

# Sukhomlinsky News



## Promoting Sukhomlinsky's Ideas

*Once again we are devoting a whole issue to a continuation of Simon Soloveichik's article about Sukhomlinsky. We hope to complete the article in next month's issue.*

## Tell people about Sukhomlinsky

*The following is a continuation of an article by journalist Simon Soloveichik, published in 1971.*

I will quote an extract from Sukhomlinsky'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:

[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 Sukhomlinsky—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

We hope you find Soloveichik's summary of Sukhomlinsky's views, and his comments on their significance, thought provoking. You may find yourself disagreeing with some of his generalisations, but as they say in Russian, 'the truth is born in argument'. There is little doubt that Soloveichik and Sukhomlinsky raise important issues.

On another front, work is progressing on the design of our new publication, a translation of Sukhomlinsky's *My Heart I Give to Children*. I would like to express my gratitude to Paul Howson for his work on the internal design, and his advice on the project, and to Julia Peddie, who has worked on the cover design. It is expected that the book will be available for purchase in April.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill

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 Sukhomlinsky was an exceptional personality, and that is why he was so successful, that we cannot all be Sukhomlinsky...

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

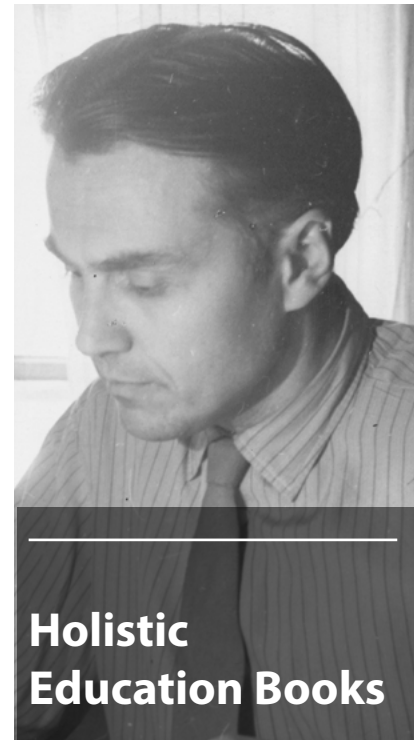
school with the right to go on to tertiary education. That is easy, but it is not a solution to the problem.

Sukhomlinsky 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. 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.'

Sukhomlinsky could not bear to see an unhappy child. The problem of educating and developing all children without exception was at the same time a universal problem, and simply the grief of one little boy or girl who could not keep up with the pace of modern instruction.

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 Sukhomlinsky did not tell us anything new. For every line that he wrote you can find a parallel



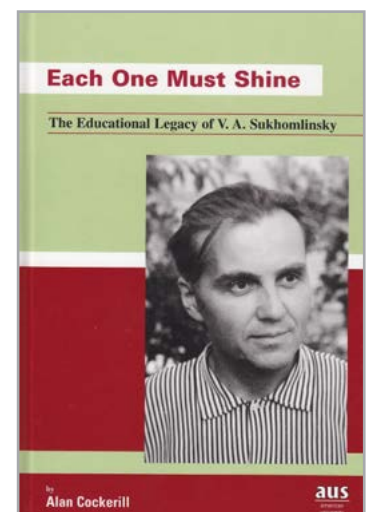
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Whatever we say about all-round development, about the favourable conditions created by our society for the full development of every person's abilities and gifts, it will be hypocrisy if there remain millions of unfortunate people, deprived because of their inadequate intellectual development...

citation in the works of past educators. Yet at the same time everything he says seems new.

Sukhomlinsky 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.

Sukhomlinsky 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 instils a 'desire to be good'.

In Sukhomlinsky'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 Sukhomlinsky is fundamental. What for others is desirable, for Sukhomlinsky is an inescapable necessity. What for others is a consequence, for Sukhomlinsky 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 Sukhomlinsky, 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 Sukhomlinsky.





## Tell people about Sukhomlinsky (cont.)

To see in front of you not a student, but a human being: that is the essence of Sukhomlinsky's pedagogy, and is a mandatory requirement for anyone who wants to educate every child. Do not judge a child by their knowledge, judge them according to their effort, according to their moral qualities. Address your efforts not just to the mind, but first and foremost to the heart of the child. Sukhomlinsky's logic is as follows: teach children humanity; then they will love work, and loving work, they will apply themselves and will study better, for effort sharpens the mind.

Never before had educators' dreams of combining instruction with character development found their realisation as fully as in Sukhomlinsky's pedagogy. For him nothing is an end in itself: he develops character, in order to arouse a desire to study, and he conducts studies in such a way as to awaken an aspiration to be a good person.

This holistic view of the school, of the child, of the teacher and of the family, explains the diversity of Sukhomlinsky's pedagogical interests. There is not a single burning issue in all the various areas of pedagogy to which he has not turned his attention and given his own answer. In our age of narrow specialization (which has had an impact on education as well) such an encyclopaedic approach is an extraordinary phenomenon.

One tends to accept Sukhomlinsky educational views immediately. There is an inner conviction about them.

Sukhomlinsky did not follow fads. He did not play around with 'definitions' ('I consider "collectivism" to be...; 'In this work we take "personality" to refer to...'), he did not identify any new 'component parts'. He did not dress up his books with specialist jargon (and for that reason some do not consider him a serious scholar). He understood that pedagogical writing has always overlapped with polemical writing and with literature, that pedagogy, unlike other sciences, cannot be written about on two levels: scientific and popular. It has to be both scientific and popular, because it is a science for millions.

Understanding these things, Sukhomlinsky followed a tried and true method. He examined his school, his children, his teachers and parents, and tested out his intuitions in his school. He measured his suppositions against the norms of folk pedagogy and expressed himself in the simplest possible words: love children, teach children to love their families, their school, the people they meet, to love work and knowledge, to love everything that lives and is beautiful, to love their homeland... Address your words to a child's heart, seeing in each one not a student, but a child. Learn to take away children's grief with a careful approach, and give them the joy of work, success, victory, friendship and humanity. Then you will be able to educate every child, and to develop the capabilities that are essential in order to receive a good education.

Practically no-one had to repeat a year. He did not send any slow learners

to special schools. They sat next to normal children and tried hard to study like everyone else. He learnt to teach everyone.

If Sukhomlinsky's ideas could be accepted by every teacher and put into practice, more of our children would go to school with joy, develop their capabilities and grow up to be good, hard-working people. There would be fewer tears about bad marks and arguments with teachers, and less unhappiness in families because children are not studying properly.

Utopia? A dream? Still, Sukhomlinsky did so much to make this dream a reality that we should do our best to follow his lead. 'Do not allow your soul to be lazy...' was Sukhomlinsky's favourite line of poetry. Do you remember Zabolotsky's verse?

Do not allow the soul to be lazy!  
For your efforts to be fruitful\*,  
The soul must labour  
Day and night, day and night.

\*The second line of this verse uses a folk saying, and is literally: 'So as not to crush water in a mortar', meaning 'So as not to perform useless work'.

[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.