

# EVERYBEAT

ACADEMIC



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## Context

In 2013, Maidan, or Revolution of Dignity, flared in Ukraine, protesting the government that exited Ukraine's European Union integration course. Brutal force was used against peaceful demonstrators, mostly students. It shook and mobilized society.

Ukrainian then-president Viktor Yanukovich fled the country to the Russian Federation. It was shortly followed by the appearance of Russian militants in Crimea, an Autonomous Republic of Ukraine and home of indigenous Crimean Tatars, resulting in the annexation of Crimea. The war ignited in the eastern part of Ukraine.

In February 2022, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation began with massive shelling, occupation, kidnapping of children, documented war crimes. Ukraine resisted. The Ukrainians behind the frontline continue to volunteer, support each other, teach and learn, discover, and contribute to the world.

One day, people are debating a new biology school textbook. Another day, they wake up to explosions behind the windows. The usual life became yesterday. People have suffered unimaginable pain and losses. Yet, they live and endure so they and their children can be safe and free tomorrow.

Olga Vasylyeva of EVERYBEAT reached Ukrainians in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Dnipro, and Donetsk region, asking them to share their experiences and lessons learned, to tell how they managed to move forward without losing the focus and prospect of the future of Ukraine despite the constant shock of war. A physics teacher, a literature teacher, a scientist, a historian, a self-schooled designer, and a mother of two middle-schoolers – all readily agreed.

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### ABOUT

The EVERYBEAT academic magazine is published by Everybeat, LLC.

The magazine was created with the aim of delivering knowledge and inspiration to students beyond the confines of the classroom, bridging the gap between academia and everyday life.

We invite you to notify us if you encounter any typos in our content. We are committed to quality, and your feedback is invaluable in maintaining our standards.

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### CONTRIBUTORS

Editor: Olga Vasylyeva

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Contributors to the 2023.01 issue:

Anton Senenko

Olha Vladymyrova

Tetyana Filipenko

Serhiy Mon'kov

Olena Honcharova

[EVERYBEATACADEMIC@GMAIL.COM](mailto:EVERYBEATACADEMIC@GMAIL.COM)



KINDNESS

EXPERTISE

INSPIRATION

## Reaching the summit last

*Serhiy Mon'kov is a physics teacher at Dnipro school for more than 30 years, and director of the summer children camp.*

### Space capital of Ukraine



*Photograph by Oliba Semenova,  
is provided by Serhiy Mon'kov.*

Dnipro is a large industrial city in eastern Ukraine, nicknamed the “space capital of Ukraine” for the concentration of space-rocket engineering industry. Designated in Soviet times as *a closed city*, a type of city where foreigners were not allowed to travel, Dnipro sinks in the verdure of maple trees, lindens, and acacias and has everything that people typically do not associate with the industrial city – beaches, a beautiful esplanade, cozy nooks, festivals, and reach agricultural traditions that engage even city-dwellers.

Dnipro, is where Serhiy Mon'kov has been teaching physics to children for more than thirty years. He used to serve as a director for the children's summer camp every season. He is a teacher 365 days a year.

## Philosophy of everything

Being well equipped with Anton Senenko's insight into the need to understand the laws of physics for survival, I decided to offer this argument to Serhiy, asking how physics helps him today. The answer I received was nothing that I expected. Serhiy came from a very different perspective.

'Everybody treats physics as a subject where you always have to solve problems, implying more of a mathematical approach. However, the very word physics means "knowledge of nature." If a person thinks as a physicist, he can, with no trouble, learn nearly any specialty. The subject of physics develops a reach worldview.'

According to Serhiy, physics is the only subject in Ukrainian schools that teaches philosophy as a fundamental study of nature.

'If you know and understand philosophy, you can predict, forecast, and calculate your further steps. It depends on your philosophy, what kind of person you will be, how you will behave, and how people will regard you. Especially it became obvious at the time of war – the philosophy of our northern neighbor and philosophy of Ukrainians are different.'

Serhiy sees the role of teaching in school beyond instructing knowledge but as basis for the worldview. He explains metaphorically. There are three types of teachers. First, there is a star teacher, a brilliant, charismatic leader that attracts followers and reaches the summit first. Second, a know-it-all expert that equips his students with maps and exact instructions for the journey. Finally, there is a teacher facilitator who creates conditions for students to discover new ideas independently. He climbs the mountain together with the group, helping those who are tired or lost, and reaches the summit last.

*UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency,  
September 2023*

Since February 2022, there have been over 5.9 million Ukrainian refugees, with children constituting 30-50%. Many teachers have also fled the country, with an estimated 25,000 teachers leaving by May 2022. Nearly 70% of Ukrainian refugees possess a university or higher degree. By February 2023, 3,151 educational institutions were damaged due to bombing or shelling, with 440 of them completely destroyed.



*Specialized school № 67 of ecological and economic profile, Dnipro, Ukraine.  
Photograph by Olga Vasylyeva.*

### **Formula for the remote learning**

Serhiy aspires to be a facilitator that sparks creativity and enthusiasm, motivates students to make their own discoveries. However, today it is very difficult to do. All classes at school are remote. Distant education might work fine for a facilitator if the group is small, with two or three children, but the task becomes nearly impossible in large classes.

'It is difficult to work. I don't feel the mood in the class and do not receive feedback. In the classroom, I could see everybody and understand what was happening. Now, I act more as an expert teacher, just explaining things.'

It is especially challenging to establish contact if the class is new and there was no prior in-person communication.

Many children are now refugees and join the class from countries with various time zones, 'When we have a lesson here, it is a time to go to sleep for a child in a different time zone.

I already tried everything. Still, if the group of children is too large, it is difficult to teach remotely. It may be easier for humanitarian subjects when everybody has their cameras turned on and has a discussion. I share a screen to write and explain. Perhaps, if I had several monitors, I could see the class. I have not yet found the formula to make remote learning more effective for a large group of children. It is really very difficult. Sometimes I feel like talking to myself.'

### **Formula for specialization**

Serhiy is not used to working like this.

'I might know about a child more than all his relatives,' he says.

'How come?' I asked.

'Because you have to talk with a child. Every child needs an adult to whom he can come with his problems or feelings. It happens that parents do not establish such a relationship. You need to take children's problems seriously. It also creates conditions for a child to study with enthusiasm. Here is a simple example. When I was a student, I loved playing basketball. Believe it or not, my first basketball coach was a physics teacher who was a very cool basketball player. Because I joined the basketball team, I felt it would be dishonorable to arrive at his science classes unprepared. I would feel ashamed to let my teacher down.'

Serhiy believes that everybody can be motivated to learn. If you treat a child with care and respect, the child responds with increased responsibility.

Serhiy likes Western educational systems, which is based on common general knowledge followed by specialization at the higher grades. One problem yet to solve is the best way to choose a specialization for a child.

'Division between humanitarian and natural science is not absolute. You see, a humanitarian is someone who knows several languages, can write an essay on French literature of the XIV century, or discuss the architectural styles of Italy – not a person who does not put forward studying multiplication tables. However, it might be that by specialization, we pre-condition a child into a particular study area.'

*If you treat a child with care  
and respect, the child  
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responsibility.*



How Serhiy sees the role of modern public schools in Ukraine?

'If you asked me this question thirty years ago, I would answer that the main role of the school is to educate. Today, I answer that the main role of the school is to ensure that a child has a future, that a child can find himself in life.'

'How do you deal with teaching in the time of war?'

*'I try. I talk with my children. I try to encourage, maybe tell a joke or share memories together. I have a friendly, tight-knit class. The big problem is we cannot gather together. What if there is an air raid?'*



*Park in  
Dnipro,  
Ukraine,  
where you  
could ride  
on the train  
or the  
electric car,  
2019.*

*Photograph  
by Olga  
Varylyeva.*