to what goes on inside it.

Dostoevsky wrote some wonderful words: 'Let us enter a courtroom with the thought that we, too, are guilty.' Let us enter the fairytale palace of childhood with a child's ardent heart, a heart beating with the pulse of a child's life, with the thought that I too was a child. Children will trust you when they feel in their hearts that you understand this simplest, and at the same time wisest, of truths.

A child is a child.

Not all moral and political ideas comprehensible to a young man or woman, or even to an adolescent, are comprehensible to a young child. We should not rush to explain truths which, by virtue of a child's age, are incomprehensible. We should not approach a sacred matter like the patriotic education of children with concepts that would be fitting for an adult. I have always been firmly convinced, and will carry my conviction to the grave, that during the years of childhood, nature—the trees, flowers, birds and blue sky of our native land—and stories provide the most indispensable means for educating the sacred feeling of love for our homeland. On the pages that

I am offering to you there may not be any words about our homeland, communism or the Party—I value these words very highly, and do not wish to cheapen them with frequent use—but these texts in their essence teach how to educate real patriots.

I want to make one more cautionary comment about the content of this book and the nature of my experiment. The primary school depends first and foremost on the creative work of each individual classroom teacher. For that reason I have consciously avoided showing the collective work of the staff and the parents. If all of that were shown in this book, it would have grown to a huge size.

In a book about childhood it was impossible not to talk about the children's families, about their parents. The situation in some families, especially after the war, was dark and depressing. Some parents were quite incapable of being good role models for their children. I could not remain silent about that. If I did not give a full and honest description of the family situations, the orientation of my whole system of education would have made no sense. I firmly believe in the great power of education, as did Krupskaya and Makarenko. My motto is expressed in the words of Pisarev: 'Human nature is so rich, powerful, and elastic, that it can preserve its freshness and its beauty, even in the midst of the most oppressive and ugly environment.'[6]

The first book of my trilogy will appear in print, it seems, as I begin the thirty-third year of my educational work. The second book will come out at the end of the thirty-fourth year, and the third at the end of the thirty-fifth year.[7] I believe that one day I will have the

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6 Pisarev, DI, *Works,* vol. 4, Moscow, 1956, p. 101.

7 Translator's note: The first book, *My heart I give to children*, was published in German in 1968 and in Russian in 1969. The second book, *The birth of a citizen*, was published in Ukrainian in 1970 and in Russian in 1971. The third book, *Letters to my son*, was published in abbreviated format (twenty-two letters) in Ukrainian in 1977 and appeared in Russian in 1979. A second edition was

opportunity to teach the grandchildren of the first students I taught in my native village. I want, once again, to make the journey from the 'school under the open sky', as I call the preschool year, to the graduation year. I believe that this will happen. The source of this faith is my love for children.

I invite you, dear readers, to write letters with your feedback about this book to the following address: Pavlysh, Onufriev District, Kirovograd Region, Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic, Sukhomlynsky, Vasyl Oleksandrovych.

Come and visit us. During just three months of 1967 (February, March and April) we have been visited by teachers from the Primorsky, Krasnoyarsk, Krasnodar, Altai, Stavropol, Kirov, Kalinin, Kaliningrad, Sverdlovsk, Lipetsk, Kharkov, Dnepropetrovsk, Kiev, Poltava, Lvov, Odessa, Sumy, Cherkasy, Nikolaev, Crimea, Lugansk and Ivano-Frankovsk regions; from the Bashkir, Tatar, Mari, North Ossetian and Komi Autonomous Republics; from Moldavia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Tajikistan.

Any teacher will be a welcome guest at our school. At our 'School of pedagogical culture' we want to meet anyone who is already working creatively and wants to discuss issues with us. We also want to meet those who aspire to work creatively.

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published in Russian in 1987 containing thirty letters. Sukhomlynsky died in 1970.

PART ONE

The School of Joy

My educational convictions

AFTER WORKING IN EDUCATION FOR ten years, I was appointed principal of Pavlysh Secondary School. Here my educational convictions, ten years in the making, finally crystallised. Here I wanted to see my convictions expressed in a living, creative endeavour.

The more I strove to give practical expression to my convictions, the clearer it became that management of educational work requires a judicious balance, between finding solutions to ideological and organisational challenges facing the whole school, and providing the personal example of a teacher at work. The role of the school principal as an organiser of the teaching staff is immeasurably enhanced if teachers see in his work an example of the highest pedagogical standards, as a direct educator of children.

Education is first and foremost a constant spiritual interaction between teacher and child. The great Russian educator KD Ushinsky called the principal the leading educator of the school. But under what conditions can the role of leading educator be realised?

To educate children through the teachers, to be a teacher of teachers, to study the art and science of education, is very important; but it is only one aspect of the multi-faceted process of managing a school. If the leading educator only teaches how to educate but has no direct interaction with children, he ceases to be an educator.

The very first weeks of my work as a principal showed me that the way to children's hearts would remain forever closed to me if I did not share with them common interests, passions and aspirations. I became convinced that without any direct, immediate educational influence on children, I, as principal, would lose an educator's most important quality—the ability to sense the spiritual world of a child. I envied the class teachers: they were always with the children. Now

the class teacher is having a heart to heart chat, now he is making preparations to take his students to the forest, the river, to work in the fields. The children cannot wait for the day when they will go on their excursion, make porridge over an open fire, catch fish, spend the night under an open sky, and gaze at the twinkling stars. And I, the principal, am left on the sidelines. I can only organise, advise, note inadequacies and correct them, encourage what is necessary, and forbid the undesirable. Of course you cannot avoid these things, but I felt dissatisfaction with my work.

It seemed to me, and this conviction is now even deeper, that the highest degree of educational skill is to be found in the principal's direct, long term participation in the life of a class. I wanted to be with the children, to experience their joys and sorrows, to feel close to them, which is one of the greatest pleasures of an educator's creative work. From time to time I tried to include myself in the life of one class or another; I accompanied the children to a workplace or on a hike through our native country, travelled on excursions, and helped to create those unforgettable joys without which it is impossible to imagine a complete education.

But I and the children felt a certain artificiality in these relations. The contrived nature of the educational situation made me uncomfortable: the children could not forget that I was only with them for a short time. Genuine sharing of heartfelt interests comes about when, over a long period, the teacher becomes a friend, a like-minded companion to the child with common pursuits. I felt that such a sharing of common interests was necessary for me, not only to experience the joy that creative work brings, but in order to demonstrate to my colleagues the art and science of education. Direct, living contact with children on a daily basis is a source of ideas, educational discoveries, joys, sorrows and disappointments, without which creativity is unthinkable in our line of work. I came to the conclusion that the leading educator must be the educator of

a class of children, a friend and companion to those children. This certainty was based on convictions that I had developed even before my work at the school in Pavlysh.

Above all, I was convinced that a genuine school is not only a place where children acquire knowledge and skills. Study is very important, but it is not the only important area in the spiritual life of a child. The more closely I examined what we are accustomed to referring to as the process of instruction and education, the more I became convinced that the real school is to be found in the multi-faceted spiritual life of a community of children, in which the educator and the student are connected by a multitude of interests and pursuits. Someone who only meets his students in the classroom, who remains on one side of the teacher's desk while the students sit on the other side, does not know a child's heart; and someone who does not know a child cannot be an educator. For such a person the thoughts, feelings and aspirations of children are hidden behind seven seals. Teachers' desks at times become like a stone wall, from behind which they mount an 'attack' on the 'enemy'—their students; but more often that desk becomes a besieged fortress, which the 'enemy' starves of sustenance, and the 'commander' taking shelter behind it feels tied hand and foot.

With great pain I saw that even for teachers who know their subject well, education sometimes becomes a bitter war, just because there are no spiritual threads connecting teacher and students, and the child's soul remains hidden, as if enclosed in a shirt buttoned right up to the neck. The main reason for these abnormal, intolerable relations between mentor and pupil, which occur in some schools, is mutual distrust and suspicion. Sometimes teachers simply do not feel the innermost movements of a child's soul, do not experience a child's joys and sorrows, do not strive mentally to put themselves in the child's place.

The eminent Polish educator Janusz Korczak refers in one of his letters to the need to ascend to the spiritual world of a child, rather

than to descend to it. This is a very subtle thought, the essence of which we, as teachers, should strive to comprehend. Without idealising children, without attributing miraculous properties to them, a genuine educator cannot but take account of the fact that a child's perception of the world, and a child's emotional and moral reaction to the reality that surrounds them, are distinguished by a certain clarity, sensitivity and immediacy. Korczak's challenge to ascend to the spiritual world of the child should be understood to entail a sensitive understanding of, and empathy with, a child's perception of the world, a perception that involves both mind and heart.

I am firmly convinced that there are qualities of the soul without which a person cannot become a genuine educator, and among these qualities the ability to enter into the spiritual world of a child takes pride of place. Only those who never forget that they were once children can become genuine teachers. The problem for many teachers (children, especially adolescents, call them 'dry old sticks') is that they forget: the student is first and foremost a living person, entering into the world of cognition, creativity and human relationships.

In education there are no unconnected phenomena acting on people in isolation. Lessons are a most important organisational format in the overall process through which students get to know the world. The whole structure of their spiritual world depends on how they learn about the world and what convictions they develop. But getting to know the world does not equate only to study. The problem for many teachers is that they measure and evaluate the spiritual world of a child only with marks and grades, separating all students into two categories depending on whether or not they learn their lessons well.

But if teachers with a narrow understanding of the many facets of spiritual life find themselves in such an unenviable situation, what can be said of a principal who sees his mission only in controlling the work of teachers, in giving 'general directions' at the appropriate time, in granting or refusing permission? His position is even more unenviable.

I felt burdened by such a role. I suffered when I approached students who were enthusiastically involved with their teachers and tried to speak to them, and they did not pay any attention to me. The children were living a rich spiritual life with their teachers and I was not a part of it. Do we need such a school principal? No, we do not. The methods and forms of management that were established in pre-revolutionary schools when the principal was in essence an inspector supervising the teachers, a bureaucratic administrator who was obliged to monitor whether or not teachers were presenting the program correctly and whether or not they had said something superfluous or mistaken, has today become an anachronism.

Today the essence of school management is that in this most difficult job of education, the teachers should see, with their own eyes, the creation, development and establishment of best practice, incorporating the most progressive pedagogy. And whoever is the creator of that best practice, the person whose work is a model for other educators, should become the school principal. Without such a principal—the best educator—one cannot imagine a school in our time. Education is above all the study of human nature, the knowledge of human nature. Without knowledge of children's psyches—their intellectual development, thought processes, interests, passions, abilities, talents and inclinations—there is no education. Just as the head doctor in a hospital cannot be a true doctor without having his own patients, so a school principal cannot manage his teachers if he does not have his own students.

Who is the central figure in a school? In what sphere of the education process must a school principal provide an example that sets a standard for the other educators? The main figure in a school is the class teacher. She is both a teacher giving knowledge to the students, and a friend to the children and organiser of their many-faceted spiritual life. Study is only one petal of the flower that represents education in the wider sense. In education there is nothing major or minor,

just as there is no main petal among the many petals that create the beauty of a flower. In education everything is important: the lessons, the children's development of diverse interests outside lessons, and the relationships between students in the school community.

After six years working as a school principal I became the educator of a class group. I would like to acknowledge that this is not the only way to develop direct, heartfelt communication between principal and students. There are other ways, with the choice depending on the creativity of the principal. But in my concrete circumstances, this way seemed to me to be the most promising. I consider work as the direct educator of a class group to be a long term experiment, conducted in natural conditions.

Before moving on to my tale of how our work developed over a period of several years, I will explain one other important conviction that, to a significant extent, determined the content and direction of my practical work.

The years of childhood play an especially important role in the formation of a human personality, particularly the preschool and early school years. The great writer and educator Leo Tolstoy was profoundly right when he asserted that from birth to the age of five, children acquire much more for the development of their intellect, feelings, will and character, than they do from the age of five to the end of their lives. 'Did I not live then, during those first years, when I learnt to see, hear and speak, slept, sucked, and kissed my mother's breast, and laughed, and gave joy to my mother?' wrote Tolstoy. 'I lived, and I lived blissfully. Was it not then that I acquired that by which I live now, and acquired so much, so quickly, that for the rest of my life I did not acquire one hundredth part of that. From the five-year-old child to what I am now is a single step. But from a new born babe to a five-year-old is a frightening distance.'[8] Tolstoy wrote these adolescent

8 Tolstoy, LN, *Collected works in 14 volumes*, Moscow, 1952, vol. 1, p. 330.

memoirs in 1878, with the wisdom of fifty years of life. The same idea was repeated by the Soviet educator Anton Makarenko: what a person will become is determined by the age of five.

The eminent Polish educator and writer Janusz Korczak, a national hero of the Polish people and a human being of extraordinary moral beauty, wrote in his book *When I am little again*, that nobody knows whether a student receives more when he looks at the blackboard or when an irresistible force (the force of the sun, turning the head of a sunflower) compels him to look out the window. What is more beneficial and important for him at that moment: the logical world, compressed to fit on the classroom blackboard, or the world sailing by on the other side of the window panes? Do not do violence to the soul of a human being. Examine closely the laws of natural development of each child, their peculiarities, aspirations and needs.

All my life I have remembered these words from a little grey-covered book in the Polish language. When, soon after the war, I learnt of Korczak's heroic sacrifice, his words became a guide for the rest of my life. Korczak was the director of an orphanage in the Warsaw Ghetto. The Nazis condemned the unfortunate children to death in the ovens of Treblinka. When Korczak was offered a choice between life without the children or death with the children, he chose death, without hesitation or doubt. 'Mr Goldsmith', the Gestapo officer told him, 'we know you are a good doctor. You do not have to go to Treblinka.' 'My conscience is not for sale', answered Korczak. The hero went to his death together with the children. He reassured them, taking care that the little ones' hearts were not pierced by the horror of knowing they were about to die. Janusz Korczak's life and his sacrifice of astounding moral strength and purity were an inspiration to me. I understood that to be a genuine educator of children you must give them your heart.

The great Russian educator Konstantin Ushinsky wrote that we may deeply love a person with whom we live constantly, but may not

be aware of that love until some misfortune shows us the depth of our attachment. A person can live all his life and not know how much he loves his native land until some event, such as a prolonged absence, reveals to him all the strength of that love. I remember these words each time I go for a prolonged period without seeing the children, without feeling their joys and sorrows. With each year the conviction grew stronger in me, that one of the determining characteristics of pedagogical culture is a feeling of attachment to children. Konstantin Stanislavsky suggested that feelings 'cannot be produced on demand', but the cultivation of feelings by a teacher, an educator, is the very essence of pedagogical culture.

Without a constant spiritual exchange between teacher and child, without mutual sharing of thoughts, feelings and experiences, there can be no emotional culture, which in turn is the flesh and blood of pedagogical culture. Multifaceted emotional relationships with children in a single, friendly group, where the teacher is not only a mentor but a friend and companion, are extremely important in the cultivation of a teacher's feelings. Emotional relationships are inconceivable if a teacher only meets his students in lessons and children feel the influence of the teacher only in class.

Of course we should not consider 'the world, compressed into the blackboard' to be opposed to the 'world sailing past the window panes'. We should not think for a moment that compulsory instruction is an act of violence on the human soul, or that the blackboard is an enslavement of children's freedom and the world beyond the windows is the only true freedom.

During the years preceding my work at the school in Pavlysh, I was convinced many times of the enormous role that a primary school teacher plays in a child's life. The teacher must be as close and dear as a mother. A young pupil's faith in the teacher, the mutual trust between educator and educated, the ideal of humanity, which children see exemplified in their teachers—these are elementary,

but at the same time complex and profound educational principles. The teacher who grasps these becomes a genuine spiritual mentor. One of the most valuable qualities in an educator is humanity, a deep love for children, a love which combines heart felt affection with the insightful strictness and expectations of a mother or father.

Childhood is an important stage in life, not a preparation for a future life but a genuine, bright, unique, unrepeatable stage in life. And how that childhood is spent, who leads children by the hand during their early years, what enters their hearts and minds from the surrounding world, determines what sort of people today's infants will become. The longer I worked in schools, the firmer this conviction became. In the preschool and early school years a person's character, way of thinking, and speech are formed. Perhaps everything that enters the minds and hearts of children from a book, from a textbook or a lesson, only enters because alongside the book is the surrounding world: nature, fields and meadows, the blue sky and the misty haze on the horizon, the song of the lark and rustling at night, the howling of a cold winter wind and the strange ice patterns on the window panes, the opening petals of a snowdrop and the scent of new leaf awakening; and because around them are the good and evil that little people see in the surrounding world. It is in this real world that they take their first difficult steps on the long road from birth to the day when they can open a book and read it independently.

Over a period of thirty-three years I studied the vocabulary of children in the early, middle and senior years, and also of adults. A striking picture was revealed. Seven-year-old children from the families of average collective farm workers (where the father and mother have graduated from high school and have a family library of 300–400 books), on entering primary school understand and feel the emotional colouring of 3,000 to 3,500 words, of which 1,500 are in their active vocabulary. Industrial or agricultural workers with a

secondary education, at the age of 45–50, understand and feel the emotional colouring of 5,000 to 5,500 words, of which about 2,500 are in their active vocabulary. This fact provides clear evidence of the significance of the childhood years in a person's life.

A conviction that the preschool and early school years to a large extent determine a person's future, in no way denies the possibility of re-education at a more mature age. Anton Makarenko brilliantly demonstrated the power of re-education in his own experience. But it was to the early years that he gave particular significance. The right way to educate is not to correct the mistakes committed in early childhood, but to avoid those mistakes and remove the need for re-education.

Working as principal I noticed, with bitter disappointment, how the natural life of children is at times perverted when the teacher sees education only in the lessons, only in cramming as much knowledge as possible into children's heads. Children who, on their first, proud day at school, are deprived of all the joys that life in nature gave them, seem to me to be like slender stalks of wheat, with tender, soft, ears of grain not yet covered with light green pollen, opening up to meet the sun and the blue sky. And suddenly these stalks are transplanted into a stuffy room, into a wooden box, and carefully watered. Every forty-five minutes they are taken outside into the fresh air for ten minutes and then again installed in a hot-house, where there is enough light, but no sun and blue sky, enough moisture, but no limitless expanse of fields. From the sweet-scented flower that is a child's life, all the petals are carefully removed, leaving only one: study, books, lessons, a bell to start lessons, and a bell to end lessons.

It makes my heart ache to see how the natural life of a child is deformed, not only in school but in after school care. There are, unfortunately, some schools where after five to six hours of study children remain in school for another four to five hours, and instead of

playing, resting and living in natural surroundings, they are sat down to a book. The child's time at school becomes an endless, exhausting lesson.

We cannot continue like this! After school activities are in essence an extremely valuable form of education. They provide favourable conditions for the continuous spiritual exchange between educator and children, without which the education of a high level of emotional culture is inconceivable. But unfortunately a wonderful idea is quite often perverted. After school care quite often turns into the same lessons, the same sitting at desks from one bell to another, exhausting a child's energy.

Why does this happen?

Because taking children to a clearing in the forest or spending time in a park is significantly more complicated than conducting a lesson. The most difficult and the most subtle education is that which is conducted in conditions that give children complete freedom to run, play, chase a butterfly or a sunbeam, call out in the forest and listen to their echoes. The whole secret of such an education, which is free in the best sense of the word, is to find a way of getting children to do what you need them to, without using compulsion.

We live in a time when without mastering scientific knowledge, it is not possible to work, to enjoy normal human relationships, or to carry out the duties of a citizen. Study cannot be a carefree game bringing only pleasure and satisfaction. The life journey of a young citizen will not be a walk in the park. We must educate knowledgeable, hardworking, resilient people, prepared to overcome difficulties no less significant than those overcome by their parents, grandparents and great-grandparents. The level of knowledge of a young person in the seventies, eighties and nineties will be much higher than the level of knowledge of previous decades. The greater the range of knowledge to be mastered, the more it is necessary to consider the nature of the human organism during childhood: that period of rapid growth,

development and formation of the personality. People have always been, and will remain, children of nature, and that which connects them with nature must be utilised to bring them into communion with the riches of our spiritual culture. The world surrounding a child is first and foremost the world of nature, with its limitless abundance of phenomena, with its inexhaustible beauty. Here, in nature, is the eternal source of children's thought, speech and ideas. And at the same time, with each year there is a growth in the role of those elements of the environment that are connected with the social relations between people, and with work.

My years of work at the school in Pavlysh led to another educational conviction: the process of discovery of our surrounding environment provides an indispensable emotional stimulus for thought. For preschool children and during the early school years, this stimulus plays an exceptionally important role. A truth that generalises about objects and phenomena in the surrounding world becomes a personal conviction for children when it is brought to life by bright images that exert an influence on their feelings. How important it is that children discover their first scientific truths in the surrounding world, that the source of their thoughts should be the beauty and inexhaustible complexity of natural phenomena. Emotional sensitivity, subtle subjective reactions to the depth and wisdom of thoughts—these features of our spiritual world are unattainable if we are not educated from a young age in a natural environment.

From the very beginning of my work at the school in Pavlysh I gave special attention to children in the early years, especially the grade one students. During their first days of study they cross the threshold of the school with such trembling anticipation, and look into their teacher's eyes so trustingly! Why does it often happen that after a few months, and sometimes after a week, the light goes out in their eyes? Why does study for some students turn into torture? All the teachers sincerely want to preserve the children's spontaneity

and facilitate their joyful perception and discovery of the world. They want the children to be inspired and enthused by their studies.

The main reason this does not happen is that the teacher knows little of the spiritual world of each child before they enrol in the school; and life within the school walls—limited to study, regulated by bells—seems to level the little ones, to reduce them to a single measure, not allowing the richness of each individual world to be revealed. Of course I gave advice and made recommendations to the teachers of the primary classes, suggesting ways to develop students' interests and to vary the spiritual life of the children; but advice was not enough. This important educational idea, which needed to be manifested in the relationship between the children and their teacher, would only become clear when it was clearly demonstrated for all our staff to see.

That is why I began my educational work with a class group, intending to work with them for ten years. I am writing about living, concrete children. Because in many cases I have to touch on deeply personal aspects of their family lives, I have changed the children's surnames.

The life of the class, described below, was not disconnected from the life of the school community. In many cases I will touch on forms and methods of education used throughout the school. But I do this only to show more clearly a single class, as it is precisely the educational work in each class that determines the success of education throughout the school.

The first year — studying the children

IN THE AUTUMN OF 1951, three weeks before lessons began and at the same time as children were being accepted into grade one, the school enrolled six-year-old boys and girls; that is, those who were to begin studies a year later. I planned to work with these children for ten years.

When I gathered all the parents and children, and suggested sending the children to school a year before they were due to commence studies, opinions were divided. Some parents approved of my intention, considering that in the absence of a year-round kindergarten (at that time the kindergarten operated only in summer), having children attend school would provide useful support to families. Others were concerned that starting school early would have a negative impact on the children's health. 'They'll have time enough to sit in class,' said Lyuba's mother. 'Their childhood only lasts until they start school.' These words again forced me to consider how harmful the sudden disruption of a child's way of life can be at school, and how necessary it is to give children space for the natural development of their talents. I told the parents and grandparents that they need not fear, that visiting the school during the year prior to studies would not mean sitting in class and studying. How sensitive parents are. They feel with their hearts that all is not well with school education, and that sitting at a desk deprives little ones of the joy of childhood. To have to convince parents that their children will be spared the trials and tribulations of study: what a contradiction in terms, and how much human bitterness is in these words. That which should bring joy in fact takes joy away. Is that not a tragedy? It is to prevent such a tragedy that I have begun my educational work long before the children officially enrol in school.

By this time I had come to the deep educational conviction that the development of the mind is just as important as study.

The year preceding formal study was necessary for me to get to know each child well, to study in depth the individual characteristics of their perception, thought and intellectual work. Before imparting knowledge we have to teach children how to think, how to apprehend, how to observe. We must also have a thorough knowledge of the health of each student: without that it is impossible to teach properly.

Intellectual education is not the same thing as acquiring knowledge. Although it is impossible without formal schooling, just as a green leaf is impossible without the sun's rays, the education of the intellect is not identical with formal schooling any more than a green leaf is identical with the sun. The teacher is dealing with thinking matter, and the capacity of the nervous system to apprehend and gain knowledge of the surrounding world depends to a great extent on the health of the child. This dependency is very subtle and difficult to grasp. The study of children's inner, spiritual world, and especially of their thinking, is one of a teacher's most important tasks.

My students' parents

IN ORDER TO KNOW CHILDREN well it is necessary to know the family: father, mother, brothers, sisters, grandfathers and grandmothers. In our school catchment area there were thirty-one children aged six: sixteen boys and fifteen girls. All the parents agreed to send their children to the 'School of Joy'—that is what the parents came to call our group of preschoolers. Of the thirty-one children, eleven did not have a father, and two had lost both parents. Those two boys, Vitya and Sashko, had both had tragic lives. Vitya's father, a resistance fighter during the Second World War, was killed by fascists after

being cruelly tortured in front of his wife. Vitya's mother could not cope with her grief and lost her mind. The boy was born six months after these tragic events. The mother died after the birth and the baby was reared with great difficulty. Sashko's father died at the front, and his mother was killed during the battle to liberate the village from fascist occupation.

Several weeks before the opening of the School of Joy I met every family. I was disturbed to find that in some families there was no warmth between parents and children, between mother and father. The mutual respect, without which a child cannot have a happy life, was missing.

I can still see before me little blue-eyed Nina in a dark blue cotton dress. On her head she wears a white scarf with light blue flowers, which has been pulled over her forehead. Next to her stands her grandmother: her mother did not come with the child. I take the little girl by the hand and look into her eyes, and my heart aches.

She was an unwanted child: the mother did not want her to be born. During her pregnancy she bound her abdomen tightly and lifted heavy weights, but the child was born alive and healthy. In a disturbed psychological state, the mother wanted to end the child's life and commit suicide, and it was only due to a fortunate circumstance that the mother and child remained alive. The girl was born with a slight facial defect: with a flat, depressed forehead. The feelings of grief and loneliness with which the mother greeted the appearance of the child, gradually grew into compassion and then genuine maternal love. So that people would not notice the flat little forehead, Nina's mother tied a scarf round her head. The child became very dear to her and every illness brought her real grief. How could I lead this little girl into the world of childish joys? How could I protect her sensitive, impressionable heart from those troubles and disappointments that are inevitable for someone who feels that they are, to some extent, deprived of the happiness

available to others? How can I educate, from this silent, timid little girl, a fine human being proud of her virtues? Looking into her beautiful eyes, as blue as cornflowers, I admire them and smile, and for the first time I see a smile in her eyes. My dear, little girl; how I wish that your beautiful eyes will be spared grief, that you will find happiness in life.

Here stands dark-eyed, dark-complexioned, snub-nosed Kolya. He has a wary expression. I smile at the boy and he frowns even more. I think of the abnormal situation in his family. (Before the war Kolya's father was in prison while his family lived in the Donets Basin. During the fascist occupation he was released from prison, and the family moved to our village. The mother and father profited from the misfortune of others by conducting shady business. They were involved in speculation. They hid goods stolen by police who were working for the fascists. During the difficult years after the war, the mother stole chickens from the collective farm and taught Kolya and his older brother how to catch crows. The children killed the birds so the mother could cook them and sell them at the market as chicken …) I look at the boy, wanting him to smile, but in his eyes I see reservation and fear. How can I awaken kindly, humane feelings in your heart, Kolya? What can I offer to counter the atmosphere of malice and cynicism in which you have been raised? I look into the indifferent, unseeing eyes of his mother, and that indifference makes me feel ill at heart.

I thought for a long time about whether it was worth including these details in my book. Dozens of times I crossed the words out, only to write them again. I could, of course, have given a more generalised description: the father and mother were not good examples for the child … But that would be smoothing things over too much. We should not ignore the existence of evil. In order to combat evil and overcome it, to cleanse young souls of the corruption inherited from the old world, we have to look truth in the face.

Tolya is thin and blond-haired, with eyes as blue as a spring sky. He stands next to his mother, holding her hand, and for some reason looks at the ground, only occasionally raising his eyes. The boy's father died a heroic death in the Carpathians: his mother was sent several medals. Tolya is proud of his father, but his mother has a bad reputation in the village: she leads a wild life and completely neglects the child … What can I do to make sure the heart of this six-year-old is not crippled by this great misfortune? What can I think of to help the mother come to her senses, to awaken in her heart feelings of concern for her son?

The war has left deep scars, wounds that have not yet healed. These children were born in 1945, some in 1944. Some of them became orphans while still in their mother's womb. Take Yura: his father died on Czech land on the second last day of the war. His mother loves her son blindly and strives to satisfy his every whim. Yura's grandfather lives with them and he is also prepared to do anything to make sure the child has a carefree life. From what I have learnt of this family, it is clear that the boy could turn into a little tyrant. Blind maternal love is as dangerous as indifference.

Petrik has come with his mother and grandfather. I have heard a lot about his mother's difficult life. Her first husband left the family before the war. The woman remarried, but her second marriage was no happier: it turned out that Petrik's father had another family somewhere in Siberia. He left after the war. The proud woman convinced her son that his father had died at the front. The boy told other children about his father's imaginary feats. Other children his age did not believe him and said his father was a fraud. Petrik cried and went to his mother in tears. It is clear that unkind people have sown the seeds of distrust and bitterness in the child's soul. What needs to be done for the child to believe in goodness again?

Kostya is already seven but he has not enrolled in grade one. The boy has been brought to the school by his father, stepmother and

grandfather. The lethal winds of war have burnt this child as well. A few weeks after our village was liberated from fascist occupation, Kostya's mother (she was expecting to give birth to him any day) found some metal objects and gave them to her first, seven-year-old son to play with. It turned out that one of the objects was a mine detonator. There was an explosion and the child died. The mother hanged herself. People rushed to help and remove her from the noose, and during her last moments of agony she gave birth to Kostya. It was a miracle the boy survived. He was saved by the fact that a neighbour was breast-feeding her own child at that time. The boy's father returned from the front. He doted on his son, cared for him and showed him affection. The boy was also loved by his stepmother—a wonderful woman—and his grandfather. But before Kostya was even five years old a new misfortune struck. The boy found a shiny metal object in the vegetable garden, began to tap it with a piece of iron, and there was an explosion. They took the child to hospital covered in blood. Kostya became disabled for the rest of his life. He lost his left hand and left eye, and his face is forever disfigured by blue specks of powder …

With merciless generosity the war has crammed our earth with all manner of mines and detonators, grenades and shells, boxes of bullets and bombs. In those days you would see wounded and crippled children in every school. No amount of advice, pleading or control could counter the insatiable curiosity of those little researchers and explorers of the world. It is now more than twenty-three years since the last shots of the war were fired in our district, and still, every year, an unexpected explosion somewhere in a field or in the forest rings out, a tragic echo of the war bearing sad news of another mother's grief.

How much kindness and affection will it take, Kostya, for you to become a happy person? How should I advise your father, stepmother and grandfather so that their love will be wise, and come

with expectations? How will you study? Your family say you often have headaches. How can we make your study easier, strengthen your health, and dispel your depressed moods? Your father told me that you sometimes cry all by yourself, that you are not interested in playing with other children your age …

Sitting over there next to his mother is Slava, a thoughtful, grey-eyed boy. His mother is nearly fifty and has had the difficult life of a lonely woman. In her youth she dreamt of happiness, but she was not beautiful and no-one wanted to marry her. Her youth passed and she had not experienced happiness in her personal life. Then a man returned from the war lonely, like her, and covered in scars from his wounds. He fell in love with her and they married. But their happiness was short-lived: the husband soon died. All the strength of her love for her husband she transferred to her son, but she did not raise him properly. It was said that Slava avoided people, sitting at home for days at a time, and if you asked something of him, his eyes lit up with malice. When I looked at him just now, his eyes immediately prickled and became watchful.

The more I got to know my future pupils, the more I became convinced that one of my main objectives must be to return a proper childhood to those who had been deprived of it in their families.

The greatest trauma for many of these children's hearts was that they had been exposed to evil too early in life. Evil had entered into their cramped, still narrow, children's worlds, darkening their joys, hardening their souls, convincing them that people were bad and that there is no truth in the world. The most terrible thing an educator can encounter is a little child who has lost faith in people, goodness and justice.

During thirty-three years of working in schools I have met several dozen such children. Life has convinced me that if we fail to return faith in goodness and justice to little children, they will never feel the human being in themselves and never experience feelings of

self-worth. During adolescence, such pupils become embittered. For them there is nothing sacred, and a teacher's words will not reach the depth of their hearts.

To heal the souls of such young people is one of the most difficult tasks facing an educator. This most subtle, painstaking work is essentially a test of our knowledge of human nature. To really understand human nature means not only to see and feel how children apprehend good and evil, but also to defend children's tender hearts from evil.

Galya has been brought by her father. She and her younger sister have experienced deep grief: their mother died. A year after their mother's death a stepmother came into their family: good, honest and sensitive. She understood what was going on in the children's hearts, was careful in expressing her feelings, and hoped to win the girls' affection. But weeks and months passed, and Galya and her little sister would not even speak to their stepmother. They seemed not to notice her. The woman cried, and sought advice from her husband and relatives about what she should do. She was even intending to leave the family but then gave birth to a boy. She thought the appearance of the child would warm the little girls' hearts, but her hopes were not realised. The children (especially Galya) ignored their little brother. How could I touch this proud heart? What advice should I give the father and stepmother? The father had already come up to the school and poured out his grief. I told him I could only advise them once I got to know Galya well.

Plump, grey-eyed, smiling Larisa is sitting next to her mother, holding a chrysanthemum in her hand. I know the mother's heart is burdened with grief. Her husband left her. The little girl had no recollection of the father but her mother told her that one day he would come. And then the woman married a good man, a worker at the tractor depot. She managed to convince the girl that this was her father. Larisa loves her new father but her mother's heart aches: what if someone's careless words should reveal her deception.

The girl is happy, but we must be vigilant to protect her heart from the impact of unkind words. Will we succeed in this? The stepfather … I wish every child had as good a natural father as Larisa's stepfather. The more I got to know this man the more I became convinced that the real father is the one who brings up the child. I often visited this family, and was amazed by an interesting phenomenon. The same kindness, affection and sensitivity that shone in the stepfather's eyes, shone in the little girl's eyes. Her eyes radiated the same delight and amazement at beauty as her stepfather's. Even her movements and facial expressions, the way she expressed wonder, alertness, or sternness—all these things Larisa had picked up from him.

Fedya … He does not have a father either, and the boy has heard caustic, insulting comments on several occasions, suggesting that his mother has not conducted herself properly. The child's soul has experienced confusion. How could what people say be true when Mum says that Dad died at the front? I have known Fedya's mother since before the war, during which her life took an unfortunate turn. How can I lead the boy into the complex world of human relationships in such a way that he will not be troubled by tormenting questions?

As educators we often forget that little children's knowledge of the world begins with knowledge of other human beings. Good and evil are revealed to children in the tone of voice their father uses with their mother, in the emotions that are expressed in his looks and gestures. I knew one little girl who went into a remote corner of the yard and quietly cried to herself after her father had come home from work silent and gloomy, and her mother had done everything she could to try and please him. Her heart was tearing itself apart with anger at her father and feelings of compassion for her mother.

But these are just the first, superficial signs that the child notices. What goes on in a child's heart when, from a casually dropped word, from an argument between mother and father, the child learns that

their father and mother do not love each other and would divorce if they were not bound together by the child?

Nina and Sasha are twin sisters. Their father has brought them to school. This large family (there are four children apart from Nina and Sasha) has its own sorrow. The mother has been bed-ridden for several years with a serious illness. The twins are the eldest and do the housework. Nina and Sasha know what hard work is, and have very few joys in their family life. When the girls saw that one of the boys had a green rubber ball, their eyes lit up with delight, but the light in their eyes died as quickly as it had appeared and I saw such deep sorrow in its place that I got a lump in my throat. How can I give these little ones the bright, carefree joy of childhood? Will I be able to? The father has already reminded me that the girls will only be able to come to school for an hour at a time because they must help him at home.

We sit on the grass, in the shade of a tall, spreading, pear tree. I tell the parents how I plan to educate the children in the School of Joy. I talk about the things that can be discussed in front of the children, but cannot get out of my head the trials and tribulations in each family. Each family has its own grief, but to make it public, to give advice in the presence of other people, would be to turn other people's souls inside out and expose the deeply personal. No, I cannot talk about those things in front of all the parents. If I need to touch the innermost sanctum of a parent's heart, it must be in a private conversation with every word weighed a thousand times before it is spoken. The heartfelt wounds, the misfortunes, insults, sorrows, troubles and suffering of these mothers and fathers (the overwhelming majority of my pupils' parents are fine people), are so individual that it is impossible to have a general discussion about them. When I see the complex weave of good and bad in the people sitting next to each other, I realise that no parent would deliberately set a bad example for their children. I promise myself never to speak about deeply personal, intimate family matters at parent meetings.

The reader may feel that I have described too much grief and misfortune for a single class of children. You have to remember that these were the wounds of war. Many years have passed since those first, post-war years and the heartfelt wounds of those years have now healed. The children who learnt to read by the light of victory salutes in 1944 and 1945, have now grown up and become mothers and fathers. The children of those first post-war students have been studying at our school for some time; some are approaching young adulthood. You might think that today's young families would shine with happiness, but in real life it is not like that. We still have grief, unhappiness, tragedies … But in those years it was much worse. I was glad that amongst my parents, most mothers and fathers lived a good family life—lived in harmony, as they say, and brought up their children well.

Look at the father of sturdy little seven-year-old Vanya. He is a great worker, an agronomist, in love with the land and with his work for the community. Every year on his home plot he propagates dozens of apple trees and grape vines, and distributes them in the community. His wife is the leader of a silk production team, a master in her trade, a kind, empathetic, warm-hearted person, and a caring mother. During the difficult years of 1933 and 1934 she took four orphans in to her family and saved them from starvation, raising them as her own children. They still call her their mother.

Lyusya, a little girl with magnificent braids of dark hair, has a very decent, honest father. There are people of whom we say that they have beautiful souls. The vast majority of such people do not achieve anything spectacular, but the beauty of their souls is expressed in their relationships with other people. I doubt if Lyusya's father has ever told her that she should be sensitive and empathetic. He teaches his children sensitivity and humanity in the way he relates to his wife. Lyusya's mother has a heart condition, but in spite of that she works on the collective farm's beet plantation. Her father has taken on all the housework.

Katya's mother and father have turned their orchard into a kind of club for little children. From early spring to late autumn their own four children are joined by children from neighbouring yards to rest, play and frolic under a shower. Katya's father has turned the yard into a little sportsground. All the fruit harvested from their orchard is given to the children as treats.

Sanya is a little girl with dark blue, ever thoughtful eyes. Her parents are kind, warm-hearted people. Every summer three girls—the father's nieces—come from the city to stay with them. Sanya looks forward to the arrival of her cousins. Sanya's father has built a bathing shed for the little ones, next to a pond. Now he is building a motor boat to bring them even more joy.

Lida comes from a wonderful family. Her father, a worker at the train construction plant, is a musician and singer. He teaches children to sing and to play the violin, and organises impromptu concerts where about twenty children gather in his yard, listen to music, and learn folk songs.

Pavel comes from a happy family. The boy's mother was bedridden for more than four years. The boy's father managed to take her place, doing all the housework as well as working.

Seryozha is a dark-complexioned, dark-eyed little boy. In his family everyone gets on well: mother, father and two children. Whenever they have a day off they all go to the forest together. There is a clearing there where they have planted four little linden trees. At home the children have planted apple trees: one each for their mother, father, grandfather and grandmother. I have often wondered why the children in this family have such a strong love for their father, mother, grandfather and grandmother. It is probably because all the goodness poured into a child's heart comes back to the mother and father with a love a hundred times more powerful and more pure.

Lyuba has come to the school with her mother, father, grandmother, elder sister and younger brother. This little girl has five

brothers and sisters, two grandmothers and a grandfather. In this family a spirit of unquestioning obedience to one's elders is based on mutual trust and respect. I have heard a lot about how the elders in this family respect their children and protect their feelings.

Good old folk traditions are observed in the family of the smallest boy, Danko. Three children, aged six, eight and nine, remain on the farm while their parents are at work. The little ones prepare dinner and supper, milk the cow and tend the vegetable garden. When the mother and father return from work on a summer's evening, the children have prepared them a shower, clean underwear, a hot supper and … a bunch of wild flowers on the table. Respect for work reigns in this family—you could say they worshipped work—but without any sense of rushing or haste.

Valya's father works at a car manufacturing plant in Kremenchuk and her mother works on the collective farm. In this happy family everyone studies: the parents and the three children. The respect for knowledge, for the school and for the teachers that reigns in their home, is very encouraging for our staff. When Valya enrolled in the School of Joy we learnt something remarkable about their family. It turned out that the old lady, who everyone thought was Valya's grandmother, was not related to them by birth. No-one remained of her own family—her two sons died at the front—so Valya's family took her in and the old lady became one of the family. Valya did not even know she was not her real grandmother.

Little, grey-eyed Lyuda's mother and father work on the collective farm, and have taught their children a deep respect for simple work on the land. Their family's honour is dear to them. 'Everything we do for others should be beautiful', says their father. During the summer holidays the older children work with their father in the fields at an outlying camp. Lyuda visits them with her mother several times a month, and these trips are a real treat.

Tanya's mother and father work in the collective farm's stock-breeding section. Their two daughters often spend time at their parents' workplace during summer. The mother and father have managed to inspire their children with a love of work. The teachers have admired, more than once, how the father has made a little enclosure in a corner of the farm, in which he has put a lamb or a calf. Tanya and her older sister carefully look after the animal. This is the children's favourite game, and it is made all the more inviting because mum and dad are playing it too.

Shura is a little boy with dark, searching, tender eyes. His father works for the railway and only comes home once a week. When his father arrives home it is a big event for Shura and his brother and sister, and leaves a deep impression. They cannot wait for their father to arrive home. He always brings a present, and his presents are quite unique. He is good at carving little figures of animals, people and imaginary creatures from wood, and brings each child a little wooden figure. The children also get enormous pleasure from his stories. He has a special gift for finding good people, and his stories about the fine people he has met provide the children with a window on the world.

Volodya's father is a bridge builder and his mother works on the collective farm. The young parents love their first-born passionately, but there is little wisdom in their love. They give their little boy too many toys of all descriptions, trying to satisfy their son's every whim as quickly as possible. Volodya is sitting next to his mother now, holding two rubber balls. He wants to say something to his mother, but she is not paying attention, and her son has puffed up his cheeks and has tears in his eyes.

Varya is a dark-complexioned, dark-eyed, curly-haired girl, as slender as a flower stem. Her mother works as a cleaner at the butter factory. Her father has been seriously ill since returning from the front, and while the whole family looks after him, his health has not improved. The three children feel that fate has placed a heavy burden

on their mother's shoulders and try with all their hearts to lighten her load. The mother earns a modest income, and during the evenings she embroiders shirts and towels to earn the extra money she needs for her husband's treatment. Varya's elder sister, a ten-year-old who looks very much like Varya, has already learnt to embroider and helps her mother. Varya is also learning folk embroidery.

A child is a mirror of the moral life of their parents. I thought about the good and bad in each family. The most valuable moral attribute of good parents, which is passed on to children without any special effort, is the heartfelt kindness of mother and father, their ability to show kindness to others. In families where the mother and father give a little of themselves to others and take the joys and sorrows of others to heart, the children grow up kind, sensitive, and warm-hearted. The greatest evil is the egoism and individualism of some parents. Sometimes this evil is poured into a blind, instinctual love for their child, as in Volodya's case. If the mother and father give all the energy of their hearts to their children with no consideration for other people, this hypertrophied love ultimately leads to unhappiness.

I thought about this as I told the parents about my dreams for the School of Joy. It was a difficult conversation. With each word addressed to the parents I had to consider all the good and evil in each family. When I spoke of the spirit of honesty, truthfulness and mutual trust that would reign in the School of Joy, I could not stop thinking about Kolya's family. But I could not speak of the dishonesty permeating the life of that family in front of the other parents. That would drive the mother away from the school, and she was not likely to ever come back. Something else was needed here, but what? I thought about it for a long time and could not find an answer to that complex question.

I described the children's future education to the parents. Today the children were coming to school as little six-year-olds. In twelve

years they would become adults: future mothers and fathers. The school staff would do everything they could to ensure that the children grew up to be patriotic citizens of their country with a love for their native land and for working people, to be honest, truthful, hard-working, kind and warm-hearted, responsive to the needs of others, rejecting evil and dishonesty, to be courageous and determined in overcoming difficulties, to be modest and morally beautiful, healthy and physically hardened. I wanted the children to become people with clear minds, noble hearts, golden hands and lofty feelings. The child is a mirror of the family: just as the sun is reflected in a drop of water, so a mother and father's moral qualities are reflected in their children. The ultimate goal for both school and parents is to help each child find happiness. Happiness is many-facetted. It comes from discovering one's talents, from developing a love of work and finding creativity in it, from appreciating the beauty of the surrounding world and creating beauty for others, from loving another person and from being loved, from raising children to be fine people. It is only through cooperating with parents that teachers can help children find true human happiness.

The children and parents go home and I say to myself, 'Tomorrow, 31 August, the life of our School of Joy will begin'.

What will tomorrow bring? Today the children are holding their mothers' hands but tomorrow they will come by themselves. Each one will bring their own joys. Each one will experience the sunny morning. Each one will have an eternity of living in front of them. On the eve of that day my main concern was that the school would not take away the little ones' childish joys. On the contrary, I must introduce them to the world of school in such a way that they continually discover new joys, so that the discovery of the world does not turn into boring study. At the same time school should not turn in to a continuous, outwardly attractive but empty game. Each day must enrich the children's minds and feelings and strengthen their wills.

A school under the open sky

I WAITED FOR THE LITTLE ones with trepidation. At eight o'clock twenty-nine children came. Sasha did not come (her mother was probably not well) and Volodya was not there—it appeared he had slept in and his mother had not wanted to wake him.

Nearly all the children were dressed in their best clothes with new shoes. That concerned me: village children have always gone barefoot when it is warm. It is an excellent way of building resistance to colds. Why do parents try to protect children's feet from the earth, from the morning dew and the sun-baked soil? It is all done with good intentions, but the result is bad. Every year more village children come down with influenza, tonsillitis and whooping-cough. We should bring up our children to brave heat and cold.

'Let's go to school, children', I said to the little ones, and headed for the orchard. The children looked at me with confusion.

'Yes children, we are going to school. Our school will be under the open sky, on the green grass, under a spreading pear tree, by the grape vines, or in the green meadows. Let's take our shoes off and walk barefoot, as you are used to doing.' The children started chattering joyfully. They were not used to wearing shoes in hot weather and found them uncomfortable. 'And tomorrow, come barefoot. That will be best at our school.'

We headed along a path to the grapes. In a quiet corner hidden by trees, grape vines were growing. Spread over a metal frame, they formed a green shelter. Inside the shelter the ground was covered with soft, green grass. Peace reigned in there, and from the shelter's green twilight the whole world looked green. We spread out on the grass.

'This is where our school begins. From here we will look out at the blue sky, the orchard, the village and the sun.'

The children fell silent, spellbound by the beauty of nature. Between the leaves hung bunches of ripe, amber-coloured grapes. The children wanted to sample the tasty fruit. 'There will be time for that children, but first let us admire the beauty.' Drops of morning dew were still hanging on the leaves like diamonds.

'Look children, and see how the orchard appears when seen through a drop of dew.'

Carefully, so as not to touch the leaves, the children spread themselves around the green wall. Each found a drop of dew and looked through it at the orchard. Exclamations of wonder rang out. Through a drop of water the orchard looked amazingly beautiful: each tree was ringed with a rainbow-coloured halo. It seemed that from the limitless depths of the blue sky little sparks were raining down on the trees. Like blinding embers, like ringing shards of crystal, they settled on the leaves and trunks. The children expressed their admiration in quiet gasps: 'How beautiful!' Someone looked through a transparent grape and saw an even more amazing scene: the world was wrapped in green mist, as if in some fairytale underwater kingdom. The surface of the earth—the fields, meadows and roads—seemed to shimmer in a malachite mist, while sparks of sunlight rained down on the shining trees.

'The sun is scattering sparks', said Katya softly. The children could not tear their eyes away from that enchanting world, and I began to tell them a story about the sun.

'Yes children, Katya has put it very well. The sun is scattering sparks. It lives high up in the sky where there are two giant blacksmiths and a golden anvil. Just before dawn, the blacksmiths with fiery beards go to the sun, who gives them two bundles of silver threads. The blacksmiths take their iron hammers, put the silver threads on their golden anvil, and hammer away. They forge a silver garland for the sun, and from under their hammers silver sparks are scattered all over the world. The sparks fall to the ground and you can see them now. In the evening the tired blacksmiths go to the sun and give him

the garland. The sun puts the garland on his golden hair and goes into his magic garden to rest.'

I tell the story and draw it at the same time. On the white page of my notebook fantastic images appear: two giant blacksmiths labour at the golden anvil and silver sparks are scattered by their iron hammers.

The children listen to the tale, enchanted by this magic world. They seem afraid to break the silence, not wanting the spell to be broken. Then suddenly they deluge me with questions. What do the blacksmiths do at night? Why does the sun need a new garland every day? Where do all the silver sparks that fall to earth every day go?

'Dear children, I will tell you all that another time. We will have plenty of time for that; but now, I want to give you some grapes.' The children wait impatiently while the basket is filled with grapes. I give each child two bunches. I advise them to eat one and to take the other bunch home for their mother, so she can try them. The children show amazing restraint and wrap the grapes in paper. But I cannot help wondering: will that restraint last all the way from school to their homes? Will Tolya and Kolya bring grapes for their mothers? I give Nina several bunches: for her sick mother, for her sisters and for her grandmother. Varya takes three bunches for her father. I have a thought: as soon as the children are strong enough, each child can plant their own grape vine at home … Varya needs to plant ten cuttings this autumn so they can bear fruit next year. That will be good for her father's health …

We leave the magic green light of the grape bower. I tell the children, 'Tomorrow come in the evening at six o'clock. Don't forget.'

I can see the children do not want to leave, but they disperse, clutching their white bundles to their chests. How I would love to know who will reach home with the grapes! But I must not question the children about this; if some tell me themselves, that will be good.

And so ended the first day of our school under the open sky … I will remember that day for the rest of my life; as I will remember my

own first day at school when my first teacher, Praskovia Alekseyevna, took us to the meadow and showed us an amazing world—the life of an anthill; as I will remember the day I became a father; as I will remember the day I presented a graduation certificate to my first student, whom I had led by the hand for ten years—from the first attempt to write letters in an exercise book to thoughts about the future of humanity.

That night I dreamt of silver sparks of sunlight, and when I woke early in the morning, I thought for a long time about what to do next. I had not compiled a detailed plan of what to say to the children each day or where to take them. The life of our school developed from an idea that had inspired me: children by their very nature are inquisitive researchers, explorers of the world. So let a world of wonder reveal itself to them in living colours, in clear and vibrant sounds, in stories and games, in their own creativity, in beauty that uplifts the heart, in the urge to do good deeds for others. Through stories, imagination and play, through children's unique creativity: that was the sure way to a child's heart. I would introduce the little ones to the surrounding world in such a way that every day they discovered something new in it, so that every step led us on a journey to the wellsprings of thought and speech, to the wondrous beauty of nature. I would take care that each of my pupils grew up to become a wise thinker and researcher, that each step on the path to knowledge enriched the heart and tempered the will.

On the second day the children came to school in the evening. A quiet September day was fading. We left the village and found a place to sit high on an ancient burial mound. Spread out in front of us was a wonderful view of a wide meadow that seemed to glow in the evening sunlight, of tall, slender poplars, and, on the horizon, distant burial mounds. We had come to the very wellsprings of thought and words. Stories and fantasy—these provide a key to unlock those springs, and life-giving streams will bubble from them.

I remembered how, on the day before, Katya had said, 'The sun is scattering sparks …' Twelve years later, when graduating from school, Katya wrote an essay about her native land and repeated that image when expressing her love for nature. Such is the power of a fairytale image to influence a child's thought. A thousand times I have been convinced that when they populate the world with fantastic images and when they create these images, children discover not only beauty, but truth. Without stories, without the play of imagination, a child cannot live. Without stories the surrounding world is just a beautiful picture painted on a canvas. Stories bring that picture to life.

Figuratively speaking, a story is a fresh wind fanning the fire of a child's thought and speech. Children not only love to hear stories, they create them. When I showed the children the world though the leaves of a grapevine, I knew I would tell them a story, but did not know exactly which one. Katya's words—the sun is scattering sparks—provided a stimulus for my flight of fancy. What truthful, precise, artistically expressive images children create; how striking and colourful their language is. We must not hide the surrounding world from them with a classroom's walls, a blackboard and the pages of a textbook.

Before opening a book, before sounding out their first word, I wanted the children to read the pages of the most wonderful book in the world—the book of nature.

Here, in the midst of nature, it was particularly clear to me that, as teachers, we are dealing with the most tender, most delicate, most sensitive thing in nature—a child's brain. When you think of a child's brain, you must imagine a tender rose on which a drop of dew is quivering. How much care and tenderness is needed to pick the rose without spilling the drop of dew. That is how much care we need each minute of the day, as we touch the most delicate thing in nature—the thinking matter of a growing organism.

Children think in images. This means, for example, that while listening to a teacher's story about the journey of a drop of water, in

their imaginations they paint silver waves of morning mist, a dark storm cloud, peals of thunder, and a spring shower. The clearer these pictures are in their imaginations, the more deeply they comprehend the laws of nature. The tender, sensitive neurons of their brains have not yet reached their full strength: they need to be developed and strengthened. For this to happen, children's thinking processes must be in accord with the natural demands of their brains. Most importantly, children must be taught to think in the midst of nature, at that life-giving wellspring of thought from which streams of living water constantly flow.

Children think … That means that a certain group of neurons in the cortex of their brains perceives images (pictures, objects, phenomena, words) from the surrounding world, and that signals pass through the sensitive nerve cells, as if through communication channels. The neurons 'process' this information—catalogue it, group it, juxtapose it, compare it—all while continuing to receive new information, which in turn must be taken in and processed. In order to cope with the volume of constantly arriving images, and with processing the information, the nervous energy of the neurons constantly switches between perceiving images and processing them.

This astonishingly rapid switching of the nervous energy of neurons is the phenomenon we call thought—a child is thinking … Children's brain cells are so delicate and react so sensitively to the objects of perception that they can only function normally when the object of perception they are making sense of is an image they can see, hear and touch. This switching of thought, which is the essence of the thinking process, is only possible when children are presented with either a real, visual image, or a verbal image that is created so vividly they are able to see, hear and sense what is being described. That is why children love stories so much.

The nature of children's brains dictates that their minds should be educated at the wellsprings of thought—amongst visual images and

mainly in natural settings, so that thought can switch from a visual image to the processing of information about that image. If children are isolated from nature, if all that a child is exposed to from the first days of school is words, the brain cells are quickly exhausted and cannot cope with the work set by the teacher. These cells need to be allowed to develop, to get stronger, to gather energy. Here we find an explanation for a phenomenon that many teachers encounter in primary classes: children are sitting quietly, looking you in the eyes, apparently listening attentively, but not understanding a single word, because the teacher talks and talks, because they have to understand rules, to solve problems, to follow examples. Without living images there is too much abstraction and generalisation, and the brain gets tired … That is why children fall behind. That is why it is necessary to develop children's thinking, to increase their mental capacity in the midst of nature—this is dictated by the natural laws governing a child's development. That is why every excursion into nature is a lesson in thought, a lesson in developing the mind.

We sit on the ancient burial mound while a chorus of grasshoppers rings out harmoniously all around and the scent of steppe grasses hangs in the air. We are silent. You do not have to say a lot to children or cram their heads with stories. Words are not an idle pursuit, and overconsumption of words is one of the most harmful forms of overconsumption. As well as needing to hear their teacher's words, children need time for silence. During such moments they think and make sense of what they have seen and heard. It is very important for teachers to show restraint when explaining things to children. We must not turn children into passive receptors of words. In order to make sense of each bright image—visual or verbal—time and nervous energy are required. Knowing when to give children time to think is one of the most refined attributes of a teacher. In the midst of nature children must be given the chance to listen, to see and to feel …

We listen attentively to the chorus of grasshoppers and I am glad the children are absorbed in this enchanting music. May this quiet evening, overflowing with the scent of fields and with wonderful modulating sounds, live in their memories forever. One day, they will make up a story about a grasshopper.

But for now the children gaze thoughtfully at the sunset. The sun has disappeared beyond the horizon and delicate shades of sunset spread across the sky.

'Now the sun has gone to rest', says Larisa, and her face becomes sad.

'The blacksmiths have brought the sun its silver garland … Where does it put yesterday's garland?' asks Lida.

The children look at me expecting a continuation of the story, but I have not decided which image to use. Fedya helps me.

'The garland has melted across the sky', he says quietly.

There is an expectant silence as we all wait to see what Fedya will say next. The boy has obviously composed a continuation to the story and his silence is probably due to shyness. I help Fedya:

'Yes, the garland has melted across the sky. During the day it gets white hot on the sun's fiery hair, and becomes as soft as wax. The sun has only to touch it with his burning hand, and it pours in a golden stream across the evening sky. The last rays of the sun, as it goes to rest, light up that stream. You can see the play of its pink colours, ever changing, growing darker as the sun moves away. Soon the sun will enter its magic garden, and the stars will come out.'

'What are stars? Why do they come out? Where do they come from? Why can't you see them during the day?' ask the children. But I should not overwhelm the children's minds with too many images. We have had enough for today, and I divert their attention to something else.

'Look at the steppe. Can you see how it is getting dark in the valleys, in the meadow, in the lowlands? Look at those hills: they look

soft, as if they are floating in the evening gloom. The hills are turning grey. Look at their surface. What do you see?'

'A forest … Bushes … A herd of cattle … Sheep and a shepherd … People are spending the night in the fields, lighting campfires; but you can't see the campfires, only the smoke rising into the air …' These are the images born of the children's imaginations as they watch the rapidly darkening hills. I suggest returning home but the children do not want to. They ask if they can sit a little longer. At dusk, when the world seems to clothe itself in a veil of mystery, children's imaginations run wild. I have only to suggest that the evening dusk and the darkness of the night were flowing like rivers from distant valleys and forests, and the children's imaginations give birth to two fairytale creatures: Darkness and Dusk. Sanya tells a story about these creatures. They live in a distant cave, beyond the primordial forest. During the day they sink into a dark, bottomless pit, where they sleep and sigh in their dreams (why they sigh, only the author of the story knows). But as soon as the sun leaves for its magic garden, they come out of their hiding place. Their huge paws are covered in soft hair, so no-one hears their steps. Dusk and Darkness are kind, peaceful, gentle creatures, and do not hurt anyone.

The children are ready to make up a story about how Darkness and Dusk put children to sleep, but we have had enough for today. We go home and the children ask if tomorrow they can come in the evening again, when, as Varya states, 'it is easy to make up stories'.

Why do children listen so willingly to stories, why do they so love the evening twilight, when the atmosphere facilitates children's flights of fancy? Why do stories develop speech and thought more powerfully than any other means? It is because story images are so laden with emotional colouring. The words from a story live in a child's consciousness. Children's hearts stop beating when they hear or pronounce words that create a world of fantasy. I cannot imagine school instruction that does not include making up and listening

to stories. I still have stories composed by the little children during those first two months of the School of Joy. They reveal a world of children's thoughts, feelings, desires and attitudes:

The hare (Shura)

Mum gave me a little plush hare. It was just before New Year. I put it on the Christmas tree in the middle of the branches. Everyone went to bed. On the tree a tiny little lamp was shining. I saw the hare jump from its branch and run around the tree. It jumped around for a while and then climbed back onto the tree.

The sunflower (Katya)

The sun rose. The birds woke up and a lark rose up into the sky. A sunflower woke up as well. It roused itself and shook some dew from its petals. It turned to the sun: 'Hello, sun. I have been waiting for you all night. See how my yellow petals have drooped without your warmth. Now they have perked up and are happy again. I am round and golden, just like you, sun.'

How they ploughed the field (Yura)

A combine harvester has cut the wheat. A hedgehog crawls out of its burrow and sees: there is no wheat, the seed heads are not rustling any more. It rolls through the stubble like a ball. Suddenly it sees a huge monster crawling towards it: a metal beetle that rumbles and roars. After it comes a plough. Behind it is a black, ploughed field. The hedgehog sits in his burrow and looks out with amazement. 'Where did that giant beetle come from?' it wonders. But it is really a tractor.

The acorn (Zina)

A wind sprang up. An acorn fell from an oak tree, yellow and shiny, as if forged from copper. It fell down and thought, 'It was so nice in the branches, but now I am on the ground. From here I cannot see the river or the forest.' The acorn became sad. 'Oak tree, please take me back onto your branch', it begged. But the oak tree replied, 'Don't be stupid. Look at me. I also grew from the earth. You should quickly put down roots and grow. Then you will turn into a tall oak tree.'

Children are not only concerned about what happens in nature. They want the world to be at peace. They know there are forces contemplating war. Here is a story in which these dark forces are depicted in the image of a snake:

How we defeated the Iron Snake (Seryozha)

He lived in a swamp, far, far away, beyond the ocean. He hated our people. He made atomic bombs. He made lots and lots of them, loaded his wings with them, and took off. He wanted to throw them at the sun. He wanted to put the sun out, so we would perish in darkness. I sent the swallows out against the Iron Snake. The swallows took sparks from the sun's fire in their beaks and chased after the Snake. They threw the fire on its wings. The Iron Snake fell into the swamp and burnt up together with its bombs. The sun shone, and the swallows were glad and twittered happily.

This story demonstrates the peculiarities of a child's view of the world. A child cannot imagine the triumph of good over evil without the participation of birds and animals. The children's writer Arkady

Gaidar once said that a story should end like this: 'The red army defeated the white army, and a hare rejoices'. The hares and swallows that are so dear to children's hearts are not just story characters; they are the embodiment of goodness.

We sit on the ancient burial mound admiring the colours of the sunset and listening to the chorus of grasshoppers. We are about to open a new page in the story of the sun. As the fiery globe touches the horizon I say to the children, 'Look at the village. What do you see in the windows of the homes?'

In the windows of the homes fires are burning. The last rays of the departing sun are reflected in the window panes, shining like crimson flames. Captivated, amazed, the children are silent. The crimson flames gradually die down in some windows, only to flare up in others.

The sun is lighting fires in the windows. 'Oh, how beautiful!' We admire the crimson fires until the sun disappears beyond the horizon.

Each day brought some new discovery in the surrounding world. Each discovery was transformed into a story created by the children. Story images helped the little ones to feel the beauty of their native land. The beauty of our countryside—revealed through stories, imagination and creativity—inspires a love for our homeland.

The beauty of nature, of our native tongue, and the beauty of the kind people surrounding a child, feed a child's heart with patriotic feelings. With little children you do not need to speak high-flown words about the greatness and might of our native land (high-flown because these words are still incomprehensible to them). That can wait for another time.

Let children feel beauty, and delight in it. Let images of their homeland remain forever in their hearts and memories. Beauty is the flesh and blood of humanity, of kindly feelings, of warm-hearted relationships. I was glad to see how the hardened hearts of Tolya, Slava, Kolya, Vitya and Sashko were gradually melting. Smiles,

enthusiasm, wonder at the beauty of nature—I saw these as providing a path to the children's hearts.

The life of our School of Joy was not cramped by strict regulations. It was not stipulated how much time the children should spend under the open sky. The main thing was that the children should not tire of it, that they should never long for the teacher to tell them it was time to go home. I tried to end our lessons when the children showed heightened interest in what we were observing or doing. I wanted the little ones to look forward to the next day with anticipation of new joys. I wanted them to see the sun scattering silver sparks in their dreams. One day the children might spend an hour or an hour and a half, the next day four hours. It all depended on how much joy the teacher was able to bring the children on that day. It was also very important that each child not only experienced joy, but also created it, making their own little contribution to the life of the class.

During that autumn we enjoyed prolonged warm, dry weather. The leaves on the trees had still not turned yellow in the middle of October. Several times thunder rolled through the sky as if summer had returned, and in the mornings, drops of dew sparkled on the grass. This created favourable conditions for our work. Several times we returned to our burial mound and 'travelled' through the clouds. These hours left indelible impressions on the children's memories with the white, fluffy clouds providing a world of amazing discoveries. In their strange, constantly changing outlines, the children saw wild animals and fairytale giants. Their childish imaginations flew, like speeding birds, beyond the clouds, beyond seas and forests, to distant unknown lands. In these flights of fancy the children's individual worlds were clearly revealed. A strange cloud would float into view.

'What do you see in it, children?'

'An old shepherd in a straw hat, leaning on a stick', says Varya. 'Look, you can see his flock of sheep next to him. In the front there's a

ram with curly horns, and behind him are lambs … And the old man has a bag over his shoulder, and something is poking out of the bag.'

'That's not an old man', objects Pavlo. 'It's a snowman like we made in winter. Look, he's even got a broom in his hand. And that's not a straw hat on his head; that's a bucket.'

'That's not a snowman', says Yura. 'That's a haystack. There are two shepherds with pitchforks on the haystack. You can see they're tossing the hay down on to a cart. What sort of a ram is that? It's not a ram, it's a cart. Those aren't horns; that's a harness …'

'It's a huge, enormous hare. I saw one like that in my dream. And that isn't a cart down the bottom; that's the hare's tail.'

I would like all the children to use their imaginations, but for some reason Kolya, Slava, Tolya and Misha remain silent. My heart aches when I see an expression of condescension on Kolya's face, such as one might come across on the face of an adult who considers childish pursuits beneath his dignity. I wonder why, when I have already seen the boy's eyes light up with delight at beauty … (At that time I had not thought about it much, but I had a gut feeling that until I succeeded in drawing such children into the enjoyment of childish pleasures, until their eyes lit up with unfeigned delight, until they enjoyed childish mischief, I had no right to speak of any educational influence over them. Children need to be children. If they are not involved in the battle between good and evil when listening to a story, if instead of delight you see indifference in their eyes, that means something is damaged in the child's soul and you need to invest a lot of energy to heal it.)

Another strange cloud appears on the horizon. This one looks like a wonderful palace surrounded by tall walls and watchtowers. The children's imaginations fill in any gaps in the outline of the palace, and Yura is already telling us a fairytale about a magic kingdom beyond the seven seas, about a cruel witch and a brave knight who saves a beautiful princess. Vitya's imagination has created a different

story. Somewhere far beyond the borders of our country, a terrifying creature lives in the mountains and plans war. The wings of fancy take the boy on a flying ship, capable of taking him in an instant to the cave where the dark force lives, destroying the evil and establishing eternal peace on Earth.

Then I tell the children about distant tropical lands, about endless summer and unusual constellations, about sky-blue oceans and tall palms. Here fairytale is interwoven with reality and I open a small window onto a distant world. I talk about the earth and its peoples, about seas and oceans, about the abundance of the plant and animal worlds, about natural phenomena.

* * *

Experience has convinced me that if children are to fully develop their intellects and have a rich spiritual life, they must hear stories and explanations from a teacher who shares their joys and sorrows. The educational significance of these stories comes from the fact that children hear them in a setting that encourages creative imagination: on a quiet evening when the first stars are coming out; in the forest by a campfire; or in a cosy hut by the light of smouldering coals, while autumn rain beats on the window pane and a cold wind sings its melancholy song. Explanations should be clear, vivid and concise. We should not load children with too many facts, with a host of impressions, or their sensitivity to the teacher's words will be blunted and it will be hard to interest them in anything.

I advise educators: work with children's feelings and imaginations; open a window on the boundless world very gradually; do not swing it open wide; do not turn it into a wide door towards which the little ones, carried away by everything you have told them, will hurtle, rolling out like marbles … First they will feel lost in the face of so many strange objects; and then those objects, about which they

essentially know nothing, will seem familiar to them and become no more than empty sounds.

The school under the open sky taught me how to open a window on the world for children, and I tried to pass on this lesson to all the other teachers. I advised them: do not overwhelm children with an avalanche of knowledge. In your lessons do not try to explain everything you know about the subject, as the children's curiosity and thirst for knowledge may be buried under that avalanche. Learn to expose children to some single phenomenon in the natural world, but in such a way that this little part of the world comes to life with all the colours of the rainbow. Always leave something unsaid, so that children want to return again and again to what they have learnt.

The achievements of human thought are limitless. Amongst other things, people have created a multitude of books. Show children the beauty, wisdom and depth of thought in a single book, but show it in such a way that each child forever falls in love with reading, and is ready to swim independently in the ocean of books. I shared with the other teachers my thoughts about our 'journeys' to the wellsprings of living words—that is what I called the little children's short, graphic, emotionally charged stories about objects and phenomena from the surrounding world that they had seen with their own eyes. Teachers in the primary classes began to make similar 'journeys', following my example. The doors of the classrooms were flung open and children began to go out on to the green grass in the fresh breeze. Reading and arithmetic lessons, especially in grades one and two, began to be conducted more and more frequently under the open sky. This was no abdication of lessons or retreat from books and learning into the world of nature. On the contrary, this enriched lessons, and brought books and learning to life.

Our Nook of Dreams

NOT FAR FROM THE SCHOOL, beyond the village, is a deep ravine overgrown with bushes and trees. For little children this is a dense forest, full of undiscovered mysteries. One day I notice the entrance to a cave in the side of the ravine. The cave is spacious inside, with solid, dry walls. This is a real treasure trove! This will be our 'Nook of Dreams'. It is hard to convey the delight of the children when I first take them to the cave. The children squeal, sing, call out to each other, and play hide and seek. That very day we spread dry grass over the floor.

At first we simply enjoy our secret nook, and make it cosy and habitable. We attach some pictures to the walls, widen the entrance and make a table. The children are delighted with a proposal to build a stove there so we can light a fire from time to time.

We dig out a place for the stove and knock through an opening for the chimney pipe. We remove the excavated soil and bring in clay and bricks. It is hard work but we have a dream: a stove. We build it for two weeks. The work inspires everybody. Even Kolya, Slava and Tolya, whose indifference to everything has so disturbed me, cannot remain on the sidelines. Their eyes light up more and more often, and their enthusiasm lingers. Our interesting work also inspires shy, timid, indecisive children like Sashko, Lyuda and Valya. I become more and more convinced that the emotional feeling in a group—the collective joy and enthusiasm—is a significant spiritual force, capable of uniting children and awakening interest in what the group is doing, even in previously indifferent hearts.

At last we are able to light a fire in our stove. The dry kindling merrily bursts into flame. Evening descends on the land. In our dwelling it is light and cosy. We look at the trees and bushes covering the slope of the ravine, and from a mysterious thicket opposite, fairytale

images march towards us. They seem to invite us to make up stories about them. The trees and bushes are enveloped in the evening haze, bluish-grey at first and then lilac-coloured. In this haze the trees take on the most unexpected shapes.

At such times children willingly exercise their imaginations and create stories.

'What do those trees scattered on the slope of the ravine look like?' I ask, not so much addressing the children as my own thoughts. To me they look like a green waterfall, rushing headlong from a precipice, only to freeze and turn into giant statues of basalt or malachite. I wonder if any child's thoughts will develop in the same direction as mine. During this evening there will be an opportunity to observe how the children think.

I learn that while one child's thoughts bubble along rapidly, giving birth to more and more images, another's flow like a mighty river—slow, full, wide and mysterious in its depths. You cannot even tell if that river is flowing, but it is strong, irresistible, and cannot be diverted. The rapid, effervescent, impetuous thoughts of other children can more easily be diverted when they meet an obstruction. Shura sees a herd of cows in the crowns of the trees, but Seryozha has only to ask, 'And what are they going to feed on? There is no grass there' for Shura's thoughts to fly off in another direction. Now it is not cows, but clouds, coming down to earth to rest for the night. Yura's thoughts soar just as quickly and impetuously. But Misha and Nina are watching silently, intently—what are they seeing? Already dozens of images born of the children's imaginations have flashed past, but Misha and Nina are silent. So is Slava. Is it possible not a single idea has come to them? It is already time to go home when Misha, the quietest of all the boys, suddenly says:

'It is a wild bull who has charged with its horns at the cliff, and unable to overcome it, has stopped in its tracks. Look, he is straining, almost pushing back the precipice …'

And suddenly all the other images that had crowded our minds fly away. We see that the mass of trees does in fact look amazingly like a bull, frozen in impotent rage. The children start chattering: look how his feet are gripping the bottom of the ravine, see how his neck is swelling—probably his sinews are straining, and his horns are stuck in the ground …

So that is what Misha was thinking about! While bright, living images were flashing through our minds, the river of his thoughts followed its own course. He listened carefully to his friends but not one image distracted him. The boy's imagination was the most lucid and the most down to earth. The child saw something that he had probably seen in real life, and that had made a deep impression on his consciousness. And silent, slow thinkers like him suffer so much during lessons. Teachers want a student to answer as quickly as possible. They are not interested in how a child thinks; they just want the child to answer so they can give him a grade. It does not occur to them that you cannot speed the flow of a slow but mighty river. That river should be allowed to flow as nature intended. Its waters will definitely reach their intended destination, but please do not hurry, do not be anxious, do not lash the mighty river with the birch rod of your grades—that will not help.

I wonder if every teacher has reflected on the fact that the development of the human organism—from birth to maturity—is longer in humans than in any other representative of the animal kingdom. The human organism grows, develops and strengthens for twenty years or more. A great secret of nature hides in the lengthy duration of this period of human development. Nature has allocated this lengthy period for the development, strengthening and education of the nervous system, including the cortex of the brain. Human beings only become human because over a very lengthy period they live through the infancy of the nervous system, the childhood of the brain.

A child enters the world with billions of nerve cells that react sensitively to the surrounding world and, given certain conditions, are capable of carrying out the functions of thought. These cells constitute the material basis for consciousness. Nature does not provide a single extra nerve cell during the period from birth to maturity, or from maturity to old age. During the childhood stage in the development of human thought, deep inner processes occur in the cells of the cerebral cortex: these cells are strengthened during the process of active thinking and gradually accumulate impressions, images and concepts. During the infancy of the nervous system the cells of thinking matter must exercise every day, and the main forms this exercise takes are perception, observation and contemplation.

Before embarking upon any deep study of cause and effect relationships in the surrounding world, children need to pass through a period of cognitive exercises. These exercises involve the observation of objects and phenomena. Children see living images and then imaginatively recreate those images in their own representations. The viewing of real objects and the creation of imaginative representations of those objects: there is no contradiction in these two stages of the cognitive process. The fantasy image in a story is interpreted by a child, and created by that same child as a vivid reality. The creation of fantasy images provides fertile ground for the vigorous development of thought processes.

During childhood, thought processes should be connected as closely as possible with bright, living, concrete objects in the surrounding world. In the beginning, do not expect children to think about cause and effect relationships. Let them simply inspect an object and discover something new about it. A boy saw an enraged bull in a mass of trees wrapped in the evening dusk. This is not simply the play of a child's imagination, but an artistic, poetic way of thinking. In the same trees other children see something different, unique to themselves—they invest the image with the individual

characteristics of their own perception, imagination and thought. Each child not only perceives, but draws, creates and constructs. A child's perception of the world is a unique form of artistic creation. The image perceived and, at the same time, created by the child is charged with striking emotional colouring. Children experience an elemental joy when they perceive an object from the surrounding world and add something to it from their imagination. The emotional richness of perception provides the spiritual energy for children's creativity. I am deeply convinced that without emotional stimulation the normal development of a child's brain cells is impossible. There are physiological processes taking place in a child's brain that are connected with emotion. During moments of enthusiasm and intense stimulation, additional nutrition is supplied to the cells of the cerebral cortex. At such times the brain cells consume a lot of energy, but they simultaneously receive a lot from the organism. After observing the intellectual work of children in the primary classes for many years, I came to the conclusion that at times of great emotional stimulation, children's thoughts become particularly clear and more intensive memorisation takes place.

These observations threw new light on the process of educating children. The thinking processes of children in the primary classes are inseparable from their feelings and emotions. The process of instruction, and especially children's perception of the surrounding world, should be charged with emotion. The laws of development of a child's thought processes demand this.

The wonderfully warm days of an Indian summer began. We did not stay in one place, but roamed the fields and woodlands, only occasionally looking into our Nook of Dreams. Two kilometres from the village the children found a little hill from which we had a breath-taking view of the village nestled among orchards, distant fields, dark blue burial mounds and forest belts. The air became amazingly clear and transparent. Fine silver cobwebs floated above the ground

and formations of migratory birds appeared more and more often in the blue sky. Not far from our little hill was a grove of trees, on the edge of which grew many briar bushes. We admired the bead-like, purple berries, and the silver webs hanging from the branches. The outline of each bush was engraved in our memories, and we gazed at the orchards and rows of tall poplars on the edge of the village. Each day the children discovered something new. Before our very eyes the green grove clothed itself in crimson, the leaves displaying an amazing array of colours. These discoveries brought the children great joy.

Here the wellsprings of living language and creative thought were so rich and abundant that had we made one discovery each hour there would have been enough to last for many years. In front of us was a briar bush, laden with bunches of purple berries. From berry to berry were strung silver webs, sparkling with trembling drops of morning dew. The dew drops seemed to be made of amber. Spell-bound, we stood by a bush and witnessed amazing things. From the edges of the webs drops of dew were moving, as if alive, crawling to the sagging centres and merging with each other; but why did they not get bigger and fall to the ground? We were completely absorbed in our observations. It turned out that the dewdrops quickly evaporated, diminishing in size as we watched and then disappearing completely.

'The sun is drinking the dewdrops', whispered Larisa. The image created by Larisa's imagination caught the children's interest and a new story was born. Here, beside the briar bush, at one of the wellsprings of living language, a new stream began to flow. Perhaps it was just chance, but it had to happen sooner or later. Larisa noticed the similarity between the rhyming words *rosinki* (dewdrops), *pautinki* (spider webs) and *businki* (beads). This striking coincidence seemed to light up the children's minds. Until now they had only heard poems from older brothers and sisters who had read them in books, but

suddenly verse was born from living words, from the surrounding world. Her eyes sparkling with joy, Larisa said:

'*Dewdrops fell at night,*
On the silver spider webs.'[9]

Everyone was silent but I could see that each child's thoughts had taken flight like a bird, with a feeling of wonder at the power of words.

'And began to shake and tremble, like amber beads', continued Yura.

This is what happens when we approach the original source of all things, when a word incorporates not only the designation of an object, but the aroma of flowers, the scent of the earth, the music of our native steppe and forests, and our own feelings and emotions.

Had I followed pedagogical guidelines I probably should have invited the children to continue the poem, but such guidelines flew out of my head and, inspired by the children's creativity, I blurted out:

'*The sun drank the dewdrops,*
The silver webs were washed
And the purple berries smiled …'

We shouted, ran around the bush, and repeated the poem we had made up. I wanted to tell the other teachers about this surge of inspiration and how it flowed from the surrounding world as soon as possible. I wanted to advise them: the first lessons in thought should not be in the classroom in front of a blackboard, but in in the midst of nature. I wanted to tell them that genuine thought is always permeated with thrilling emotion. If children can only sense

9 Translator's note: Here, and in the lines that follow, the children and their teacher compose several lines of rhyming verse. The rhyme and metre are lost in translation.

the flavour of a word, their hearts will be inspired. Go to the fields or the park, drink from the wellsprings of thought, and that living water will turn your pupils into insightful researchers, inquisitive, curious people and poets. I have been convinced over and over again: without a poetic, emotional and aesthetic impetus, a child's intellect cannot fully develop. The very nature of a child's thought demands poetic creativity. Beauty and living thought are connected as organically as the sun and the flowers. Poetic creativity begins with a vision of beauty. The beauty of nature heightens perception, awakens creative thought, and endows words with unique associations. Why do people acquire such a large vocabulary during childhood? Because that is when they first discover the beauty of the surrounding world. Because in each word they not only find meaning, they sense the most subtle shades of beauty.

Nature—the source of health

EXPERIENCE HAS CONVINCED ME THAT for approximately 85% of students who fall behind in their studies, the main reason is a poor state of health: some indisposition or illness, more often than not unnoticed, which is only cured through the joint efforts of mother, father, doctor and teacher. Such hidden conditions, masked by children's vitality and animation, may affect the circulatory, respiratory and digestive systems, and are often not fully blown illnesses but rather deviations from a normal state of health. The observations of many years have convinced me that in many cases, so-called mental retardation is due to some general indisposition that children themselves are not aware of, rather than to any physiological changes or impairment to the function of the cells of the cerebral cortex. In some children you can observe an unhealthy pallor, a lack of appetite. The

slightest attempts to improve nutrition provoke a reaction: pimples appear on the body. Exhaustive pathology tests reveal nothing: everything seems okay. In most cases it turns out that the problem is a disturbance of the metabolism, resulting from spending too much time indoors. Due to this disturbance, the child loses the capacity for concentrated intellectual work. The occurrence of such problems increases during periods of rapid growth and sexual maturation.

The only radical treatment in such cases is a change in the routines of work and rest: prolonged periods in the fresh air, sleeping with an open window, going to bed early and getting up early, and good nutrition.

Some children appear healthy, but when you study their work closely you discover some hidden ailment. And here is what is interesting: these hidden ailments and indispositions become much more noticeable when the teacher tries to fill every minute of the lesson with intense intellectual work. Some children cannot cope at all when a teacher tries to ensure that 'not a single minute of the lesson will be wasted'. I am convinced that this accelerated tempo is harmful, even for completely healthy children. Excessive intellectual exertion leads to children's eyes growing listless; their wits are dulled and their movements become sluggish. Before long children are not capable of anything; they just want to get out in the fresh air; but the teacher keeps them 'in harness' and urges them on: giddy-up, giddy-up …

During the first weeks of the School of Joy I carefully studied the children's health. Although all the children had grown up in the countryside in the lap of nature, some of them were pale with weak chests. And Volodya, Katya and Sanya were just skin and bones. They nearly all had good nutrition at home. The main reason that some children were weak and sickly was that they lived in a hothouse environment, where mothers protected them from the slightest draft. These children tired quickly. During the first days of the School of

Joy they had trouble walking a kilometre. Their mothers complained that they had poor appetites.

I convinced the parents that the more they protected their children from catching cold, the weaker they would become. All agreed to my insistent request that on hot days they should send the children to school with bare feet. This delighted the children. One day we were caught in a field during a warm downpour. The children had to walk home through puddles. In spite of the parents' fears, no-one fell ill. With great difficulty I managed to convince the parents not to dress their children in a hundred garments, piling on jumpers and tops 'just in case'. It became our rule that during autumn, spring and summer, the children should not spend a single minute indoors. During the first three or four weeks of the School of Joy the children walked two or three kilometres every day; during the second month, four or five kilometres; and during the third month, six kilometres. And all this walking took place in fields and meadows, in woodlands and forests. The children did not notice the distance covered each day because we did not set ourselves the aim of covering a certain number of kilometres. Walking was a means for achieving other goals. The children wanted to walk because they were exploring the world. The children came home tired, but happy and cheerful. Health is impossible without tiredness. Health flows into a child's organism with life-giving energy when, after difficult exertion, a child rests. After walking several kilometres in the fresh air the children developed, in their parents' words, 'the appetite of a wolf'. On days when we planned a trip to the forest I advised the little ones to bring bread, an onion, salt, water and a few raw potatoes. At first the parents were doubtful: would the children really eat that? But it turned out that in the forest, bread, onion and potatoes were the most delicious food. Moreover, the children's appetites developed and when they got home they ate the soup they were offered with pleasure. After a month even the palest children had rosy cheeks, and the mothers could not

speak highly enough of their children's appetites. Their fussiness had disappeared and they ate whatever they were offered.

Movement is one of the most important factors contributing to physical conditioning. Children love to run and to play. We made a playground for them. Here they had everything necessary for playing and having fun in the fresh air, but I dreamt of more. I wanted to make a merry-go-round and some swings. I wanted the children's lively games to be connected with fairytales, to be fed by fantasy. I already imagined the figures of Konyok-Gorbunok (a magic horse from a fairytale), an elephant, a grey wolf, and a cunning fox standing on the wooden circle of our merry-go-round. The children would not only ride on them, but experience the excitement of saddling Konyok-Gorbunok or a grey wolf. So far these were no more than ideas, but I was sure that in six months or a year I would make them a reality. I obtained the materials for building a merry-go-round. I was also thinking about how to prepare the children for winter so they could spend as much time as possible in the fresh air.

Many years observing the physical development of young school children has convinced me of the major role played by a complete, healthy diet. In the diet of many of the children there was a lack of important nutrients essential for strengthening the organism, and for preventing colds and metabolic disorders. Only eight families had honey, and honey is sunshine on a plate, figuratively speaking. I chatted with the parents and convinced them of the importance of honey for their children's health. By the end of September, thirteen families had acquired one or two hives of bees. By springtime there were bees in twenty-three families.

During autumn I advised the mothers to build up winter supplies of jam made from the fruit of briars, blackthorn and other vitamin rich fruits. I discussed the need for each family to have enough fruit trees, especially apples. All winter there should be fresh fruit. In a village that is very easy; you just need to put in a bit of work.

Air saturated with the phytoncides of grasses (wheat, rye, barley, buckwheat and meadow grasses), is an elixir of health. I often took the children to the fields and meadows so they could breathe air infused with the scent of cereal plants. I advised parents to plant several nut trees near their children's bedroom windows. Nut trees fill the air with phytoncides, killing many pathogenic microbes. Harmful insects such as flies and mosquitoes cannot stand the smell of nut trees and keep away from them. I also tried to make sure every family had a summer shower in their yard.

For several years I pondered why so many children had poor eyesight. Why does a grade three child already need glasses? Observation of many young children led me to the conclusion that the problem lay not so much in exhaustion from too much reading as in irregular routines—especially diets lacking in vitamins—and in the fact that children are not physically resilient and easily catch colds. Some childhood illnesses affect the eyesight. Regular routines, a complete diet, physical conditioning: these protect children from illness and allow them to enjoy the beauty of the surrounding world.

Years of observation of children revealed a disturbing phenomenon: in spring, from March onwards, all children experience deteriorating health. The children seem to run out of steam. Their resistance to respiratory infections is weakened and their capacity for work is lower. It is especially noticeable that eyesight deteriorates in the spring months.

I found an explanation for this phenomenon in medical and psychological works. By spring, the reduction in solar radiation over the winter months makes itself felt and there is a fall in the level of vitamins in the body. This leads to changes in the interactions between the body's systems, and continuous, intense mental activity brings the nervous system to a state of fatigue.

I thought about how to reduce the impact of these factors. The parents began to take measures to stock up on vitamin rich foods for

the spring months. We tried to maximise our use of each sunny day in winter and spring with walks in the fresh air. I could not help thinking that we ought to reduce the intensity of intellectual work during the spring months, and saw a way to do this through introducing more variety in our intellectual activities. As much as possible, intellectual activity should take place outdoors, and it should be combined with physical work. Gradually this became one of our guidelines for study during the spring months.

During the years immediately after the war, many children were clearly predisposed to neurosis. With some of my pupils (especially Tolya, Kolya, Slava and Fedya) this found expression in depression and an aloofness from life. I tried not to allow children's inhibitions, timidity, indecisiveness or excessive shyness to develop into neurosis. I tried to make sure that our collective life brought them joy, and that their daily interactions with friends required active involvement. It was especially important, in my view, to use our school environment to soften the impact of any disappointments and conflicts children encountered in their families. I tried to make sure that, in our school group at least, children's troubles and sorrows were forgotten. For me it was very important to know what was going on in each child's soul, so as not to allow children's sensitive hearts to be hurt.

Children whose souls had been damaged by traumatic experiences required special attention. Sometimes the nerves of Kolya, Sashko, Tolya, Petrik and Slava, were stretched to the limit. You had only to touch one of them and they would 'flare up' and 'explode'. On some days you could not question these children. Procedures that were effective when educating others were completely inappropriate for these children. I came across the term 'medical pedagogy' in medical works, and this seemed to best describe the approach that was required when educating children whose unhealthy state of mind left its stamp on their behaviour. The main principles of medical pedagogy are: 1) spare the child's sick and vulnerable psyche; 2) the

ethos and organisation of school life should be such as to distract children from dark thoughts and experiences, and to awaken their enjoyment of life; and 3) under no circumstances should children be given to understand that they are being treated as ill.

One of the boys in our school who was predisposed to hysterical neurosis was Volodya. I was very concerned that the boy's mother and father were so proud of him. They had convinced themselves that their son was an exceptional child. I was afraid that when the inevitable disillusionment came, the boy could develop hatred for his parents and for adults generally. The main treatment for such children, in my view, is the education of modesty and respect for others. I tried to help Volodya see the human being in all those close to him.

Medical pedagogy devotes particular attention to children with delayed, inhibited thinking processes. Sluggishness and inertness of the cells of the cerebral cortex should be treated just as thoughtfully and patiently as a disease of the heart muscle or the intestines. But such treatment requires a thousand times more care and educational skill, and a deep knowledge of the individual characteristics of each child.

Each child is an artist

A WEEK AFTER LESSONS AT the School of Joy began I told the little ones, 'Tomorrow, bring sketch books and pencils. We are going to draw.' The next day we spread out on a lawn in the school grounds. I suggested to the children, 'Look around you. What can you see that is beautiful? Draw whatever you like the most.'

We could see the school orchard and our experimental plot lit up by the autumn sun. The children started chattering. One liked the red and yellow pumpkins, another liked the heads of sunflowers bent to the ground, a third liked the dovecote, and a fourth the grapevines.

Shura admired the light fluffy clouds floating in the sky. Seryozha liked the geese on the mirror-like surface of the pond. Danko wanted to draw a fish: he told us with excitement how he had once gone fishing with his uncle. They did not catch anything, but they saw how the fish 'played'.

'I want to draw the sun', said Tina.

Silence descended. The children were absorbed in their drawing. I had read a lot about the methodology of conducting a drawing lesson, but now I had living children in front of me. I saw that a child's drawing—the process of drawing—is part of a child's spiritual life. Children do not simply transfer something from the surrounding world to the page. They live in that world and enter into it as creators of beauty, taking pleasure in that beauty. Consider Vanya, completely absorbed in his work. He is drawing a bee hive. Next to the hive is a tree with huge flowers. Above a flower is a bee, almost as big as the hive. The boy's cheeks are flushed and his eyes shine with the fire of inspiration, and this brings great joy to his teacher. Is it really possible to squeeze such a creative process into the framework of lessons, homework, grades and a teacher's directions about what to draw?

Children's creativity is a deeply individual sphere of their spiritual life, involving a self-expression and self-affirmation that reveals the unique individuality of each child. This uniqueness cannot be encompassed by any one set of rules, compulsory for everyone.

Kolya has not said what he likes and I am very concerned to see what he will draw. In the boy's sketch book I see a spreading tree with large round fruit—that must be an apple tree. The tree is surrounded by a swarm of little stars in a halo of light beams. High above the tree is a crescent moon. How I would like to read the child's secret thoughts and feelings in this interesting drawing. I see the same spark of inspiration in his eyes that I saw when we looked at the world through a drop of dew.

'What are those stars above the apple tree?' I ask Kolya.

'Those aren't stars', says the boy. 'Those are the silver sparks which fall on the orchard from the moon. The moon has giant blacksmiths too, doesn't it?'

'Of course it does', I answer, astounded at the thoughts that had excited the child on some quiet evening. He must have looked at the night sky, admired the moon's radiance and noticed a trembling halo of pale light over the apple trees.

'But what threads do those giant blacksmiths hammer at night?' wonders the child; and it seems to me that he is not so much addressing his teacher as his own recollections of the night sky, the pale moonlight and the round dance of the stars. I did not want to disturb the child's creative inspiration. My heart beat more strongly from a joyful discovery: creativity opens those secret corners of a child's soul where kindly feelings lie dormant. In helping a child to feel the beauty of the surrounding world, a teacher unobtrusively releases those hidden springs from which humanity and kindness flow, washing away all the evil that is alien to a child's nature.

Following Larisa's example, I begin to draw the giant blacksmiths. I think I am drawing pretty well. My blacksmiths look like real blacksmith's strikers, and my anvil looks just like the one in the collective farm's smithy. Forgetting that I am an adult, I experience feelings of joy: of course my blacksmiths will be better than Larisa's. But the children are not particularly interested in my blacksmiths and a little crowd gathers around Larisa. 'What has she drawn?' I wonder. I look over the children's heads. There does not appear to be anything special about her drawing, so why are they all admiring it and not paying attention to mine? The more I study the little girl's picture, the clearer it becomes that little ones have their own vision of the world, and their own artistic language with its own imagery. You cannot imitate that language however much you try. My blacksmiths are wearing normal caps and aprons, with long beards and boots. But in her picture, a halo of sparks blazes around the luxuriant hair on the heads of the

mighty blacksmiths. And the beards are not just beards, but swirling fire. The huge hammers are almost twice the size of their heads … For a child this is not a departure from the truth but a most vivid representation of truth—of the truth about the fantastic strength and skill of humankind, and their fairytale connection with the element of fire. We should not try to make this wonderful language of children's imaginations conform to our adult language. Let children speak to each other in their own language. I advised teachers of the primary classes: teach children the laws of proportion, perspective and proportionality—that is all right—but at the same time allow room for children's imaginations; do not destroy children's artistic language and their fairytale vision of the world …

All the children wanted to talk about what they had drawn. In their accounts, bright images and similes sparkled like gemstones. Drawing helped children to develop their oral language.

From that day on, we nearly always took sketch books and pencils on our walks to the fields and forests. The older students made small sketch books for the little ones to put in their pockets. In the spring, several months after the life of our school began, I made a big album in which each child drew their favourite part of the surrounding world. I wrote little stories in that album. It constituted a whole page in the life and spiritual development of our class.

Caring for the living and the beautiful

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. Once we were walking through a meadow. Butterflies, bumblebees and beetles were flying above

the grass. Yura caught a beetle and, taking a shard of glass from his pocket, cut the insect in half and 'researched' its internal organs. In a remote corner of the school grounds, several families of swallows had been nesting for many years. On one visit there, before I had time to say anything about the swallows' nests, Shura had thrown a stone at the nesting box. All our school students looked after the beautiful canna flowers growing in the grounds, but Lyusya went over to a flower bed and pulled up a plant. All of these things happened during the first few days of our School of Joy. I was struck by the fact that even though children took delight in beauty, they could be indifferent to the fate of the beautiful. Long before I met my pupils, I was convinced that admiration for beauty is only the first green shoot of kindness, and that it needs to be further developed into a practical urge to act. I was especially troubled by the actions of Kolya and Tolya. Kolya had some sort of obsession with the destruction of sparrow nests. I heard that he had thrown unfledged nestlings, which had fallen from a disturbed nest, into a sewage pipe at the butter factory. The baby sparrows cheeped for a long time, but Kolya just put his ear to the pipe and listened. Children's cruelty was demonstrated not only by Kolya, who had witnessed evil in his family, but by children living in normal surroundings. And the most troubling thing was that the children did not see anything wrong with those 'minor' displays of evil, of indifference to beauty and to life, from which crude heartlessness gradually develops.

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 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*: *zhar* means "fire", and *voronok* means "little raven". 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.

A few days later Katya brought a woodpecker. Her father had found it in the forest. It looked as if, by some miracle, it had escaped from the paws of a predator. The woodpecker's wings hung limply, and dried blood was caked on its back. No-one knew what food to give a woodpecker—little beetles, perhaps? Where would you look for them? Under bark?

'I know', boasted Kolya. 'They don't just eat beetles and flies. They like willow buds and grass seeds. I've seen …'—the boy wanted to say something else but he was embarrassed. He had probably hunted woodpeckers.

'Well, seeing as you know how to feed woodpeckers, you could collect his food. You can see how pitifully he is looking at us.'

Kolya began to bring food for the bird every day. He still did not have any feeling of pity for the living creature. He was simply pleased to earn the admiration of his friends: look at our Kolya, he knows how to feed birds. But it does not matter if the awakening of kindly feelings begins with vanity. Once good deeds become habitual, they will awaken the heart.

I remembered hundreds of boys' answers to the question: what sort of person do you want to become?—strong, brave, courageous, intelligent, resourceful, fearless … But not one said kind. Why is kindness not considered to be on a par with such virtues as courage and bravery? Why are boys even embarrassed by their kindness? Without kindness—genuine warmth of heart which one person shows to another—beauty of the soul is impossible. Without kindness a human being turns into an intelligent animal, and a group of people turns into a herd. Kindness is humanity's salvation; indifference treads humanity underfoot. I reflected on why boys show less kindness than girls. Perhaps it only seems that way? No, it really is so. A girl is kinder, more empathetic and affectionate, probably because an unconscious maternal instinct lives in her from an early age. A feeling of concern for life is established in her heart long

before she becomes the creator of new life. The root, the source of kindness, is in creation, in creativity, in the affirmation of life and beauty. Kindness is inextricably linked to beauty.

It was a day for celebration when Fedya brought an oriole to school one morning. This bird was also unable to fly for some reason. The boy had found it in a bush near the animal breeding farm. The children could not tear their eyes from the oriole's beautiful, many-coloured feathers. We came to the 'bird clinic' (the children's name for a corner of their room) to greet each new day, and to say goodbye at the end of the day. Kostya brought a weak and sickly sparrow he had picked up from the side of the road. The bird did not want to peck at grains or bread crumbs. The boy took the bird's illness to heart. We all grieved when our sparrow died. Kostya cried. The girls cried. Kolya became silent and gloomy.

I remembered the words of Janusz Korczak:

> Children's pure democracy knows no hierarchy. A child is quickly saddened by a labourer's toil, a hungry child, the cruel fate of a village horse, or a slaughtered hen. A dog or a bird is close to him. A butterfly and a flower are his equals. A pebble and a cockleshell are his brothers. The arrogance of the upstart is foreign to him. A child does not know that only a human has a soul.[10]

Yes, that is all true, but kind children do not fall from the sky. They have to be educated.

During a walk along a dried up river bed the children found a baby hare with a crippled leg. We brought him to our room and put him in a new cage. Now we had a new clinic—for animals. A week later Larisa brought a scraggy kitten, shivering from the cold. We put

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10 Korczak, Janusz, *Selected educational works*, Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 1966, p. 271.

it in the same cage as the hare. The children now had a lot to think about. They brought carrot for the hare and milk for the kitten. It is hard to convey in words the children's delight when, one morning, we found the kitten and hare cuddling up to each other, fast asleep. The children talked in whispers, afraid of waking the animals …

In winter, several tomtits arrived at our bird clinic. The children had picked them up near some bird feeders set up for the winter … And something else gave me great joy: some of the little ones set up their own bird clinics and living corners at home. After we set up an aquarium with little fish in our room, the children started to beg their parents to set up aquariums at home. Many parents came to the school and asked how to go about it. It was difficult to find plants and fish for the aquariums, and not easy to find food. But all these difficulties were overcome thanks to the persistence of the children. They gave no peace either to their parents or to me. Slava's and Tina's mothers came to me. Their children would not give them a moment's peace: the others had goldfish and they did not. We had to turn to the older students for help. In those days we did not yet have school workshops, and the need to construct aquariums forced us to set up our first workshop for the older students.[11]

I will never forget those evenings, when we sat by an aquarium illuminated with a little lamp and admired the goldfish. I told the children about the depths of the ocean, about the fascinating life of sea creatures. My pupils, who have long graduated from school, still remember those evenings, even as adults. Kolya recently said to me:

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11 Translator's note: The original says: 'for the Pioneers and members of the Young Communist League'. In soviet schools, all children joined the Pioneers at about ten years of age. Pioneers were a bit like boy scouts and girl guides, and every school class was something like a scout troop. When children were about fifteen years old, they graduated from the Pioneers to the Young Communist League (the Komsomol).

'I used to dream about that lamp. Its light was my first source of knowledge. I wanted to know more about the depths of the sea, about exotic fish.'

If a twenty-four-year-old man remembers fish with such warmth, it means it is no trivial matter. Kindly feelings flowed from that experience. With bated breath I waited for the time when the beauty of the surrounding world would awaken kindly feelings—affection and compassion—in the most indifferent hearts. I will never forget the first autumn frosts of that year. We went to a rose bush in the garden and saw a brilliantly flowering bloom. On its tender petals were drops of dew. It was a miracle the flower had survived that cold night, and as we looked at it we all felt sad: soon the frost would destroy this beauty. My eyes met Kolya's, and for the first time I saw in his eyes sadness and anxiety—the pure feelings of a child. Then we went to the greenhouse, where there were several pots containing flowers that were rare in our locality—rhododendrons and cactuses. We sat down and for a long time we admired a little scarlet flower, the flower of a cactus.

Caring for the living and the beautiful gradually became part of the children's lives. In the late autumn of 1951, when the leaves had fallen from the trees, we went into the forest, dug up a little linden tree, brought it to the school grounds, and planted it. The little tree became our friend. We dreamt about it, fantasised, and made up stories about it, as if it were a living creature capable of feeling and responding to our care and concern. The children were glad when warm rain fell: our friend needed lots of moisture. We were worried when the earth was frost bound and a piercing wind blew over the fields: our friend would be cold. The children gathered snow and piled it around the linden tree. The girls brought some reeds, and bound them round the trunk of the tree. As spring approached we often visited our friend and looked with excitement to see if any buds had opened. The children were in raptures when the first green leaves appeared: the tree was alive. In summer we watered our linden tree.

A collective feeling of affection and kindness, a collective benevolence, is a mighty force. Like a raging torrent it carries along even the most indifferent. I was overjoyed to see how Kolya, Tolya, Slava and Petrik went excitedly to see our friend, the green linden tree; how their eyes shone when they fed the fish in the aquarium. Again and again I was convinced how much easier it is to educate a person during early childhood, rather than during adolescence or early adulthood. The earlier we plant the roots of kindness in a child's soul, the more brightly the flowers of humanity will bloom.

Those children, whose hearts trembled at the thought that the little linden tree was cold during a winter chill, are now adults. Our friend has become a large, spreading tree; and even now young men and women, mothers and fathers, come to it, and a wave of kindness fills their hearts when they remember that golden autumn of their childhood.

Experience confirms that the roots of kindly feelings reach back into childhood, and that humanity, kindness, affection and good will are born in work, care and concern for the beauty of the surrounding world.

Kindly feelings, emotional culture, these are the core of humanity. If kindly feelings are not educated in childhood you will never educate them, because this essence of humanity takes root in the soul along with the discovery of the earliest and most important truths, along with experiencing and feeling the subtlest nuances of one's native language. In childhood a person must pass through an emotional school: a school educating kindly feelings. Just as one cannot catch up during young adulthood that which is missed in intellectual education during childhood, so one cannot catch up what is missed in the sphere of emotional education. Kindly, humane feelings and motives will never excite people's souls, and will not motivate their actions, if they have not passed through a school in kindly feelings.

We listen to the music of nature

MUSIC, MELODY, A FEELING FOR the beauty of musical sounds—these provide an important means for educating a person, morally and intellectually, for ennobling the heart and purifying the soul. Imagine that a harmoniously developed personality—richly endowed both morally and spiritually—is represented by a beautiful flower. Now imagine that the petal of that flower that has grown from musical appreciation is removed. The flower will immediately fade and lose its beauty. The experience of many years has convinced me that without the development of feelings—moral feelings, aesthetic feelings, intellectual feelings—there is no human being; and it is impossible to awaken, develop and refine feelings without musical appreciation. Music opens a person's eyes to beauty: the beauty of nature, the beauty of a human being, the beauty of moral relationships, and the beauty of work. And this vision and awareness of beauty facilitated by music begins during the preschool years. Music is a powerful means for educating the heart, for awakening kindly, humane feelings, for self-education. Thanks to music, people become aware of that which is sublime, majestic and beautiful, not only in the surrounding world, but within themselves.

Many years observing the spiritual development of the same students, from the early school years to maturity, have convinced me that the uncontrolled, uncoordinated influence on children of cinema, radio and television hinders rather than assists a proper aesthetic education, giving rise to a superficial reaction to beauty, cultivating ignoble, primitive aesthetic expectations of the surrounding world, people and art. A chaotic abundance and 'overconsumption' of musical impressions is particularly harmful. I considered it important that exposure to musical works should alternate with exposure to

the background against which a person can understand and feel the beauty of music: the tranquillity of fields and meadows, the rustling of an oak forest, the song of the lark in a blue sky, the whisper of ripening ears of wheat, the drone of bees. This is the music of nature, the source from which a person draws inspiration when creating a musical melody.

In aesthetic education in general, and musical education in particular, the psychological objectives of the teacher who is acquainting children with the world of the beautiful are important. For me the main objective was to educate a capacity to relate emotionally to beauty and to instil a thirst for impressions of an aesthetic nature. In my view, the main aim of our whole system of education was to teach people to live in the world of the beautiful, so that they could not live without beauty, so that the beauty of the world created an inner beauty.

In the School of Joy a lot of attention was given to listening to music: both musical works and the music of nature. The first task was to awaken an emotional reaction to a melody, and then to gradually convince the children that the beauty of the music had its origins in the beauty of the surrounding world. It is as if a musical melody throws out a challenge to people: stop and listen to the music of nature; drink in the beauty of the world; preserve that beauty and increase it. The experience of many years has convinced me that a human being acquires both their native language and the rudiments of musical appreciation—the ability to grasp, understand, feel and experience the beauty of a melody—only during childhood. That which is missed in childhood is very difficult, almost impossible to make up as an adult. A child's soul is equally sensitive to its native language, the beauty of nature and a musical melody. If the beauty of a musical work touches the heart in early childhood, if children sense the many nuances of human feeling in its sounds, they reach a level of refinement that cannot be reached through any other means.

The beauty of a musical melody reveals to children their own beauty. They become conscious of their own virtue. Musical education does not mean educating musicians; it means educating human beings.

In early autumn, when in the clear air every sound can be heard distinctly, I sit on the grass with the children just before dusk. I suggest listening to 'The flight of the bumblebee', from Rimsky-Korsakov's opera *The tale of Tsar Saltan*. This accessible music draws an emotional response from the children. The little ones say, 'You can hear the bumblebee getting closer and then further away. You can hear the twittering of the little birds …' We listen to the melody again. Then we walk to a flowering meadow, rich in nectar. The children hear the chorus of the bees and then the buzzing of a bumblebee. There it is, big and furry, rising and now settling on a flower. The children are in raptures: it is almost exactly the melody recorded on the tape, but in the musical work there is a unique beauty that the composer has discerned in nature, and conveyed to us. The children want to listen to the recorded music again.

The next day we visit the sweet-flowering meadow in the morning. The children listen to the chorus of bees and try to detect the sound of the furry bumblebee. Something which previously seemed ordinary to them now reveals its beauty. Such is the power of music.

I selected melodies whose vivid images were accessible to the children and conveyed sounds that they could hear around them: the twittering of birds, the rustling of leaves, the rumble of thunder, the babbling of a brook, and the howling of the wind … At the same time I did not overwhelm the children. I repeat: a surfeit of musical images is harmful for children. It can provoke confusion and then completely blunt emotional responsiveness. I used no more than two melodies per month, but with each melody I conducted a lot of work, with the aim of awakening in the children a desire to listen to the music again and again, so that on each occasion they would discover new beauty. It is very important that between listening sessions, which

are devoted to melodies that you consider significant in acquiring the rudiments of musical appreciation, there should not be other chaotic, confusing impressions. After listening to a melody children should listen to the quiet of the fields. Between listening to two melodies, they should come to know the beauty of nature.

We walk to a grove of oak trees. It is a quiet, sunny day of our Indian summer. The trees, decked in many colours, glitter in the sun's rays. We can hear the songs of the autumn birds and the distant roar of a tractor engine. A formation of departing geese crosses the blue sky. We listen to Tchaikovsky's '*Autumn song (October)'* from *The seasons.* The melody helps the children to feel the unique beauty of things that they had previously not noticed in their natural surroundings: the quiet trembling of the leaves on the yellowing oak trees; the scent of the clear air; the fading camomile flowers by the side of the road.

The children are in a bright, happy mood, but the music, in a minor key, brings on a light sadness. The children sense the approach of overcast, rainy days, cold blizzards, and early dusk. Under the influence of the music, they talk about the beauty of summer and the first golden days of autumn. Each child remembers something striking, something significant, and now the images of summer and autumn appear before them in all their beauty. For instance Larisa says, 'I walked with my father to a ravine. On the slopes of the ravine was a green wall: forest, forest everywhere, flooded with sunlight. Somewhere a turtle-dove started cooing. And it was so beautiful in the forest, so beautiful … I wanted to walk and walk, and for the sun to shine forever. When the turtle-dove cooed, the leaves on the trees seemed to freeze and to listen.'

Shura remembers: 'Mum took me into the field. She was working near the combine harvester. I rode with my uncle on the harvester. And then I got sleepy. Mum laid me on a pile of fresh straw. I looked at the sky and my pile of hay started floating high above the earth. Sometimes I got very close to a little bird flitting in the sky; sometimes

I was further away from it. And the grasshoppers were floating with me, singing in a chorus and flying to meet the bird. That is how I fell asleep. When I woke up the bird was still flitting in the sky and the grasshoppers were singing even louder.'

We listen once again to Tchaikovsky's melody and I sense that in the music children find memories dear to their hearts: of the beauty of unforgettable summer and autumn days. The children listen to more memories.

'Dad and I were carting a load of hay. I lay on the hay and the stars were twinkling in the sky. A quail was calling in the field. And the stars seemed so close, it was as if I could reach up and take one, like a little lamp.'

This is Zina's recollection. I listen to the girl and am amazed. Zina has always remained silent. You cannot drag a word out of her. But the music has prompted her to speak.

How pleased I am that music heightens emotional responsiveness and awakens thoughts brought on by the beauty of musical images. I would like every child to dream and fantasise under the influence of music. How good it is that music has the power to intensify the poetic, dreamy element in children's natures. I am glad that Kolya and Tolya, listening to Tanya and Larisa's excited accounts, are sitting thoughtfully. They are also remembering something.

Music is a powerful stimulus for thought. Without musical education a child's intellectual development will be incomplete. The origins of music lie not only in the surrounding world but in people themselves, in their inner worlds, in thought and speech. A musical image reveals new qualities in the objects and phenomena of the surrounding world. Children's attention is concentrated on the objects and phenomena on which music has shed new light, and their minds draw vivid pictures. These pictures beg to be described in words. Children use words creatively, drawing upon their experience of the world for new concepts and for reflection.

Music—imagination—fantasy—stories—creativity—this is the pathway children follow to develop their inner capabilities. Music awakens vivid images in children. As a means of awakening the creative abilities of the mind, it is without equal. Listening to the music of Grieg, the children imagined fairytale caves, impenetrable forests, and good and evil creatures. Even the most silent child wanted to speak. Children's hands reached for their pencils and sketch books—they wanted to record those fairytale images on paper. Music aroused the thinking of even the most sluggish children. It was as if it bestowed some miraculous force on the brain cells. In this increase in mental energy under the influence of music I saw evidence of the emotional stimulation of thought.

On winter days when all our summer paths were covered in snow, I sat in a school room with the children and we listened to the music of Tchaikovsky, Grieg, Schubert and Schumann. In the twilight hours the children especially liked listening to fairytale music. I told the children a Ukrainian folk tale about the witch Baba-Yaga and then we listened to Tchaikovsky's music inspired by that tale. It is difficult to convey in words the richness of the fantastic images and ideas born under the influence of that music. In their dreams, the children soared beyond distant mountains, beyond the primordial forest, beyond blue seas, to mysterious caves and ravines. With amazement I listened to the children's remarkable stories. Some of them I remembered for the rest of my life. In Yura's imagination, Baba-Yaga was transformed into someone who hated humanity, who attempted to destroy people's joy, to destroy the gift of song. 'She took a big pot, sat in her mortar, and flew around the world. As soon as she heard a song, she flew to the place where people were singing and having fun, and struck her pot against the mortar. The people fell silent, forgetting how to sing because she had trapped the song in her pot. In this way Baba-Yaga hid all the songs. Only one singing shepherd boy remained, all by himself. He played on his pipe and sang songs. No matter how much

the witch struck her pot on the mortar she could not stop him singing. His pipe was magic. The wicked, wicked Baba-Yaga sat in her misery, on her pot with all the songs. The whole world was quiet and nobody sang or was happy, except for the shepherd boy. The boy went to sleep. Baba-Yaga stole his pipe. The boy woke up. He gathered other brave boys around him and went in search of Baba-Yaga …' Yura went on to imagine how the shepherd boy freed all the songs and returned joy to all the people. It is an amazing phenomenon. Under the influence of music children create in their imaginations such vivid images of fairytale creatures, incarnating good and evil, that it is as if they are participants in a battle for what is right. Music fills fairytale images with a living heartbeat, with vibrant thought. Music leads children into the world of goodness.

Each time I noticed that the children's thinking had become sluggish I took them to the oak grove or the orchard, and we listened to music that awakened vivid images of good and evil. Music stimulated the flow of thoughts. During those winter days more and more dreamers were revealed in our school. Little Danko was so shy that you rarely heard a word from him, but then he told his tale about Baba-Yaga. It is true that it was quite like Yura's tale. In Danko's version Baba-Yaga flew around the world and picked all the flowers. She flew to her diabolical kitchen, put her pot in the oven, and all the flowers were destroyed. 'But I (children often put themselves in the role of the fairytale hero) gathered the seeds of all the flowers and sowed them all over the earth. The flowers bloomed again. When Baba-Yaga found out about it she was so angry she smashed her mortar and her bony leg, and now she cannot harm people anymore.'

After these amazing stories I talked to the other teachers about the difficulties encountered in educating children. We came to a unanimous conclusion: our pedagogy forgets that for a good half of their years of study in school, students remain children. Teachers are so busy cramming facts, generalisations and conclusions into children's

heads, that we sometimes do not give children the opportunity to visit the wellsprings of thought and living language. We bind the wings of their dreams, imagination and creativity. From a living, active being, the child is frequently turned into a memorising machine. No, it should not be like that. We should not separate children from the world with a brick wall. We should not deprive them of a spiritual life. To live full spiritual lives children need to live in a world of play, stories, music, imagination and creativity. Without that they are dried flowers.

Of course study cannot be an easy game that provides continuous and constant pleasure. Above all, it is work. But when we organise that work, we need to consider the characteristics of a child's inner world at each stage of their intellectual, moral, emotional and aesthetic development. The intellectual work of a child differs from the intellectual work of an adult. For a child the ultimate goal of acquiring knowledge cannot be the main stimulus for their intellectual work, as it is in the case of an adult. The source of the desire to study is in the very nature of children's intellectual work, in the emotional colouring of their thoughts, in the way children live through their intellectual experiences. If this source dries up there is no way you can force a child to read a book.

I will never forget the first winter of the School of Joy. If not for the music, fantasy and creativity, that warm classroom would soon have grown wearisome. Music filled our surrounding world with amazing charm. In the gloom of cold January evenings our imaginations led us to perceive fairytale creatures everywhere: on the silver carpet gleaming in the moonlight, in the swirls of blizzard snow, and in the cracking sound of a frozen pond.

The first spring of our School of Joy arrived. The streams began to murmur, the snowdrops flowered, and the chorus of the bees rang out in a sea of apple and pear blossom. During those days we listened to the music of the spring forest, the blue sky, the meadows and steppe.

One quiet evening we went to a meadow. There we saw thoughtful willows covered in tender new foliage. The fathomless firmament was reflected in a pond, and formations of swans flew across the pure blue sky. We listened to the music of that beautiful evening. Somewhere in the pond a marvellous sound could be heard, as if someone had lightly touched the keyboard of a piano, and the pond, its banks and the sky seemed to resonate. 'What is that?' whispered Vanya. 'That is the music of the spring meadows', I told the children. 'In the pond you can see the reflection of the deep blue sky. At a great depth there is a huge bell made of crystal. There, in a magic palace, lives a beautiful princess called Spring. She touches the crystal bell with a little golden hammer and the echo pours over the meadows.'

The sound rang out again. Kolya smiled. 'That's just the frogs calling.' I was afraid the children would laugh and the spell would be broken, but no-one even stirred. 'Perhaps it's a frog and perhaps it isn't', said Sashko. 'But even if it is a frog, the meadow is singing.'

As if in response to his words, the sound rang out above a neighbouring pond. A few moments later a distant meadow replied. We stood, charmed by the wonderful music of the spring meadows. This music is a life-giving source of optimism. It helped the children to understand and experience the joy of existence in a world of beauty. The harmony of that beauty seemed to me like a radiant halo, which, for the rest of our lives, surrounds our unforgettable memories of childhood.

On the first sunny day of April, when the ancient burial mounds shimmered in the hot air, we went into the steppe to listen to the song of the lark. A little grey ball of life flashed in the azure sky and the delicate ring of a silver bell carried to our ears. Suddenly the bell fell silent and the grey ball plummeted to Earth. Above the tender green shoots of winter wheat, the bird stretched its wings, and slowly, as if stretching an invisible thread, rose higher and higher. Now it was

not the ring of a bell that we heard but the sound of a silver string … I wanted this wonderful music to reach the children's hearts, to open their eyes to the beauty of the surrounding world. I told them a story about the lark.

'It is a child of the sun. In winter the sun travels far, far away from us, and the earth is covered with snow and bound with frost. Slowly, slowly the sun comes back to us, but it is hard for it to melt the snow. It throws burning sparks at the snow drifts. Thawed patches appear where the sparks land, a lump of earth comes to life and a wonderful bird is born: a firebird, a lark. It rises into the blue sky and flies towards the sun. It flies and sings, and the sun scatters its silver sparks. The lark hangs in the blue sky, watching the earth, looking for the brightest spark it can see. Then it flies like a stone to the earth and picks up the spark, which instantly turns into a fine silver thread. The lark lowers one end of the thread and ties it to a stalk of wheat. It pulls the other end higher and higher towards the sun, into the bright blue sky. You can see it is not easy for it to climb so high. Look how its little grey wings are beating. The silver thread rings out like the string of a musical instrument, and the higher the lark flies, the higher the sound that string makes. The lark stretches the silver thread all the way to the sun, and then returns to Earth again to look for another spark.'

Will such stories make it more difficult to learn the real laws of nature? No, on the contrary, they will make it easier. The children understand perfectly well that a ball of earth cannot become a living creature, just as they understand that there is no such thing as the giant blacksmiths, Baba-Yaga or Koshchei the Immortal (a wizard in Russian and Ukrainian folklore). But if children did not have fairytales, if they did not experience the battle between good and evil, if they did not feel the human notions of truth, honour and beauty reflected in those stories, their world would be cramped and uncomfortable.

The story of the lark helped children to understand the music of nature and prepared them for listening to a musical composition. We returned to the school and listened to Tchaikovsky's 'Song of the lark (March)'. The children were delighted. In the wonderful sounds of the music they could hear the ring of the silver bell, and the overflowing sound of the fine silver string joining the green field with the sun. We listened to this piece on many occasions: on fine, clear mornings, and on grey, cloudy days. And on each occasion the children remembered that wonderful world flooded in sunlight, the blue heavens, the little grey ball of life, and the limitless expanse of the fields. The little ones wanted to embody their visions of the fairytale bird in bright images. They drew pictures of the lark, the silver spark, and the string stretching from the earth to the sun.

Gradually we created an album of the children's favourite musical works. From time to time we came to our room and listened to music. I called the album our 'music box'. The children liked that. They would say with pride, 'We have a music box'. I had an idea. From year to year we would choose the best works we could find from the treasures of musical culture and create a music room. There we would be able to appreciate the beauty created by nature and by humanity. We would sing, and learn to play on the violin and the piano. But that would be in the future. First we could learn to play our humble country pipe.

One overcast day we went to a grove and cut a pipe from an elder tree. We polished it and cut holes in it. I played a Ukrainian folk song about a happy shepherd. It is difficult to convey in words the children's delight. Each child wanted to try their abilities, each dreamt of their own musical instrument. Each one made their own pipe. Lida, Larisa, Yura, Tina, Seryozha and Kostya all turned out to have a keen musical ear and an ability to pick up a tune. Within a few weeks the children were playing the tunes of folk songs and dances. I will never forget that quiet evening when Tina played

the Ukrainian folk song 'All over the hill the reapers are reaping'. The girl's eyes shone and her cheeks were flushed. Her mother told me that Tina sat for ages in the garden with her pipe, 'thinking up' something, playing tunes, and sometimes gazing dreamily at the sky and the trees.

One day I came to school early in the morning. All around was quiet. Suddenly, from the depths of the orchard, the quiet sounds of a pipe could be heard. I followed the sounds. Somebody was making up their own tune: the melody was clearly an improvisation. The whole melody breathed a pure, light sadness. Carefully, so as not to disturb the musician, I approached a rose bush. On the grass sat Tina. It was as if the pipe was part of her body. The girl was looking at a flowering rose, and her eyes were soft and tender. Now I understood the melody: the girl was playing about the beautiful flower and the blue spring sky. That which had seemed to me to be sadness was concern: the girl was using sounds to communicate her thoughts about the future.

Kostya also became absorbed in his pipe playing. It was difficult for him to play with only one hand but he quickly learnt to play several folk songs, and then began to improvise: to fantasise and to communicate his thoughts, feelings and experiences through music. Once, during a summer storm, we were sitting in our Nook of Dreams. The last peals of thunder faded into the distance and a rainbow hung over the earth. We were all silent, admiring the beauty of this scene. Then we heard a quiet melody—Kostya was playing. In his music you could hear the murmur of a stream, which was replaced by an agitated rumbling as a storm cloud approached and distant thunder growled. The boy had forgotten that we were listening to him. He was completely absorbed in his creation. Then he suddenly noticed his friends' thoughtful faces and was embarrassed … Not everyone can become a musician, but I deeply believe that everyone can develop an appreciation for music.

Our involvement in this simple folk music was a deeply personal matter. Sometimes the children were in a musical mood and wanted to sit down and play. More often than not, this happened in the evenings after sunset, while the earth was still illuminated by the dying light of the sun. We felt very fortunate that music could give us such joy and pleasure.

Kolya had a sensitive musical ear and the boy quickly learnt to reproduce the melodies of folk songs. Once when we were returning home from the forest, I said to Kolya, 'Do you remember how you drew the blacksmiths forging the silver garland? Try to tell the story of the blacksmiths on your pipe: how they hammer and how the cold sparks scatter on the earth.'

'Those sparks aren't cold, oh, no', objected the boy heatedly. 'They're hot, oh, so hot.'

'Yes of course they're hot.' It is impossible for something cold to fly from a hammer and anvil. I also tried to tell the story of the blacksmiths on my pipe: the story of the sunny blacksmiths.

The next day, in the morning, we came to the school orchard. With the simple melodies of our pipes we told the story of the wonderful blacksmiths. We not only understood each other, we felt the mood underlying each melody. I listened to the music of Kolya's blacksmiths. The boy not only conveyed the ringing dialogue of their hammering, but took delight in their strength. He was amazed at the beauty of the silver sparks falling on the fields and orchards, and saddened that his gaze could not take in the whole earth. He wanted to see the beauty that he vaguely felt to be in everything.

Yes, I could see a path to this child's heart. Music educates the soul; it humanises feelings. Like language, music reflects what is truly human. In developing children's sensitivity to music we ennoble their thoughts and aspirations. Music can open up in each heart a life-giving stream of human feelings. Children can discover the beauty of the surrounding world in the living, vibrant words

of their native language, and in a musical melody. But music—the language of human feeling—does more than convey to a child's soul the beauty of the world. It reveals human greatness and virtue. While enjoying music a child feels truly human. The soul of a child is the soul of a sensitive musician. Within a child's soul are tightly-stretched strings, and if you know how to touch them you will hear enchanting music: not only in a figurative sense, but in a literal sense. Childhood is impossible without music, just as it is impossible without play or stories.

Experience confirms that music provides a most favourable setting for developing spiritual ties between children and their teacher. It seems to open people's hearts. Listening to a beautiful melody, experiencing and admiring its beauty, teacher and pupil become closer, more like family.

During those moments of common feeling, which are achievable only through music, educators see things in a child that they would never see without music. Under the magical influence of musical sounds, when the soul is enchanted with lofty feelings, children will entrust their troubles and concerns to you. On one of those occasions Kolya told me that he had a sketch book where he drew everything that excited, delighted and troubled him. Then the boy showed me his drawings. I saw the world of his dreams. Kolya wanted to drive a tractor and to be a frontier guard.

Our winter joys and concerns

WINTER … WHAT WONDERFUL OPPORTUNITIES for children's education and development there are in this remarkable season! Those who consider that summer is the only time for strengthening children's health are deeply mistaken. If winter is not used to strengthen

children's health, with its moderate frosts and soft, abundant snow, summer will not provide benefits either. I taught the little ones to spend time out in the frost and to breathe the pure, frosty air.

In the morning we would go to the school glasshouse to greet the sunrise, which lent a scarlet colour to the strange patterns on its frozen panes. Each pane inspired our imaginations: we saw fantastic animals, mysterious mountain ravines, clouds and flowers. Here, looking at the frozen panes, the children created many stories. Here they learnt to read, of which I will have more to say later.

After greeting the sun, the children opened the door from the passage into the glasshouse and entered a world of flowers. Chrysanthemums flower in one of our glasshouses during winter. Each child had their own flower—their friend. The children watered the flowers. These were joyful moments, as rainbows appeared in the water droplets, and the children admired them and dreamt of summer … This is where we made up the story about a bridge to the sun—a golden rainbow.

After each blizzard when the earth's white carpet was renewed, we went to look at the snowdrifts in the school yard. Snowdrifts are an amazing world: just as mysterious and unexpected as clouds. In the strangely shaped snowdrifts the children found fairytale towers on the tops of inaccessible mountains, ocean waves, a white swan, a grey wolf and a cunning fox. On one occasion nature seemed to create, just for us, a fairytale ship with sails and a captain's bridge, with an anchor and pirates gazing into the distance. For several days in a row, until the wind and sun levelled it, we went and inspected the ship. In the evenings the children gathered at the school and listened to my stories about pirates, and about the good people who freed the weak and the unjustly injured, about the battle between good and evil, about the triumph of truth over injustice.

We did not go for walks when it was really cold, but if the frost was only light, the children spent time in the fresh air. And when

the thaw came we really celebrated. The Pioneers helped us to build a snow city. They made a shelter from blocks of snow resulting in something like a cave. Here, too, rest and work were accompanied by stories and play. We pretended to be travellers to the North Pole. I told the children stories about the great white silence. In my stories fantasy was interwoven with people's real, heroic accomplishments. With sadness, the children said goodbye to their shelter as it melted in the sun's rays.

We travelled into the forest twice during the winter: once in cars and once on horses. The light frost burnt our cheeks but no-one complained about the cold. Those days spent in the winter forest remained in the children's memories forever. We listened to the music of the winter forest and observed the life of the birds. In a forest ravine, we found a spring that had not frozen over. We warmed ourselves by a campfire and made porridge. We admired the beauty of the evening sunset, as before our eyes the snow-covered branches changed colour: first pale pink, then orange, crimson and violet-blue. Our story about the sun was enriched with new images, thrilling the children with their fantastic strangeness and beauty. Here we composed a poem in which the children conveyed their impression of the winter forest. Katya, admiring the beauty of a pine tree dressed in snow, said:

'The pine tree is sleeping.'

Zina drew a more striking image:

'The pine tree has gone to sleep till summer …'

'The pine tree slumbers until spring', said Seryozha, and everyone felt the melodiousness of those words.[12] The children wanted to continue their friend's line of thought.

'So many dreams its slumber brings', said one of the children.

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12 Translator's note: In this scene, the children create a rhyming couplet. I have not translated it literally, but have tried to recreate its rhythm and approximate meaning.

The pine tree slumbers until spring,
So many dreams its slumber brings,

… sang the boys and girls, experiencing a feeling of pride that they had composed a song all by themselves.

That winter evening revealed to me the rich inner world of a child. I was further convinced that we should teach children to think and develop their intellectual capabilities at the direct source of thoughts and language.

What little child does not like to make a snowman or ride on a sled! On still days, when the frost was moderate and the sun was shining brightly, we spent whole days in the open air. On the edge of the village we constructed an ice slide. We were not satisfied with wooden and metal sleds—they did not slide quickly enough—so we made twenty ice sleds. We took some straw, mixed it with manure and poured water over it, making the sleds in the shape of a nest. The sleds were completely safe.

I remembered an idea from my own childhood … We found a cartwheel and stuck its axle through a hole in the ice of a pond. The ice froze around the axle, and the wheel turned into an ice carousel. Holding on to a stick fastened to the wheel, the children slid over the mirror smooth surface of the pond. We spent whole days playing games like that. The weaker children—Sanya, Volodya, Katya and Kostya—became rosy cheeked.

The distinctive beauty of nature in winter revealed itself especially strikingly to the children on quiet, cloudless, frosty evenings. We would stand somewhere in the orchard, looking at the scarlet sunset and waiting for the first stars to come out. In the evening light the snowdrifts shone pink, then pale violet. At such moments the feelings that overcame the children found expression in words and in music. The children recalled the melodies of folk songs that were in keeping

with the unique beauty. Enchanted, we walked to the school, lit a fire in the stove and sang songs.

On quiet winter mornings the children admired the sunrise. They stood silently, contemplating the beauty. They wanted to find words to express their admiration. I helped them when they were searching for a word. Each discovery not only awakened joy, but was at the same time a stimulus for thought.

Our first Day of the Lark

AS WE STOOD BY THE cages of our bird and animal clinics during the winter, we dreamt of a warm spring day when our little friends could once again fly in the blue sky or hop through a grove. At last, the long awaited day of celebration arrived. A day after the first lark appeared in the sky we took our cages of birds and animals to the top of an ancient burial mound. The steppe was ringing with the calls of birds. The children opened the cages and the lark, the woodpecker, the oriole and the hare were free. There was our lark, singing in the sky; and there it was, plummeting to earth … We stood, enchanted by the beauty, and experiencing joy from the knowledge that we had preserved the life of living creatures.

At that moment I saw the future in my mind's eye: each year we would climb this burial mound and celebrate the Day of the Lark.

The Day of the Lark came to mark the boundary between spring and summer. The children considered it a personal honour to have saved the life of a bird. Each child had their own 'corner of life and beauty'. The image of the lark, with its unique song ringing above the sun-drenched fields—all of this entered the children's spiritual world forever. The children also looked forward to the Day of the Lark because that day was associated with the excitement of artistic

creation. Together with their mothers, the children fashioned little larks, swallows, starlings, bullfinches, magpies, nightingales and tomtits from bread dough and brought them to school. The children's little creations embodied their love of nature and each child expressed their own notions of beauty.

In autumn the children sorrowfully said goodbye to the migratory birds. Such sorrow ennobles the human heart. Without it there is no kindness.

How we learnt to read and write

I WILL TELL YOU HOW the little ones learnt to read and write. Dear reader, please do not consider what I am about to describe to be a new method for teaching literacy. I did not think about the scientific basis for our creativity—and that is what I am describing: children's creativity, extra-curricular work supporting formal studies. I am far from thinking that it can replace methods for teaching literacy that have been tried and tested for decades. I am describing the creativity that was born in the midst of fields and meadows, in the shade of oak trees, in the hot wind of the steppe, at the dawn of a summer day and during the dusk of winter.

For many years I had thought what a difficult, exhausting and uninteresting business reading and writing become during a child's first days of school life, and how many failures children meet on the thorny path to knowledge—all because study turns into a purely bookish affair. I saw how children struggled during the lesson to distinguish the letters, how those letters danced before their eyes, melting into a pattern that was impossible to decipher. At the same time I saw how easily children memorise letters and make words from them when the activity is lit with some interest, is connected

with play and, most importantly, when nobody is telling them that if they do not learn their lessons, it will be the worse for them.

From the first days of their school lives an idol appears on children's thorny path to knowledge—the grade. For some children it is kind and considerate, for others it is cruel, merciless and relentless. Children simply do not understand why the grade is a patron for some and a tyrant for others. Seven-year-old children cannot comprehend the relationship between a grade and their work, their personal efforts. They try to satisfy or, in the worst case, to deceive the idol, and gradually learn to study not for the joy it brings but for the grade. I am not suggesting we completely banish grades from school life. We cannot manage without grades. But children should only receive grades when they are capable of understanding that the quality of their intellectual work depends on the personal effort they invest in study.

In my view, the most important thing that is required of assessment in the primary school is that it should be a source of optimism and joy. A grade should be a reward for hard work, not a punishment for laziness and carelessness. If the teacher sees failing grades as a whip with which to urge on a lazy horse and good grades as a carrot, children will soon learn to hate both the whip and the carrot. Failing grades are a very sharp and subtle instrument, which a wise primary school teacher always keeps in reserve but never uses. To tell the truth, in the primary school that instrument should only exist so as never to be used. The pedagogical wisdom of the educator lies in never allowing children to lose faith in their abilities, in never allowing them to feel that they cannot succeed. Each task must be at least a tiny step forward. Seven-year-old children, who have only just crossed the school's threshold and can barely distinguish between A and B, suddenly receive failing grades. They do not understand what is going on. At first they do not even experience bitterness or anxiety. They are simply stunned. 'Sometimes a reasonable child stops

short in amazement when confronted by the aggression of malicious, grey-haired stupidity', wrote Janusz Korczak. 'Respect a child's ignorance.' These words of the Polish educator have stayed with me all my life. Only when a teacher achieves the highest wisdom in the study of human nature—the ability to respect a child's ignorance—will a failing grade become the sharpest, most subtle instrument, which is, however, never used in the primary school.

Several years before we opened the School of Joy the following incident occurred. I took some young children—six-year-old preschoolers—to a grove. We sat down on the edge of the grove and I began to tell them about butterflies and beetles. Our attention was attracted by a large, horned beetle crawling on the grass. Several times it tried to take off into the air, but could not escape from the grass. The little ones studied the insect in all its detail. I had a sketch book in front of me and I drew the beetle. I wrote underneath in big block letters: ЖУК [Ukrainian for 'beetle'—pronounced 'zhook', where 'zh' is like the sound of the 's' in 'pleasure']. The curious little children began to repeat the word and to examine the letters, which for them were little drawings. Some copied these letter-drawings in the sand, while others wove the word out of grass stems. Each letter reminded the children of something. For example, the letter 'Ж' reminded them of our luckless beetle spreading its wings as it attempted to fly.

A few months later I visited a lesson with the very same children, who were now studying at the school. The teacher complained that she was having trouble teaching them to read. And what a coincidence, at that very lesson they were studying the letter 'Ж'. The children's faces lit up with smiles and the classroom was filled with a buzzing, as the children repeated the word 'ЖУК', emphasising the letter 'Ж'. All their hands went up, and the teacher heard with bewilderment that all the children knew how to write the word 'ЖУК'. What a happy lesson that was. For me it was one of the lessons that life taught to pedagogy.

I remembered that occasion years later, in the School of Joy. Children should live in a world of beauty, of games, stories, music, drawing, fantasy and creativity. That same world should also surround children when we want to teach them to read and write. After all, how children feel when they take their first steps up the ladder of knowledge, what they experience, will influence the rest of their climb. It is simply frightening to think that, for many children, that first step becomes a stumbling-block. Look at school life and you will see that it is precisely during the period when children are developing literacy skills that many of them lose faith in their abilities. Dear colleagues, let us climb that first step in such a way that children do not experience tiredness; in such a way that each step towards knowledge is the proud flight of a bird, and not the weary plod of an exhausted traveller staggering under a heavy burden.

From the first weeks of the School of Joy I had taken the children on journeys to the source of words. I opened the children's eyes to the beauty of the world, and at the same time attempted to convey to their hearts the music of words. I strove to ensure that for each child a word was not simply the designation of an object or phenomenon, but carried within it an emotional colouring—its own fragrance, its own subtle nuances. It was important for children to listen to each word as if to a beautiful melody, so that the beauty of the word, and the beauty of that part of the world that the word reflected, should awaken interest in those drawings that convey the music of human speech—in letters. Until children sense the fragrance of a word, until they are aware of its subtle nuances, we should not begin instruction in literacy, and if teachers do, they condemn children to hard labour. (In the end the children will overcome that burden, but at a heavy cost!)

The process of learning to read and write will be facilitated if literacy is presented to the children as a bright, engaging part of life that is full of living images, sounds and melodies. Things that children

have to memorise must be interesting in the first place. Instruction in literacy should be closely connected with drawing.

We went on journeys to the sources of words with sketch books and pencils. Here is one of our first journeys. My aim was to show the children the beauty and the subtle shades of meaning of the word 'ЛУГ' [Ukrainian for 'meadow'—pronounced approximately as 'loogh', where 'gh' is like a voiced version of 'ch' in the Scottish word 'loch']. We settled ourselves under a willow that leant over a pond. In the distance a green meadow was bathed in sunlight. I said to the children, 'Look at the beauty before us. Above the grass, butterflies are flying and bees are buzzing. In the distance is a herd of cattle that look like toys. It seems as if the meadow is a light green river and the trees are its dark green banks. The herd is bathing in the river. Look how many beautiful flowers early autumn has sprinkled around. And as we listen to the music of the meadow, can you hear the soft drone of the flies and the song of a grasshopper?'

I draw the meadow in my sketch book. I draw the cows, the geese scattered about like white fluff, and a barely perceptible puff of smoke and white cloud on the horizon. The children are spellbound by the beauty of the quiet morning and they are also drawing. I write underneath the drawing: 'ЛУГ'. For the majority of children, letters are drawings. And each drawing reminds them of something. Of what? Of a blade of grass? Bend the blade over and you have an 'Л'. Put two blades together and you have a new drawing, an 'У'. The children write the word 'ЛУГ' below their drawings. Then we read the word. Sensitivity to the music of nature helps the children to sense the meaning of the word. The outline of each letter is memorised. The children impart to each letter a living sound, and each letter is easily memorised. The drawing of the word is perceived as a whole. The word is read, and this reading is not the result of lengthy exercises in phonic analysis and synthesis, but a conscious reproduction of a phonic, musical image, which corresponds to the visual image

of the word that has just been drawn by the children. When there is such an integration of visual and auditory perception, infused with a wealth of emotional colouring—which is contained both in the visual image and in the musical sound of the word—the letters and the small word are memorised simultaneously. Dear reader, this is not a discovery of some new method for teaching literacy. It is the practical realisation of that which has been proven by science: that it is easier to memorise something one is not obliged to memorise, and that the emotional colouring of perceived images plays a crucial role in memorisation.

This integration of the visual image, the sound and the emotional colouring of a word, does not exclude independent, discrete phonic analysis. On the contrary, while attending to the pronunciation of the word 'ЛУГ', the children distinguish each sound in it, and understand that the word consists of separate sounds, each with a corresponding letter.

A few days later we go on a new journey to the source of words. We come in the morning to the school yard to greet the sun. The grass on the lawn, the leaves on the trees, the bunches of grapes, the yellow pears and the dove-blue plums—everything is sprinkled with drops of dew. In every drop a spark of sunlight burns. The sparks disappear from one place and reappear in another. It is as if the sun is drinking some drops and sprinkling others. But that is just the way it seems. A spark appears in a drop of dew when the sun shines on it. But where does the dew go? Some drops evaporate, others slowly roll down the grass stems and are drunk by the earth. Without the dew, the grass and flowers would dry out.

Then we look at the shining dew drops on the asters, nasturtiums, canna flowers and roses. I draw a blade of grass, a nasturtium, the sun, and drops of dew with burning sparks. The children also draw. Under our pictures we write the caption 'РОСА' [Ukrainian for 'dew', pronounced approximately as 'rossáh']. These letters remind the children

of the sun and the dew drops. We read our letter pictures. Each child draws the letters in their own way, revealing their understanding of the world in what they have drawn. Seryozha says to his friends, 'This drop of dew is hanging on a blade of grass. Soon it will roll down to the earth'—that is how he interprets the letter 'P'. 'This drop is still waiting for the sun'—that is how he sees the letter 'O'. 'And in this drop a spark of sunlight is already burning'—Seryozha runs his pencil once more over the outline of the letter 'C'.

I invite each child to draw a blade of grass with drops of dew in a big sketch book. The children write the word 'dew' under their pictures. It may seem easy to say that the children drew and wrote a caption, but for them the drawing and the caption contain a whole world of images, sounds, colours and feelings. Each letter is connected in the child's consciousness with concrete images. That is why it is easy to memorise the whole word, and each letter.

Over the course of several days we again and again admire the dew drops, and again and again we draw and write captions. And each new drawing is not a routine exercise but a creation. Our creativity is associated with the word 'dew' for two or three weeks. Each child creates several drawings of a blade of grass or a twig that takes their fancy, listens to the sound of the word, distinguishes the separate sounds in it and designates the sounds with letters. Finding a similarity between the letters and the objects of the surrounding world—that is in essence fantasy, fairytale, children's creativity.

I write a title on the cover of the sketch book: 'Our native language'. 'We will keep this sketch book for many years', I tell the children, 'Until you finish school and become adults. You will each have your own sketch book with drawings and words, but this will be our shared sketch book.'

The days and weeks passed, and we made more and more new journeys to the sources of living words. It was especially interesting to become acquainted with the words 'village', 'coniferous forest' [a single

syllable word in Ukrainian], 'oak tree', 'willow', 'forest', 'smoke', 'ice', 'mountain', 'ear of grain', 'sky', 'hay', 'grove', 'linden tree', 'ash tree', 'apple tree', 'cloud', 'burial mound', 'acorn' and 'autumn leaf-fall'. In spring we devoted our journeys to the words 'flowers', 'lilac', 'lily', 'acacia', 'grape', 'pond', 'river', 'lake', 'forest edge', 'mist', 'rain', 'thunder storm', 'dawn', 'doves', 'poplar' and 'cherry tree'. On each occasion a picture was drawn in the 'Our native language' sketch book by the child in whom the word awakened the most striking images, feelings and recollections. Nobody remained indifferent to the beauty of our native language. By the spring of 1952, about eight months after we began our work, the children knew all the letters, and could write and read words.

I must issue a word of caution here about attempts to mechanically duplicate my experience. Teaching reading and writing by this method is a creative process and creativity does not fit within the confines of a template. To borrow something new one must be creative. The most important element in the method I have described is the richness of children's spiritual life, the integration of intellectual work, play, stories, fantasy, music and creativity.

It is very important that children should not be set the compulsory task of memorising the letters or of learning to read. Our children climbed their first step up the ladder of knowledge in the process of play. Their intellectual life was inspired by beauty, stories, music, fantasy, creativity and the play of their imaginations. The images that excited their feelings and enchanted them with their beauty sunk deep into their memories. I was struck by the burning desire of many children not only to express their feelings in words, but to write words.

One day we took shelter from the rain in a forest hut. Thunder rumbled and forks of lightening flashed. Small hailstones peppered the earth. The hailstones lay on the grass for some time after it stopped raining. The sun peered out from behind the storm cloud and the little hailstones turned green. The children squealed with delight: how beautiful! The next day the little ones wanted to draw what they

had seen. Yura, Seryozha, Shura and Galya even wrote captions to their pictures. They already read quite well and now I got to see their first compositions. Here they are: 'The storm cloud sprinkled hail on the grass'; 'White hailstones on the green grass'; 'The sun melted the white hailstones'; 'The thunder sent white hailstones'.

This example showed me once again: the closer children are to the primary source of thought and language—to the surrounding world—the richer and more expressive their language will be. I believed that my little ones would soon be writing miniature compositions. My confidence was vindicated in the summer of 1952. In one corner of the school grounds we had sown poppies. I took the children there when the poppies had exploded with a myriad of colours. The astounding beauty stirred a wave of joyful feelings in the children's hearts. We admired the flowers for a long time, listening to the drone of the bees. The next day we came to the same place with sketch books and coloured pencils. The children drew and I told them a story about a poppy seed, and how the rainbow had given it the beauty of seven colours. Many children wanted to express their admiration in words and wrote vivid, expressive captions: 'A carpet of poppies is flowering' (Tanya); 'A carpet of poppies has covered the earth' (Nina); 'The poppies have flowered, the sun rejoices' (Zina); 'The bees are buzzing over a carpet of poppies' (Galya); 'The sun has sprinkled flowers over the earth: dark blue, pink, red, light blue' (Larisa); 'A furry bumblebee on light blue petals' (Seryozha); 'The flowers are swaying on delicate stems' (Shura); 'The sun is playing in the poppy flowers' (Kolya); 'Light blue petals have fallen from the sky, a carpet has flowered on the earth' (Katya). The children copied these drawings and captions from their sketch books to the shared sketch book of 'Our native language'.

The lively wellsprings of the children's imaginations bubbled with bright images during our journeys to the sunflowers and to a field of flowering buckwheat. The more the children were excited by the

beauty of the surrounding world, the more deeply the letters were embedded in their memories—although this goal was never made obvious. I became more and more convinced that the heart and soul of children's thinking is an artistic vision of the world that impels them to express their appreciation of beauty in words. Children's thinking is artistic, figurative and emotionally charged. For children to become intelligent and quick-witted, they need to experience the happiness of an artistic vision of the world in early childhood.

Inexhaustible springs of fantasy, creativity and living thought open up in a child's consciousness when they see and feel beauty! I will never forget one of our journeys to the source of living words. One summer day we went to the collective farm's apiary. The old beekeeper treated us to fresh honey and cold spring water. The children sat under an apple tree and admired the beauty of a field of flowering buckwheat. The bees, returning to their hive after a flight into the steppe, circled above a little stream of cold spring water and quietly hummed. 'They are telling each other about the flowers and the groves, about the buckwheat and the sunflowers, about the bright poppy heads and the blue clover flowers', said the children.

Five years later, when my little ones had become grade four students, I suggested they write a fairytale composition on the topic 'What the bees are buzzing about', and the unforgettable impressions of that June day came pouring out in vivid images and vigorous streams of thought. The things one falls in love with in early childhood are never forgotten. Let the beauty of our native language and of the surrounding world be forever impressed on the consciousness of children during the years of childhood. May the first steps up the steep ladder of knowledge be inspired by beauty!

As the children gradually mastered reading and writing, books became more and more part of their spiritual life. We created a little library of picture books. Unfortunately, I could not find good picture books in the book shops, and had to write and illustrate little books

myself. The first little picture book I illustrated was a Ukrainian folk tale about Grandpa Frost, a wicked stepmother, a kind stepdaughter, and a lazy daughter. The book turned out to be a fair length—over thirty pages—with an illustration and a few sentences (sometimes only one sentence) on each page. By the spring of 1952 most of the children could read it fluently. Varya, Kolya, Galya, Larisa, Seryozha and Lida read particularly well.

We would sit on the grass and one of the children would open the picture book and read … It is not just a matter of reading words and putting together sentences. It is a creative act. When reading a fairytale, a child enters the world illustrated in the pictures. The intonation of the child's reading conveys the slightest nuances in the emotions and intentions of the kindly Grandpa Frost, of the wicked stepmother, the industrious and warm-hearted stepdaughter, and the lazy heartless daughter. The children are deeply involved in the story: they hate evil and delight in the triumph of goodness.

And the interesting thing is that children read the same story dozens of times, but still listen with great interest. I remember the teachers' concerns: why do the children read so monotonously, with so little expression? Why is it so rare to hear emotion expressed in the children's reading? It is because, in many cases, the reading is not connected to the children's spiritual life, to their thoughts, feelings and ideas. The child is interested in one thing, but has to read about something else. Reading only enriches children's lives when the words touch secret recesses of their hearts.

We began to create new picture books. The pictures were drawn by Yura, Seryozha, Katya, Lida, Lyuba and Larisa. There was not a single child who did not want to draw. Difficulties in mastering literacy were overcome thanks mainly to their interest in drawing.

In the summer of 1952 the children began to read short published books: folk tales retold by Leo Tolstoy, short stories from Konstantin Ushinsky's *Native language*, and poems by Pushkin, Lermontov,

Nekrasov, Shevchenko, Lesya Ukrainka and Ivan Franko. When we read the poem 'Children, let's get ready for school' from Ushinsky's *Native language*, the little ones memorised it instantly. Delighted by that, I thought with concern about the many awkward poems found in children's readers, starting with our alphabet text book. Dry and written in artificial language, such verses are more likely to kill any feeling for poetry than to educate a love of words.

You live amongst other people

IN A REMOTE CORNER OF the school yard the Pioneers had planted some chrysanthemums. As autumn approached, white, blue and pink flowers bloomed. On a warm, clear day I took the little ones to see them. The children were in raptures at the abundance of flowers. However, bitter experience had convinced me that children's admiration of beauty is often egoistic. A child can pick a flower and think nothing of it. And so it was on this occasion. Soon I saw one, two, three flowers in the children's hands. When no more than half the flowers were left, Katya shouted, 'Is it really all right to pick the chrysanthemums?'

There was no note of surprise or indignation in her words; she was simply asking.

I did not reply. Let this day provide a lesson for the children. The children picked a few more flowers; the beauty of that corner disappeared, the clearing appeared orphaned. The rush of delight at beauty, which had flared for a moment in the children's hearts, died down. The little ones did not know what to do with the flowers.

'What do you think children, is this place beautiful?' I asked. 'Are these stalks, from which you have picked the flowers, beautiful?'

The children were silent. Then several children spoke at once: 'No, they're not beautiful.'

'And where will we go now to admire the flowers?'

'These flowers were planted by the Pioneers', I told the children. 'They will come here to admire the beauty and what will they see? Don't forget that you live amongst other people. Everyone wants to admire beauty. We have lots of flowers at our school, but what will happen if every student picks one flower? There will be nothing left. People will have nothing to admire. We must create beauty and not destroy it. Autumn will come and with it the cold weather. We will transplant these chrysanthemums to the greenhouse. We will admire their beauty. To pick one flower, you must grow ten.'

A few days later we went to another clearing. Here there were even more chrysanthemums. This time the children did not pick the flowers. They admired the beauty.

A child's heart is sensitive to appeals to create beauty and joy for others, but it is important that such appeals are followed by work. If children feel that there are other people next to them and that they can bring others joy through their actions, they learn from a young age to bring their own desires in line with the interests of others. And this is very important for educating kindness and humanity. People who do not know how to limit their desires will never become good citizens. Egoists, self-seeking people who are indifferent to the grief and suffering of others, grow from those who are only aware of their own desires and pay no attention to the interests of the group during childhood. The ability to control one's desires—in this apparently simple, but in fact very complex human habit—is the source of humanity, sensitivity, warmth and self-discipline, without which there can be no conscience and no genuine human being.

And here again it is necessary to emphasise the significance of the early years in educating humanity. Moral convictions, attitudes and habits are all closely connected with feelings. Feelings provide, figuratively speaking, the life-giving soil for altruistic moral actions. Where there is no sensitivity, no acute perception of the surrounding

world, people grow up soulless and heartless. Sensitivity and impressionability of soul are formed in childhood. If the childhood years are missed, you will never make up the lost ground.

To lead a child into the complex world of human relationships is one of the most important tasks of education. Children cannot live without joy. Our society does everything to ensure that childhood is happy but a child's joys should not be carefree. When a little child picks the fruit of joy from a tree carefully grown by their elders, without thinking about what is left for others, they lose an important human characteristic: a conscience. Before children become aware of being future citizens of a socialist country, they must learn to repay kindness with kindness, to create happiness and joy for others with their own hands.

For several years before the creation of the School of Joy I had been concerned that many parents, blinded by an instinctual love for their children, see only the beautiful in their child and do not notice negative characteristics. I remember one incident. Instead of using the toilet, a four-year-old boy relieved himself in the yard in full view of his mother and their neighbour. The mother was not indignant, but was touched: 'What a fine son we have; he is not afraid of anything'. In his wilful eyes, in his puffed up cheeks, in the scornful grin of the foolish four-year-old, you could already catch glimpses of a disgusting creature who could easily grow into a scoundrel if no-one straightened him out and made him look at himself through the eyes of others.

I had to speak with Volodya's mother several times. As soon as the mother began to say something her son pulled at her dress and grabbed her hand—he always needed attention immediately. In children, individualism takes the form of persistent attention-seeking and a lack of respect, the origins of which are indulgence, condescension and the absence of any punishment. Some parents (and unfortunately the occasional teacher) consider that when talking with children it is necessary to adopt a childish tone of voice. The sensitive ear of a child

detects condescension in such a tone. When an adult uses baby talk, the unsophisticated heart of a child responds with wilful behaviour. I was always wary of slipping into that tone of voice and, without for a moment forgetting that I had children in front of me, I saw in each little person a future adult citizen. I thought it was particularly important to keep that in mind when talking about working for others. The worst thing that can accompany children's work is the thought that they are doing adults a big favour, and therefore deserve lavish praise, even rewards.

In autumn we dug up the chrysanthemums and transferred them to the greenhouse. For village children that is not an onerous task. The children watered the transplanted bushes each day and waited impatiently for the appearance of the first flowers. The greenhouse became a wonderful place. 'Now let's invite some guests here', I advised the children. 'Who shall we invite?' Many of the children had little brothers and sisters, and brought them to the greenhouse. The little boys' and girls' hands stretched towards the chrysanthemums, but my pupils would not let them pick the flowers.

'If we manage to grow lots of flowers, on 8 March [International Women's Day] we will give all our mothers a chrysanthemum each', I told the children. This goal inspired the children and by 8 March we had enough flowers. We invited all the mothers to the celebration, showed them the greenhouse and presented each of them with a beautiful flower. Galya's mother came to the school and the girl handed over her chrysanthemum. I had spoken to Galya many times about her relationship with her stepmother, convincing her that she was a kind person, and my words had reached the child's heart. I was delighted that Kolya's and Tolya's mothers, Sashko's grandmother, and Kostya's stepmother also came to the celebration.

There are many things that are impossible to explain to small children. Beautiful words about nobility are unlikely to touch their hearts. But even little ones are capable of feeling the beauty of kindness with

their hearts. From the first days of the School of Joy I tried to ensure that each little child experienced the joy, the grief, the sorrow and the misfortunes of other people. During autumn and spring we often visited the old collective farm beekeeper, Grandpa Andrei. The old man did not have any family. Loneliness was his great sorrow. The children sensed that Grandpa Andrei rejoiced in every one of our visits. Before each visit to the apiary I advised the children: let us take Grandpa some apples, grapes or plums—he will be pleased. Let us pick some wildflowers—that will give him joy. The children's hearts became more and more sensitive to the moods, emotions and feelings of other people. The children themselves began to look for ways to bring the old man joy. One day we were cooking some porridge in the forest. The moment when the campfire burst into flames brought so many joyful feelings to the children … And right at that joyful moment Varya said thoughtfully, 'But Grandpa Andrei is all by himself now'.

The children all became thoughtful. Perhaps this picture will seem sentimental to some adults. Some may wonder: are seven-year-old children really capable of such spiritual impulses? Yes, dear fellow teachers. If you take the opportunity at this early age to hone children's sensitivity, if you instil in their hearts the great truth that 'you live amongst other people, my children', they will want to share their joys with others, and will experience great pain at the thought that they are having fun while their friend is alone.

The children decided to share their joy with Grandpa Andrei. 'Let's take him some porridge and lard', said Kostya. These words were met with enthusiasm. The little ones put so much porridge in the pot that even the hungriest man could hardly have eaten it all. At the apiary we had supper a second time, together with the old man.

Sensitivity to the joys and sorrows of others is educated only in childhood. At this age the heart is especially sensitive to human suffering, misfortune, grief and loneliness. It is as if children are transformed when they put themselves in another's place. I remember

how one day, on the way back from the forest, we passed a lonely hut exposed to the four winds. I told them that a disabled war veteran lived there. He was sick and could not plant apple trees or grape vines. Tears appeared in the children's eyes. Each child experienced the loneliness of that sick man. We planted two apple trees and two grape vines: that was our present to the man. And in return we received the most precious gift—the joy of creating happiness for another human being.

In this very subtle matter there should be as little talk as possible about good and evil. In such cases it is completely inappropriate to lavish praise or give rewards to encourage industriousness, when that industriousness comes from an impulse to do good deeds. The education of sensitivity, of empathy for the grief and suffering of others, is the very essence of communist education. A person can only be a friend, comrade and brother to another person if that other person's grief is experienced as their own grief.

Children should learn to sense other people with their hearts: that is one of the main educational goals that I set myself. I consider this goal to be exceptionally important. Without success in this direction there can be no success in education, and, if this is not done, everything else you do is a façade.

If a child does not care what is going on in the heart of his friend, mother, father or any fellow citizen with whom he comes in contact, he will never become a real human being. I tried to hone the heartfelt sensitivity of my pupils so that they could read feelings of joy or sorrow in the eyes of others, not only those with whom they had contact every day, but even those whom they met by chance.

One day we were returning from the forest. We saw an old man sitting on the grass by the side of the road. He was upset by something and his eyes were full of sorrow. 'Something has happened to that man', I told the children. 'Can you see how much sadness there is in his eyes … Perhaps he has fallen ill on the road? Perhaps he has lost

something?' We walk up to the old man and ask him, 'How can we help you grandpa?' The old man sighs heavily. 'Thank you children', he says. 'However much you want to help me you will not be able to. I am grieving. My dear old wife is dying in hospital. I am going to be with her now and am waiting for the bus. You cannot help me, but I feel a little better because there are good people in the world.' The children fell silent. Their carefree childish chatter stopped. They were all affected by the old man's sad words. They had been planning to play a little longer, but somehow they forgot any thought of play and each went their own way.

To teach how to feel is the most difficult task in education. The best school for learning warmth, sensitivity, empathy and sympathy is friendship and comradeship, treating others as your brothers and sisters. Children are very sensitive to the emotions of others when they do things for their happiness, joy and peace of mind. If not inspired by the creation of goodness, little children's love for their mothers, fathers, grandmothers or grandfathers can easily turn into an egotistical feeling. Children may love their mothers because they are the source of their joys and are necessary to them. We need to educate in a child's heart genuine human love: feelings of care and concern for the fate of another human being. True love is only born in a heart that experiences concern for the fate of another human being. It is important for children to have a friend to take care of. Grandpa Andrei became such a friend to my pupils. I became convinced that the more children care for another person, the more sensitive their hearts become to their friends and parents. I told the children about Grandpa Andrei's difficult life. His two sons had perished in the war; his wife had died. He felt alone.

'We will go to see Grandpa Andrei more often. Each time we must find a way to make him happy.'

When we were getting ready to visit him, each child was trying to think of a way to bring him happiness. The children presented

him with a sketch book, in which each of us had drawn a picture. On the bank of the river we collected pebbles of many colours and gave them to Grandpa Andrei. He made a special wooden box to keep the pebbles in and gave it to us … The boys wove a straw hat for their friend. Grandpa Andrei carved several animal figures for us from wood: a hare, a fox and a sheep …

The more heartfelt concern the children showed to their friend, the more they noticed troubles and sadness around them. They noticed that Nina and Sasha sometimes came to school with sad, preoccupied eyes. The children asked the sisters how their mother was. The mother was feeling poorly—that was why the girls were sad. Kindly feelings take root in the heart when children do something to lighten the sorrow of their friends. Several times we visited Nina and Sasha's family. We pulled up the weeds in their yard and helped harvest the potatoes in their vegetable garden. Every time we made preparations to go to the forest we wondered if Nina and Sasha would be able to come with us. Sometimes they stayed at home because they had to help their father. So we would visit Nina and Sasha the day before our special outing and help in whatever way we could.

To live in society means to be able to forgo one's own joys for the benefit and peace of mind of other people. We have probably all come across cases where children are confronted with grief, unhappiness and tears, but continue to enjoy their own pleasures. Sometimes a mother will try to distract her child from anything dark or sad, concerned that not a single drop should spill from her child's cup of joy. This is a blatant school for egoism. Do not lead a child away from the darker sides of human life. Let children know that there is sorrow in our life as well as joy. Let the grief experienced by others enter a child's heart.

A person's spiritual world, their moral calibre, depends ultimately on the sources from which they derived joy in childhood. If those

joys were the thoughtless joys of a consumer, if children did not know what grief or hurt or suffering were, they will grow up to be egoists who are blind to the needs of others. It is very important that our students should know the highest joy—the joy of those stirring emotions that arise from concern for another human being.

Our class is a friendly family

FROM THE VERY FIRST DAYS of our School of Joy, I tried to foster a spirit of family warmth, intimacy, empathy, mutual trust and assistance. Three children had birthdays in September: Vitya, Valya and Kolya. We celebrated their birthdays collectively: the school cafeteria baked them a tart and we gave them drawings and books. I was amazed to learn that in Kolya's family they never celebrated birthdays for children or adults. This was the very first celebration in the boy's life, and he was moved by the attention of his friends.

In childhood every person needs love and affection. If children grow up in a heartless environment they will become indifferent to goodness and beauty. A school cannot completely take the place of a family, especially the mother, but if children are deprived of affection, warmth and care at home, we, as educators, must be particularly attentive to them.

Our little group began to accumulate its own property, secrets, cares and disappointments. We kept toys, pencils and notebooks in a cupboard. In our Nook of Dreams we had a 'pantry', in which we kept potatoes, grain, butter and onions—for those autumn evenings when it was raining outside. All the members of our family were little children, but some were especially small: Danko, Tina and Valya. When walking on roads and in the forest we considered it our duty to help the littlest ones.

If individual children stayed home for some unknown reason, their friends would visit them in the evening to see if they had fallen ill. This became a valued tradition.

A feeling of attachment forms the basis for an important spiritual imperative, without which one cannot imaging communist relations between people—the need for human fellowship. I tried to ensure that each child found happiness and a rich emotional life in communicating with their friends through a mutual spiritual exchange. Each child must bring something unique to the group, and create happiness and joy for others.

We live in the garden of health

ONLY ONE MONTH REMAINED UNTIL my pupils would become school students. August—that wonderful month of summer—was approaching. On hot July days the children came to school early in the morning or towards evening. Some of them had a long way to walk home for lunch and sometimes six or seven children remained at school to dine in the school cafeteria. I had an idea: the little ones could live for a month away from home, somewhere in the orchard. We chose a spot on the bank of the pond. The Pioneers helped us build several shelters among some thickets. The watchmen guarding the melon plantations live in such shelters all summer. We put hay in the shelters and made little tables for drawing. A large collective farm orchard was located nearby and the orchardist gave us permission to use the orchard as our main recreation area. We built a kitchen next to the shelters, and the collective farm gave us supplies and allocated a cook to help us. Sanya's father constructed a bathing shed, and next to it was a motor boat that made the boys' eyes light up.

And so began our life together in the Garden of Health—that is what the parents called our living quarters and place of recreation. We lived in the open air for a whole month. We woke at dawn before the sun rose. We bathed in the pond, did some exercises, had breakfast, and set off on a walk somewhere—to the forest, the orchard or the fields. During that month we had our most interesting journeys to the sources of words. We watched the sunrise and sunset from our burial mound in the steppe. We saw how hundreds of swallows gathered in flocks to fly to warmer climes, and how the sun and the morning breeze chased away the white shroud of mist that covered the river. The children had their lunch in the fields and meadows or in the forest, eating apples, pears, plums, new potatoes boiled in their jackets, fresh cucumbers, watermelon, rockmelon, boiled sweet corn and tomatoes. August is the month for fruit and vegetables. During these days each child ate at least two kilograms of apples and pears. Each day Grandpa Andrei brought us honey. In the mornings and evenings the children drank fresh milk. The cook prepared us a delicious beetroot soup with vegetables.

Suntanned in shorts, singlets and bare feet, the children set off each day for a hike or ride in the motor boat.

Good nutrition, sunlight, fresh air, water, appropriate work and rest—all of these things combined to restore and strengthen the children's health.

Thoughts on the eve of the first school year

THE LIFE OF OUR SCHOOL of Joy was coming to an end. Soon my pupils would become school students—a thought that brought me both joy and anxiety. Joy because for many years I would lead my little ones on the path of life, work and knowledge, and because

in the course of a year my little ones had become strong and suntanned.

At the end of our time together in the School of Joy I compared how Volodya, Katya, Sanya, Tolya, Varya and Kostya were a year ago to how they were now. They had been pale and weak with dark circles under their eyes. And now they were all rosy and suntanned. People say such children look like 'peaches and cream'. I was also joyful because without a stuffy classroom, without a blackboard and chalk, without pale drawings and cut-out letters, the children had climbed the first step up the staircase of knowledge—they had learnt to read and write. Now it would be so much easier for them than if that first step had begun with the rectangular frame of a classroom blackboard.

I have the greatest respect for pedagogy and hate hair-brained schemes. But life itself requires that the acquisition of knowledge should begin gently, that study—a child's most serious and painstaking work—should at the same time be joyful work that strengthens children spiritually and physically. This is especially important for little ones who cannot yet understand the aim of the work or the nature of their difficulties.

It has been said a thousand times: study is work and you cannot turn it into a game. But we do not need to construct a Great Wall of China to separate work and play. Let us closely examine the significance of play in the life of a child, especially during the preschool years. Play is a most serious business for a child. Children discover the world through play and reveal their creative abilities. Without play, full intellectual development is impossible. Play is a huge open window through which a life-giving stream of concepts and ideas pours into the child's spiritual world. Play is a spark, igniting the fires of inquisitiveness and curiosity. So what is so terrible about a child learning to write through play? Or combining work and play during a particular stage in their intellectual development so that the teacher rarely has to say, 'Well you've had a play. Now it's time to work.'

Play is a very broad and multifaceted concept. Children play not only when they are running and competing to see who is the fastest and the friskiest. Play may take the form of intense creative effort and imagination. Without the play of mental energy, without the creative use of the imagination, instruction will be lacking something—especially in the preschool years. In the broadest sense, play begins wherever there is beauty. And since a little child's work is inconceivable without an aesthetic foundation, it follows that in the early years work must be closely connected with play. On the ceremonial first day of the harvest in our school grounds, all the children come dressed in their best clothes. The first harvested ears of grain stand in a vase on a table with a tablecloth. In this there is an element of play full of deep meaning. But the play will lose its educational value if it is artificially added on to work, and if the beauty does not express a human evaluation of the surrounding world and of oneself.

One issue remains unresolved: when is the most expedient time to begin instruction in literacy? Is it when a child first sits at a desk in grade one, or perhaps a little earlier during the preschool years? Experience has convinced our staff that school should not mark a dramatic turning point in a child's life. When children become students they should be able to continue doing the things they did previously. Let new things enter their lives gradually and not overwhelm them with an avalanche of new impressions.

I am convinced that instruction in literacy that is closely connected with drawing and with play could provide an excellent bridge linking preschool education with studies in school. In their drawings of letters my pupils discovered the beauty of sunlit dewdrops, a mighty hundred-year oak tree, a willow leaning over a pond, a formation of cranes in the blue sky, and a meadow that had fallen asleep after a hot July day. The children might not be able to draw their letters beautifully yet—that is not the most important thing—but they felt the beat of life in every drawing. It also gave me joy that the

children had begun to appreciate the nuances and music of words. The foundations of vivid, poetic thought, rich in images, were laid in their minds. Drawing had become part of the children's spiritual life. In their drawings the children tried to express their feelings, thoughts and experiences. For my pupils, listening to music had become a spiritual imperative.

I was delighted that the children had taken the first steps in their moral development. They had begun to appreciate the beauty in human acts of kindness. Sensitivity to the joys and sorrows of other people had awakened in their hearts. They already knew the happiness of creating beauty and joy for another person. As I understand it, the process of education over many years—from the time when children first cross the school's threshold to the time when they experience life as a mature, fully developed personality—is above all a process of educating human feelings. The people we are educating must genuinely feel that the people living around them experience the same grief, suffering, disappointment and difficulties that they do. I tried to ensure that during the childhood years the kindly actions of my pupils were based primarily on the ability to feel for another person. It gave me joy to see that the little ones had learnt compassion, and were quick to sense the feelings of their friends, older children, parents and adults in general. The greatest joy was to see that in everyone they met in life, they saw a human being first and foremost.

Along with my feelings of joy I experienced some anxiety. Daily intellectual work would now become the children's prime responsibility. Would I be able to maintain their lively interest in the surrounding world? Each child sees the surrounding world in their own way, perceives objects and phenomena in their own way, and thinks in their own way. Would I be able to introduce the world of knowledge to a child who thinks like a rushing, bubbling stream, and at the same time to one who thinks like a quiet, full river whose flow is barely perceptible?

I experienced even more anxiety when I thought about the spiritual world of each child. I was dealing with sensitive, tender, impressionable hearts. The more contact I had with the children, the more clearly I saw that their impressionable hearts and minds were becoming ever more receptive to my words, looks, and the tone of my advice and comments. In front of me were thirty-one children—thirty-one worlds. I remembered the words of Heinrich Heine: 'Each person is a world that with him is born and with him dies. Under each gravestone lies the history of the world.' How different they are even now, in the preschool years: Kolya and Kostya, Varya and Tina, Danko and Larisa, Volodya and Slava … But those deeply personal things that make each one unique will stand out more clearly and noticeably with every day and every week. Somewhere in the hidden recesses of every child's heart is a string that resonates with its own tone, and in order for that heart to respond to my words I needed to tune myself to that string. On more than one occasion I have observed what painful emotions awaken in a child's heart when the child is upset about something, is hurt, and the teacher does not notice. Will I be aware of what is going on in each child's heart each day? Will I always be fair with the children?

Fairness is the basis for a child's trust in the teacher; but not some abstract fairness, taking no account of individual differences, interests, passions and impulses. To be fair you need intimate knowledge of the spiritual world of each child. That is why I saw our continuing educational work as a process of coming to know each child ever more deeply.

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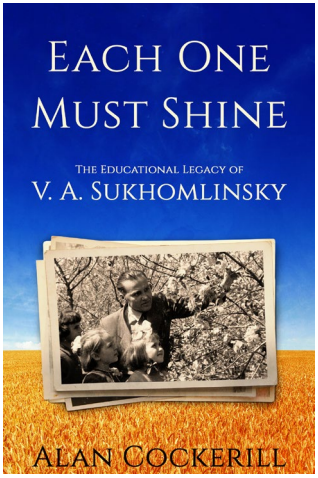

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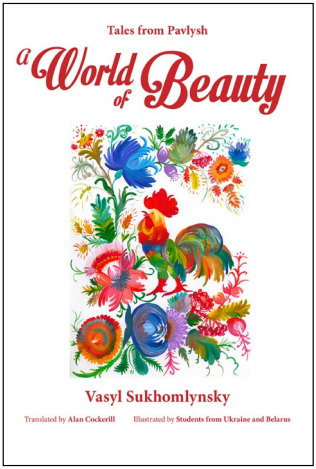

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