

Sukhomlinsky News



The earlier curiosity is educated, the more significant the range of abilities that are developed in a person.



Empathy, Curiosity and Industry

Thank you for showing an interest in the educational legacy of Vasily Sukhomlinsky. The aim of this newsletter is to make Sukhomlinsky's name better known amongst English-speaking educators, so I hope you will forward it on to anyone who you think may be interested.

This main article in this month's issue is about fostering curiosity. I recently attended training in a school improvement pathway focused on Curiosity and Powerful Learning, run by Dr Wayne Craig (McRel International) and Professor David Hopkins.

This program aims, amongst other things, to make every student literate, numerate and curious. I was drawn to reflect on the relevance of Sukhomlinsky's approach to this agenda. Curiosity is not just a capability, like literacy and numeracy, but is a personality or character trait. It occurred to me that three key character traits fostered by Sukhomlinsky were empathy, curiosity and industry, (applying heart, mind and hands) and this month's article reflects that.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill

Fostering Curiosity

*The following article is an extract from Sukhomlinsky's **How to Educate a Real Human Being**, a book about values education. Chapter 26 is entitled "How to awaken curiosity"; and the following is part of that chapter.*

The activity that is required to develop children's creative abilities (being genuinely creative, and not just following instructions) requires more than just being active physically. We need activity that involves the mind and demands resourcefulness and imagination. In other words, the hands are working, but the mind is solving problems. The hands become a means of developing thought.

I remember a particular incident. A young mother, in charge of a brigade on a turnip farm, left for work at dawn with her husband, a tractor driver. She left her six-year-old daughter Masha at home with her eighteen month old brother Vanya. The daughter was given the task of weeding the carrot and cabbage beds. Masha took her brother with her when she went to weed the beds. But for some reason the boy was making a fuss. Worrying that her little brother might be falling ill, Masha lay him in a cot under a pear tree near the vegetable beds. But Vanya kept on crying. Masha began to think about how she could settle the boy. She took him in her arms and lifted him up so he could see a starling-house with some little birds in it. But she could not hold Vanya in her arms all the time; she had to work. And Masha found a solution. She hung a large mirror right next to the head of Vanya's bed. The bird-house and its occupants were reflected in the mirror. (continued on page 2)

Our task is to ensure that in early childhood all children become little thinkers, that their activity in the world should lead to an irresistible avalanche of discovery. The only way to achieve this is through work, in the broadest sense of the word.

Now they were right in front of the child. A feeling of bewilderment and amazement overcame the child: the birds that he had seen in the tree had come to him. Vanya sat up in his cot and moved closer to the mirror. He understood that these were not real birds, but this did not lessen his interest in this mysterious phenomenon. The child had discovered something incomprehensible, but real. He kept an eye on the birds, and Masha kept an eye on him. For a six-year-old child this was real creativity, but is was nothing exceptional. This is a perfectly normal reaction for a child placed in a situation where it is necessary to act. The circumstances themselves prompted the six-year-old girl to action, in which the defining element was the application of mental effort to solve a problem. The next day Masha thought up new amusements for her brother: spraying water to create a rainbow, to the delight of her brother. Then she put some flowers on the table, and sprinkling them with sweetened water, observed with Vanya how furry bumblebees were attracted to her bouquet.

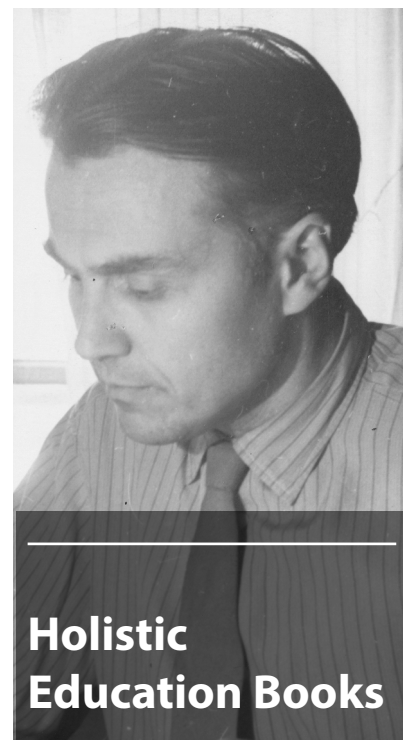
I have cited this example to illustrate the way that circumstances can encourage observation. The activity that most facilitates the development of [children's] abilities includes observation, investigation, and the discovery of the most diverse aspects and qualities of objects and phenomena — observation and investigation in the course of which children are interested parties: they are investigating the world in order to enrich their activity. Active observation gives rise to *curiosity*. This is the very essence of fostering abilities. The earlier curiosity is educated, the more significant the range of abilities that are developed in a person.

In the very notion of *curiosity* is hidden a deep meaning: it is a growing, ever intensifying need to know, to find out, to explain. The more actively [young] people interact with the surrounding world, the more they see connections between things, facts, nuances, characteristics and the peculiar features of things, facts and phenomena, and the more they are filled with wonder and amazement. They discover many incomprehensible things, thousands of riddles that they must solve, no matter what. In this

appearance of riddles and their solution is the essence of curiosity. Our task is to ensure that in early childhood all children become little thinkers, that their activity in the world should lead to an irresistible avalanche of discovery. The only way to achieve this is through work, in the broadest sense of the word. Children's work does not mean giving them a shovel and letting them dig till they are exhausted. Curiosity is a very delicate personal quality, and it is very easy to destroy it, awakening an aversion to work, if that work is beyond a child's strength or is too monotonous. I am talking about the work of a thinker. Children's work is an active vision of the world, a vision through which children become active participants in natural processes, and custodians of nature.

For two years before they join the compulsory school program, I work with little children in a preparatory group. I would call this period a school in curiosity. This is first and foremost an educator making contact with a child's brain, which is so plastic and responsive during the preschool years. The main method employed in making this contact is to inspire children with wonder and amazement. The main instrument is a teacher's words, and the main form of activity is excursions to the source of thought and language, in the midst of the inexhaustible richness of nature. My aim is that a growing curiosity should become an autonomous force, governing the interests and aspirations of children. If I manage to establish curiosity as an inextinguishable flame, I know that children will not be non-achievers.

Here we come to the essence of the ethical teaching: **think about the fact that you will not always be a child.** Only [young] people for whom curiosity has become the essence of their soul can think like this. I consider it extremely important that when little children start school, their activity should not be to just follow instructions. This is a terrible threat to intellectual development. With the beginning of formal studies, when there is a lot of monotonous work at desks that involves passive memorisation (this is necessary and inescapable), there is a growing role for special activity that feeds, so to speak, the avalanche of



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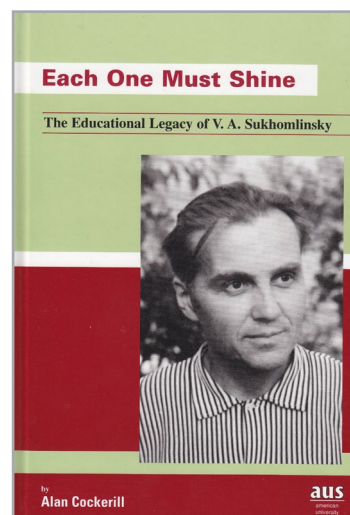
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Everywhere children must be accompanied by a feeling that things are real.

curiosity. I spoke about investigative activity (lessons in thought) in an earlier section. I would like to add a note about the *adult-like* nature of our work in our workshops, school gardens, orchards, and the school animal breeding farm. Everywhere children must be accompanied by a feeling that things are real. At our school we have real little machines for children: a tractor, a car, a motorcycle,

a threshing machine, a harvester, and grain cleaning mechanisms. There is a children's electricity generator with safety devices to ensure there are no accidents. The deep meaning of the teaching that 'you are child, but do not forget that you will become an adult'; is all that more accessible to children's understanding because they gather in the harvest with a real harvesting machine, however small,

thresh the grain with a real threshing machine, and drive a real tractor. At such times they develop adult ways of thinking and an adult view of the world. Although from an adult's point of view much of this activity appears to be a game, from a child's point of view it is not a game at all (just as real games for them are not games).

Progress on publication of *My Heart I Give to Children*

I have received my manuscript back from editor Lisa Hill, and now need to go through all her suggestions for improving the text. I hope to complete this work during the September holidays.

I am now beginning to look at my cover design, and will most probably

not use the draft design on the right, but one that will be more suggestive of the content to readers with no prior knowledge of Sukhomlinsky. I am likely to use the photograph at the foot of this page. Comments are welcome.



Vasily Sukhomlinsky
My Heart I Give to Children

Translated by Alan Cockerill



Readers interested in previewing my manuscript should email me at: ejr.cockerill@gmail.com .





Stories for Children

The Snowflake and the Drop of Water

Alyonka is running over the ice. Snowflakes are falling, floating in the air. One snowflake settles on Alyonka's sleeve. Alyonka looks at the fluffy snowflake. It is a six-pointed star, so beautiful and shiny, that a fairy-tale master might have cut it from a plate of silver.

Alyonka bends her face to the snowflake, studying it, admiring it. Suddenly a miracle happens: the snowflake turns into a drop of water.

How Can the Bumblebee get out?

A bumble bee flew into the classroom, yellow and furry. For a long time it flew around the classroom and then it flew over to the window. It beat against the glass and cried, but it could not get out.

When the children arrived at school, the bumble bee was quietly crawling across the window pane. Sometimes it tried to fly, but it had no strength left. The bumble bee was crawling over the glass. Nobody took any notice of the poor bumble bee. Only Nina, the smallest girl in the class, stared at it all the time.

Nina wanted so much to go up to the bumble bee, to take it in the palm of her hand, lift it up to the open ventilation window, and let it out.

Nina could not wait for the break.

If only the time would go faster.

If only the bell could ring sooner.

The Blade of Grass and Last Year's Leaf

The autumn frosts hit hard. A green blade of grass wilted and lay on the ground. To make things worse, a leaf fell on it. The blade of grass lay under the leaf. A blizzard blew, and covered the ground with snow. The blade of grass was warm under the snow.

The blade of grass slept for a long time. In a dream it heard something singing above it, something was echoing above the forest. The blade of grass wanted to stand up, but it could not. The dry leaf would not let it. The blade of grass gathered all its strength, rose up and poked its sharp tip through last year's leaf. It looked around and trembled with joy: birds were singing in the trees, spring waters were thundering in the gully, and in the blue sky the cranes were calling. "It's spring!" thought the blade of grass, and raised itself even higher.

An Unusual Hunter

In our village lives Grandpa Maksim. Everyone says he is a hunter. As soon as the season for hunting hares or ducks begins, Grandpa goes every day to the forest with his gun. He leaves early in the morning and does not return until evening.

But what an unusual hunter he is! He never brings home a hare or a duck. He comes back with an empty sack. Once he did bring home a little baby hare. He found it under a bush. The hare had a broken leg. Grandpa made a splint from two sticks and bandaged its little leg. After a week the leg mended and Grandpa took the little hare back to the field.

Why is Grandpa Maksim so unsuccessful?

One day the children followed Grandpa. They wanted to see how he hunted. They looked, and he put his gun under a bush, and started walking through the forest laying hay under the bushes for the hares.

Then the children understood why Grandpa Maksim is such an unusual hunter.

A Drop of Dew

Early one morning, a drop of dew woke up on a rose. "How did I get here?" wondered the dew drop. "Last night I was high in the sky. How did I end up on the earth?"

She wanted to climb back up into the sky.

The sun warmed her and she evaporated, rising up and up into the blue sky, right up to the sun. There were thousands of other drops there. They gathered to make a dark cloud and covered the sun.

"Why are you hiding me from the people?" The sun was angry, and sent a fiery arrow flying at the cloud. Lightning flashed and thunder rumbled. The dark cloud was frightened and sprinkled water everywhere. It started raining. The drop of water fell back to the earth. "Thank you for coming back," said the earth. "I really missed you."

