

Sukhomlinsky News

No. 18
December 2016



Happy New Year!

I would like to wish our subscribers all the best for the New Year.

January will see the publication of a new article about Sukhomlinsky in the journal AEU News, a publication of the Victorian branch of the Australian Education Union. The article will be written by Seth Unmack, a journalist with the AEU.

This year will also be marked by efforts to have UNESCO recognise the 100th anniversary of Sukhomlinsky's birth in 2018. I invite subscribers to support this initiative in any way they can.

In this issue of our newsletter I am continuing my translation of Sukhomlinsky's One Hundred Pieces of Advice for Teachers with the ninth chapter, which discusses the importance of extracurricular reading. I have also translated an extract from I will tell you a story: Philosophy for children, and some of Sukhomlinsky's miniature stories for children.

*Best wishes,
Alan Cockerill*

The Really Good Book Shop to stock our publications

We have closed the 'Holistic Education Books' online bookstore, but our three main English language publications are now being stocked by The Really Good Book Shop in Brisbane, Australia. This will provide access to quality offset printed editions of *Each One Must Shine* and *A World of Beauty*, as well as to Sukhomlinsky's *My Heart I Give to Children*. I would like to thank Wendy from The Really Good Book Shop for stocking these books, which will be available both at her shop in Hillcrest, and online at <http://www.thereallygoodbookshop.com.au/>.



Contact details for The Really Good Book Shop:

Retail Shop Address:

Shop 4, 1-3 Central Court
HILLCREST QLD 4118
AUSTRALIA

Opening Hours (AEST GMT+10):

Mon-Wed 9am-5.30pm; Thur-Frid 9am-6.30pm; Saturday 9am-4.00pm;
Sundays Closed.

Telephone: (07)3802 8746

Creating an 'intellectual background'

The ninth chapter in Sukhomlinsky's collection of advice for young teachers looks at the role of extracurricular reading in providing an 'intellectual background' for studying the curriculum.

9. 'Two programs of instruction', developing students' thinking

A teacher does not have enough time mainly because students have difficulty studying. For many years I have reflected on how to make students' work easier. Developing practical skills as a foundation for knowledge development is only the first step. Memorisation and storage of knowledge in long term memory is the next step. I advise every teacher: *analyse the content to be taught and clearly demarcate those elements that must be stored securely in long term memory.* It is important that a teacher is able to identify those knowledge 'hubs' or 'nerve centres', the strength of which determine the development of thought, of intellectual ability and of a capacity to make use of knowledge. These 'hubs' include important conclusions and generalisations, formulae, rules and laws that characterise a particular subject. Experienced teachers have their students keep special exercise books for recording material that must be memorised and committed to long term memory.

The more complex the material that needs to be memorised, the more generalisations, conclusions and rules that need to be stored in long term memory, the more significant the 'intellectual background' to the process of study becomes. In other words, in order to commit formulae, rules, conclusions and other generalisations to long term memory, students need to read a lot of material that they are not required to memorise. Reading must be closely connected with study. If it involves going more deeply into the facts, phenomena and objects that provide a basis for making generalisations, it facilitates memorisation. We might call such reading the creation of the *intellectual background* necessary for study, and for memorising material. The more students read out of pure interest in the material, from a desire to find out, to think through, to make sense of something, the easier it is

for them to memorise the material that they are required to learn and to commit to memory.

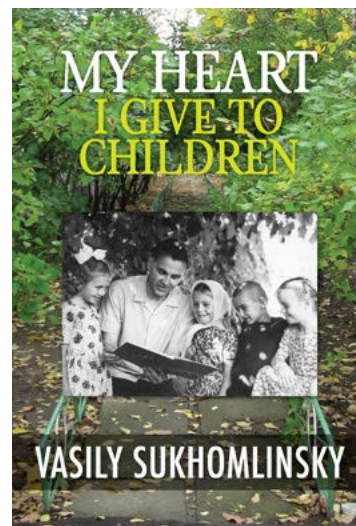
Keeping this important principle in mind, in my practical work I always had *two programs* of study in mind: the first made up of the material that it was essential to memorise, and the second made up of extracurricular reading and other sources of information.

Physics is one of the most demanding subjects in its requirement to memorise material, especially in grades six through to eight. The program at these levels contains many new concepts. I taught this subject for six years, and always tried to provide extracurricular reading to correspond to each new concept. The more complex the concept that is being studied at any given time, the more attractive and interesting the books that students read need to be. When studying the laws governing electrical currents, I compiled a special library for individual extracurricular reading. It contained fifty-five books about natural phenomena that demonstrated the diverse electrical properties of matter.

I was able to stimulate a wave of intense interest among the students. They literally showered me with questions. What? How? Why? About 80% of their questions began with the word 'why'. There were many things that the students could not understand; and the more things in the surrounding world that they could not understand, the greater their desire to learn grew, and the more *receptive to knowledge* they became. The children literally 'caught in mid-air' everything I told them. When it was time to explain the concept of an electric current as a flow of free electrons it turned out that my adolescent students had many questions specifically about this complex physical phenomenon. The answers to their questions provided the missing bricks in the picture of the world that had formed in the students' minds as a result of their reading and the other

 **REALLY GOOD
BOOK SHOP**

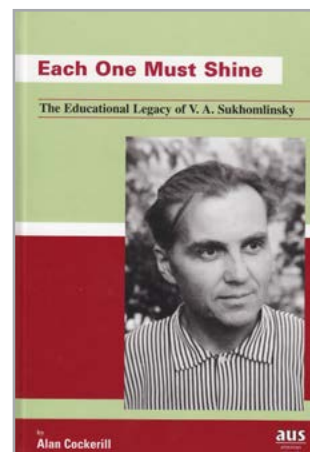
<http://www.thereallygoodbookshop.com.au/>



AUS\$24.95



AUS\$14.95



AUS\$34.95

information they had received earlier.

I taught senior biology for three years. This course contains a host of difficult theoretical concepts, which are all the more difficult to commit to memory. When the students were first acquiring scientific concepts such as 'life', 'living matter', 'heredity', 'metabolism' and 'organism', I selected material for them from scientific and popular scientific journals, books and pamphlets. Their 'second program of study' included pamphlets, books and

articles calculated to arouse a wave of interest in a number of complex scientific issues, and consequently in further reading. The young biology students began to take an interest in the natural phenomena that surrounded them, including the exceptional diversity of forms that metabolism could take. The more questions they had, the deeper their knowledge became. When I assessed their knowledge, there was not a single response that was evaluated lower than '4'. [In the Soviet system of assessment,

'3' meant 'satisfactory', '4' meant 'good' and '5' meant 'excellent!']

I advise all teachers: create an intellectual background for the memorisation and storage in long term memory of the required curriculum. Students only achieve lasting mastery when they think about what they are learning. Think about how to stimulate thought, analysis and observation relating to the material that is being studied, or will soon be studied, at your lessons.

§§§§§

On moral education

From *I will tell you a story: Philosophy for children* (pp 16-17)

Children meet each other every day at school, in the corridors, in the classrooms. They look each other in the eye, share secrets, argue, enjoy each other's company, get upset, and sometimes fight, nursing injuries great and small. Sometimes in our daily work we lose sight of the subtleties of these human relationships. Educators, do not forget that understanding these human relationships is your first duty. How each of your pupils views other human beings, what they discover in them, what they impart to others, and what remains in their hearts from others—this is a hundred times more important than whether or not they have completed today's homework. In essence, education is a lengthy process, taking many years, that prepares young people to realise the essential truth that human beings are of ultimate value. This is a realisation not as a consumer, not in a selfish sense, but in an altruistic sense, with a concern for others. One of the most subtle aspects of educational skill is the ability to foster in our pupils a need to relate to other human beings in this way.

In this connection we need to reflect on one very important aspect of the extremely complex process of education. In education two things are in sharp contrast: affirmation and negation. We are always trying to affirm something or to negate, to overcome something. The wisdom of our educational approach depends on the interrelationship between these two things. When affirmation predominates, creative work and mutual trust reign. Teachers and parents breathe easily, and the children being educated obey their educators. When our relationships with children consist mostly of negation, as we strive to overcome their vices, school life becomes a burden, and it is unbearably hard for teachers and parents.

Less flowery talk about love for humanity, and more concrete deeds and heartfelt participation in life, in the creation of joy—this should be the rule in moral education. It is very dangerous when good deeds are done for show, when a child helps a friend in order to win approval and praise.

The ideal of education is when the gift of our inner resources to others is stored in the heart as something precious and untouchable. The need to relate to others is one of the most private of feelings. Tolstoy considered even feelings of patriotism to be of this nature.

In childhood an exceptionally important role is played by self-education, self-discovery, the development of resilience, and of an ability to make demands of oneself and exercise self-control. The spirit and psyche are inseparable from the body, and strength of spirit is manifested in an ability to harness our physical energy, in an ability to combine physical resilience with subtle and tender feelings. I have always been astonished that children's physical education, in both theory and practice, is divorced from the spiritual and psychological development of the personality. This separation is unacceptable. Physical effort must always incorporate the spiritual and psychological realm, and awaken an awareness of the relationship between the personality and our strength of spirit. Only then will people acquire the ability to educate themselves.

I would like to emphasise once again the importance of developing spiritual and psychological resilience in the early years. If you miss the early years you miss everything. It is completely unacceptable to encourage grade one students to think that they are still little, that they are not yet strong enough and things are too hard for them. Children do not want to think and feel that they are weak, defenceless and small. That they are small and need to be defended by you, that they must be protected from misfortune and danger, should be thought but not expressed. In children's hearts and minds you should implant the thought: 'I am strong and courageous. I do not need defending; I should defend others. The world is full of creatures who are much weaker than me, and I should defend them.'



Stories for Children

Why is the water in the well warm?

The tents at a children's camp were pitched under the spreading branches of an oak tree. In each tent were five boys.

In one of the tents the boys agreed that at midnight one of them would bring cold water from a nearby well. The well was in a dark ravine in the middle of the forest. It was frightening to walk through the forest at night, and even more frightening to climb down into the ravine, but the boys told each other they were not afraid of anything. Quietly, so as not to wake the others, they got up one at a time and went to get water.

Today was Andryusha's turn. When the sun set, he looked anxiously at the dark forest, and felt he did not have the courage to go down into the ravine in the middle of the night. Secretly, so the other boys would not see him, he took the bucket, ran for the water, and hid it in the bushes behind the tent.

At midnight he took the bucket from behind the bushes and put it on a little table in front of the tent.

It was a hot night, and everyone would be thirsty. Whoever woke up first would go straight to get a cup of water.

Andryusha could not sleep. He felt anxious. Would anyone notice that he had brought the water in the evening and not during the night?

In the morning, Kolya, Andryusha's friend, asked:

'Why is the water from the well warm?'

He asked and looked Andryusha straight in the eye. All the boys were looking at him.

'Yes,' he replied. 'The water in the well was warm.'

Andryusha could not look his friends in the eye.

Honey in his pocket

Dima, Vasya and Yura were getting ready for a walk in the forest. Their mothers gave them a pie each. The friends wrapped their pies in paper and put them in their pockets.

Yura's mother also gave him a little jar of honey. She said to her son:

'Don't tell the other boys you have honey. Find a place in the forest to sit and eat it by yourself.'

Yura put the little jar of honey in his pocket. The friends walked into the forest and finally found a clearing where they could sit and rest. They were hungry and took out their pies and ate them.

Suddenly a bee flew up to Yura, settled on his trousers and tried to crawl into

his pocket. Then a second bee came, and a third. Many bees came flying and they all tried to crawl into Yura's pocket.

Dima and Vasya were amazed:

'What have you got there?'

The bees just kept on coming.

Yura took the jar of honey from his pocket and threw it into the grass. It was soon covered in bees.

Yura lowered his head, and Vasya and Dima laughed:

'So that's what you were hiding!...'

Even the flowers blushed with shame

Mum went to work early. She gave instructions to her daughter:

'I will be in the field all day. You clean the house, wash your sheets, cook supper and water the flowers.'

The girl cleaned the house, washed her sheets and cooked supper, but did not water the flowers. Several times during the day she walked past the white chrysanthemums and thought, 'I need to water the flowers.' But as soon as she remembered them a little voice seemed to say to her, 'It won't matter if you don't water them for one day.' This was the voice of dishonesty, a feeble little creature, who had appeared from nowhere, and settled in a dark little corner of the little girl's soul.

In the evening, mum came home from the field. She saw that the house had been cleaned, the sheets washed and dried, and supper cooked. She asked:

'Did you water the flowers?'

'I watered them,' said the little girl, and lowered her eyes.

The feeble little creature who had settled in a dark corner of the child's soul jumped for joy.

'I watered them,' repeated the little girl, as quiet as could be, and looked at the chrysanthemums. She looked and was amazed: the white flowers now had a tinge of purple. They were blushing with shame.

'Mum, forgive me,' said the girl. 'I told you a lie. I didn't water the flowers. I will never lie to you again.'

The purple tinge on the flowers faded, and they became white again. The feeble little creature, hiding in a dark corner of the girl's soul, disappeared, and the dark corner became bright.

Mum hugged her daughter and gave her a kiss.