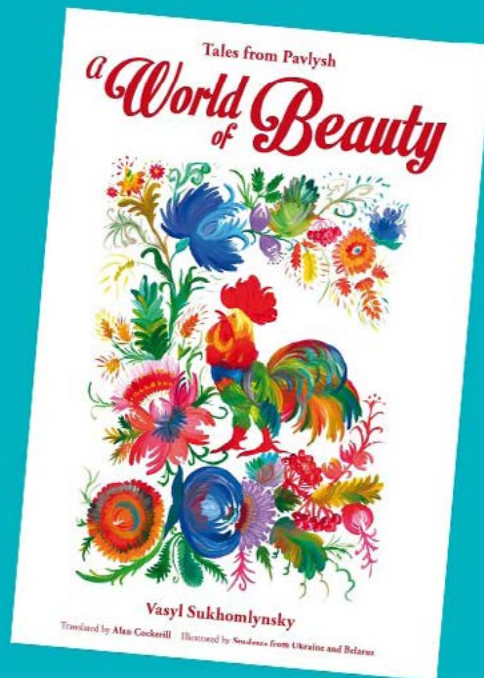
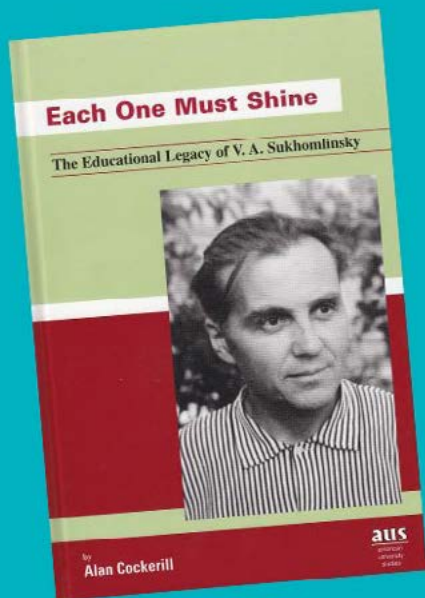


Sukhomlinsky News

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A new phase of development

*We are embarking on a new strategy for publishing translations of Sukhomlinsky's work, relying on print on demand services, rather than expensive offset printing, and selling through major online outlets such as Amazon, rather than maintaining our own online bookstore. We believe this is a more sustainable strategy, and one that will reach more people in the long run. This means we will be closing Holistic Education Books at the end of this year, on 24 December. In this issue of our newsletter we are continuing our translation of Sukhomlinsky's **One Hundred Pieces of Advice for Teachers**. This month's extract is the eighth chapter, and looks at how we embed essential learning in the primary school. We have also translated some of Sukhomlinsky's miniature stories for children, and have cited an extract from **My Heart I Give to Children**.*

*Best wishes,
Alan Cockerill*

Holistic Education Books Closing Down Sale

We are closing the 'Holistic Education Books' online bookstore, hosted for the past couple of years by Shopify. The store was opened in 2013 to sell *Tales from Pavlysh: A World of Beauty* and *Each One Must Shine: The educational legacy of V.A. Sukhomlinsky*. Both of these books are now available on Amazon and through other online retailers, and all future publications will be made available through these channels on a print-on-demand basis, so it is no longer necessary for us to maintain our own bookstore.

The advantage in buying *A World of Beauty* or *Each One Must Shine* from Holistic Education Books is that the editions sold by us are of a slightly higher quality, being printed by quality offset printers rather than through Amazon's print-on-demand service. For this reason we are holding a closing down sale to give subscribers to this newsletter and other patrons of our shop one last chance to purchase these limited editions online. We will be selling ***A World of Beauty*** at the reduced price of AUS \$9.95 (English language version only). With Christmas approaching, this may be a suitable present for children you know. The Peter Lang edition of ***Each One Must Shine*** is being reduced to AUS \$19.95, well below the publisher's current list price of US\$59.95. All pdf publications are being reduced to AUS\$4.95. To take advantage of these offers, which will expire on 24 December, please go to: <https://holistic-education-books.com/>.

Alan Cockerill
Brisbane, Australia

Embedding essential learning

The eighth chapter in Sukhomlinsky's collection of advice for young teachers addresses the issue of how essential learning is embedded in long-term memory.

8. Committing elementary knowledge to long-term memory

Thirty years of working in schools has led me to uncover an important secret, an educational principle. The students who fall behind in middle and senior school are those who in primary school did not commit to long term memory those elementary truths that form a basis for all knowledge. Imagine that the foundation for a tall building is laid on very unstable concrete. The mortar keeps crumbling and stones keep falling out. People continually have to repair what was not done properly in the first place, and live in constant fear of the building collapsing. This is the situation that many language and mathematics teachers find themselves in when teaching grades four to ten. They are trying to construct the building, but the foundation is crumbling.

Teachers in primary schools! Your most important task is to build a strong foundation for knowledge: so strong, that the teachers working after you do not need to think about that foundation. If you are commencing work with grade one, study the grade four program, mainly in language and mathematics, and have a look also at the grade five program in mathematics. In your class reader, compare the reading material on history, science and geography with the grade four programs in these subjects. Think about what a student needs to learn in grade three in order to study successfully in grades four and five.

Most importantly, think about elementary literacy. In our language there are roughly 2,000–2,500 spelling words that provide a framework for knowledge and literacy. Experience shows that if children firmly commit these words to long term memory, they will become literate adults. But that is not all. If literacy is acquired in primary school, it becomes an instrument for acquiring knowledge in the middle and senior classes.

When teaching children in the primary school I always had this list of important spelling words in mind. That list in itself provides a program for elementary literacy. I distributed those two and a half thousand words in such a way that we studied three words on each school

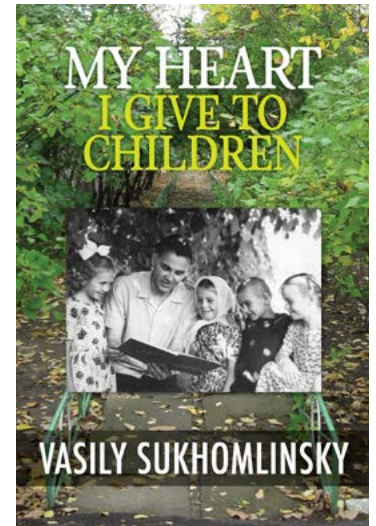
day. The children recorded them in their exercise books and memorised them. This work takes a few minutes each day. Young children's memories are very sharp and receptive, and if you manage those memories well and do not overload them, they will become your best helpers. What a student memorises during the early years is never forgotten. The 'technique for managing memory' in this case consists of the following. At the beginning of the working day (before the first lesson) I write the three words for the day on the board, for example: *steppe, warmth, rustle*. As soon as they enter the classroom, the children write these three words in their spelling dictionaries, which they maintain for three years. They think about these words, and next to them write several words with the same root. This only takes three or four minutes, and the students gradually get used to this routine.

The work then takes on some of the characteristics of a game, incorporating elements of self-education and self-assessment. 'On the way home,' I say to the children, 'Remember the three words we wrote this morning, and how they are spelt. Recall the outline of these words. In the morning when you wake up, the first thing I want you to do is remember the spelling of these words and write them in your exercise book.' (The exercise book in question is a general exercise book that amounts to a second copy of their spelling dictionary.) There is no student who will not join in this game if you begin it in grade one, if teachers believe in its success, if they love children, and if they are always interested in everything the children do. During lessons at school a great variety of activities are conducted to ensure that the spelling words that have already been memorised are revised and put to use. One of the most important activities I conduct is to memorise 400 turns of phrase, which I am convinced provide a framework for oral language. During the primary years special attention is given to those turns of phrase that are commonly misused. I would like to emphasise once more that it is very important to introduce an element of play into children's studies.

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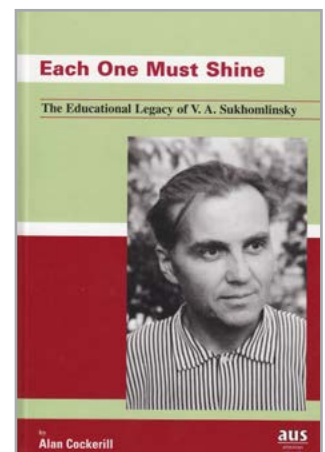
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I have a list of 600 'fairy-tale' words that are often used in children's fairy tales. During the four years of primary schooling the children and I **draw** several dozen fairy-tales. The children write captions to these illustrations, using the 600 words. This has proved to be a very successful way of reinforcing basic spelling words.

When studying mathematics in the primary school, children memorise those operations that, due to their frequent repetition, may be considered mathematical generalizations. They are so habitual that it is meaningless to waste effort thinking about them each time they are required. I am speaking not only

of the multiplication tables, but also of the most common instances of addition, subtraction, division and multiplication involving numbers up to one thousand. Children also memorise the most common measurements and conversions of measurements. I work on the principle that in the middle and upper grades students' intellects should not be occupied with basic operations, but should be free to engage in creative work.

Of course all our work is based on conscious mastery of material, but at the same time we should recognise that it is not possible to explain everything. I aim for a combination of

voluntary and involuntary attention and memorisation.

[Translator's note: By 'involuntary' attention and memorisation Sukhomlinsky is referring to that which arises through spontaneous interest and engagement. He has commented elsewhere (see below) that when working with children in the early years, it is essential to engage their interest spontaneously through engaging content, as young children are for the most part incapable of forcing themselves to pay attention.]

What does Sukhomlinsky mean by 'involuntary attention'?

From My Heart I Give to Children (pp 141-143)

'You need to teach in such a way that children are not thinking about the goals—that is what lightens intellectual work. All this is not as simple as it may first seem. We are talking about a particular stage in the intellectual development of children, about a stage that Professor VL Ryzhov calls 'the infancy of the human nervous system'. During this developmental stage—during the early years, and especially during the first year of school—children simply do not have the ability to concentrate. The teacher must engage the children's attention by awakening what in psychology is called involuntary attention.

The attention of a little child is a fickle creature. To me it seems like a timid little bird that flies further away from its nest as soon as you try to get close to it. If you do manage at last to catch the little bird, you can only keep it by holding it in your hands or putting it in a cage. Do not expect any songs from the bird if it feels itself to be a prisoner. It is the same with the attention of a little child: if you hold it captive like an imprisoned bird, it will be of little help to you.

There are some teachers who are proud of the fact that they can create an 'environment of constant intellectual exertion' during their lessons. More often than not this is achieved through external factors that act as a bridle, restraining the attention of the child: frequent reminders ('listen carefully'); rapid rotations from one form of work to another; the prospect of knowledge being checked immediately after an explanation is given (more precisely, the threat of receiving a failing grade if you do not listen to what I am saying); the requirement to carry out some form of practical work as soon as a theoretical proposition has been explained.

All these methods create an initial appearance of active intellectual work: the work activities rotate like a kaleidoscope; the children, concentrating, listen to the teacher's every word; and there is a tense silence in the classroom. But what is the cost of achieving this, and what results does it lead to? Constant straining to be attentive and not to miss anything (and students at this age cannot force themselves to be attentive) overstrains and exhausts the nervous system. Not to lose a single minute during a lesson, not to go for one moment without active intellectual work—what could be more stupid in the subtle business of educating a human being? Such a direction in a teacher's work means, in effect, to squeeze everything out of children that they can give. After such 'effective' lessons children go home tired. They are easily irritated and upset. They need to have a really good rest, but they still have homework to do and one look at that schoolbag with its textbooks and exercise books is enough to make children feel sick.

It is no accident that there are many discipline problems in schools that lead to conflicts, with students being rude to the teacher and to each other and cheekily answering back when they are reprimanded. During the lesson children's nerves are stretched to the limit, and the teachers themselves are not electronic machines. Just try holding the attention of a class for the duration of a lesson with an emphasis on 'high effectiveness' and with work activities rotating like a kaleidoscope. It is no accident that children often come home from lessons gloomy, not wanting to talk, indifferent to everything, or sometimes just the opposite—abnormally irritable.

No, we should not seek children's attentiveness, concentration and intellectual activity at such a cost. Student's intellectual strength and nervous energy, especially at a young age, is not a bottomless well from which one can draw endlessly. We must take from that well with wisdom, and very circumspectly, and most importantly we must constantly replenish the child's sources of nervous energy. The sources of this replenishment are to be found in observation of the objects and phenomena of the surrounding world, in life in the midst of nature, in reading (but in reading which is motivated by interest, by the desire to learn something, and not from a fear of being questioned), and in journeys to the source of living thought and language.'



Stories for Children

Good health to you, Grandpa!

Next to the school lives an old man named Grandpa Ivan. He has nobody: no family and no friends. He had two sons, but they died at the front. And his wife died not long ago.

Every day Grandpa Ivan comes to the school for water. 'The school well has very tasty water,' he tells his neighbours.

As soon as the old man approaches the well, children run up to him.

'Grandpa, let us help you draw the water,' they say.

The old man smiles. He hardly has time to rest by the well before his bucket is full of water.

'Good health to you, Grandpa,' twitter the children.

These words are like beautiful music to the old man. They make his heart warm and joyful.

Grandpa Ivan has come out of his house again and is sitting on a bench by the fence. He is sitting and listening. What is he listening for? A bell rings in the school yard. The old man picks up his bucket and goes for water. How he longs to hear those heartfelt words:

'Good health to you, Grandpa.'

A lily of the valley

Natasha from our class has been ill for six months. She has a serious illness: her legs lie motionless, as if they do not belong to her. Natasha is bedridden day and night.

We do not forget Natasha, and visit her every day. We have learnt to read well, and so has Natasha. We often draw pictures of a butterfly or a lark and take them to her. She loves butterflies and larks.

When spring arrives Natasha's bed is placed by the window. She looks at the grass and the leaves and says, 'I so want to walk on the grass.'

One day Natasha sees two big green leaves, like two ribbons, in the middle of the grass.

'Look,' she whispers, 'A lily of the valley!'

A lily of the valley really has grown in her garden. How did it end up here, in the middle of the grass?

Every day we go to see if the lily of the valley has flowered yet. When at last little white bells appear between the green leaves, Natasha is so pleased her cheeks

are rosy.

But then suddenly trouble comes. During the night there is a heavy downpour. Early in the morning, before sunrise, while Natasha still sleeps, we come to her garden and see that the lily of the valley is broken. What should we do? This will be a source of great sorrow for Natasha...

We take a spade into the forest, dig up a lily of the valley, and transplant it to the spot under Natasha's window.

When Natasha wakes, she asks her mother to open her window. We are already waiting for her. Natasha smiles and asks us, 'How is the lily of the valley?'

'It is flowering. You can see its little white bells.'

'And I was so worried... There was a thunderstorm last night, with strong winds, and I dreamt that the storm broke the lily of the valley.'

Borrowing a spade

A father sent his seven year old son to his neighbour, Grandpa Fedor.

'Misha, go and ask if we can borrow his spade for half a day. Ours has broken.'

The boy came to Grandpa Fedor and said, 'Give us your spade, Grandpa. My father asked if we can borrow it...'

But Grandpa kept doing what he was doing, as if he could not see or hear Misha. Misha might as well not have been there.

Misha asked again, 'Give us your spade, Grandpa. My father asked if we can borrow it...'

Grandpa still did not reply. The boy returned home empty-handed and asked, 'Dad, what's wrong with Grandpa Fedor?'

'Did you say hello to Grandpa and ask how he is?'

'No,' answered Misha.

'Go back to Grandpa, say hello, and ask if he is well. Then ask him to forgive you your ignorance. If he forgives you, then you can ask for the spade.'

Misha went back to Grandpa Fedor's house and said everything that his father had asked him to. Grandpa seemed so stern that Misha nearly cried when he asked for forgiveness.

Grandpa smiled, stroked Misha's head and gave him the spade. Then he said, 'Go over to the apple tree by the well and pick yourself an apple. Pick the best one you can find.'