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## **THE HIDDEN SCHOOL CURRICULUM OF WASILIJ SUCHOMLIŃSKI**

### **INTRODUCTION PERSONAL THREAD**

Over forty years ago when I was the headmaster of a school and was looking for practical tips on how to make teacher's work better, I found Russian articles about the school in Pawłysz in Ukraine and its innovative headmaster – Wasyl Suchomliński, who was called the Ukrainian Pestalozzi. The effects of the work of this rural school were so alluring that I spent a couple of years on getting to know his educational legacy. One of effects of this admiration was one of the first translation of his book, "*Oddaję serce dzieciom*"<sup>1</sup> and this first doctoral dissertation outside of the USSR on the pedagogical concept and the system of educational work of W. Suchomliński<sup>2</sup> as well as fragments of other articles by the pedagogue from Pawłysz and over ten scientific publication in Polish pedagogical journals<sup>3</sup>. This period resulted in contacts with the family of Suchomliński, correspondence with the researches of his legacy in many countries.

As an enthusiast of the school and its creator, I paid special attention to successes of the school which I learned about after Suchomliński died but I confronted what he wrote in "*Pawłyska szkoła średnia*" with the archives

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<sup>1</sup> W. Suchomliński, *Oddaję serce dzieciom*, transl. M. Bybluk, WSiP, Warszawa 1978. This book was awarded with the 1st national prize in Ukraine when it came to science and technology in 1974, after the author died. The first edition was published in the German Democratic Republic in 1968 because no publisher in Ukraine or Russia wanted to print it, as it did not contain any content related to "communist education".

<sup>2</sup> See M. Bybluk, *Koncepcja pedagogiczna i system wychowawczy Wasyla Suchomlińskiego*, UMK Publishing House, Toruń 1982.

<sup>3</sup> See: *Ukraiński tryptyk pedagogiczny*, [in:] M. Bybluk, *Odrodzenie i rozwój oświaty na niepodległej Ukrainie 1991–2010*, KPSW Publishing House, Bydgoszcz 2011, p. 112–123.

of Memorial-Pedagogical Museum in Pawłysz and the statements of his co-workers who I interviewed.

As a practician finding it hard to run a school and a beginner researcher and translator, I was interested both in what was published by the author of *"Jak wychować prawdziwego człowieka"* as well as in the facts which showed a hard road to success but where unknown or almost unknown.

I must say that although I have intuitively appreciated the hardships of the professional technique of Suchomliński and his closest co-workers but I did not fully understand its meaning for the objectivisation of the discovered didactic-education processes of the school. It was not without importance that in this situation everything that was Soviet had to officially be flawless or it would be censored. Today we can appreciate that there was no theoretical case for the objective research on what was official, especially what was hidden from the less inquisitive one, hidden on purpose or unsupported by doctrine.

Now, when the natural Pawłysz experiment found an unquestionable place in the history of pedagogical thought<sup>4</sup> and its creator scaled the "top of the mountain" (B. Tartakowski) of pedagogical innovations and took his place amongst the finest educators, it is time to show with no retouching the way from deficiencies and shortcomings to success, the approach seen from the so called pedagogical kitchen with too many cooks, and despite the main cook's good will, not all food is tasty and fine<sup>5</sup>.

## THE HIDDEN SCHOOL CURRICULUM

That above reasoning leads us to think that apart from the official school program, that is everything connected with schools and the effects of

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<sup>4</sup> The work of W. Suchomliński has been translated into 53 languages, including all of the main Western languages, in China, Japan, USA, Australia. He published 48 larger works on pedagogy, over 500 articles, 1500 tales and stories for children (up to 2000 there were over 3300 of his publications). See: M. Bybluk, *Suchomliński Wasyl Aleksandrowicz*, [in:] *Encyklopedia Pedagogiczna XXI wieku*, vol. VI, scientific editor T. Pilch, ŻAK Academic Press, Warszawa 2007, p. 15–17.

<sup>5</sup> When on the jubilee conference in 2003 in Kiev the author gave the lecture about *The hidden school program of W. Suchomliński* I was faced with the assessment of a editor the "Szkolny Świat" [School Word] magazine that it is an "non-standard, non-traditional approach to the characteristic of the didactic-educational system of the school in Pawłysz, incorporating its pros and cons".

learning, regardless whether it was intended or not, there is a second program – unintentional, called by sociologists and psychologists, as well as pedagogues recently, the hidden curriculum. From the 1960s this curriculum has become one of the instruments of scientific exploration of all of the aspects of the functional of school. Most considerations and theoretical works by American and British sociologists of education (R. Meigham, P. Jackson, S. Bowles, H. Gintis, G. Whitty, M.F.D. Young, I. Lister and other) state that the hidden curriculum goes against the official or transparent curriculum which means: with the course or series of actions designed with the educational goals in mind. This curriculum is the non-didactic but educationally important consequences of going to school which appear systematically but are not included in any set of goals and educational justifications.

The premise of this curriculum is that notwithstanding how educated the teachers are, how innovative or forward-thinking is the official curriculum and how pro-social the school is, the pupils are faced with something which is not talked about during classes or outside them. They shape some attitude to life, thinking and behaviour without any consent.<sup>6</sup> The results of this curriculum may be negative, like passivity, counting on some relief when not prepared, recreating knowledge and memorizing as the highest form of intellectual achievement, avoiding independent assessments, own ideas, egocentricity, feigned obedience, destruction of school hardware and environment, student gambling and following negative adult behaviour but they can also be positive, dependent on the level of the students, education environment and the influence of planned educational work in the school and the realisation of the real curriculum of teaching and educating.

In the school reality the students learn how to “survive” the boring lessons, how to please the teacher, how to answer the teacher according to his or her suggestions. They are forced to cope with waiting for the classes to start, with access to teaching aids, learn how to communicate with the teacher in class, how to react to denial and prohibition, interrupting their answers as well how to write a control work with ease, how to avoid answering etc. In the face of such impediments in the functioning of the school, the students start to use survival strategies: resignation (losing hope that

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<sup>6</sup> See R. Meighan et al., *Socjologia edukacji, Część druga. Ukryty program*, UMK Publishing House, Toruń 1993.

school can have any sense), false engagement, the so called masquerade, or one more positive: patience. There is also a set of strategies of lowering fear and anxiety with class life, which allows one to find a proper answer or acceptable reaction but as they take the place of thinking about the answer, they reduce proper learning in the long run.

There are three possible real reactions to the existence of the hidden curriculum:

1. realize that the hidden curriculum exists and do nothing, let it be hidden;
2. adapt to the situation that the school creates obedient and polite people as the society probably needs exactly this. You can move part of the elements of the hidden curriculum to the open curriculum or also do nothing, considering the current state is good.
3. change the school practice, environment, rules of teacher behaviour in such a manner as to root out the characteristics of teaching and education which are considered inappropriate;

The observation of school reality leads to the conclusion that what is prevalent is passivity to the existence of the hidden curriculum, attempts at keep the *status quo* are made or the phenomena is completely ignored.

Considering the existence of different ideologists of education and assuming that “the modern world requires complex behaviours”, in order not to simplify the analyses, different approaches are available, both authoritarian reactions as we need people who know how to follow instruction and when to give it but we also need to ability to self-steer, characteristic for autonomous behaviours and in other cases – the ability to cooperate, related to democratic behaviour. Let’s illustrate the three approaches in relation to the place of learning. In the authoritarian approach the school is the only place for learning and pupils work under the orders of the teacher. In the autonomous approach learning takes place where something useful or interesting for the student happens, and in the democratic approach every place is suitable for group learning.

The example areas for the studying the hidden curriculum are most often:

- 1) buildings and rooms,
- 2) interpersonal communication,
- 3) non-school environment,
- 4) organisational conditions,
- 5) structural and symbolic violence,

- 6) content of teaching and educating,
- 7) the professional role of the teacher.

Before we move on to the analysis of the selected areas of the hidden curriculum of the school in Pawłysz headed by W. Suchomliński (in 1948–1970) we need some introductory remarks.

- 1) The author of this research paper has only part of the facts which can show the functioning of the second curriculum and even those can be debatable and seem to be chosen with bias (do not mistake this with the “second curriculum” of the school, the “travels in the book sea” which were about gaining non-mandatory knowledge, reading not in order to memorise but enrich one’s inner life). Many manifestations of the hidden curriculum can only be judged based on the statements of W. Suchomliński regarding the existence and need to get rid of negative phenomena.
- 2) The framework of this article does not allow for the analysis of all of the areas of the behaviour of students and teachers, including those showing the reaction to the appearance of democratic or autonomous rules in school.
- 3) The actions of Suchomliński were dynamic, multifaceted and effective enough in getting rid of the inadequacies of the process of teaching and educating, that it is more reasonable to present the changes in the school practice, rules of teacher work and not the side effects of the functioning of the official school curriculum.

### THE PROFESSIONAL ROLE OF A TEACHER

From the point of view of the analyzed topic and the gaining of pedagogical experience the case of the teachers, the co-creators of the Pawłysz School, are fascinating. Based on the archival issues<sup>7</sup> and the work of W. Suchomliński on the school<sup>8</sup> one can assume that among the most important conditions for the pedagogical growth of the teachers of the

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<sup>7</sup> See M. Bybluk, *Wasył Suchomliński o pracy pedagogicznej i nauczycielu-wychowawcy*, „Ruch Pedagogiczny” 1977, no 6.

<sup>8</sup> The monograph of the school (*Pawłyszskaja sriedniaja szkoła*, Moscow 1969) is the most important work of W. Suchomliński related to the Pawłysz high school. It was the basis for the author’s doctorate.

Pawłysz School, as the conditions for the elimination of the unintentional effects of one's pedagogical actions, one can enumerate the personality of the headmaster<sup>9</sup>, whose pedagogic concept is implemented in the form of a system of didactic-educational work, as well as the effective unification of the beliefs of the team of teachers related to the most important issues of teaching and education.

The views of different researchers on the "pedagogical growing up" of W. Suchomliński and his 1960s metamorphoses are generally known. It is similar with the rich, detailed and positively commented description of the members of the pedagogical team of the school which appears in many of Suchomliński's texts. Less known are the facts related to his co-workers who can be said to have contributed to the creation of the second curriculum.

If we omit the cases of ideological attacks on some of the teachers which were mostly results of external pressure, for the so called "manifestation of spoiled bourgeois liberalism" and alleged cooperation with the invader as well the unrelated to the core of education and teaching communist indoctrination of the school community, the archives of the school from 1948–1969 show that the level of preparation of teachers was not satisfactory in the beginning. In the 1950/51 school year among the 24 teacher only 7 had university education. Visitations and the school management showed significant deficiencies in the formal and didactic preparation of the teachers and process preparations. Sometimes an unprepared teacher was not allowed to conduct classes. Cases of teachers not interested in the work, shouting at students, restrictive or too liberal system of grading were not that rare. At the school board meeting the school heads pointed out to teachers their intellectual limitations, poor vocabulary, not reading book, neglecting obligation by the form teachers.

During the first years there were cases of amoral behaviour of the teachers, alcohol abuse, lack of authority among the students, misunderstanding of pedagogical ideas that the school started to implement. This condition of the teaching staff led to unintended consequences in the form of a low effectiveness of class and outside of class work of the teachers and this resulted in the students not achieving satisfactory grades or behaviour. The pedagogical board presented cases of teachers lying to the students and

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<sup>9</sup> W. Suchomliński, *System pracy dyrektora szkoły*, Kiev 1959 (in Ukrainian).

parents when it comes to the teaching, cheating on control tests, destruction of books. It is not a secret that during the first years of Suchomliński's work, close to a hundred students a year were not promoted to schools, some were expelled due to violation of the school regulations, running from the boarding school.

The situation changed drastically after 10 years. At that point Suchomliński called 19 of the 30 teachers "experiences masters of the pedagogical craft". From the "*Pawłyszskaja sriedniaja szkoła* (1969) monograph we know that 25 of the 35 teachers had higher education and every one of them acted as a guardian, tutor and organizer of their spiritual life.

One of the paths to raising the intellectual levels of the teachers was a broadly developed self-educational work, constant drive to popularize the experiences of the best teachers. A breakthrough moment, when it comes to the approach to the teachers and their results, came on the pedagogical board meeting on the 2nd of April 1951 which somehow escaped the attention of the researches of the legacy of Suchomliński, when at the behest to A.I. Suchomlińska – the pedagogue's wife – there was a radical change in how the teachers were graded: talking not about bad work but about the need to learn how to work better using the best examples, getting to know the experiences of the well working teachers. From that point on Suchomliński analyzed with more detail all of the individual solutions of the teachers which led to a bettering of teaching and education. For example, this happened with the individual experience of a primary class teacher, M.N. Wierchowinina, who was the first to start the "classes of thinking among nature", as well as the arithmetic teaching method of W.P. Nowicka or the experimental work started by the biology teacher, O.J. Stiepanowa.

All of the teachers had their "pedagogical studies in school" which were different as they were strictly connected to the tasks and needs of one school. This included reading scientific works and school monographs, mutual class visitations, cooperation with other institutes of the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences, broadening of personal libraries, taking part in theoretical and pedagogical seminars and the a pedagogical culture seminar which was supposed to lead to the creation of system of preparation to the lessons and work system of the school. It started with the creation of the methodology cabinet, preparing varied methodology themes and even a logic club for the teachers.



The high requirements of the school became a factor mobilizing the teachers to constantly better the quality of their work, which became “a source of happiness for the teachers” (the opinion of O.J. Stiepanowa which she relayed to the author). As a side note: many years later D. Goleman in *“Emotional intelligence”* argued that the ability to motivate, persistence in going for the goal despite failures and the ability to keep emotions at bay has a great influence on what we call happiness, being happy with life<sup>10</sup>. Only a couple of teachers who were not able to cope with the requirement, left the school. The decision to leave was made collectively during the pedagogical board meeting, and the opinion of the interested party was also taken into consideration. Those who left created a “group experience in education”.

The sacrifices of the teachers, the using of their free time for the students should especially be underlined. This work was described by Suchomliński when after a student committed theft, people tried to question the thoroughness of work and to point to the doubts from this work: *“Teachers, class tutors and the headmasters work 17–18 hours a day, no free days and no time off. There are no days without educational work with the students... No one forces us to do this, we do it based on a sense of duty...”*<sup>11</sup>.

Who were the teachers whom other headmasters envied Suchomliński? They were not cherry picked people but regular teachers whom the headmaster – the “teacher of teachers” – shaped and made his allies, stewing an enthusiasm for educational work. You could also say that the teachers shaped Suchomliński, transferred their experience to him, helped him.

## THE SCHOOL BUILDINGS AND ROOMS

Unintentional student behaviour stemming from the poor, dysfunctional school infrastructure in the first 10 years, when the school had two shifts, were: running in the corridors, pushing, screaming during breaks, making the school dirty by means of dirty shoes, grouping of students in places they could smoke due to a lack of overview. There were also cases of smoking in class and playing games for money.

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<sup>10</sup> D. Goleman, *Emotional intelligence*, Poznań 1997.

<sup>11</sup> Book of protocols of the meetings of the Pawłysz High School board. Protocol from the 21.03.1969 meeting. Inventory number 8. (Archival materials. Memorial-Pedagogical Museum in Pawłysz).



This behaviour that was against the school rules was significantly limited or got rid off when in 1958 after a serious effort, from the teachers, students and parents, the school was extended and a mini-campus was created which has been described years later as follows: even if it is not the most modern of architecture, it is – taking into consideration a student-friendly school – more of a picture of the future than a school made of glass and concrete. This way they had a chance to divide all of the students from one shift into younger and older groups so that – as Suchomliński commented – there would be no cramping and pushing and so that students be faced with greenery when leaving the school.

It took many years to keep the school tidy. Initially students were obliged to clean the classrooms three times, water containers were placed in front of the school so that students could wash their shoes. Asphalt walkways leading from one building to the other also helped with the cleanliness. The issue of a student-only area where teachers were not allowed was also fixed, creating the conditions for self-education and shaping a feeling of co-management.

Reprehensible and harmful students' behaviour could be gradually limited because the function of the school infrastructure changed and had different cognitive offerings. Instead of empty space around the school, the students had at their disposal a green and experienceable environment (they were methodically presented with the idea of nature as a source of thought and impressions, "listening to the music of nature"), a space for cultural entertainment, sport and technical activities and they also had an open rural space for learning to work in the countryside and see the attempts of this work. Various surprising places where the active process of teaching and educating of the Pawłysz school took part can be seen in the "*Oddaję serce dzieciom*" and "*Narodziny obywatela*" books<sup>12</sup>.

### INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION IN SCHOOL

One of the important problems of the Pawłysz School was the issue of the communication between teachers and students. This was one of the most significant during the first years of the school headed by W. Suchomliński. As part of this issue one can single out the negative effects of bad organ-

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<sup>12</sup> W. Suchomliński, *Oddaję serce dzieciom*, Warszawa 1978; ibidem, *Narodziny obywatela*, Moscow 1982.

isation of students' work during classes which did not contribute to the development of the thinking and memory of students, so the transfer of knowledge instead of organising a process of acquisition under the teachers oversight as well as the deficiencies of the grading system.

When it comes to the latter issue, the statements of W. Suchomliński from the meetings of the psychological seminar between 1968 and 1969 were distinctive and showed a deep understanding and a systematic approach to the technology of teaching. W. Suchomliński said: *"The assessment of knowledge cannot be the one and most important stimulus for the student to learn. If there is no other incentive, the grade will not play its educational role but it will become a reason to lie, to create words incompatible with deeds."* And he added: *"A grade can be a measure of education only when the teacher takes into consideration how much work it took."* *"School grades cannot become shackles for the thinking student"*<sup>13</sup>.

The over-increase of grades was as harmful and it was practiced by primary class teachers and the less active ones.

One of the effective solutions when it comes to the technology of teaching which was many years ahead of the macroworld decisions, was the preparation and implementation of educational standards such as reading comprehension, writing, thinking and logical analysis of text.

The relationships between the students and teachers were not based on interdictions and penalties. In 1967 the school started a mass experiment in order to eliminate penalties from the educational activity<sup>14</sup>. The whole-school style of interpersonal relationships required the teachers not only to talk but also to listen to the student so that he could analyse the situation and motives of the students actions and mood. So the basis of the relations was not as much a social contract – as can be seen in Korczak institutions – but an equal level of partners in mutual relations under the condition the teacher acts in a deliberate manner, not revealing his educational intentions to the students. We should also point out the systematic approach to students stunts, without which the school – in the

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<sup>13</sup> Protocols of the Pawłysz High School psychological seminar (1968/1969. Meeting 24.09.1969. Topic: The assessment of knowledge as a mean for education and the emergence of pedagogical tact. (Archival materials. Memorial-Pedagogical Museum in Pawłysz).

<sup>14</sup> W. Suchomliński, *Wychowanie bez kar*, „Prawda” 1968, 25.03 (in Russian).

words of Suchomliński – would change in a prefuneral place. There was also a conviction that if a student stole a book it was not theft<sup>15</sup>.

An indicator of the quality of the relations between teachers and students, “a brave word about what is good and bad, a high mark of moral beauty”, was the chrysanthemum that the students brought every day from the greenhouse. If the relations were correct and the students believed the teacher, then a red or pink chrysanthemum would appear in the vase as it was the symbol of the children’s happiness. Blue was for anxiety, sky blue for sadness, yellow for a longer separation from a colleague. The violet chrysanthemum would mean that the students were feeling offended, that the teacher failed them, did not keep a promise or divulged a common secret<sup>16</sup>.

### COOPERATION WITH THE NON-SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

The time the author spent in the schools allow to distinguish two periods of its presentations. The first, post-war was when orphans, children from single mother families, incomplete families, perverted and neglected children arrived. For these children the school was a second home, it fed them, cared for them, tried to fulfil their needs and improve their hard fate. A characteristic example of the sensitive approach of the school to the children scarred by war was the silence surrounding the orphan status or the lack of a parent. In the second period, which started in 1951, there were conflicts, exclusive interests of the school and parents. In the case when parents did not give a good example to their children, the pedagogical team did their best to neutralize or limit the unwelcome parental influences. This was the practice of the teachers if the parents were part of sect, were alcoholics and also when they did not work with the children.

The team work was systematically carried out with the parents for many years. The school held a university for parents with certain dysfunctions. It is especially worth to point out the successes of the school in eliminating the possible reasons for underdevelopment, diseases and proper bringing up of the children. The core of the success of the cooperation of the school and parents lies in the specific orientation in the bringing up of

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<sup>15</sup> From an unpublished interview with the pedagogues brother, S. Suchomliński (author’s own archive).

<sup>16</sup> W. Suchomliński, *Fioletowa chryzantema*, „Junost” 1970 no 1 (in Russian).

future mothers and fathers in their school benches. The preparation for family life was understood mainly as shaping the emotional culture of the future parents. A special subject, “Mutual relation culture in the family”, served this purpose along with a meeting with Suchomliński regarding being faithful in love<sup>17</sup>.

The lack of document proving an active participation of the parents in school life is an interesting tidbit when it comes to the cooperation with a family as the basic representative of the local environment. One can think that without pretence the school aligned the relation with the parents in a natural manner, making them a close helper in the education.

The relations and cooperation with representative of the local environment were of a varied nature. They took the form of activity in the rural culture organizations, a choir with adults, a mother tongue section for adults as well in popularizing reading books among the residents of the rural settlements and editing the “Our village” magazine. The cooperation with the local kolkhoz was favourable which was not a patronage institution and thus had balanced relations with the school when it comes to education and production.

The shaping of generally uniform social views in the Pawłysz environment, achieving an observance of similar moral norms, paying homage to the same school and rural, rich traditions by different resident groups, factories and organizations with the participation of the parents caused a limitation or elimination of negative factor which appeared in the neighbouring local environments. Taking into consideration the effects of school and parents’ cooperation, and the non-school environment, one can speak of a local Pawłysz system of education. This can also be seen as the source of there only being a slight difference between the hidden and the formal curriculum of the W. Suchomliński school.

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<sup>17</sup> W. Suchomliński, *Książka o miłości*, Moskwa 1963 (in Russian).

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## SUMMARY

The article covers the educational activity of the village school in Pawłysz, Ukraine, which was headed by a prominent pedagogue, Wasyl Suchomliński, from 1948 to 1970, whose 100-year jubilee is observed by the world pedagogical society based on an UNESCO act. The theoretical basis for the analysis is the socio-pedagogical concept of R. Meighan et al. of the official school curriculum being accompanied by a hidden curriculum which contradicts the official one. Being able to personally get to know the legacy of the school and the chosen school as well as available instrument of scientific exploration of the aspects of the functioning of the school, the author chose to analyse – due to the size limit of the article – only some areas of the research: the professional role of the teacher, school buildings and rooms, interpersonal communication in school as well as cooperation with the non-school environment.

**Key words:** rural school operation, aspects of school operation and areas of research, school operation analysis, hidden school curriculum, difference between the hidden and official school curriculum.