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*Дата надходження рукопису 19. 09. 2018 р.*

UDC 37.0:372:376

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VASIYL SUKHOMLINSKY'S INSPIRATION AND GUIDANCE IN THE AUSTRALIAN VALUES EDUCATION PROGRAM

Introduction

The work of Vasyl Sukhomlinsky came to be known by the investigator team responsible for the Australian Values Education Program (AVEP), work that would ultimately go on to inspire the program, as well as guide the analysis of its findings, in a variety of ways. This occurred partly through the regular review of literature in the field but largely because of the work of Alan Cockerill, the Australian academic whose PhD and research interests have focussed especially on Sukhomlinsky's work. The connection firmed when I, as Chief Investigator of AVEP, met Professor Olga Sukhomlinska, Vasyl's daughter, at an educational event in Kiev. Subsequently, Professor Sukhomlinska contributed a chapter to the Handbook compiled to summarize the key intentions, conceptual foundations and findings of AVEP. The chapter was dedicated to her father's work and its relevance to everything that AVEP represented. This article will provide a summary

of AVEP, its history, impact and practical effects, and attempt to illustrate the connecting points with the enduring work and contribution of Vasyl Sukhomlinsky.

The Australian Values Education Program: Intentions and Findings

AVEP ran from 2003 to 2010 as an Australian Government initiative. It was therefore a national program that cut across the six State and two Territory educational divisions that characterise Australian education. It also traversed the public, religious and private educational systems, another often-disuniting feature of Australian education. AVEP was inspired mainly by a stated concern for the role that moral development should play in all forms of education. This was a controversial sentiment, granted the sectarian nature of Australian educational history, one that persistently divided educationists around issues of religion, values and spiritual education (Lovat, 2018). AVEP was a

clear attempt to address this division, deemed unhelpful in attending to all the needs of holistic education. The *National Framework for Values Education* (ADEST, 2005), designed to provide the conceptual foundations of the Program, was explicit in asserting that values education was not a mere option, least of all a religious or ideological one, in the business of any education hoping for optimal effects. It urged school leaders and teachers to «... recognize that values interact with and are integral to all key learning areas». (p. 7) It spoke of values education as a feature of overall quality teaching.

A range of practice-based projects were implemented, the largest and most important being the *Values Education Good Practice Schools Project* (VEGPSP) (ADEST, 2006; ADEEWR, 2008). This project, in its two phases, involved over 300 Australian schools drawn from every corner of the country, every age group and every system. It was followed by an evaluation in the form of the *Project to Test and Measure the Impact of Values Education on Student Effects and School Ambience* (T&M) (Lovat et al., 2009). Most of the enduring data emanated from these two projects. Key findings illustrated the connection between values education and overall quality teaching effects, encompassing the range of emotional, social, moral and academic development. Evidence pertaining to improved behaviour and enhanced communication among students, and between students and teachers, was commonly found across the schools. Reports from researcher 'friends' referred often to strengthened reflectivity on the part of students, greater student resilience and social skills, improved relationships of care and trust between all stakeholders, strengthening of positive relationships between teacher and students, and students and students, and students claiming a greater sense of belonging to the school community.

Arguably, the most unexpected consequence, commonly referred to as the «surprise effect», was in the many claims made about improved academic performance resulting from the values education approach. The T&M evaluation project endorsed these claims as evidential in its Executive Summary:

Thus, there was substantial quantitative and qualitative evidence suggesting that there were observable and measurable improvements in students' academic diligence, including increased attentiveness, a greater capacity to work independently as well as more cooperatively, greater care and effort being invested in schoolwork and students assuming more responsibility for their own learning as well as classroom «chores».

The so-called «surprise effect», namely the unintended but persistent flow-on of academic

strengthening as a result of values inculcation sent the researchers back to the literature and, in particular, to the latest findings in the field of neuroscience. Herein we found a welter of evidence that pointed to the role of emotional, social and moral impulses in strengthening cognitive reasoning and intellectual engagement. Mary Immordino-Yang (2011) speaks to the informing power of emerging evidence from the neurosciences, especially concerning the relationship between emotion, sociality and cognition, for our educational understanding. Patricia Churchland (2012) speaks even more directly to the role of moral formation in this regard. For her, the strength of our thinking and reasoning is influenced directly and powerfully by emotional, social and moral neural impulses working in conjunction in the brain. The role of moral formation as part-and-parcel of any effective education comes to be seen as central, rather than optional or marginal. In similar vein, Darcia Narvaez (2010, 2014) speaks of the power of moral education to activate those emotional and social centres of the brain that influence and effect sound reasoning.

Among much of the data from findings that signalled the practical implications of those neuroscientific insights that point to the circular effect between moral growth and holistic educational development were the following from the researchers attached to each cluster of schools and responsible for verifying the findings:

Everyone in the classroom exchange, teachers and students alike, became more conscious of trying to be respectful, trying to do their best, and trying to give others a fair go (ie. practise fairness). We also found that by creating an environment where these values were constantly shaping classroom activity, teachers and students were happier, and school was calmer ... student learning was improving (ADEST, 2006, p. 120).

Starting from the premise that schooling educates for the whole child and must necessarily engage a student's heart, mind and actions, effective values education empowers student decision making ... students can be seen to move in stages from growing in knowledge and understanding ... to an increasing clarity and commitment ... and then concerted action in living those values in their personal and community lives (ADEEWR, 2008, p.11).

#### **Sukhomlinsky's Affirmation**

The major perspective and key findings emanating from AVEP are mere reflections of Vasyl Sukhomlinsky's insights from the school classroom. In his own principal text, Sukhomlinsky (1981) emphasizes the holistic nature of education, a theme made forcefully by both his biographer, Alan Cockerill (1999) and his

academic daughter, Olga Sukhomlinska (2010). The latter points explicitly to the neurosciences in explaining how education for life necessitated synergistic activity between the cognitive, affective and social dimensions «...essential for engagement in sustained learning» (Sukhomlinska, 2010, p. 556). She refers to her father's persistent use of strategies like the telling of fairy tales to stimulate emotional growth through the development of the students' creative capacities and so, in turn, to influence critical capacities and cognitive growth. The emphasis on mastery of content, destined to slow if not retard all capacities, was eschewed in favour of holism in learning. In further reflection of AVEP findings, the establishment of a calm learning environment and strengthened teacher-student relationships were hailed by Sukhomlinsky (1981) as central to any effective learning. Trust and respect as two-way dynamics in establishing calm and positive relationships were crucial to students opening their minds and hearts to the stimulus of learning. Enjoyment was central to effective pedagogy; anger and punishment were, obversely, ineffective. Rather than school being seen as a time wherein students moved from their childhood, Sukhomlinsky emphasized the importance of schooling preserving and prolonging the natural inquisitiveness and openness to learning of childhood (Cockerill, 1999).

As Sukhomlinska (2010) notes, her father's instinctive educational premise revolved around the love and respect for students that he displayed, leading in turn to a profound understanding of their own inner world and their perceptions of the world around them. He then naturally moved beyond seeing them as mere instruments for academic outcomes to taking practical interest in their physical, psychological and spiritual health. All expectations about the individual student were determined not by a system's «stage» assumptions but entirely by the demonstrated capacities and developmental needs of that individual. All assessment (marks, grades, etc.) were tailored to assure encouragement, rather than judgement or, least of all, punishment or belittlement. Sukhomlinsky was adamant that discouragement of a student could lead to disengagement from learning; then all would be lost. Vital was to develop the students «sense of agency» as the foundation for continued interest and engagement in learning. Inspiring in students a love of learning and so igniting the intrinsic motivation that constituted the grounds for ongoing independent learning was at the heart of the purpose of schooling, as far as he was concerned. This was best assured through engaging students natural curiosity. In many ways ahead of his time, and genuinely prophetic, Sukhomlinsky seemed to

understand innately that personal, emotional, spiritual, social and ethical development and maturity were not in any way distractive of the intellectual skills and capacities needed for academic mastery; indeed, the opposite was the case. In that sense, his educational intuitions were ahead of the neuroscience that would confirm them and the AVEP findings that would endorse them.

#### **Sukhomlinsky and AVEP on Calmness and Positive Relationships as artefacts of Effective Learning**

There are many points of inspiration, endorsement and cross-over between the insights of Sukhomlinsky and those of AVEP. Two insights that both inspired directly the work of AVEP and helped in discerning why the atmosphere instilled by it worked to impel happier and more efficacious learners centre on the notions of calmness and positive relationships. In the T&M evaluation project (Lovat et al., 2009), the importance of instilling calm as an enabler of effective learning and, in turn, calmness as an effect of the more efficacious learning that ensued constituted one of the most persistent items of feedback. Similarly, the targeted establishment of more positive relationships between the teacher and the students, and the students with each other, had an enabling effect and, in turn, became a resultant feature of the learning environment that ensued.

Examples of the calmness artefact are evident in the following excerpts from Lovat et al. (2009):

There were also numerous comments to suggest that the playground was a calmer, more caring and more cooperative environment than before the values program (p. 7).

... a «calmer» environment with less conflict and with a reduction in the number of referrals to the planning room (p. 8).

... assemblies had «dramatically improved» and were «much calmer» and that there was «more ordered movement around the school», all of which helped to «set a better tone» (p. 8).

... the school assumes a calmer, more peaceful ambience (p. 12).

... calmer and more peaceful classrooms, and helped children to be more settled and attentive (p. 34).

... calmer, more caring and more cooperative environment than before the values program. (p. 44)

... most staff are calmer in their approach to students (p. 52).

... the school assumes a calmer, more peaceful ambience, better student-teacher relationships are forged, student and teacher wellbeing improves and parents are more engaged with the school (p. 68).

Virtually all the case studies report that, since the schools' involvement with values education, they have become significantly calmer and more peaceful places (p. 80).

Most put this down to the students knowing the meaning of things like respect and responsibility (p. 80).

The positive effects on school ambience included teacher perceptions of the school being calmer and more peaceful, of conflict being managed more constructively and of students demonstrating improved social skills (p. 86). The main outcomes of the school's values program have been: 1. A focus on the explicit teaching of values 2. The calming effect it has had on the school (p. 99).

The focus group was unequivocal about the impact the values education program has had on classroom life. Classrooms are calmer since its introduction (p. 101).

The group felt that there was a direct correlation between the success of the values education program and the increased calmness and respectfulness observed in classrooms (p. 101).

... contributed to the school becoming a calmer and more peaceful environment where mutual respect is taken seriously (p. 102).

... the school seems calmer and more focused than it was 1-2 years ago (ie. before the Values program) (p. 123).

Examples of the positive relationships artefact are seen in the following excerpts from Lovat et al (2009):

Teachers and students comments also suggested that improved relationships between students contributed to a more cooperative and productive learning environment (p. 6).

The main impact of values education on student-teacher relationships appeared to be a greater understanding of each other's perspective or at least to have a greater respect for each other's position (p. 9).

While previously, teachers might have been able to establish caring and positive relationships with 'well-behaved' students, the explicit teaching of values meant that teachers now regarded instances of «misbehaviour» as teaching opportunities whereby students could be assisted to identify their mistakes and practise the value that they hadn't yet learned (p. 10).

The results of the current investigation provide ... consistent findings that values education changes teacher-student relationships so that rather than enforcing minimum standards of behaviour or school work, teachers are more likely to support and encourage students to strive for higher ideals (p. 12).

... as schools give increasing curriculum and teaching emphasis to values education, students become more academically diligent, the school

assumes a calmer, more peaceful ambience, better student-teacher relationships are forged, student and teacher wellbeing improves and parents are more engaged with the school (p. 12).

... the effects of well-crafted values education programs extend to a transformation of student behaviour, teacher-student relationships ... (p. 16)

Teachers' comments suggested that improved relationships between students contributed to a more cooperative and productive learning environment. (p. 37)

Some parents were optimistic about changes in relationships between students and attributed this to the impact of values education... (p. 49).

... the quantitative and qualitative survey data obtained from the students, teachers, and families in the Group A schools provided converging evidence about the positive impact of values education on student academic diligence, school ambience, student and teacher relationships and student and teacher wellbeing (p. 58).

As well as being the conduits for disseminating values, teachers also benefited from more mutually respectful relationships with students and from more collegial relationships with other staff (p. 66).

... the relationships between staff and students and between students have improved enormously since we introduced the values program (p. 78).

... case studies that present data on student – teacher relationships mostly report improved and very positive patterns (p. 81).

The outcomes of this improved relationship are reflected in the School Survey data (p. 84).

Improvement in students' interpersonal relationships was noted by students, staff and parents and these observed and measurable changes in student behaviour had important repercussions for the schools' ambience (p. 86).

... the investigation of the impact on Student-teacher relationships revealed that values education helped to develop «more trusting» relationships between staff and students (p. 87).

... more trusting student-teacher relationships and the more peaceful and harmonious school climate emanating from the values education programs appeared to have a positive impact on both Student and teacher wellbeing (p. 87).

... the quantitative and qualitative evidence ... has demonstrated that a well-crafted and well-managed values education intervention has potential to impact positively on ... student-teacher relationships... (p. 88).

Hence, the notions of calmness and improved relationships as artefacts of effective learning resulting from the values education intervention seemed to be apparent. These notions

then became key items of analysis as the findings from AVEP were analysed and disseminated.

#### **The Calmness Factor in the AVEP Analysis**

The very first of the Australian studies (ADEST, 2003), a pilot project for the entire Program, provided a clue to what was to come in regard to the calmness factor. It identified «cohesion» and «peace» as features of those results that were most obvious in the schools that engaged in the study. It also noted that these features appeared to be attached to the improved environment of learning that also resulted. In turn, it reflected on some of the earliest testimony associated with pilot projects (cf. Lovat & Schofield, 1996) that began to build up data sets around the effects of values education. In the work at hand, the notion of the «calmer environment» was singled out as a key reason why attention to learning seemed to have strengthened. As noted above, it was then found as a persistent factor in the observational and reflective overseeing by teachers and researchers. Hence, it became an important item in the analysis and dissemination of findings (Lovat et al., 2011).

In the first phase of VEGPSP (DEST, 2006), the theme of calmness related to improvement in both behaviour and learning continued strongly throughout all of the reports from across the schools. The school was declared to be a 'better place' because the intervention had led to students displaying improved self-control and hence becoming better behaved, in both the classroom and the playground. In much of the testimony, it seems the better environment happened first and the improved learning followed. In other testimony, however, it seemed the reverse was the case. The improved attitudes of teachers to their teaching was often mentioned as the first change that was notable, and that when teachers were faced with the challenge of integrating values into their curriculum, they implemented more engaging learning activities and, furthermore, through using the discourse of the values program itself learned how to deal with behaviour more effectively. In turn, students began adapting better to their learning and, in the accumulated effects of all this, a greater calmness descended:

... by creating an environment where these values were constantly shaping classroom activity, student learning was improving, teachers and students were happier, and school was calmer (p. 120).

In the second phase of VEGPSP (DEEWR, 2008), evidence underlined the importance of explicitness in putting values front and centre as the object of education. In itself, this strengthened the learning environment and, as part of that, instilled a greater calmness, seen especially in students more self-regulated behaviour. There was

also in phase 2 a repeat of the notion of cohesion accompanying calmness, as well as emphasis on growth in both student and teacher self-confidence.

In international studies, the notion of calmness as a cause of, a result of, or simply in conjunction with, improved learning regimes is also evident. Frances Farrer (2010) refers to calmness among both students and staff as one of the features of the values education she witnessed transforming the West Kidlington, UK, school:

Because everyone's happy and calm, they're learning more (p. 396).

Farrer appears to see calmness as a deliberate strategy that sets the scene for effective values education of the kind that leads to enhanced learning. Hence, she sees the Head Teacher, Dr Neil Hawkes' 'moment's silence' as an imposed reflectivity that constitutes an important initial step in settling children's minds and bodies so that they will be in a relaxed and receptive state for learning.

A similar perspective is seen in Shahida Abdul-Samad (2010) who recommends the establishment of calm as a prerequisite for learning. In the specific training regime of which she is speaking, Abdul-Samad underlines the importance of the trainer (or teacher) modelling calmness in order to elicit similar calmness in trainees in order that the right learning disposition might be established. Ron Tooth (2010) provides case study data that illustrates the importance of calmness as a positive disposition that students then take into their learning routines. Thomas Nielsen (2010) refers to a range of studies that illustrated the calming effect, including to clinical ones with strict scientific controls around them. Sigrun Adalbjarnardottir (2010) provides further case study data that sees calmness as an accompaniment to values education and hence the more efficacious learning environment.

#### **The Positive Relationships Factor in the AVEP Analysis**

Again, the issue of improved relationships resulting from values infusion and intervention was apparent from the very first iteration of the Australian programs and became an ever-recurring theme throughout their history:

... the 50 final projects ... were underpinned by a clear focus on building more positive relationships within the school as a central consideration for implementing values education on a broader scale (DEST, 2003, p. 3).

It was ... observed (within the school) that where teachers were seeing the importance of establishing relationships and of respecting their students – this was reflected in the behaviour of their students ... Where teachers are embracing values education as something that is important and to be embedded in practice – their pedagogy

is enhanced (DEEWR, 2008, pp. 81–82).

. . . focussed classroom activity, calmer classrooms with students going about their work purposefully, and more respectful behaviour between students. Teachers and students also reported improved relationships between the two groups. Other reports included improved student attendance, fewer reportable behaviour incidents and the observation that students appeared happier (DEEWR 2008, p. 27).

In the final analysis and wrap-up by the investigators, Neville Clement (2010) drew on a wealth of international research in demonstrating that the issue of relationships is entirely central to the flow-on effects of improved behaviour, calmer environments and enhanced academic focus: «The development of intrinsic motivation flourishes in the context of secure relationships» (p. 48).

In general terms, the findings concerning relationships were in accord with a vast array of international evidence that draws the same conclusions. David Carr (2010) spoke of teaching as an inherently relational craft that renders it inconceivable that anyone could think effective teaching (and presumably learning) could proceed in the absence of an emphasis on and realization of positive and supportive relations between teachers and their students: «... teaching as both a professional role and an activity is implicated in, or impossible to conceive apart from, human qualities of an inherently «personal» nature, or from interpersonal relationships» (p. 63). From Carr's point of view, the teacher whose relationships with students are not characterized by fair treatment, trust and support will have little chance of producing any positive effects in their students' wellbeing or work.

Wendy Robinson and Robert Campbell (2010) explored «inclusiveness» as an adjunct of the kinds of positive relationships that allow students to feel they belong to the learning environment and the learning within it. Engagement with learning is the result and so academic focus and diligence are naturally strengthened. Kirsi Tirri (2010) identified relationships management as one of the key features that underpins effective professional work for teachers and a feature of effective relationships management is in the capacity to deal with affect: «The skill in understanding and expressing emotions is ... necessary for teachers to establish caring relationships with their students and their families» (p. 159). Granted the neuroscientific work referred to above, it is clear that the teacher who can deal with affect and facilitate student comfort with the affective side of learning is likely to impel improved cognitive effect in students as well.

Adrian Gellert (2010) asserted: «... teachers play a fundamental role since it is through the

relationships that they establish and develop with students, colleagues and the wider community that they share and facilitate values and holistic development» (p. 163). Neil Hawkes (2010), meanwhile, offered a case study that confirmed the centrality of positive relationships as an artefact of values education and one that had a clear academic effect, in this case one actually endorsed by a formal inspectorial report (Ofsted, 2007).

Karen Osterman (2010) linked the issue of teacher-student relationships with the overall quality of teaching. She was at pains to make the point that high quality teaching has its own effect on relationships. Osterman also underlined the crucial nature of modelling for good relationships to ensue. Teachers must be the model for the relationships they want for their students. Osterman (2010) cites results of a study that showed that positive relationships among students were an inherent aspect of teachers achieving optimal results: «... these teacher behaviors appeared to contribute to a more positive classroom environment where students were engaged in and valued learning and where relationships with peers were governed by friendship and support» (p. 247).

James Arthur and Kenneth Wilson (2010) reported on a study from the UK that confirmed relationships as one of a number of key features of programs that nurture student wellbeing, including in the development of character and students' overall growth in knowledge and confidence as learners:

Above all, the quality of relationships between teachers and students is an essential aspect of character formation in schools (p. 352).

Meanwhile, Nazreen Dasoo's (2010) report on a South African study with a particularly disadvantaged clientele illustrated dramatically the indispensable nature of promoting and establishing the right sorts of relationships as an inherent and inextricable part of effective learning, in her case relationships to be found in the context of an explicit values education intervention:

I will present evidence of how a values education initiative has the potential to refocus and nurture the teacher's understanding of the important role he or she plays not only in imparting subject knowledge to a learner but also in creating relationships with them that are indicative of commitment to and care for the development of their character and the eventual role they will play in society (p. 360).

Jacques Benninga and Susan Tracz (2010) specified that one of the highlighted features of the «values» schools with which they had worked was to be found in «... a caring community and positive social relationships» (p. 523). Sigrun

Adalbjarnardottir (2010) concluded that a teacher's capacity to establish effective and positive relationships with students and among students is a fundamental piece in the puzzle of teacher competence. Meanwhile, Roger and David Johnson (Johnson & Johnson, 2010) confirmed this view in their work that showed the impact of values education on a range of developmental measures and effects, including strengthened relationships with peers and others. From their perspective, it seems relationships are clearly an effect as well as a pedagogical strategy in a sound values education program.

### Conclusion

In summary, it is apparent that the work of Vasily Sukhomlinsky lives on and continues to impact on our understanding of the soundest parameters of holistic education and efficacious learning. In the case of the Australian Values Education Program, his work both inspired much of the thinking that went into the planning and strategic directionality of the program as well as providing for important insights that allowed for depth of analysis of the findings and likely parameters for understanding their cause. Especially in the light of values education often having to confront age-old political correctness around instrumentalist educational notions concerned with linearity in learning, most obviously around matters of behaviour management, control, testing and other forms of regulation, it was of great interest to us that Sukhomlinsky's work had emanated from the highly regulated environment of a Soviet state. If his educational instincts could break out and be successful in that sort of public environment, then our values education confrontation with the unhelpful instrumentalism and regularities to be found in the crevices of Australian education should always have been an easy task!

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*Дата надходження рукопису 29. 08. 2018 р.  
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