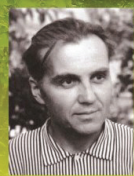


Sukhomlinsky News

AN INSPIRING ACCOUNT OF WHAT EDUCATION CAN BE

MY HEART I GIVE TO CHILDREN
BY VASILY SUKHOMLINSKY



HIS SCHOOL WAS VISITED BY THOUSANDS, HIS BOOKS ARE READ BY MILLIONS.

"Now I see the secret of the making of the best persons, It is to grow in the open air and to eat and sleep with the earth."

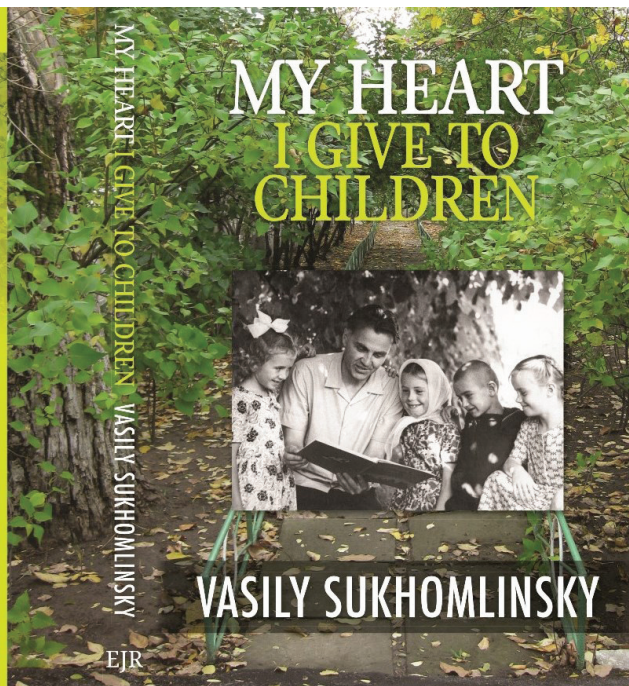
With these words from Walt Whitman's 'Song of the Open Road' Sukhomlinsky closes his account of how he educated young children in a Ukrainian village during the aftermath of the Second World War.

Vasily Sukhomlinsky (1918-1970) was principal of the same rural school in Pavlysh, central Ukraine, for twenty-two years. His remarkable work attracted thousands of visitors, some of whom travelled from the length and breadth of the Soviet Union to see his school with their own eyes. One visiting principal commented:

"I have spent only one day in this remarkable school... but I have learnt as much as I did in four years at teachers college." (M. MASUKIAN)

My Heart I Give to Children was many years 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, how to foster an intrinsic love for learning, and how to support children who struggle to acquire skills in literacy and numeracy. This classic work is addressed to school principals, teachers, and anyone interested in the upbringing of young children.

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New book launched!

Our new translation of Sukhomlinsky's *My Heart I Give to Children* went on sale this month. The book (RRP Aus\$24.99) is available from our online bookstore, *Holistic Education Books*, and from some major online retailers, including Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and The Book Depository. A big thank you to those who have supported this publication by purchasing a copy. If you enjoy the book, please go to the Amazon site (US or UK) and write a short review to encourage others to read it. Sukhomlinsky is not yet well known in English-speaking countries, and the best way to make him better known is by word of mouth.

I am most interested in receiving feedback about the book. Please write to me to tell me what you think about it: what you find relevant, and anything that you find difficult to relate to. And of course please let me know about any errors you come across.

I will be grateful for anything you can do to bring this book to the attention of those who will benefit from reading it.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill

My Heart I Give to Children book launch

On Thursday 21 April the official book launch of *My Heart I Give to Children* took place at Serviceton South State School in Inala, Brisbane. The event was attended by the school principal, Marni Morrison, and other teachers. It was also attended by Ashleigh Howarth, editor of the local newspaper, *The Satellite*. Ashleigh interviewed me about the book, and a report of the event should appear in *The Satellite* early in May.

At the book launch, I talked about my motivation for translating and publishing the book. I see Sukhomlinsky's work as an inspiring example of holistic education, an approach that addresses the developmental needs of the whole child, fostering their health, and their physical, emotional, moral, aesthetic, intellectual and vocational development. The book also demonstrates a way of developing strong ties with nature, at a time when many of our young people are becoming absorbed in a virtual reality, sometimes at the expense of ties with the real world.

I read a passage from a chapter entitled "Three hundred pages of the 'book of nature'", and responded to a number of questions. A tasty afternoon tea was enjoyed by all. The following day I presented my book to a meeting of members of the Ipswich District Teacher Librarian Network.

Of course it will take more than a couple of talks to truly launch this publication. Subscribers to this list can help to bring the book to the attention of new readers by sharing it on social media and mentioning it to friends who might be interested.

Alan Cockerill

Extract from *My Heart I Give to Children*

The following extract is taken from a chapter entitled 'You live amongst other people.' It focuses on the development of empathy and responsibility.

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.

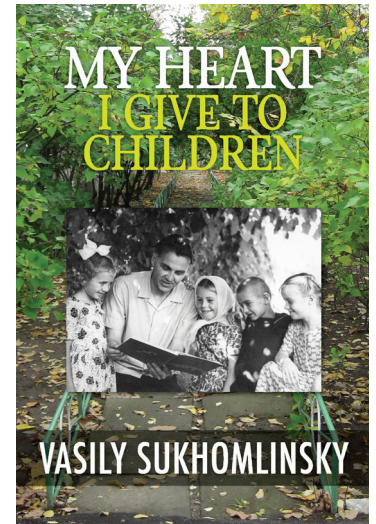
To lead a child into the complex world of human relationships is one of the most important tasks of education. Children cannot live without joy. Our society does everything to ensure that childhood is happy but a child's joys should not be carefree. When a little child picks the fruit of joy from a tree 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

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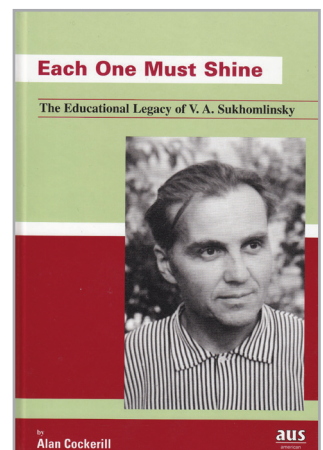


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Translated by Alan Cockerill. Illustrated by Students from Ukraine and Belarus.

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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...

... 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.



Stories for Children

I suddenly feel much better

A mole was digging a burrow, when it got a prickle stuck in its paw. The paw became infected and hurt. The mole could not dig a burrow any more. It thought to itself, 'I will go to the doctor in the forest.' At that time the forest doctor was a bear. The mole limped to the bear's home and knocked on the door. The bear opened the door and said, 'Come in, patient.'

The mole went into the bear's surgery. The bear sat him in an armchair, examined his paw, and cut it off.

The mole left, limping on his three paws. As soon as he left the bear's home he met a hedgehog.

'What illness the bear treat you for?' asked the hedgehog.

'I had an abscess on my paw.'

'And how did it go? Did the bear cure you of your abscess?'

'He cured it. He cut my paw off. Now I don't have an abscess any more.'

'But you don't have the paw any more either,' said the hedgehog.

'That's true,' said the mole in surprise. 'How could I not have noticed before? And what illness are you coming to see the bear about?'

'I've got a big pimple on my nose. I couldn't sleep all night. But it doesn't hurt any more. It doesn't hurt at all. I am sure I can deal with this pimple. I suddenly feel much better. Let's go home, mole. We're going in the same direction.'

The cuckoo's sorrow

A cuckoo lays its eggs in other birds' nests. When the cuckoo chicks hatch, they throw the owners' chicks out of the nest.

'Why are you so cruel, cuckoo? Why don't you make your own nest and raise your chicks yourself?' asked the wind one day.

'Listen, wind,' answered the cuckoo. 'I am not as cruel as people think. As soon as the forest begins to turn green, caterpillars crawl out of their cocoons. Many caterpillars appear in the forest: big, hairy, green, poisonous. No other bird eats them, but I do. If I did not eat these pests, the forest would die. The caterpillars would eat all the leaves. I don't have time to raise my chicks...'

That is what the cuckoo told the wind. It told its story and felt very sad. It called so pitifully and sadly, 'Cuckoo, cuckoo.'

'Why are you calling out so pitifully?' asked the wind.

'I miss my children,' answered the cuckoo.

'But you do not feed them,' said the wind. 'Other birds feed them.'

'I am saving the forest for them,' said the cuckoo softly.

The hare and the carrot

A hare wished that all the other animals were afraid of him. He went to the blacksmith and asked, 'Can you fit me with wolf's teeth?'

The blacksmith fitted the hare with wolf's teeth. The hare went into the field and met a goat.

'I'm going to eat you,' said the hare, and snapped his teeth. The hare thought the goat would be scared of him, but she wasn't scared at all. She could see that he was just a hare with wolf's teeth.

'All right, eat me,' said the goat. 'But first, let me go into the vegetable garden and eat some carrots.'

'Where? Where are the carrots?' asked the rabbit excitedly. 'Take me there at once.'

The goat took the hare to the carrots, and they ate them together. The hare completely forgot that he had wolf's teeth.

The squirrel and the Jay

A squirrel was hopping from tree to tree, picking acorns and carrying them to its hole in a tree. A jay saw he at work and thought, 'I will steal the squirrel's acorns and put them in my hiding place.'

She flew up to the squirrel's hole and took two acorns. But the squirrel jumped up quickly and hit the jay with its paw. The jay dropped the acorns and flew away. It could see that it would have to find its own acorns, and store them in its hiding place for winter.

