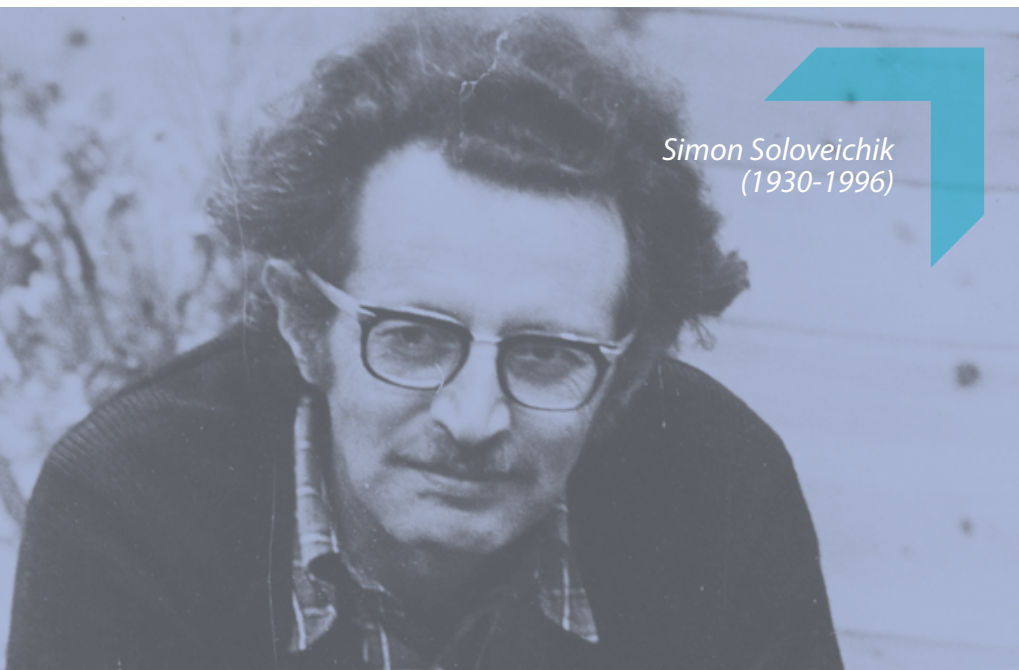


# Sukhomlinsky News



Simon Soloveichik  
(1930-1996)



## A time for reflection

*It is now six months since I launched the first Sukhomlinsky newsletter, and New Year is a good time to reflect on the value of this exercise. Sukhomlinsky's writing has been read by millions around the world, but not in English speaking countries. This newsletter is a small step towards making Sukhomlinsky's work better known in Australia and other countries where English is spoken. I would be very interested in feedback from subscribers, telling what you have found of value, and any suggestions you have for improvements.*

This month we are devoting the whole issue to a second instalment of Simon Soloveichik's article 'Tell people about Sukhomlinsky'. Soloveichik was himself passionately interested in education, and wrote extensively about it, both for teachers and parents. He was responsible for bringing together creative Soviet teachers during the late 1980s, and for formulating an educational manifesto entitled 'The pedagogy of cooperation.' I hope you enjoy this second instalment of his article.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill

## Tell people about Sukhomlinsky

*The following is a continuation of an article by journalist Simon Soloveichik, published in 1971. Last month's newsletter contains the first part of the article.*

Everything is like in any other school, except...

Except that the first display that hits you in the eye when you enter the building is addressed not to the children, but to their mothers: 'Mother, remember that you are the main teacher, the main educator. The future of society depends on you.' Then there are pictures with advice for mothers. The first piece of advice is: 'Mothers, tell your children folk tales.'

Then there is another large display board, this time addressed to the children: 'Take care of your mothers!'

In another place, in large letters, is the message: 'Without mothers there are no poets or heroes.' (Gorky). On this display are oil colour portraits of M.A. Ulyanova, A.K. Timiryazeva, T.S. Repina, L.T. Kosmodemyanskaya, O.O. Ostrovskaya, Z.M. Konstantinova (mother of two heroes), A.A. Mayakovskaya, and A. T. Gagarina. Sukhomlinsky believed that feelings of patriotism grew out of love for one's mother...

I cannot resist describing some of the other displays on the walls of the school:

'The most valuable thing in the world is a human being.' Here is a selection of quotations from Gorky, Chekhov and Tagore. In the centre are the eye-catching words: 'A good person is ashamed to do wrong even in front of a dog.' (A.P. Chekhov)

'These books are part of the treasures of world literature. Humankind will read them eternally.' There follows a list of books from Homer to Hemingway.

Another display: 'Consider what people live on Earth for.'

'A school will only become a seat of culture', wrote Sukhomlinsky, 'When four great loves reign there: a love for one's homeland, a love for people, a love for books, and a love for one's native language.'

This is what makes the school in Pavlysh different. In place of the usual devotion to marks and discipline, culture reigns. In everything you can see an aspiration to give each child's life a high moral purpose.

We should not think that everything that Sukhomlinsky wrote is an exact description of his practice. Sukhomlinsky's books are not inventories. You should not walk around his school checking each line of his books: 'He mentions a greenhouse. Show me the greenhouse. Good. Next, a violet bush. It's not there? They dug it up? I see... Where is the story room? You don't have one?'

In fact there is no story room. In its place they have various props that allow any classroom to be turned into a story room. There are many things you will not find. Sukhomlinsky did not just describe 'the most advanced practice'. He was a scholar, and at times a dreamer.

But in this school you will find the most important thing: 'an intellectual climate,' 'a spiritual atmosphere.' Without these things, Sukhomlinsky considered, study turns into pedantry, and he hated pedantry.

Two young graduates from the Chuvash Teachers College, a young man and a young woman, were at Pavlysh at the same time as I was. They were on a study trip to collect material for a graduate thesis about Sukhomlinsky. They sat in lessons all day for a week, and left stunned. They had themselves graduated from school relatively recently, and had visited many schools for teaching practicums, but never had they seen children, from grade one all the way up to grade ten, studying with such willingness and such interest.

For Sukhomlinsky this was the most important thing. He kept repeating that study is a joy, and children must be given this joy. In the last school document written in Sukhomlinsky's hand—the official 'Plan for educational work for the 1970/71 school year'—the words 'wonder' and 'amazement' appear several times. During their lessons children should experience amazement at the mysteries of nature. I would like anyone who knows of another school in whose study plan the word 'amazement' appears, to write about it. Such schools should receive special consideration.

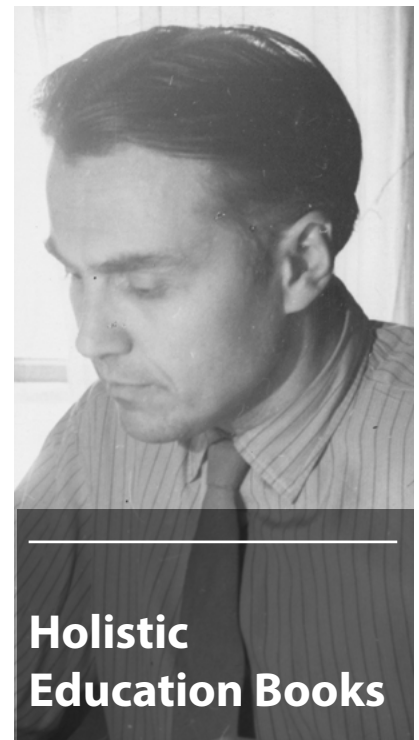
The school in Pavlysh anticipates the interests of children. For example they do not teach boys to ride a motorcycle or drive a tractor in the senior classes, when the majority of them are already familiar with driving (it's a country town), but in grade three, when everything is a novelty and is greeted with enthusiasm. They have specially constructed small motorcycles for the little ones, and when

you ask 'Who can drive a tractor?' all the boys in grade four joyfully raise their hands. Moreover it turns out they can all drive a crank-started tractor, and they all know they will learn to crank an engine at the end of grade four [around eleven years of age]. They all cultivate grain with their own hands. In autumn grade three students are allotted a plot of land about half the size of their classroom, and sow it with winter wheat. In spring the children take turns to guard the crop against sparrows, and before they enter grade four they harvest the grain, thresh it in a little threshing machine, transport the sack of grain to the mill—the whole class clambering on to a trailer—collect the flour, and take it to the bakery, where it is used to bake pastries and a big cottage loaf for the harvest festival...

Last year they baked two festive loaves: one for the festival, and one for Vasily Aleksandrovich [Sukhomlinsky], who was in hospital, and for the first time in 23 years could not attend the festival.

That is how they graduate from primary school in Pavlysh—making their own bread. Tell people about that. And also tell them that at the school in Pavlysh they try to celebrate not just knowledge, but the success, the victory of overcoming difficulties in study. Success—that is the source of joy in study!

During the early years here they try never to award failing marks to students, but to ensure that they overcome any initial lack of success through hard work and complete the task well. Only then do they award a mark. The principal appealed to all staff: 'Do not catch your children out in their ignorance. A mark is not a punishment; a mark should bring joy.' Here they try to give recognition for the slightest progress, to notice, to comment, to praise and to support... Here they judge students according to their individual abilities, and not according to some abstract concept of what a student should be, so that children with the most modest abilities should not feel left behind or rejected, so that school should bring every child joy. 'We should not expect the impossible of a child,' Sukhomlinsky would say. 'Any program in any subject represents a defined level and sphere of knowledge, but not a living child. To reach that level in that sphere of knowledge children take different paths. One child can independently read



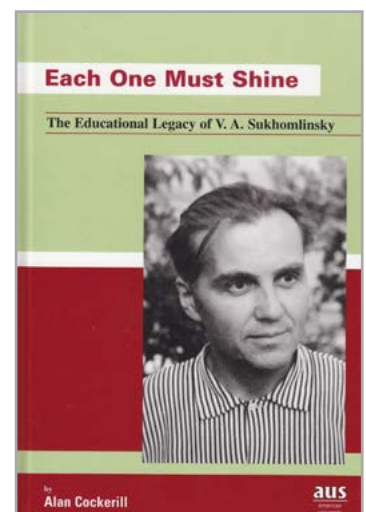
## Holistic Education Books

<http://holistic-education-books.com/>

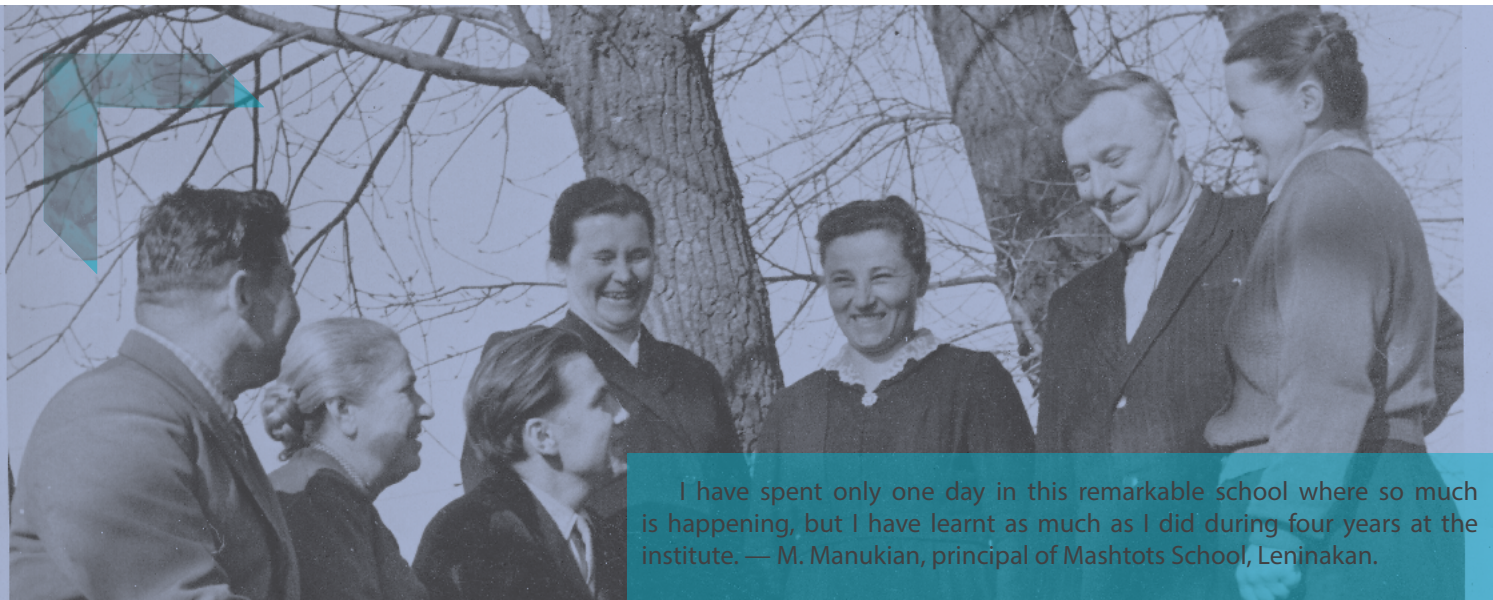
### CURRENT PUBLICATIONS



AUS\$14.95, pdf AUS\$9.99



AUS\$35.00, pdf AUS\$9.99



I have spent only one day in this remarkable school where so much is happening, but I have learnt as much as I did during four years at the institute. — M. Manukian, principal of Mashtots School, Leninakan.

and solve a mathematical problem in grade one, while another can only do that at the end of grade two or even at the end of grade three... The art and skill of instruction and education lies in the ability to uncover every child's strengths and abilities, so that each one will experience the joy of success in intellectual work.'

Here are some entries from a thick notebook I accidentally discovered among some books in the principal's office during the final evening I spent at Pavlysh. Nobody even told me about it. This was a 'Visitors' Registration Book', compulsory in every school, where inspectors enter their comments. Pavlysh was under the constant scrutiny of hundreds of people, and these are some of the comments entered in the book by voluntary 'inspectors'.

'In my view, this is the best school in the world. — Irina Pechernikova'

'I have read Sukhomlinsky's books, and now I have seen with my own eyes the things I liked in his books. And this has inspired me even more.

— Komlosi Shandor, Senior Lecturer in Education, Hungary.'

'I have spent only one day in this remarkable school where so much is happening, but I have learnt as much as I did during four years at the institute. — M. Manukian, principal of Mashtots School, Leninakan.'

'...A most amazing and wonderful human being of our time... — Staff from the Aktyubinsk Regional Education Office.'

'Pavlysh Secondary School should be renamed a university of education! We say this quite seriously: a feeling of wonder and admiration overcomes anyone with the slightest love for children and schools. — V.A. Karakovsky, principal of School No. 1, Chelyabinsk.'

And so it continues. But in the school itself, in my discussions with the children, I did not detect any traces of special pride in their school. For the students, their school is not the best, not 'famous', there is nothing put on for show... It is just a school. Tell people about Sukhomlinsky 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 Sukhomlinsky 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 Sukhomlinsky 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.





## Tell people about Sukhomlinsky (cont.)

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 Sukhomlinsky 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.

After three years a teacher either stayed at Pavlysh for good, or left for good. Not everyone was capable of working as hard as Sukhomlinsky 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 Sukhomlinsky. '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 ration 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...

Sukhomlinsky 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. Sukhomlinsky could not imagine how it was possible to discuss children's successes and, even worse, their weaknesses, in the 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.

[To be continued next month.]



### FORTHCOMING PUBLICATION

It is now planned to release our forthcoming publication of Sukhomlinsky's book *My heart I give to children* in April, 2016.