

Sukhomlynsky News



Tell People about Sukhomlynsky

article by Simon Soloveichik

[continued from previous issue]

Tell people about Sukhomlynsky the school principal! He was a true school principal: he lived in his teachers. I have talked with many teachers during my lifetime, and I can honestly say I have never met so many true educators gathered under one school roof. All are distinguished by a broad view of education, a huge capacity for work, and love and respect for children. They have pedagogical convictions, and that is very important. I will not describe them in detail, as Sukhomlynsky has written about his teachers in detail in *Pavlysh Secondary School*. You cannot help wondering, where did so many good teachers come from, in an ordinary country school?

The answer is that Sukhomlynsky cultivated them. His constant concern was for each teacher. He did not rely on a school ethos, on a general system, or on his own efforts. He made of each teacher a like-minded companion. He would never visit a teacher for just a single lesson but would visit a series of lessons for 12-15 days in succession.

One day someone will publish the notes he took when he visited lessons, and it will make a wonderful textbook. For the first three years Sukhomlynsky would never criticise a young teacher, but would only praise and encourage them, leading them from one small success to another. The older teachers even complained: 'We're people too, aren't we? He keeps visiting the young ones.' Incidentally, the principal was also very concerned to support the young teachers financially.



Tell people about Sukhomlynsky

Dear reader,

I hope you are well.

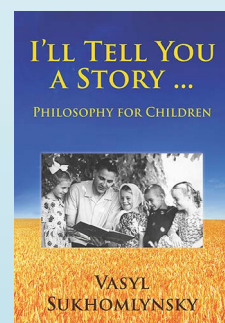
In this month's newsletter we are continuing the publication of an article by education journalist Simon Soloveichik.

The article was written during a visit to Sukhomlynsky's school in Pavlysh, not long after Sukhomlynsky died in 1970. Greatly impressed by what he witnessed at the school, Soloveichik sat up through the night to write the article.

The article will be continued in next month's newsletter.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill



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Tell People about Sukhomlynsky (continued)

After three years a teacher either stayed at Pavlysh for good or left for good. Not everyone was capable of working as hard as Sukhomlynsky expected. To be a teacher at Pavlysh School is very difficult, as several teachers who had transferred in from other schools told me. 'There is no comparison. The demands here are enormous...' But there is pride in their voices when they say it. Any normal human being likes to work to the highest expectations. 'If a teacher has a small, seemingly insignificant deficit in skill or knowledge, the students will have a significant deficit,' wrote Sukhomlynsky. 'The students are like magnifying glasses, revealing a teacher's ignorance ...' In another manuscript he writes, 'If the knowledge that a teacher commands during their first years of practice, in relation to the minimum that it is necessary to pass on to children, can be expressed as a factor of 10:1, by the time a teacher has worked for 15-20 years that ratio has increased to 20:1, 30:1 or 50:1...' It would appear that the teachers at Pavlysh have this sort of knowledge. There have been cohorts of graduates, where every single student has gained admittance to tertiary institutions. For a country school this is a rarity.

'I go to every lesson with joy,' one senior teacher with more than 30 years' experience told me.

What else does a school need, but that every teacher goes to each lesson with joy?

You can easily capture the spirit of a school by sitting quietly in the staff room for an hour or two, and listening to the conversations between the teachers. At Pavlysh, the staff room is the only place where nothing reminds you of school, apart from a timetable on the wall and some neatly arranged bookshelves with books about pedagogy and psychology. There is some homely furniture, an aquarium with fish, serviettes, and not a single poster or notice. Everything is soft and quiet. Teachers should be able to rest in the staffroom. Here people do not talk about illnesses, ailments or family problems. An atmosphere of optimism reigns. Teachers come to staff meetings knowing that they will not be criticised in the presence of others, that any school issues will be resolved in a business-like way, and not in public, and that at staff meetings and psychological seminars they will only discuss matters of principle, in a way that is uplifting.

Here are some topics for psychological seminars for the 1970/71 school year:

'How to teach in such a way that children will trust their teacher'

'To know when to make demands, and when to forgive; to be able to see but not notice everything'

'Know how to come down to a child's level, to understand childhood and a child's weaknesses'

'How to avoid prejudice in our relations with students'

'A teacher is a nation's conscience.'

'There is no place in a school for fuss, irritability or haste.'

'Conformism and education'

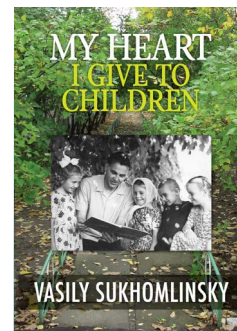
At the end of each seminar the staff members discuss the educational and psychological characteristics of one of the students. In this way the teachers learn to see and understand children more clearly ...

Sukhomlynsky also held seminars for parents, and once a month he held seminars for guests. There are no teacher-parent meetings of the sort that we are used to. Sukhomlynsky could not imagine how it was possible to discuss children's successes and, even worse, their weaknesses, in the

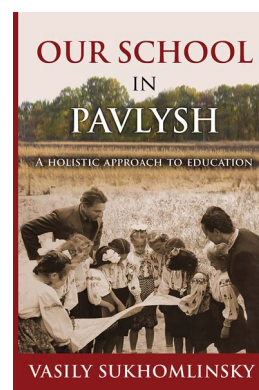
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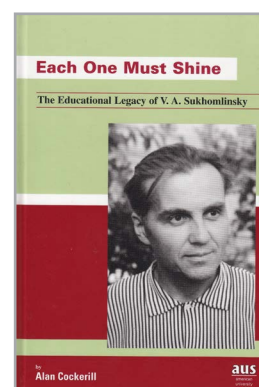
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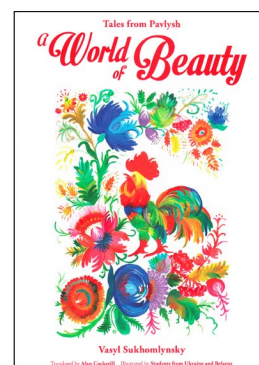
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presence of other families ... But all parents attended lectures on pedagogy and psychology, which, in their extent, exceeded those offered in analogous courses in teacher training institutes. And of course, children were not permitted to discuss the misbehaviour of other children in class.

I will quote an extract from Sukhomlynsky's manuscript *A hundred practical pieces of advice for school teachers*. (I am convinced that when it is published, all the teachers in the country will know it by heart.)

'Things that should not be the subject of class discussion:

[Note: At the time one common method of dealing with misbehaviour in Soviet schools was to encourage other students to collectively condemn it.]

Misbehaviour prompted by obvious or hidden problems in the family ...

Misbehaviour or lapses in behaviour when the cause is a psychological disturbance connected with the fact that a child has a stepmother or stepfather. However serious a child's breach of discipline is, if they do not have a mother or father, no class of children can discuss their behaviour objectively ...

Misbehaviour or lapses in behaviour which constitute a protest against the rudeness or unjust impositions of parents or other adults, including teachers ...

Misbehaviour which is a reaction to the unfair assessment by a teacher of a student's knowledge. As is the case in many other instances, we are dealing here with a child's hurt, and this is a very delicate, reactive wound: the more attention you pay to it, the more you touch the wounded spot, the more it hurts. Such wounds are best left to heal ...

A behaviour incident which cannot be discussed without a deeply personal account of the child's friendship with a peer or an older or younger child. Insisting on openness in such cases is experienced by the student as a demand to betray a friend ... Children have their own understanding, their own convictions about honour and dishonour, and we have to respect these.

... The reader may be wondering—continues Sukhomlynsky—what [sorts of misbehaviour] it is appropriate to subject to class discussion. The answer is none.'

... Tell people about the school in Pavlysh where they do not raise their voices to condemn a child, where they can see the grief in a child's eyes, where they spare wounds, where they do not 'battle' with the children, where they enhance a child's joy and prolong childhood.

You may hear people object that Sukhomlynsky was an exceptional personality, and that is why he was

so successful, that we cannot all be Sukhomlynsky ...

Well, Sukhomlynsky's school has been managing without Sukhomlynsky for quite a few months now. They have a new principal, Mykola Ivanovych Kodak. He used to manage another school in the same district of Onufriivka. He is a calm, business-like man who completely shares Sukhomlynsky's views.

Of course the school is experiencing some difficulties, but it is alive, and everything in it is as it was before. No one can say, 'It's not the same now.' The school in Pavlysh depended no so much on the principal, as on his views and ideas, and these are accessible to many.

Tell people about Sukhomlynsky the teacher! He tackled the most important and burning educational issue that we face today.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century Europe for the first time took on the challenge of universal primary education. At that time nobody knew if it was possible to instruct all children literacy and numeracy. The Swiss educator Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi was the first to demonstrate that it is indeed possible to give a primary education to every child. He taught all of them how to study.

Nearly two centuries have passed. Now the world faces an equally burning issue: the universal economic imperative to implement universal secondary education.

You might think that this depends purely on the economic feasibility of creating the required number of schools and staffing them with the necessary teachers and so on. But in fact we will never solve this problem just by supplying enough schools, teachers and text books, because nobody knows how to educate all students to the final year of high school without exception, regardless of their ability and their desire to study.

There are some countries where all children study for perhaps nine years, but at some stage they 'sort' the children into those who are more capable and those who are less capable. Only the capable ones complete secondary school with the right to go on to tertiary education. That is easy, but it is not a solution to the problem.

Sukhomlynsky wrote: 'You cannot escape from this very difficult problem, which is both an educational and a social one. In the secondary schools in our country there are at least two million students who are struggling. They are future citizens, workers, mothers and fathers. *[continued overleaf]*



Whatever we say about all-round development, about the favourable conditions created by our society for the full development of every person's abilities and gifts, it will be hypocrisy if there remain millions of unfortunate people, deprived because of their inadequate intellectual development ... We need to educate them as genuine human beings: there is no other solution! We need to educate these children in normal high schools. To create special institutions for them would be an abrogation of elementary humanity. These children are not deformed. They are the most fragile and delicate flowers in the limitless diversity of humanity. It is not their fault that they come to school sickly, weak and defenceless. The fault lies with nature, with the whole human race, with social injustice that has existed for many hundreds of years, and that even when eliminated, leaves its fruits for many years to come, with our society, which has unfortunately been unable to overcome some social ills, of which the most significant are alcoholism and instability in the family.'

He did not make any supernatural discoveries, any more than Pestalozzi did in his time, or any other great educator. We can replace lessons with lectures, and lectures with individual activities in 'blocks', (the American system of 'team teaching'), we can introduce the most ingenious methods of teaching and hope that they will provide a solution, but there has never been and never will be a pedagogical panacea, just as there has never been and never will be a medical panacea.

I would appear that Sukhomlynsky did not tell us anything new. For every line that he wrote you can find a parallel citation in the works of past educators. Yet at the same time everything he says seems new.

Sukhomlynsky built a pedagogy concentrated on the child. There were previous attempts to do this. For nearly a century the world's best educators has aspired to do this, and each time they had fallen into an error which pedagogical science calls 'pedocentrism': the educator does not lead children but follows them.

Sukhomlynsky did not simply find a 'golden mean', did not simply avoid going to extremes, but found a fundamentally different solution to the problem.

He leads children on the path to knowledge, instructing them seriously on a firm foundation, following the requirements of the state curriculum, and not the random interests of his students. But his main concern is to arouse in children a desire to

study. He educates character, but first of all he instills a 'desire to be good'.

In Sukhomlynsky's view it is impossible to give an education without developing an impulse towards self-education. Education is impossible if there is no aspiration for self-education.

Who today does not repeat words about the importance of self-education in our century of accelerating technological progress? Who does not dream about children's self-education? But what for others is supplementary, for Sukhomlynsky is fundamental. What for others is desirable, for Sukhomlynsky is an inescapable necessity. What for others is a consequence, for Sukhomlynsky is the prime cause.

All his advice, all his articles and books, are about the same thing: how to develop interest in study, how to teach children to work with joy, how to awaken a desire to be a good person.

This marks a shift in the centre of gravity of the whole pedagogical system.

For many educators, children are creatures with a single faculty: memory. In the best scenario—and this is the height of pedagogical wisdom—we also value their quick-wittedness.

For Sukhomlynsky, in accordance with the principles of modern scientific thinking, a child must be viewed as a whole.

If we address only a child's memory and intelligence, we can educate the majority of children, but if we want to educate everyone, we must see each child as a whole. In schools we cannot judge children just by their marks, by their success in their studies. Then slower children will feel like second class citizens, school will become torture for them, they will leave school, and it will be impossible to educate them. Instead evaluate children according to their moral qualities: in this area everyone is capable of success and will feel pride in their achievement, and this human pride will help to develop other abilities and will help in study. 'If people become only school students, in many respects they will cease to be human beings', wrote Sukhomlynsky.

[to be continued next month]

