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Natalia POBIRCHENKO

Ukrainian academician Oleksandr A. Zakharenko author's school

The name of O. Zakharenko, the founder of the outstanding School on the Ros River, the creator of the unique education system is well-known in Ukrainian pedagogical spheres, from the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences to rural schools. The phenomenon of the School on the Ros River has been studied, analyzed, used by scientists from Europe and neighbouring countries. 'To consider people's opinion' does not mean to follow the fashion but to realize the true value of the gift that create a grain of ideas working as the wise nature lasting mechanisms.

We have been living without O. Zakharenko for more than 5 years already, but his ideas have not been forgotten. Now his works seem to attract even more attention. His ideas are being studied, tested in new environment, put into practice. So, the ideas created in the Village of Sahnivka are spreading. It is really true that all great things are better seen from a distance.

Those who are interested in O. Zakharenko's ideas and who did not have a chance to visit the School on the Ros River when its creator was alive, often ask what kind of person Oleksandr Antonovych was. What was his mystery, how come that he formed an extraordinary centre of culture, happiness, creativity in the time when everyday life of the remote small village was oppressed by the ideological dictate?

I chanced to have been acquainted with O. Zakharenko and to have been working with him in the education sphere for many years. Of course, it is impossible to characterize such a person in a few words. But I am sure that the understanding of his success, effectiveness and efficiency of his educative principles lies in his being sincere in communication with people. He had no hypocrisy or double-faced traits. He was characterized as an ordinary and discreet person but had real talent and energy. In his work 'Pieces of Advice for a Colleague Cre-

ated on the Ros River' he wrote: "Dear colleague! If you want your students to be modest, you should be modest yourself. Though modesty is not popular nowadays it has been the main trait for a teacher profession for many years"¹.

His actions spoke louder than words, he supported fair principles for himself and others. That's why one could not help believing him and children realized it better than others. There is a saying 'It is easier to be a prophet in your native country than in your native village'. In a village everybody is seen, no action can be hidden and every word will be heard. Both old people and children in small Sahnivka village (Korsun-Shevchenkivsk District, Cherkasy region) liked O. Zakharenko, he was very popular with the community. But that was not owing to administrative power or money (he was just the headmaster of a rural school). O. Zakharenko was a real spiritual leader, 'a spiritual headmaster' as he was called in the Village of Sahnivka.

Oleksandr Antonovych held important positions and had different awards: he was a deputy of Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada, Honoured Teacher of Ukraine, the Head of Ukrainian Teachers' Creative Union, academician, a member of Ukraine's Academy of Pedagogical Sciences, possessed the title 'Excellent worker in education'. He was awarded with Lenin Order and Makarenko Medal, was the prize-winner of many professional competitions. Having such a long recognition list O. Zakharenko as a talented and competent pedagogue had many opportunities to work in the capital, to be the head of a University faculty and to get all conditions for his creative work. He could get rid of traditional village household problems taking up so much time and effort. He even was proposed to become the Minister of Education of Ukraine. But he refused all proposals stating a simple and laconic reason: 'I will not leave the Village of Sahnivka'. The school on the Ros River was his creation, the most important project in his life.

And out of all honours the best for him was the status of author's school awarded to Sahnivka School (Ministry of Science and Education Decree dated by February 1, 2002). In the 50s he came to Sahnivka village as a young teacher after graduation from Cherkasy Pedagogical Institute. It was a usual rural school, poor and not perspective, situated in a remote village. And that school made the village known all over the world.

They developed together – O. Zakharenko, a young teacher of Physics and Mathematics who became the headmaster in 1966, and his school. One of the most important principles for O. Zakharenko's successful work was the fact that he did not build his education system on the ideological postulates, but on eternal human values: family (mother cult will be shown below), beauty of nature, charity, love for native land and country. O. Zakharenko is said to create Pedagogy for Specific Purpose.

¹ О. Захаренко. Поради колезі, народжені в школі над Россю. – Черкаси, 2005. – С. 4.

His work essence was to find a specific purpose which would delight and unite the staff. Looking into the talented pedagogue's ideas from the distance everybody can make the following conclusion: the main purpose of his life was to create the school where similar to fresh air in the field or at the seaside, dominates the atmosphere of creativity, happiness, confidence, inner, moral and physical health. In such environment children become healthy adults with strong psychological immunity.

Olexandr Antonovych never created soap-bubble conditions, isolation from troubles and dirtiness of the world. The matter was that in their Alma Mater the Sahnivka schoolchildren got moral health, ability to appreciate everything good and impartial, confidence in their strength which helped them to resist the life difficulties.

O. Zakharenko's pedagogical system forms a triangle: parents – child – teacher. The development of mutual respect, constant collaboration, harmonious relations in the triangle is one of the most important factors necessary for creating the atmosphere where a child's positive abilities and skills can be developed.

Studying O. Zakharenko's published works one can see that Oleksandr Antonovych avoided formal expressions like 'to determine the task', 'to organize an event' etc. He used to call principles of his education system ideas. On the wall of school hall in Sahnivka village there is an idea considered to be fundamental, determinative, great, simple and expressed in words understood by every child: 'If you want to change the world for the better, to save its original beauty, untouched holiness, you should begin with yourself!' So, let's cross the threshold and enter the Author's school of the well-known Ukrainian pedagogue.

The school is divided into five main educational centres. The centre for junior pupils occupies one wing of the sports building. There are classrooms, recreation rooms, a computer complex, and the Fairy-tale Room. Choreography Rooms, Music Showroom, and a Art Room are situated nearby. The Centre for Health, Sport and Recreation consists of a gymnasium, a swimming-pool, volleyball and basketball sports grounds. There are shooting range, and a sports ground for gymnastics lessons. Here one can find phytobar where medicinal prophylactic teas are made, and some of them are original teas made by Sahnivka recipes. The Centre for Labour Training and Education has seven workshops: turner's, metalworker's, woodworker's, culinary, tool-making, and electrical engineering. Besides, there are school fields, hothouses, experimental areas, motor vehicles fleet in miniature. The Centre for Culture and Education is housed in a separate building and includes a well-arranged museum 'My Little Motherland', a room for lectures and film watching, an exhibition hall, an observatory and planetarium. Besides, the school area has the Memory Place, the Well of Conscience, the Wheat Ear Fountain, the Pole of Peace, Shevchenko's monuments (a Ukrainian great poet). All these places contribute to creating a special atmosphere of the intellectual wealth at school.

The Centre for Senior Students is situated in the oldest and the biggest school building. It is the main education base: classrooms for Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics, Computer Science, Biology, Ukrainian and foreign languages and literature are situated here. The same building combines a Pedagogical Reception Room, a library with reading rooms, the Room of Wisdom and Beauty, Radio and Broadcasting Studio, and a canteen.

School in Sahnivka Village can be compared to a small country having its own peculiarities. And if, for example, experimental fields and a gymnasium can be found everywhere, are there a lot of Ukrainian rural schools having observatory and own television channel for 15 villages? All these things appeared gradually in Sahnivka village, year by years. The headmaster had an idea and it was transformed into a specific purpose. For example, the idea of bringing up a healthy child (this idea belongs to principal ones in O. Zakharenko's education system). Oleksandr Antonovych put it into practice: he began to construct the Building of Health with a swimming-pool. It cost a lot to embody such an idea in the village in the 80s when even bricks were hard to buy. Teachers, parents and students built it themselves. And there is a gymnasium now, since 1983 it has been functioning with summer and winter swimming-pools. In the experimental fields one can find a great special flowerbed 'Green Pharmacy' divided into sections where herbs are grown. The plants are cultivated according to all pharmacology principles. Strict pieces of advice are written: how to grow, when to gather and to dry, what every herb is for. Every autumn children store up hundreds of medicinal prophylactic tea 'The Bouquet from Ukrainian Forests' and make special preparations for the drink 'Shepherdess' by a local original recipe. Here is the chain combining three links: an idea – a specific purpose – consecutive embodiment. And it results in children's strong health. Practically every schoolchild attends the swimming pool once or two times a week. The water is treated with silver and rich in salt from the Black Sea. As a result it has medicinal characteristics. According to doctors' conclusions children having scoliosis stabilize their health owing to lessons in the swimming pool during one season. The school curriculum in Sahnivka village contains compulsory credits in swimming, school leavers take swimming examinations and the grades are included into a school leaving certificate.

To inoculate habits of work and to make a child respect labour are every teacher's tasks. O. Zakharenko's education system suggests its own approach for labour. If you just give brooms and spades for children to sweep and to dig the result can be opposite. Mechanical execution of dull operations may create boredom and compulsion may result in protest. Oleksandr Antonovych's rule is that a child's even simple work should include creativity, play, romantic and invention components². For example, schoolchildren from Sahnivka Village work in

² О. Захаренко. Поспішаймо робити добро. – Черкаси, 1997. – С. 26.

forestry – they store up hay and brushwood for forest habitants' feeding in winter. The students are divided into groups and every group is headed by elected leaders and instructors – a class teacher or a parent.

The school makes small parts for agricultural machines by order from Korsun-Shevchenkivsk Machinery Plant, and sew gauntlets, overalls, and aprons for the Korsunchanka Factory. It is a more interesting work which requires some skills and abilities. In the fifth form children receive work records to register their things done. Children's labour especially when some skills are needed for complicated operations, as O. Zakharenko put it, is a constant complex of brain efforts, combination of a child's thoughts, interests, needs and feelings arising during this process.

The main thing about it are intellectual efforts, conscious creativity, self-esteem development. 'The feeling of respect to people's work, material welfare and spiritual values created by people is cultivated when students see things made with their own and other people's hands, protect and improve them. If students do not like to see dust and mess around, if they are concerned about cleanliness, order, beauty everywhere, they enjoy work and realize the cost of welfare' wrote Oleksandr Antonovych³.

His testament which was constant strengthening labour worship in children's consciousness has always been the specific purpose at school. Here are some quotations from the school working plan: 'To make students realize such main principles: people can develop only if they are hard-working and industrious. Talent and gift, beauty and strength, great wisdom and strong will, spiritual values and labour honour are the result of creative daring and hard work. Do not waste time, work and develop every day... Respect hard-working people. Love and appreciate any work if it brings welfare and happiness to others. There are different kinds of work: manual and intellectual, easy and hard, interesting and dull, for yourself and for people, for today and for future, for parents and for the state. Enjoy any work, find happiness and achieve success'⁴.

The problems of a young person's adaptation to the society, searching his own position, determination of a social role optimal for a definite character are given great importance at school in Sahnivka village. The system of self-control was established at school. It is the best way to develop initiative, to establish responsibility, practical skills of self-organization. A. Makarenko's classical model with its rules, system of rights, duties, and self-management was taken as a pattern. The senior student on duty was appointed for the position of a Deputy Headmaster; he was to organize school life. He had keys from the school, had the right to give orders (students had to follow them), to make remarks and to express his gratitude. The headmaster's young deputy was to form a detachment on duty which worked during a week and kept school in good order.

³ О.А. Захаренко, С.М. Мазурик. Школа над Россю. – 1979. – С. 98.

⁴ Ibid. – С. 120.

The environment, group work form an individual – this statement is very typical for School on the Ros River, where a lot of outstanding people were grown in the creative and live atmosphere. But even the best collectivism can not substitute individual work with a child. The child is in the centre of teachers' attention, their contemplations and observation. There is a special form of characteristics at Sahnivka School. The front page includes 'a student's psychological characteristics': his traits, temperament, abilities, interests, his position in the group of classmates. A child's family conditions are briefly described on the second page. Once a term class teachers write here observation results taken from their diaries.

The conception of individual work with a child is based on a traditional principle: to help a child be a success in a definite activity. Irrespective of his studying progress a child should have an activity which he is interested and successful in, it will help in his self-realization.

The school in Sahnivka Village has its own report cards which can better reflect students' studying and progress. The academic year starts and students write in the special column the grades they are planning to receive during the next term. A report card includes grade columns for assiduity, industriousness, good breeding, treatment of relatives, civic duties etc. At the end of each term real grades are taken. The grade indices are discussed both by teachers and classmates. Such a report card is the best way to see a student's progress and his position among classmates, and at the same time it is a stimulus for developing. 'A report card may show not only the student personality but the reasons he is like this, why some demands have failed' – wrote O.A. Zakharenko. The main aim of school in Sahnivka village is to help a child find his own way in life. And O. Zakharenko's school is a school of self-determination with the motto: 'A child's heart can be won only with inspiration of creativity, work and studying'.

Speaking about report cards and grades one may think that such democratic approach is excessive. But democratism is one of the basic principles in the author's school functioning. It does not mean lack of any restraint but a high level of self-responsibility. Every student is to study according to his intelligence level, to be aware of his abilities and skills and to receive definite marks. If a senior student agrees, the mark is put into the register; the school rules provide students with rights to pass the topic again and to attend evening extra consultation.

In senior school the assessment system shows specific results but its basic principles are formed in preparatory school where characters are diagnosed and precedence is established. Speaking about democratism in assessment, one can say that at Sahnivka school the term grade results are not put subjectively. Every mark is taken and based on 10 grades analysis (Such a method was used at school in Sahnivka Village when 12-grade-scale was not even thought about in Ukraine). If there are less than 10 marks and truancy, skipped topics are obvious; a pupil will not be assessed or will have a poor mark. It means that he missed his

opportunity to get a good grade. And the previous excellent marks will be of no help. In such situations compromises are not expected by the school rules.

The stimulating system is also worth mentioning. It provides excellent students with stipends and awards for excellent studying specific subjects, prizes for school activities, diplomas for success in different competitions, even prizes for everyday morning exercises (famous roll-calls in Sahnivka Village). School has its own system of moral stimulation: reports about a student, his family are often broadcast on school or local TV. The stimulating system is strictly regulated and has its rules because it is very important to keep within limits, not to be formal otherwise the system will lose its effectiveness.

The basic idea in O. Zakharenko's school system was creativity: to learn not with enforcement, but with a child's interest. This classical principle was transformed by Oleksandr Antonovych. Every teacher should use a play. A play which instructs is a very serious but exciting work. Every day at the morning roll-call an intellectual competition is played. The school atmosphere is rich in romance, humour, and music. Daily routine is not felt even in an autumn day. And children at this bright comfortable school are not just consumers, but creators, participants of the process.

Competitions dedicated to the best form, the nicest field spot, the brightest flowerbed take place here. According to O. Zakharenko's principles every square centimetre of the wall in the yard or school ground should have emotional colour and be educative. A good tradition was begun – every pupil plants a tree: a forest with more than a thousand of trees has been grown by now. There are arborvitae providing fresh air for young children, flower beds, sites for recreation. Every form has them own and it gives a space for creativity. In the hot houses the flower sprouts are grown by children both for school community and for village inhabitants. Last year 10 thousands of sages were planted.

The idea of emotional memory awakening education was introduced at O. Zakharenko's school. The main task was to establish a museum where the letters of war soldiers were main things to be displayed. Once Oleksandr Antonovych said that studying education experience in Poland, he met Polish schoolchildren who could recollect their family tree up to the eighth generation. Unfortunately such tradition has been lost in our country but it is priceless. The specific realization of the idea is formation of the book "Encyclopaedia of the School Generation" (four volumes have already been written). It is a unique issue in history of Ukrainian pedagogy.

O. Zakharenko's school is an establishment educating not only children but teachers and parents as well. True teachers were formed from young persons who came to school after graduation. They rarely left school though O. Zakharenko was very demanding. Oleksandr Antonovych used to emphasize that special selection of staff was needed for elementary school. It is hard to overestimate the role of the first teacher: in his hands there is a child's future and the

future of the nation. That is why selecting teachers for primary school should start from pedagogical classes, colleges, universities. They must be gifted people with creativity, having a great desire to teach young school children⁵. In Sakhnivka Village the best and the most experienced teachers work at elementary school. There is an excellent rule: a teacher gives two demonstration lessons a month. It is an effective process of group creativity, gaining new experience and seeing the colleagues' findings. 'One more riddle in the teacher's creativity, wrote O. Zakharenko, is his absolute freedom in choosing methods and forms. He can't work without it. There is only one demand – knowledge can be deep when it is based on doubt, arguments, children's own opinion and a research element'⁶.

As A. Makarenko put it, 'pedagogical staff' is a synonym for the definition 'school staff' which means all teachers and students. This principle was followed by O. Zakharenko. Cooperation, mutual respect between teachers and students are the base the personnel continue to follow after author school creator's death.

Let us mention the third part of O. Zakharenko's educative triangle – parents. Parents are constant participants of all school events, often even grandparents take part in them. And they do not concern only funding or building. All buildings which appeared on the school territory in O. Zakharenko's lifetime were built by village community, teachers and parents. Sometimes the school in Sahnivka village is called 'a school built by work team'. Parents participate in school exhibitions, celebrations, from time to time they are present at school examinations, make reports in school radio programmes. The university for parents is functioning at school. Proper emotions are aimed at arousing adults' interest and what is the most important – to make the child proud of his family. Parents together with children form their family tree, note important events from their family life. This information is a good basis for 'Encyclopaedia of the School Generation'.

Another basic idea in O. Zakharenko's education system is mother cult. At the beginning of school course a series of discussions is prepared for a form. They are about treatment of mother, family, lifelong responsibility for mother. The plans and methodical synopses of such discussions are school achievement and kept at school. Mother's image is regularly mentioned, children are offered to think who the mother is in a person's life. In such a way schoolchildren's thoughts of get more intensified, and their responsibility is realized. Oleksandr Antonovych kept emphasizing: a pedagogue must consciously use the smallest opportunity – in the classroom, in extracurricular activity, going for a walk, on the field ground, in the swimming-pool or any other place – to remember children that all good things they have got from their mothers. Before the 8th of March there is a school tradition to celebrate a week devoted to mothers, grand-

⁵ О. Захаренко. Поспішаймо робити добро. – Черкаси, 1997. – С. 16.

⁶ О. Захаренко. Поспішаймо робити добро. – Черкаси, 1997. – С. 4.

mothers, schoolmistresses and girls. Traditionally it begins with the lesson of ethics in every form. At such lessons children themselves determined the principles:

- everyone's main duty is to love and respect mother;
- everyone should do his best to make mother proud of her child, be sure for his future;
- everyone should work help mother;
- everyone should obey mother for her not to worry.

'Cultivating moral, emotional treatment of parents and relatives in children provides constant many-sided work' – wrote O.A. Zakharenko⁷. His school meets all main demands of 'the Self-Realization School' paradigm as the dominants have been changed from social to humanistic oriented; individuality is considered the main aim of many-sided development; the education process is pedagogically controlled with the opportunity to chose activity according to interests; the child as a participant of such process acquires social experience – knowledge, abilities and skills of communication; the teacher as a leader of educational process is both a highly qualified specialist and a friend, advisor in collaboration with a student. Management model of the author school is complex, multicomponent and at the same time highly effective, and flexible.

Till his last days Oleksandr Antonovych worked hard to determine his strategical ideas for school, development of teachers' creative potential, to form innovative culture for his school. The author's school provides self-realization of creative inclinations for both students and teachers – the creator was striving for it. Sahnivka village became 'Pedagogical Mecca' for Ukrainian researchers and practical scientists, and for foreign colleagues. For already five years the strong organism of the establishment has been functioning without the Spiritual Headmaster. It means that the right strategy has been selected. The colleagues often felt sorry for the fact that Oleksandr Antonovych didn't write much as he was always busy with practical work, constantly surrounded by people. His first book 'School on the Ros River' was created in 1979, 'Hurry up to Make the Good' – almost 20 years later, in 1997. Being terminally ill he wrote intensively to leave his thoughts on paper. During his last years in 2001 four volumes of 'Encyclopedia of School Life' were published and he called this work 'a collective creation of the whole Sahnivka village'. In 2002 his 'Pieces of Advice for a Colleague Created on the Ros River' were published. This work is a pedagogical precept of a great teacher where every word is valuable. That year shortly after Oleksandr Antonovych's death a collection '210 School Roll-calls' written in co-authorship with his son Sergiy was published. Small in volume but extremely profound published heritage. It is like a deep methodological source for Ukrainian teachers to use. It is for researchers to analyze and generalize. It is for O. Zakharenko's ideas to be used in a new environment.

⁷ Там само. – С. 46.

Summary

Ukrainian academician Oleksandr A. Zakharenko author's school

The name of O. Zakharenko, the founder of the outstanding School on the Ros River, the creator of the unique education system is well-known in Ukrainian pedagogical spheres, from the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences to rural schools. The phenomenon of the School on the Ros River has been studied, analyzed, used by scientists from Europe and neighbouring countries. 'To consider people's opinion' does not mean to follow the fashion but to realize the true value of the gift that create a grain of ideas working as the wise nature lasting mechanisms.