

Sukhomlinsky News

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Know the inner world of each student.

This month I am continuing to translate the first chapter from Sukhomlinsky's 1969 book Pavlysh Secondary School. In last month's extract, Sukhomlinsky wrote about the need to have faith in every student. This is easier said than done, and in this month's extract Sukhomlinsky writes about how he did this in practice, especially in the case of the most difficult students.

Sukhomlinsky suggests that the key is to really get to know each student, not just in class, but in situations where the student is able to demonstrate their intrinsic or innate qualities. We also need to get to know their families, so as to understand the background to the behaviours that we see at school.

I have also included in this newsletter three of Sukhomlinsky's little stories for children.

Best wishes,

Alan Cockerill

Understanding our students

This month we are continuing to present our translation of the first chapter in Sukhomlinsky's *Pavlysh Secondary School*. In the extract presented here, Sukhomlinsky talks about the need to understand our students and their backgrounds, in order to educate them as human beings. He emphasises the need to 'know the inner world of each student'.

Individual, friendly, open, heartfelt conversation is the main method in a principal's work with teachers. Education, after all, is a most subtle spiritual activity. I would compare the influence of an educator upon a student with the influence of music. "To try and influence someone's spiritual life through force," wrote Tolstoy, "is like trying to catch the rays of the sun. No matter what you cover them with, they always come out on top." I can remember thousands of conversations with teachers. Some gave me joy, and some bitter disappointment. Sometimes I had to talk for one, two or three hours about a single word, even a smile or an angry glance. Once, while checking the homework in year 5, the literature teacher called on a weak student. She did not like the sentence he had composed. Without saying a word, she dismissed him with a wave of her hand, and the boy cried all evening... It was necessary to have a long conversation to show the teacher her mistake, to explain that her gesture was an expression of her educational views—indifference to the child, a lack of faith that he could achieve anything worthwhile, acceptance of the idea that a bad student will always be a bad student.

[continued on next page]

From Pavlysh Secondary School [cont.]

Only when I have succeeded in convincing a teacher, and he begins to express his conviction in his practical actions (this is of course not achieved in a single conversation, and not by conversation alone), only then do I consider that I have fulfilled my mission as a principal. I have never written a single direction relating to the process of education. In a principal's work that is a complete waste of time. Neither have I ever taken up a complicated difference of opinion with a teacher at a staff meeting.

To know the inner world of each student as deeply as possible—that is the first commandment for both teacher and principal. A new student arrives at the school. I study him closely, I seek some means of heartfelt communication with him, which might motivate his active participation, the vibrant expression of his wishes and interests. The child's behaviour must tell me what I need to know about him—that is one of the principles of educational management of a group of children. In our school we have dozens of educational and hobby groups, and in each of them bubbles the multifaceted spiritual life of the students. The principal is an active participant in these groups, and first and foremost a friend and comrade to the students. The path to the heart of a child is through friendship, through common interests, passions, feelings and experiences. I could narrate at least ten instances when the heart of the seemingly most unapproachable, closed child opened up, simply because he and I shared a common joy, were enthused by the same activity, the same book, game or journey.

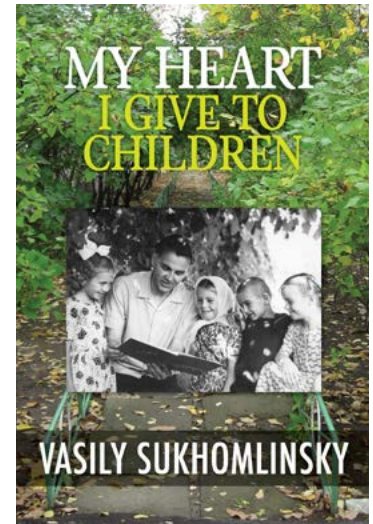
I remember how an obstinate, unsettled boy, very embittered about something, entered our school in year 5. He did everything in defiance of his teachers. I advised the staff: we need to find some com-

mon interest with the boy, and then his heart will open up to us, and we will learn what we need to learn about him. We began to seek his interests. The whole staff was searching. I was convinced that somewhere we would find common ground with this obstinate year five student: in the creative writing circle, in the nature study circle, in the young explorers club (we met from time to time in our "Northern Robinson"), in the green laboratory, in the young electricians' circle, the young mechanics, the young biochemists or the animal husbandry group.

I found common ground with him twice: the first time in the nature study group, the second time in science fiction club (we have one of those too). For a long time we had been unable to acclimatize to our locality that noble southern plant: the peach tree. Finally we attempted to graft some buds of that warmth loving tree to the frost-hardy apricot. Spring came. Each day the most impatient amongst us ran to the orchard to see if any of the buds had opened. I went to the orchard early in the morning. And then one day I saw a boy squatting near an apricot tree. It seemed to me that he was holding his breath, afraid of harming the shining little green shoot, which had just appeared from one of the buds on this sunny morning. I was also so excited about this first shoot, that at first I did not think about who it was who had come into the orchard before me. Then I raised my head to share my joy with this other person. At that moment he also raised his head, evidently also wishing to share his joy with me. Our eyes met, and it was him, Volodya N. We put our arms over each other's shoulders, and from that time became friends. Then was revealed to me not only the heart of this intelligent, wonderfully sensitive, sincere child, but also the terrible experience that had already crip-

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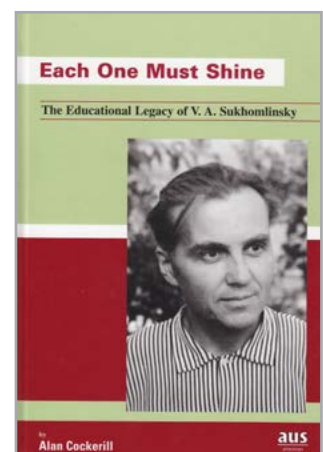
Tales from Pavlysh
a World of Beauty



Vasily Sukhomlinsky

Translated by Alan Cockerill. Illustrated by Students from Ukraine and Belarus.

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pled his soul, and sown mistrust of other human beings...

I will not tell of that now. I have mentioned this encounter, this genuine human encounter with Volodya only in order to reinforce the principle: approach a child as one human being to another, find in his heart that corner which responds to your call, and it will be easier for you to overcome the obstacles that impede education. I always tried to convince teachers that if you only see a student from behind your classroom desk, if he only comes to you when you summon him, if his whole conversation with you is just answering your questions, no knowledge of psychology will help you. You need to meet the student as a friend, a like-minded person, to experience with him the joy of victory and the disappointment of loss.

Just as, in order to prevent and cure disease, a doctor needs to know in detail what can strengthen and what weakens the organism, so the main educator in a school, the principal, needs to study and analyse the conditions in which a child's life unfolds during the years preceding his enrolment at school. In this respect I was especially interested in the most difficult children. (If they do not change for the better at school, then the well-behaved children will change for the worse, learning bad attitudes and habits from the difficult children.) Each week I spend time in the families of these difficult children, seeking out the sources from whence have originated the formation of their values. I chat with the parents, neighbours and teachers who have already been involved in the upbringing of the children. Each difficult child is revealed to the staff as a unique world of thoughts, feelings and wishes, the harmony of which has been distorted by callous, egotistical people.

Eleven year old Kolya S. was one who came to our school. The boy struck us all with his unsociable

nature and his bitterness. In a teacher's sincere kindness and affection he saw some kind of trickery and subterfuge. He sought to isolate himself, avoided other students and did not want to work. I went to the farmstead where Kolya's parents lived and learnt some astonishing things. It turned out that the boy had grown up in a remote little world, isolated from other people, in which an atmosphere of dishonesty, deceit and crime reigned. The moral concepts that a previous teacher had tried to impart to her students in a little one-teacher school where Kolya had studied, had been addressed to some abstract student, and had been viewed by the children just as material to be memorised. The child was inquisitive, curious, and often asked, in the teacher's words, "strange" questions: "Why does uncle Fedor say at the brigade meeting that they need to look after collective farm property, but then he brings home a whole load of maize from the field? Why has uncle Grisha (who during the occupation served in the Fascist police force, and now works as a forester) built two houses for himself, while aunty Galya, whose husband died at the front, cannot manage to get a pension? Why does the collective farm manager drive the car to the market in town every Sunday with his wife, but he wouldn't let grandpa Anton use the car to go to the hospital when he got sick, and grandpa Anton died?"

The teacher brushed aside these questions, but the child's heart was in confusion. On the one hand there were stories in books, saying what a person should be like. On the other hand there was his father's advice: without trickery you can't survive, work loves a fool and the fool praises work, and so on, evil about which people always spoke under their breath. The child lost faith in everything bright, clean and fair. He suspected that the heroic images of Pavlik Morozov and Zoya Kosmodemianskaya were just fairy tales, like the

tales about beautiful princesses, the elixir of life and epic heroes. Kolya became embittered, disobedient and irritable. He was rude to his teacher and his mother. I travelled to the farmstead two more times, became acquainted with the people and the life of its little working collective, tried to understand the interests of the people surrounding the boy. The teaching staff devoted more than one conversation to Kolya's spiritual life. We came to the unanimous conclusion, that there are still remote corners of our country in which children are surrounded by the stifling atmosphere of petty smallholders' interests, the thirst for profit, acquisitiveness. If in such circumstances the educational work in schools is poorly arranged, a sensitive, impressionable child, thirsting for light, goodness and justice, but not finding support, experiences confused emotions. The little person does not want to accept injustice, he protests, but this protest is far from a conscious juxtaposition of good and evil. The child becomes bitter towards everyone and everything. The education of such a student is a very complex and difficult process. He has to be convinced that goodness, truth and beauty will triumph in our society, that a human being is not just a speck of dust in the whirlwind of fate, but an active defender of goodness, truth and beauty. Such conversations about the education of difficult children, about the sources of their morality, develop in us, as teachers, sensitivity, attentiveness, educational perception and observational skill.





Stories for Children

All good people are one family

Grade two were having a drawing lesson. The children were drawing a swallow.

Suddenly someone knocked at the door. The teacher opened the door and saw a woman who had been crying. It was the mother of little blonde-haired, blue-eyed Natasha.

'Please let Natasha come home,' the mother asked the teacher. 'Her grandma has died.' The teacher returned to his desk and quietly said, 'Children there has been a great misfortune. Natasha's grandma has died.'

Natasha turned pale. Her eyes filled with tears. She lay her head on the desk and cried quietly.

'Natasha, you can go home. Your mother has come for you.'

While the girl gathered her things to go home, the teacher said, 'We will not have any lessons today either. Our family has suffered a great misfortune.'

'Isn't it just Natasha's family?' asked Kolya. 'No, it is our human family,' explained the teacher. 'All good people are one family. And if someone in our family has died that is a loss for all of us.'

Joy and Sorrow

Across a stream there was a bridge. Actually it was not so much a bridge as a wooden pathway, a single plank in width. Only one person could cross it at a time, and it was quite impossible for two people to pass each other.

One day a man in a white shirt started to cross the wooden pathway from one side of the river, singing merrily.

From the other side a man in a black shirt began to cross, his head hanging sadly, deep

in thought.

The two travellers met in the middle of the bridge. The man in the black shirt said, 'Let me through, I am in a great hurry. Go back to the shore and cross after me.'

'Where are you going in such a hurry?' asked the man in the white shirt.

'I have to get home. My son has died.'

'I'm also in a hurry,' said the man in the white shirt.

'Where are you going?'

'I'm also going home. My wife has given birth to a son.'

The two men stood silently facing each other, looking into each other's eyes. Then the man in the white shirt said, 'You need to get home sooner.'

The man in the white shirt turned and went back, giving way to the man in the black shirt, because joy must always give way to sorrow.

Who will build ovens?

Autumn came. It was cold in the hut and it was necessary to light a fire in the large brick oven. Tarasik's mother set a fire, but the wood would not burn.

'We need to get the oven fixed,' said his mother. 'I'll go and see Grandpa Trofim.'

Grandpa Trofim was the only man in the village who could build and maintain ovens. Tarasik looked at his great big beard with respect and fear. The old man tapped the oven wall with the handle of his trowel and said, 'This oven will not give any heat no matter how much you try to fix it. You need to build a new one.'

Tarasik and his mother took all the bricks from the oven outside, leaving an empty spot.

Grandpa Trofim began to build a new oven, and Tarasik helped him.

'Grandpa, is it true that you are the only person in our village who knows how to build an oven?'

'That's true, my boy,' said Grandpa Trofim.

'What will happen when you die?'

'When I die, there will be no-one to lay bricks for a new oven.'

Tarasik sat sorrowfully for a long time. Then he went up to Grandpa Trofim and said,

'Grandpa, please teach me how to build an oven...'