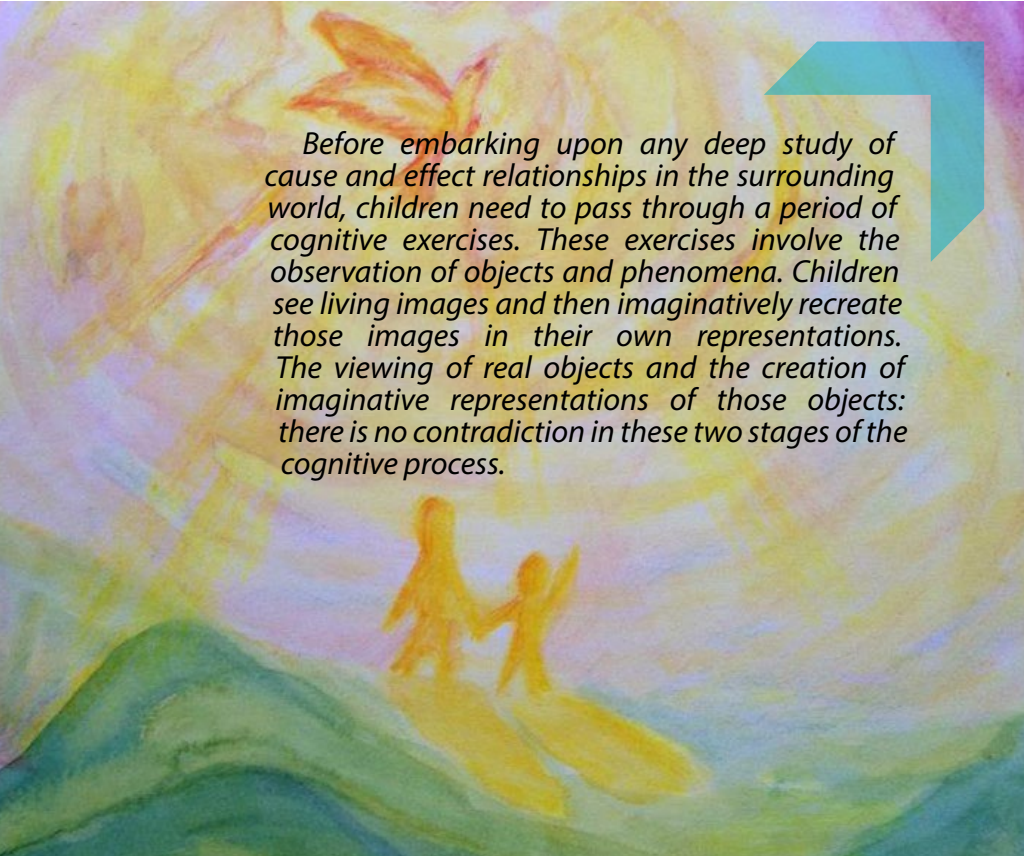


# Sukhomlinsky News



*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.*



## Welcome to another issue!

*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. New readers can subscribe to the newsletter and access archives at: <http://ejr.com.au/sukhomlinsky/newsletter.html>.*

This month's article continues last month's discussion of how children's brains function and develop, with a special focus on observation and the imaginative reconstruction of what is observed.

Sukhomlinsky suggests that observation of the real world, and imaginative reconstruction of what has been observed, are both necessary for the development of a child's thinking.

Sukhomlinsky reflects on the children's thought processes as they sit one evening in their 'Nook of Dreams', a cave that Sukhomlinsky discovered not far from the school, and which the children set up as a comfortable hideaway with a stove.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill

## How children think

*The following is an extract from Sukhomlinsky's **My Heart I Give to Children**. In this passage he describes the children's mental activity in their hideaway in a cave.*

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, fairy tale 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 are easily diverted when they meet an obstruction. Shura sees a herd of

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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, 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.

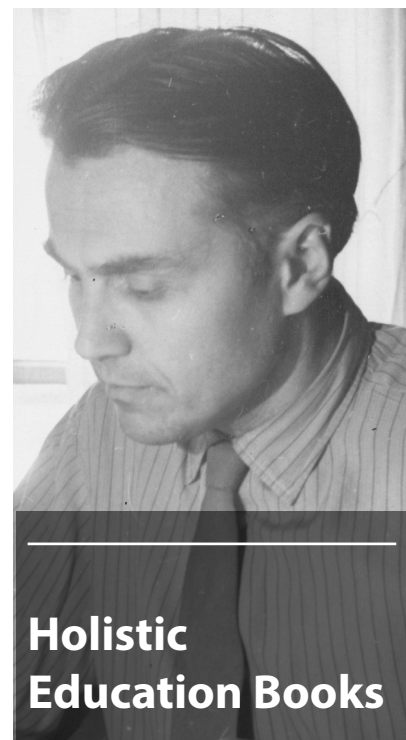
I wonder if every teacher has reflected on the fact that the development of

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.

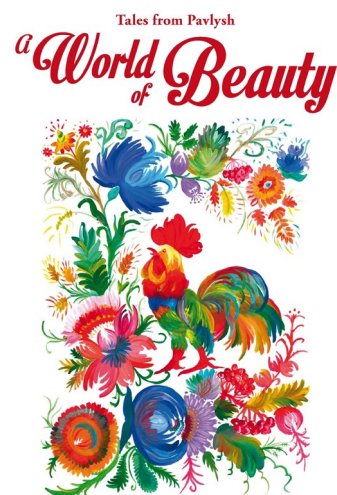
Before embarking upon any deep study of cause and effect relationships in the surrounding world, children need to pass through a period of cognitive exercises. These exercises involve the observation of objects and phenomena. Children see living images and then imaginatively recreate those images in 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



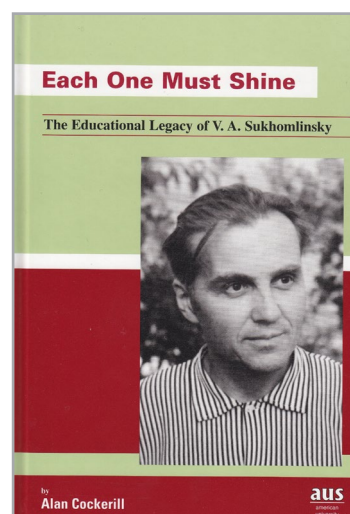
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possible with bright, living, concrete objects in the surrounding world. In the beginning, do not expect children to think about cause and effect relationships. Let them simply inspect an object and discover something new about it. A boy saw an enraged 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.

Readers interested in previewing the manuscript of *My Heart I Give to Children* should email Alan Cockerill at: [ejr.cockerill@gmail.com](mailto:ejr.cockerill@gmail.com) .





## Stories for Children

### The doctor fell ill

This happened high in the Carpathian Mountains. After a blizzard, the mountains were covered in mist. It had snowed for three days, and snowdrifts covered the roads and pathways. It was impossible to reach the little mountain village on foot, by road or by plane.

In the village was a hospital. Seven patients were being treated there. One little girl was seriously ill. She needed an operation.

And suddenly a misfortune happened: the doctor fell seriously ill. He could not get up; his whole body burnt as if on fire.

The little girl was groaning in the ward.

Many people came to the doctor's home. They stood in silence and grief. The people waited. Perhaps the doctor would get better. Perhaps he would get up and perform the operation the sick girl needed.

The doctor's apartment was next to the ward where the little girl was lying. At sunrise, when the doctor regained consciousness, he heard quiet groans. It was the little girl groaning.

Gathering all his strength, the doctor got up. He put on his white surgical gown. Nurses helped him to stand, and he performed the operation.

When the operation was completed, the doctor again lost consciousness. He lay in his bed, and there was no-one to help him, as he was the only doctor in the village. The mist covering the village was so thick, that no-one could reach the village by road, on foot, or by plane.

During the night, the doctor died.

But the little girl got better.

### A drop of water

It was a hot day in July. A group of school students approached a well under a tall oak tree. They were returning from a hiking trip. The children were very thirsty and the closer they got to the well, the faster they walked.

From the opposite direction an old lady approached them. She had come a long way and was very tired. The old lady and the children reached the well at the same time.

On the wall of the well sat a bucket of cold water. The children surrounded it and drank water in turn, and the old lady could not reach the bucket. She stood to one side, sadly leaning on an oak tree.

When the children had drunk their fill and walked on, the old lady watched them leave, and thoughtfully shook her head.

### A normal man

In the middle of the hot, dry steppe was a well. By the well was a hut. In the hut lived a grandfather and his grandson.

The well had a bucket on a long rope. When people travelled that way, they would stop at the well, drink some water, and thank the grandfather.

One day the bucket came off the rope and fell to the bottom of the deep well. The grandfather did not have another bucket, and had no way of getting water to drink.

The next morning a man rode up to the hut in a cart. He had a bucket under some hay.

The traveller looked at the well, looked at the grandfather and his grandson, cracked his whip at the horse, and travelled on.

'What sort of man was that?' asked the grandson.

'That's not a man,' answered the grandfather.

At midday another traveller came past the grandfather's hut. He took a bucket from under his hay, tied it to the rope, drew some water and had a drink, gave a drink to the grandfather and his grandson, poured some water on the dry sand, put his bucket back under his hay, and travelled on.

'What sort of man was that?' asked the grandson.

'That is still not a man,' answered the grandfather.

In the evening a third traveller stopped by the grandfather's hut. He took a bucket from his cart, tied it to the rope, drew water, had a drink, thanked them and travelled on, leaving the bucket tied to the rope.

'And what sort of man was that?' asked the grandson.

'A normal man,' answered the grandfather.

