

# Sukhomlinsky News

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## What makes a good teacher?

*Sukhomlinsky took a fairly unconventional approach to finding new teachers for his school. Rather than waiting for trained applicants to apply for a position, he occasionally head hunted people from other professions, who he thought ought to be teachers. He had very high expectations of his staff, and created a school ethos that supported the highest standards. I hope you enjoy this month's extract from Pavlysh Secondary School.*

*Once again I have included three of Sukhomlinsky's little stories for children.*

*Best wishes,*

*Alan Cockerill*

## The roles of principal and staff

**In this month's extract from Pavlysh Secondary School, Sukhomlinsky reflects on the role of the principal and the qualities of a good teacher.**

I try to ensure that my main focus, as principal, is on educational matters, rather than on business matters. Every day, early in the morning, before classes start, I spend ten or fifteen minutes in conversation with our bursar, and do not devote any further attention to such matters for the rest of the day. All business matters that I feel concerned about are recorded in a notebook (for the next meeting, or for discussion with teachers). A significant number of business matters are decided in accordance with our educational principles, with involvement from the whole school community, both teachers and students, such decisions being subordinated to our educational goals.

Management of the educational process, participation in the life of student groups, entering into children's spiritual worlds: all of these require the principal's close attention. Educational ideas have to be incarnated in thousands of varied activities, always keeping in mind the development of the school community. In the life of a school there are thousands of educational phenomena, and the more you think about each one of them, about the lives of individual students, and about their actions, the more practical problems arise which need to be addressed by the whole school community.

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## From Pavlysh Secondary School [cont.]

Logical analysis of the of the education process is best conducted at the end of the working day, more often than not in conversation with one of the teachers or parents, with the director of studies, or with students. Here are some of the issues that are addressed in such conversations or reflections:

How do we draw children into involvement with the school community? What inner, spiritual connections—thoughts, feelings, experiences—can form a healthy basis for strengthening the school community and children's friendships with each other? How can we ensure that personal happiness, the personal joys of each child, are harmonized with the interests of the community and of society? Why do some children develop individualistic habits, and how can we prevent this? What has been done, and is being done so that children and their teachers may share common thoughts, interests and aspirations? By what means are the spiritual riches developed by humanity being passed on to the children? How can we educate honesty, honour and integrity, so that children stand up to evil, injustice and deceit? How can we ensure that every child, from a young age, feels their indebtedness to their homeland, and to previous generations, for the material and spiritual benefits they enjoy, for their happy childhood? How do we instil the urge to work as an intrinsic motivation? How do we bring moral, intellectual, vocational, physical and aesthetic development into harmony? How do we ensure that morality informs every aspect of our students' lives? Does each student find happiness and personal satisfaction in what they do and what they give back to society? Is there a harmony between

what a young person receives from older generations and what they give back to society, or what they are preparing to do in the future? What do those children live for, who are of special interest and concern to us as teachers? How rich is the intellectual life of our school community? Are teachers doing everything they can to develop students' intellectual interests? What books are our students reading? What issues of science and technology are exciting our senior students? How is knowledge being applied in practice? Are students' individual needs and interests being satisfied? How are our school graduates performing in the workplace?

Reflection on these questions forms an important basis for practical planning to decide what to do tomorrow, in a month or in a year's time, and to set goals for our school community. Each of the issues listed above from time to time becomes a subject for discussion amongst our school staff. We try to ensure that all our staff, from the principal to the groundsman, is involved in implementing educational ideals, and that our community lives by these ideals.

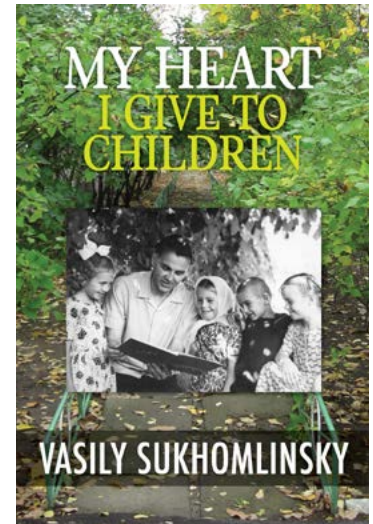
### Our teachers and educators

What makes a good teacher? First and foremost a teacher must be a person who loves children, who finds joy in their company, who believes that every child can become a good person, who knows how to make friends with children, who takes children's joys and sorrows to heart, who knows a child's soul, and who never forgets that they were once a child themselves.

Secondly, a good teacher is a person who has a thorough knowledge of the discipline upon which the subject they teach is based, who is in love with their

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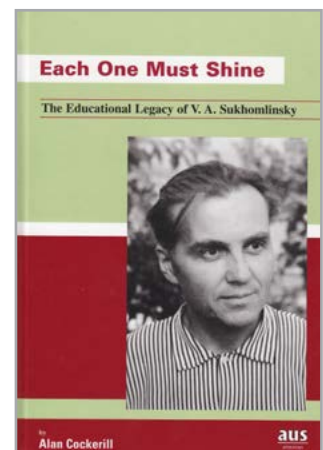
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subject, and who knows its horizons, keeping abreast of new discoveries, research and achievements. A school can take great pride in those teachers who, in addition to the above, are enthused by the problems that their discipline is grappling with, and is capable of independent research. Good teachers know many times more than is required by the secondary school program. For them a school subject is just the ABC of their discipline. Deep knowledge, broad horizons, interest in research—all of these things are necessary for a teacher in order to be able to reveal to students the attractive power of knowledge, of the discipline, of scholarship, of learning. Students should see in their teachers intelligent, knowledgeable, thinking people, in love with learning. The deeper teachers' knowledge is, the wider their horizons, and the more erudite they are, the more they are not only teachers, but educators. For primary school teachers it is important to have not only a good general education, but also a special interest in a particular branch of knowledge.

Thirdly, a good teacher is a person with a good grasp of psychology and pedagogy, understanding and feeling that they cannot work with children without knowledge of educational disciplines.

Fourthly, a good teacher should have an excellent mastery of some work skill or other, and be a master in their field. It is very important for a school to have a fine orchardist, a person who loves working with machinery, a master of electronics, a joiner, and a horticulturalist who loves digging in the school's experimental plot. In a good school every teacher has some work passion.

Where are people with such multi-faceted development to be found? There are good people all around us, we just need to

be skilled at seeking them out. I always sought the right to appoint teachers independently, and consider a school to be unthinkable without that right.

Without the moral support of all the teachers for my work as principal I would not stay in the school for a single day. At the beginning of each school year we meet as a staff to determine the duties and work load of each teacher, and as a staff we determine who will carry out the roles of principal, director of studies, senior pioneer leader and class teachers. If the staff comes to the conclusion that a teacher is not coping with their duties, that teacher leaves the school. These matters are decided with the participation of parents who are members of the school council. Their opinions are very important.

Good teachers do not always arrive at a school with all the qualities we have listed. Often it is necessary to select a person who has just the prerequisites to develop the rounded qualities outlined above. Then we begin meticulous work with that person, and they become a good teacher mainly because of the milieu of creative work established by our staff and students.

Before formally appointing a new teacher through the department of national education, I try to get to know them as well as possible as a human being, to gain an understanding of their interests, outlook and spiritual life. The best means for doing this is relaxed and friendly conversations. We find topics that excite us and express our views and convictions. During this process it always becomes clear what a person lives for, and what has led them to the idea of devoting their life to educational work. I place the highest value on teachers who combine a love for children with creative interest in scholarship and research.

Quite often the search for a future teacher begins with the fact that a person who has not yet undertaken teacher training shows the potential to be a talented educator.

One of the enterprises in our district employed a demobilized soldier named Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Filippov, an electrician by trade, who had completed secondary education. I was very interested to learn that this young worker had a whole workshop at home, and that during evenings and weekends young people—students from our school and from a neighbouring school—came to his workshop and constructed working models and electrical equipment with him.

I got to know Aleksandr Aleksandrovich, and became convinced that he would make a good teacher. I advised him to undertake external studies in education. Over the following year, Aleksandr Aleksandrovich got to know our school, and visited the lessons of experienced teachers. We helped him with his external studies, and he helped the school with extra-curricular activities. Students with an interest in technical innovation were drawn to him. We found a room for extra-curricular work in technology, and the children referred to it with pride as their automation and telemechanics laboratory.

That was two years before A.A. Filippov was officially appointed as our physics teacher. When he was appointed, the young teacher (still studying externally as a third year student) presented me with a demand: apart from the physics laboratory (which we did have, though it was inadequately equipped), we needed to create an electronics laboratory, and, in future, a small technical workshop. I was very happy to agree, as I knew that I would be able to create this together with the young teacher.



## Stories for Children

### As you sow, so shall you reap

A male pigeon and a female pigeon flew to our house. They settled on the roof and cooed. They looked at me as if they were asking for something. I climbed into our attic and opened a little window. The pigeons flew into it. Later I brought them some grain. They pecked at it and then flew back through the window into our attic.

The next morning I again fed the pigeons and gave them a container with some water to drink. After that I sometimes fed them, and sometimes forgot. There were more days when I forgot to feed the pigeons. They sat on our balcony and looked at me, but I was always in a hurry to get somewhere. Once I was walking, and a pigeon flew above my head, as if he wanted to settle on my shoulder. I thought he was just playing, and did not realise he was hungry.

One morning I saw that the pigeons were in my neighbours' yard, and little Olya was feeding them. Her father was building a little house on a post, a dovecote.

It pained me. I called and called to the pigeons, but they did not come to me anymore. They settled in the dovecote. Olya feeds them every day, morning and evening. They love the little girl, settling on her shoulder and letting her hold them in her hands.

The proverb says, 'As you sow, so shall you reap.' I sowed indifference, and I reaped neglect. Birds do not love those who are indifferent to them.

### Kolya, Vitya and the puppy

On the way home from school Kolya and Vitya found a puppy. It was sitting in a ditch and whining pitifully.

Who should keep the puppy? The boys thought for a long time, and then made a decision. First the puppy would live for three

days with Vitya, then for three days with Kolya, then three days with Vitya and so on... After a month the boys would take the puppy out into the middle of a field and walk in opposite directions. Whoever the puppy ran after would be its master.

Kolya build a beautiful kennel for the puppy. Three times a day his mother took the puppy some soup and a rissole.

Vitya did not have a kennel, and did not have any soup or rissoles. He put a mat next to his bed and the puppy slept on it. Sometimes at night the puppy wanted to go outside to do some doggy business. He would quietly touch Vitya's blanket with his paw, and Vitya would wake up and let him out. The puppy ate crusts of bread soaked in hot water.

After a month had passed, the boys took the puppy and walked far out into the middle of a field. They climbed an ancient burial mound, put the puppy on the ground, and ran in opposite directions.

The puppy ran after Vitya.

### The song of the Big Grey Stone

Ivan and Taras always left school together, but only stayed together until they reached the Big Grey Stone, which had been lying next to the path for longer than anyone could remember.

Once they reached the Big Grey Stone, Ivan went his way to Poplar Street, and Taras went his way to Cherry Tree Street.

It took about ten minutes to walk from school to the Big Grey Stone, just long enough to tell a story. The boys took it in turns to tell stories. Ivan would tell a story one day, and Taras the next.

One day, something very unusual happened. At the fifth lesson of the day Ivan received a failing mark, and in the sixth lesson Taras received a failing mark. Both boys had failing marks written in their homework diaries, and comments from the teachers to the parents asking them to give the matter their attention. The friends left school sad and depressed. Today it was Taras's turn to tell a story, but he was silent.

They reached the Big Grey Stone.

'Let's go to your place together,' said Ivan.

'And then we can go to your place,' said Taras.

And the boys set off together.