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Vasyl Sukhomlynsky and the Phenomenon of Elementary School Teacher's "Creative Acme"

*Wasył Suchomliński i fenomen „twórczego akme”
nauczyciela w szkole podstawowej*

SUMMARY

The article attempts to examine the phenomenon of "creative acme" from the standpoint of the outstanding academic, educator Vasyl Sukhomlynsky. It indicates the phenomenology of the concept, features and specifics of the key concept from educator's conceptual positions and considerations, his reflections about the importance of creativity in education and upbringing of pupils. The main principles are outlined, which, according to Sukhomlynsky, reveal the creative potential of the teacher and determine the meaning of his or her professional success throughout the life, namely volitional efforts, proactive attitude, motivation to fulfill one's potential; creative orientation, development of creativity. Sukhomlynsky considered that creativity criteria include a teacher's capacity for innovativeness, improvisation and insight. According to the educator, they contribute to the development of emotions and inner language (language of experience), attention, imagination, creativity, self-confidence. These qualities are interdependent, as they develop and form not only in pupils, but also in the teacher, who is a carrier of creativity. Particular emphasis is placed on the technologies for the development of creative interaction which took place in the educational process of the Pavlysh School and were summarized in such works as *School of Joy, My Heart I Give to Children*, and which can be fully implemented in the content of the Concept of the New Ukrainian School. These are the development of creative playgrounds/laboratories, where, together with children, the teacher experiences a sense of inspiration, revelation, insight, comprehension, variation and improvisation, quest and errors. It is these technologies that develop students' interest in learning, "push" them towards creativity, and reveal "a new world" for them. Therefore, the task of the teacher is to develop this ability throughout life. This is the meaning of Sukhomlynsky's "creative acme" as a carrier of innovativeness and mentor for teachers whose experience is unsurpassed for future generations.

Keywords: teacher's personality; creative acme; innovativeness; improvisation; teaching and educational process of the Pavlysh School

RELEVANCE OF THE TOPIC

Teacher's pedagogical activity is characterized by different levels of creativity, novelty elements and innovativeness. It can be confirmed with the results of the professional acme of such masters as: S. Amonashvili, E. Ilyin, S. Lysenkov, A. Makarenko, V. Sukhomlynsky, V. Shatalov and others. What is their phenomenon all about? This article addresses the phenomenology of the concept and illustrates it with the example of Vasyl Sukhomlynsky's pedagogical heritage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sukhomlynsky examined *creativity* as a complex, multifaceted phenomenon, which begins

(...) where the spark of a living, trembling thought emerges, which seeks to answer the question put forward by life. The question that ignites the spark of creativity arises when you want to see your work and its results better than they are now, when you do not give rest to the thought: why do your efforts not lead to what they seemingly should lead? (Sukhomlynsky 1976–1977a)

Acme is a mental state, which means the highest level of the professional development for a given person in a given period of time. Creative acme is a mental state, which means a maximum level of mobilization, fulfillment of all professional abilities, opportunities and reserves of a person at a particular stage of his or her life. It is a form of achieving high levels of professional development by a person. Stated differently, it is a culmination, a climax in the professional development of a teacher at the given life stage.

In Sukhomlynsky's works, this phenomenon is closely interwoven into the context of pedagogical activity, the key manifestation of which is self-expression, self-affirmation of the individual, the fulfillment of intelligent and creative potential throughout his or her life. A confirmation of the educator's idea can be found in the work *One Hundred Pieces of Advice for Teachers*, where he reveals the essential characteristics of the teacher's profession.

Like any highly-qualified, systematic, multi-faceted work, educating and teaching a person is a profession, an area of expertise. Profession of a teacher is a special and specific one; it cannot be compared with other professions. After all, the teacher deals with the most expensive thing in life – with a human. And it is wisdom, skills, art and creativity which their health, mind, personality, etc. depend on (Sukhomlynsky 1976–1977b). Thus, the teacher is a person who is characterized by awareness of creativity in professional activity at the level of persuasion, purposefulness, intellectual

activity, which manifests itself in the scientific and pedagogical style of thinking and creative imagination, an extraordinary nature of professional activity.

As the educator emphasized, what determines the creative person is not only the high creative potential (that is, something “naturally given”), but also the efforts of individuals themselves: the proactive attitude, motivated towards the fulfillment of this potential; creative orientation that determines the dynamics of their creativity development. This is a person who must integrate in him- or herself a sufficiently large range of features, properties, qualities which create a kind of “background” for creativity. An important role in this conglomerate is performed by:

- a) cognitive sphere of the teacher – involuntary and voluntary attention, the success of the attention switch, sensitivity to differentiation, constancy and consciousness of perception, developed emotional, figurative and verbal memory, self-reliance, flexibility, mental processing speed, ability to allocate the significant, and independently come up with new generalizations,
- b) emotional-volitional sphere – the ability to concentrate on creative efforts, perseverance, determination, courage, propensity for reasonable risks, independence of thought, purposefulness, optimism, high level of self-esteem, positivity of perceptions, creative imagination, fantasy,
- c) individual psychological features, which are based on the peculiar manifestations of the psyche (systems of organization of psyche identity – temperament, personality, skills; interindividual – a set of interpersonal relationships, mediated by the activity, and superindividual – the organization of a person, which is a kind of continuation of yourself in another one, not only during the action of the subject on other individuals, but outside the immediate continual interaction); compensatory nature of properties – fertile imagination, creativity, responsibility, self-criticism, acute observation skills, a complex of organizational skills, artistry and other (Marusynets 2014, pp. 84–89).

On the other hand, the practice of Sukhomlynsky's work with teachers, especially young ones, required a constant search for technologies which involved a process of rethinking the stable, effective orientations into new ones; shift away from traditional, clichéd stereotypes to creative ones which expanded a range of their creativeness. It is worth remarking that not all teachers of the Pavlysh School took the initiative of a young deputy head teacher, and later – the head teacher – to introduce the changes which concerned themselves and the management of the educational process in the school. The main motto during discussions with teachers were calls for the creation of an atmosphere of creative cooperation in education and upbringing, a collaborative work with pupils – “The path to the heart of the child leads through friendship, common interests, hobbies, feelings, and experiences” (Sukhomlynsky 1976–1977a, pp. 39–40).

Sukhomlynsky considered a creative attitude to the educational work to be the main component of the teacher's content. In his opinion, this was due to the fact that the

very object of education – the child – is constantly in a state of change, development: “Between the idea, which teachers embody in their conception, and the specific human relationships, which must reveal the idea, there is a living person, his or her thoughts, feelings, experiences, will” (Sukhomlynsky 1976–1977a, p. 372).

The teacher constantly faces a need for creative search for ways and means to achieve the maximum perfection of their activities. In this regard, Sukhomlynsky believed that pedagogical creativity occurs when a desire is born in a teacher to see his activity and its results better than they are now.

The element of creativity is necessarily present in the educational process, which Sukhomlynsky called the *scientific prediction*:

Without scientific prediction, without the ability to sow in the person today those seeds, that will sprout decades away, education would turn into the primitive supervision, a teacher – into an illiterate nanny, Pedagogy – into a charlatanry. There is a need in the scientific prediction – this is the essence of the pedagogical process culture, and the more subtle, thoughtful prediction there is, the less unexpected misfortunes the teacher gets. (Sukhomlynsky 1976–1977a, p. 372)

His thoughts on the significance of the creative development of the teacher, along with his pupils, were summarized in the conclusions to the work *Problems of Education of a Fully Developed Person*. Sukhomlynsky not only generalized, but also further developed his views. He stated that:

Harmony of social development is unthinkable without the prosperity of the strengths, skills, talents of each person, it is impossible without his or her happiness (...) a person, whom the school failed to educate, who did not develop working propensities and interests within the school years, did not reveal creative powers and abilities, who did not find him- or herself, did not define his or her place in society, becomes personally unhappy, and every unhappy one is a scourge for the society. (Sukhomlynsky 1976–1977a, p. 203)

Despite the pre-war and post-war period, which coincided with the pedagogical activity of the teacher, and created a considerable impediment for the implementation of his ideas, Sukhomlynsky still managed to convincingly demonstrate high expectations of himself and of the professional and personal position of the teacher. Tellingly, his honest, unbiased feedbacks on the lessons of senior colleagues he visited were not always accepted by the teaching staff, because of the conditions of a unified education system and regulatory requirements. Accordingly, professional development of the educator’s personality took place within the framework of the overall process of improving the educational process, and the skills enhancement was carried out inefficiently, according to common plans at scientific and methodological courses and workshops without taking into account their individual abilities and creative potential.

Sukhomlynsky did not abandon the idea of creating an environment in the teaching staff, which would motivate teachers to creativity, fulfilling their creative potential. The algorithm, which the educator developed, served as the stimulus, which underpinned the process of creativity development:

- showing respect for the pupil's personality,
- creating an atmosphere of mental clean-up and culture,
- declaration of subject-subject relations,
- cultivating ethical, universal, and national values,
- creating an atmosphere of openness, efficiency, tolerance and creativity.

Interpreting the teacher's mission extensively, Sukhomlynsky stressed that labor is a part of the psyche. All his reflections on the value of labor are concentrated on the striving for its spiritualization, recognizing it as a source of high moral inspiration, spiritual enrichment of the individual as a way of unlocking and developing his/her abilities and talents. Sharing the opinion of the great pedagogical master, which implies that the essence of the creative search is beyond the existing stereotype or norms of reasoning and action, we emphasize that his innovative contribution has been used for over a hundred years in the vector of creative self-realization of the teacher's personality at all levels – from the initial one (the choice of profession) to life-long affirmation by means of self-improvement, self-development and self-esteem of own achievements; searching for ways of personal and “creative acme”.

In the context of implementing the Concept of the New Ukrainian School, one may find a lot of good ideas of the educator, which are actively embodied in the creative process of the primary school teacher's work and serve as a guide to their implementation, namely:

- the ability to independently solve various tasks that arise in the process of teacher's professional activity (motivational and axiological awareness of the significance of pedagogical creativity, the need of its implementation),
- professional thinking, which manifests itself in the ability to analyze pedagogical situations and to quickly refer to them,
- developing self-reflection at all stages of pedagogical activity,
- teacher's autonomy and initiative, in particular, forecasting and “transferring” knowledge; finding alternative ways of solving pedagogical problems; ability to combine already-known techniques in order to find a new solution to pedagogical situations, problems; the search for the creation of one's own methodical techniques; finding something new in the already-known, etc.,
- non-standard approach to the solution of pedagogical problems, based on developed creative imagination,
- readiness to create and implement pedagogical innovations related to such dynamic characteristics of the person as persistence, self-discipline, mental flexibility, reflexivity of behavior, in other words, to be an *innovator* of one's own business, to be good at improvisation.

Innovativeness is the manifestation of the initiative, the creation of the new in science, art, manufacturing, management, any activity, etc. In psychological and pedagogical scientific publications, innovativeness is seen as a specific type of activity, in the process of which a person reaches the transcendence of existence; the creation of new samples of material and spiritual culture, creation of the intention; the confrontation with the old – the creation of a new, approval of its implementation. Sukhomlynsky showed examples of innovativeness and was an example for others to follow. By conducting lessons in the open air, together with his pupils, he created and opened the world of the new, through improvisation, insight (revelation).

Improvisation is a way of achieving a result in accordance with the goal in purpose (sudden, unpredictable, without prior training). In reference sources on psychology and pedagogy, improvisation is regarded as an abrupt pedagogical decision and its embodiment “here and now”. But this solution cannot be spontaneous, chaotic, it is conscious. Therefore, improvisations are characterized by the same algorithms as in mathematics. The more we are aware that we improvise, the higher its quality and effectiveness. The Pavlysh School is a vivid example of pedagogical improvisation. It was namely this feature which Sukhomlynsky paid attention to and advised teachers to find the unexpected pedagogical solution and instantaneous embodiment during the educational process. A specific aspect for the development of teacher’s creativity, the use of creativity methods and techniques is educational communication: “Learning can become an interesting, fascinating process for children, if it is reflected in the bright light of thought, feeling, creativity...” (Sukhomlynsky 1976–1977a, p. 203).

Sukhomlynsky was convinced that pedagogical improvisation was a necessary element of the teacher’s “communicative attack”. It encodes an intuitive-logical process of instantaneous creation of meaningful elements of creative activity. Improvisation is needed in cases when it is necessary to find the way out of an unforeseen pedagogical situation as soon as possible, to attract attention of the class; it is based on the ability of the teacher to promptly and correctly assess the situation of learning communication. Usually, it manifests itself in verbal, motor or verbal-motor, verbal-visual actions (monologue, dialogue, replicas, phrases, gestures).

Insight is revelation, sudden clarification, enrichment; it is an opportunity to look at a problem in a new way. For the first time this concept was used by Wolfgang Kohler in 1925. Psychologists use this term to describe such a phenomenon when a person experiences a revelation which is more likely to be related to the category of memories, but different from the latter due to the fact that not only the image but also all the feelings that were inherent in memories are actualized. Sukhomlynsky understood an “insight” as an intellectual phenomenon, or a sudden understanding of finding a solution to the problem. He exposed “eureka” of the world around to the children in the natural surroundings, in the garden grown by them, in the field, and other places. The exposition of such a solution for children was considered by him as an important moment in the creative process.

An example for teachers to follow is Sukhomlynsky's creative playgrounds/laboratories, which is summarized in his works *School of Joy, My Heart I Give to Children*. Together with the children, the educator experienced a sense of revelation; imprinting, insight; comprehension, variability and improvisation, quest, attempts and mistakes. These technologies are inherent in the content of the New Ukrainian School. They are proven by the century experience and give a positive result in the organization of educational interaction: pupil–teacher and teacher–pupil. Their application promotes not only the development of the pupil, but in the first place – that of a teacher, the carrier of creativity. Here are some tips for teachers by Sukhomlynsky (1976–1977c, p. 126):

1. Emotions and inner speech. We are constantly turning to inner speech (reflection), expressing reasoning. The teacher must possess the ability to manage his inner speech, because it can become a very powerful tool for influencing others. It is unacceptable for a teacher to speak one thing, but to think about other things. In this case, the trust of the interlocutor is lost and there is no desire to communicate with you.
2. Attention. It is classified into: attention to yourself, to other people, and to society. Only the ability to correctly prioritize the manifestations of one's attention makes the adequate educator, argued Sukhomlynsky.
3. Assertiveness (trust), which is one of the most problematic in the teacher's activities. In the teacher's profession, trust improvisation must be unconditional. As the educator claimed, the pupil must be convinced that the teacher believes him or her, otherwise, they will not seek help, advice or solution to the problem that arose. Sukhomlynsky instructed his teachers, that without trust it is impossible to get a good result, and *vice versa*, the most difficult tasks are sometimes solved simply because one showed this ability both in relation to oneself, and in relation to others.
4. Idea. An idea can be labeled as a psycho-emotional response which your presentation or product will cause to another person. It is important to understand one thing in principle: it is not what you want to say, but what another person wants to hear (Marusynets 2014, pp. 84–89).
5. Imagination. If you turn to life experience, then it is divided into your own experience, other people's experience and indirect one. It is proved that most often we get knowledge through our own experience – 80%; through that of other people – 15% and indirect – 5%. However, in the process of life, we get experience mostly indirectly, through books, films, television, lectures, classes, and stories of other people. Therefore, the proportion of indirect experience in our lives is roughly 80%. Accordingly, the question arises whether in the future this will cause the “mediation” syndrome, and will throw back the development of the emotional-perceptual intelligence, which prevailed in the Pavlysh School.

Sukhomlynsky was convinced that when implementing his/her experience in the real-life conditions of the educational space, one can trace only the result of the mental

development of the child. The task of the teacher is to see the interaction of the child with the outside world, with objects, phenomena, people, and natural forces.

Sukhomlynsky persuaded teachers that the work of the educator requires a permanent decision-making process in various complex pedagogical and life situations. Of course, they do not master this ability at once, because it requires special skills, knowledge and experience, as well as the desire to create. The teacher himself must master different technologies that would evoke interest in pupils, “push” them towards creativity, develop the ability to create, and in order to do this, the teacher must himself or herself be creative and interesting for pupils. This is a long-term work, the price of which is the “creative acme” of a teacher, the generator and mentor of which is Sukhomlynsky himself and his unrivaled experience for future generations.

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STRESZCZENIE

W artykule podjęto próbę przybliżenia fenomenowi „twórczego akme” w ujęciu słynnego uczonego i pedagoga Wasyla Suchomlińskiego. Określono fenologię pojęcia, wskazano na główne treści, specyfikę pojęcia kluczowego z perspektywy koncepcyjnej oraz z punktu widzenia uczonego i pedagoga, a zwłaszcza przedstawiono jego rozważania o znaczeniu twórczości w procesie edukacji uczniów. Określono zalecenia zasadnicze, które w przekonaniu Suchomlińskiego ujawniają twórczy potencjał nauczyciela oraz stanowią sens jego sukcesu zawodowego w ciągu całego życia. Są to: wysiłki wolicjonalne, aktywność, motywacja w realizacji potencjału własnego, twórcza orientacja, rozwój kreatywności. Szczególny nacisk kładzie się na technologie interakcji twórczej, które stanowiły treść procesu edukacyjnego szkoły pawłyńskiej oraz zostały uogólnione w takich dziełach, jak *Oddaję serce dzieciom* oraz *Radosna szkoła*. Można je w pełni implementować w treści koncepcji nowej szkoły ukraińskiej. Jest to stworzenie kreatywnych placów zabaw/laboratoriów, w których nauczyciel wraz z dziećmi doświadcza poczucia oświecenia, imprintingu, dojścia do zrozumienia, improwizacji i błędów. To właśnie te technologie rozwijają zainteresowanie uczniów nauką, „popychają” ich do twórczości, ujawniają nowy świat. Dlatego głównym zadaniem nauczyciela jest rozwój tych zdolności przez całe życie. W tym wszystkim upatruje się sensu „twórczego akme” Suchomlińskiego jako nośnika nowatorstwa oraz mentora dla nauczycieli, czyje doświadczenie jest nieprześcignione dla pokolenia następców.

Słowa kluczowe: osobowość nauczyciela; twórcze akme; nowatorstwo; improwizacja; proces edukacyjny szkoły pawłyńskiej