

Obituaries to Teachers on the Pages of Periodicals of the 20th Century

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Introduction

Obituaries are an extremely interesting and original source of educational history that has recently attracted the attention of researchers from different countries. For example, the topic of academic obituaries is covered in the articles by Bruce Macfarlane and Roy Y. Chan *The last judgement: exploring intellectual leadership in higher education through academic obituaries*¹ and Julian Hamann “*Let us salute one of our kind*”. *How academic obituaries consecrate research biographies*². In a thorough work *Oscuri martiri, eroi del dovere: memoria e celebrazione del maestro elementare attraverso i necrologi pubblicati sulle riviste didattiche e magistral nel primo secolo dell'Italia unita (1861-1961)* Anna Ascenzi and Roberto Sani, by examining the obituaries, reconstruct the evolution of the image of the teacher at different historical stages and in the light of different ideological, political and cultural contexts³. In Ukraine, in connection with the processes of decommunization and decolonization of Ukrainian humanities, in recent years, researchers of the history of education have been paying more attention to the peculiarities of the development of national schooling in different periods of Ukrainian history. One of the sources that allow us to look at the processes of the past from a new perspective is obituaries for educators in pedagogical journals.

The purpose of this article is to present statistical, factual, and bibliographic information about obituaries of Ukrainian educators on the pages of periodicals of the 20th century; to analyze obituaries published in Ukrainian Soviet pedagogical journals of the 1920s-1980s.

The first stage of any scientific research is the source research heuristic. This is the name given to this stage by the French luminaries of source studies Charles Victor Langlois, and Charles Seignobos in the late 19th century in their classic work *Introduction to the Study of*

¹ B. Macfarlane, R.Y. Chan, *The last judgement: exploring intellectual leadership in higher education through academic obituaries*, «Studies in Higher Education», vol. 39, n. 2, 2014, pp. 294-306.

² J. Haman, «*Let us salute one of our kind*». *How academic obituaries consecrate research biographies*, «Poetics», vol. 56, n. 3, 2016, pp. 1-14.

³ A. Ascenzi & R. Sani, *Oscuri martiri, eroi del dovere: memoria e celebrazione del maestro elementare attraverso i necrologi pubblicati sulle riviste didattiche e magistral nel primo secolo dell'Italia unita (1861-1961)*, Milano: Franco Angeli, 2016.

History (1898), the first chapter of which is entitled *Searching for Documents (Heuristics)*⁴. Critical analysis and interpretation of sources on a particular research problem are preceded by the question of their existence, quantity, and place of storage. The obituaries we will analyze below were published in 20th-century pedagogical journals stored in the Pedagogical Museum of Ukraine (Kyiv).

1. Results and discussion

In 2014, the Pedagogical Museum of Ukraine launched the publishing series «Pedagogical Re-publications» with the aim to popularize and update little-known or forgotten works of Ukrainian educators of the past and thematic selections of materials on a certain problem. In 2022, the ninth edition of this series was published – the book *In memoriam: nekrolohy na storinkakh ukrainskykh pedahohichnykh chasopysiv kintsia XIX – pochatku XX st. (za materialamy fondiv Pedahohichnoho muzeiu Ukrainy)*⁵. In the following, when quoting obituaries, we will refer to this edition.

The obituaries in the book are organized into six sections. We present them in the form of a table. The titles of Ukrainian pedagogical journals are given in English after the slash /.

Table 1. Systematized information on obituaries published in Ukrainian pedagogical journals from the late 19th to the early 21st century

Section title	Journals in which obituaries were published	Number of obituaries
Obituaries in periodicals of the late 19 th and early 20 th centuries	Biblioteka dlia molodizhy / Library for Youth (Chernivtsi, 1885–1914), Literaturno-naukovyi visnyk / Literary and Scientific Herald (Lviv, 1898–1932), Svitlo / Light (Kyiv, 1910–1914), Uchytelske slovo / Teacher's Word (Lviv, 1912–1939)	17
Obituaries in the periodicals of the Ukrainian Revolution of 1917–1921	Vilna ukrainska shkola / Free Ukrainian School (Kyiv, 1917–1920), Prosvitnianyn-kooperator / Educator-Cooperator (Romny, 1919–1920)	15
Obituaries in publications of the western region of Ukraine in the 1930s	Ridna shkola / Native School (Lviv, 1932–1939), Ukrainska shkola / Ukrainian School (Lviv, 1925–1934, 1938–1939, 1942–1944) Shliakh vykhovannia i navchannia / The Way of Education and Training (Lviv, 1927–1939)	16

⁴ C.V. Langlois, C. Seignobos, *Introduction aux études historiques*, Paris, Librairie Hachette, 1898.

⁵ O. Mikhno (ed.), *In memoriam: nekrolohy na storinkakh ukrainskykh pedahohichnykh chasopysiv kintsia XIX – pochatku XX st. (za materialamy fondiv Pedahohichnoho muzeiu Ukrainy)*, Vinnytsia, FOP Kushnir Yu.V., 2022.

Obituaries in Ukrainian Soviet periodicals of the 1920s-1980s	Literatura v shkoli / Literature at School (Kyiv, 1951–1963), Pochatkova shkola / Primary School (Kyiv, 1969 – present), Ukrainska mova v shkoli / Ukrainian Language at School (Kyiv, 1951–1963), Ukrainska mova i literatura v shkoli / Ukrainian Language and Literature at School (Kyiv, 1963–1994), Doshkilne vykhovannia / Preschool Education (Kyiv, 1951 – present), Shliakh osvity / The Way of Education (Kharkiv, 1922–1930, since 1931 – Komunistychna osvita / Communist Education, since 1945 – Kyiv, Radianska shkola / Soviet School)	35
Obituaries in publications of the Ukrainian diaspora in the 1980s-2010s	Vidhuknitsia / Respond (Toronto, Canada, 1988 – present), Ridna shkola / Native School (New York, USA, 1964 – present)	24
Obituaries in publications of the period of restoration of independence of Ukraine (since 1991)	Pedahohika i psykholohiia / Pedagogy and Psychology (Kyiv, 1993–2019), Postmetodyka / Postmethodology (Poltava, 1993 – present), Fizychnе vykhovannia v shkoli / Physical Education at School (Kyiv, 1996–2012), Dzvin / The Bell (Lviv, 1990 – present)	5

We chose the section *Obituaries in Ukrainian Soviet Periodicals of the 1920s-1980s* for detailed analysis because it is the largest in terms of time (70 years) and quantity (8 pedagogical journals and 35 obituaries). In order to trace the trends in the writing and publication of obituaries for Ukrainian teachers in the Soviet era, we used a historical and chronological approach. Based on the periodization proposed by Orest Subtelny in his book *Ukraine: A History*⁶ we have identified 5 periods, the names of which accurately characterize the socio-political situation in Ukraine in the 1920s-1980s and help us understand the context in which Ukrainian education and pedagogical science developed. Let us briefly characterize each period and the obituaries published at that time.

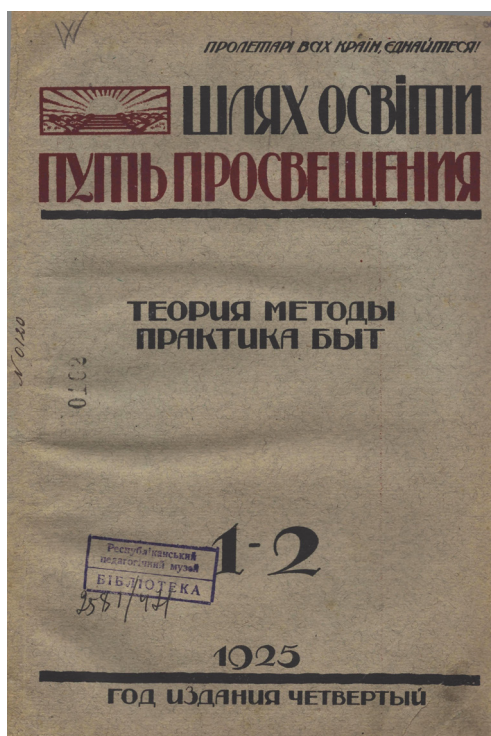


Fig. 1. The cover of the journal «Shliakh osvity», n. 1-2, 1925 (Pedagogical Museum of Ukraine, Kyiv)

⁶ O. Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2009.

1.1 1920s. Soviet Ukraine: The Innovative Twenties

In the 1920s, the Ukrainian school and pedagogical science were actively developing in line with European trends. Obituaries for teachers were published in the leading pedagogical journal «Shlyakh Osvity», which was published in Kharkiv in 1922, first in Russian, then in Ukrainian and Russian in 1925, and in Ukrainian in 1927. Four out of seven obituaries presented here are written in Russian and three in Ukrainian. The obituaries are dedicated to both well-known educators Mykola Sumtsov (1854-1922) and Kostiantyn Lebedyntsev (1878-1925), and ordinary teachers Vasyl Romanovskiy (1865-1922), Tikhon Kotov (1895-1923), Valerii Fesenko (1870-1925), and others. The texts of the obituaries are extremely detailed and contain descriptions of the main stages of the deceased's life and a detailed assessment of his teaching activities. All obituaries of this period have authors, though sometimes they are signed with cryptonyms. For example, in the obituary of V. Fesenko, M. Holubenko provides a detailed description of the deceased's life and work, which is concretized with interesting facts: «French, German, English, Italian were accessible to him, Scandinavian languages, Polish and Czech were also languages he used»⁷, «he had a huge library, more than 2500 volumes, which he collected at his own expense»⁸, «the main work of V.M. Fesenko and the main legacy left is a mathematics classroom» with «the accessories and the numerous of photographs and many drawings that illustrate the history of mathematics in one way or another»⁹.

1.2 1930s. Soviet Ukraine: The Traumatic Thirties

An extremely difficult period in the history of Ukraine (at that time, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic or Ukrainian SSR), when the leadership of the Soviet Union, led by Stalin, deliberately organized the Holodomor of 1932-1933 in Ukraine, the genocide of the Ukrainian people and mass political repression to establish totalitarianism in the USSR. The victims of the Holodomor and repression were many teachers, who were and remain an important socio-professional group in Ukrainian society. Since teachers shaped the worldview of the average citizen, they have always experienced distrust and sometimes hostility from the Soviet regime¹⁰. Today, it is impossible to estimate the number of teachers repressed in Ukraine. According to Yevhen Stryzhak, more than 20,000 teachers and higher school professors were repressed or politically persecuted in Ukraine in the 1930s¹¹. However, this data are not complete, and the figures are approximate.

⁷ Mikhno, *In memoriam*, cit., p. 158.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 160-161.

¹⁰ M.V. Bryvko, *Politychni peresliduvannia y represii proty vchyteliv Ukrainy v 1920–1930-ky rokakh*, «Osvita ta Pedahohichna Nauka», vol. 177, n. 2, 2021, pp. 56-74.

¹¹ Y. Stryzhak, *Represii 1930-ky rr. ta yikhni naslidky dlia kadrovoho zabezpechennia serednoi i vyshchoi shkoly USRR*, Cherkasy, Vertykal, 2007, p. 60.

In the context of the above, obituaries in pedagogical journals of the 1930s were almost never published. We managed to find only two obituaries in journal «Komunistychna osvita»: one for the head of the Kyiv Commission for Juvenile Offenders, Yevhenia Ginzburg (?-1933), and the other for the Russian teacher Maria Pronina (1893-1936), reprinted from the Pravda newspaper (Moscow). The texts of both obituaries are very brief and uninformative, but strike with communist rhetoric: there is no mention of her date of birth in Ye. Ginzburg's obituary, but it is noted that she «always stubbornly fought for a clear Marxist-Leninist ideology»¹², and M. Pronina is called «an enthusiast of socialist construction», «a faithful assistant to the party and the Soviet government» and «a Stalinist educator»¹³. The tendency to fill a teacher's obituary with phrases about his devotion to the Communist Party and the Soviet system instead of a true description of his life and work would dominate Soviet pedagogical journals until the collapse of the USSR. It is worth noting that during the 1930s, six editors-in-chief of the journal «Komunistychna osvita» changed. Three of the six editors-in-chief were repressed: Oleksandr Polotskyi (1886-1938), Hryhorii Bodanskyi (1900-1937), and Israel Hait (1894-1938) were shot. Of course, no obituaries were published for these educators killed by the Communists.



Fig. 2. The cover of the journal «Doshkilne vykhovannia», n. 6, 1968 (Pedagogical Museum of Ukraine, Kyiv)

1.3 1940s. Ukraine during the Second World War, Reconstruction and Retrenchment

From 1941 to 1945, pedagogical journals were not published in Ukraine. Starting from 1945, the leading pedagogical journal «Radianska Shkola» published five obituaries of famous scholars and teachers. This is a new trend: from that time on, pedagogical journals did not publish obituaries for ordinary teachers. The published obituaries were

¹² Mikhno, *In memoriam*, cit., p. 165.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 167-168.

devoted for well-known Ukrainian educators: mathematician Kostiantyn Khlebnikov, psychologist Petro Rubinstein (1887-1945), literary critics Oleksandr Doroshkevych (1889-1946) and Serhii Rodzevych (1888-1942), and President of the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR Oleksandr Bohomolets (1881-1946). The obituary texts are small, 1-2 pages long, briefly describe the biography of the deceased and include a mandatory paragraph about his or her activities during the war. During this period, the final phrase appears in the texts, which in various variations will be constantly used in Soviet obituaries. In the obituary for O. Bohomolets, this template phrase reads as follows: «The bright image of the outstanding scientist-patriot and statesman of our country, Oleksandr Oleksandrovych Bohomolets, will forever live in the memory of the Soviet people»¹⁴.

1.4 1950s and 1960s. *The Thaw*

This period is characterized by a certain revival in the cultural life of the USSR, including in the field of education. Several new pedagogical journals appeared. They published 14 obituaries for Ukrainian educators, mostly scientists: educational historian Mykola Dadenkov (1885-1955), philologists Mykola Hrunskyi (1872-1951), Ilya Kyrychenko (1889-1955), Yevhen Tychyna (1895-1955), pedagogical scientists Sava Chavdarov (1892-1962), Oleksii Rusko (1906-1964), and others. The texts of obituaries of this period are quite large in length, ranging from 2 to 4 pages, and are built on the same template: each stage of the deceased's life and work is characterized from an ideological perspective. For example, in the obituary of Ilya Kyrychenko we read: «The life of Ilya Nikitovich is typical of many Soviet scientists»¹⁵. «All his scientific work was conducted under Soviet rule. He belonged to that new type of researchers who, through their scientific work, are directly involved in the practice of socialist construction»¹⁶. The use of such verbal rhetoric was a requirement of the time, but at the same time, the obituaries contain a fairly complete biography of the deceased and a positive assessment of his or her creative heritage. In general, the language of obituaries is as neutral as possible; sincere statements are rare and therefore perceived as an exception: «An irreconcilable enemy of easy success, cheap effect, narcissism, self-confidence, and indifference, he was a model of modesty, tireless creative activity, passion, and possessed a rare ability to listen to the voices of his young students and friends»¹⁷. Another feature of obituaries of this period is the absence of authors: obituaries are either unsigned or signed with the impersonal construction «Group of Comrades»¹⁸.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 198, 201, 212.

1.5 1970s and 1980s. Stagnation and Attempts at Reform

As Ukrainian educational historian Olha Sukhomlynska aptly puts it, «during this period, the emasculation and devastation of the Soviet canon, its rhetorical content, and divergence from reality were most evident»¹⁹. So, a common phenomenon of Soviet reality in the 1970s was a double morality, and Ukrainian schools paid great attention to the ideological orientation of education, to the education of a «Soviet person»²⁰. In the 1970s, the Soviet school was a social institution fully regulated and controlled by the Communist Party and the state. The task was to form a person according to a standard, a general pattern of certain behavior, worldview, and political views. During this period, the role of the school in the formation of a citizen in Soviet society was one of the priorities of state policy, not inferior to family upbringing, and in most cases even exceeding its importance. The ideological component

in education in the 1970s was very significant, but compared to the previous periods of the 1930s and 1960s, it was already purely declarative. After all, they were talking about the communist future, but the actual reality was different. That is why obituaries of teachers from this last period of the USSR's existence are extremely brief (1 page) and describe not their contribution to the development of schooling and pedagogical science, but their devotion to Soviet ideals. Each of the seven obituaries of this period necessarily characterizes the teacher as a «communist teacher», «a principled communist», «a fiery patriot of the socialist homeland», «a member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union since 1940», «ardent communist», «member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union», «a loyal son of the Communist Party»²¹. Obituaries have no authors or are signed by a large group of people, which was a characteristic feature of the Soviet period of the 1970s and 1980s: V. Sukhomlynsky's obituary was signed by 24 people, A.



Fig. 3. The cover of the journal «Pochatkova shkola», n. 10, 1972, (Pedagogical Museum of Ukraine, Kyiv)

¹⁹ O. Sukhomlynska, *Radianska pedahohika yak ideolohiia. Sproba istorychnoi rekonstruktsii*, «Shkilnyi Svit», n. 4, 2015, p. 20.

²⁰ O. Mikhno, *Fenomen pedahohichnoi kharakterystyky uchnia: vid Ushynskoho do Sukhomlynskoho*, Vinnytsia, FOP Kushnir Yu. V., 2020, p. 298.

²¹ Mikhno, *In memoriam*, cit., pp. 219, 221, 222, 224, 228, 230, 233.



Fig. 4. Obituary for Vasyl Sukhomlynskyi (1918-1970). Journal «Radianska shkola», n. 10, 1970, p. 109. (Pedagogical Museum of Ukraine, Kyiv)

Soviet pedagogical journals of the 1920s-1980s. If the teacher did not quite meet this criterion but made a significant contribution to the development of pedagogical science and schooling, it was written about it in the obituary as follows: «raised his ideological and political level», «systematically worked to improve his or her ideological and theoretical level»²².

Thus, the obituaries of teachers of the Soviet period are extremely ideologized and full of Soviet rhetoric. Therefore, the question arises: how can we use these obituaries today, are they a relevant source for the history of education? Currently, Ukrainian humanities, in particular the history of education, is undergoing active processes of decolonization and decommunization, catalyzed by the Russian-Ukrainian war that began in 2014 and Russia's full-scale invasion of sovereign Ukraine on 24 February 2022. In the process of decolonization, Ukrainian scholars are seeking to reconsider the Soviet period of

Holovko's one was signed by 48, and O. Kornichuk's by 92 people.

The ideologization of schooling and pedagogical science in Ukraine during the Soviet period can be illustrated by the use of vocabulary specific to an obituary for an educator. We have calculated that words such as «teacher» and «teacher's» were used 40 times, «education» 62 times, «students» 15 times, and «memory» 29 times in 35 obituaries from the 1920s to the 1980s. At the same time, the word «Soviet» was used 102 times, «party» 25 times, «Soviet government» 19 times, «Lenin» 23 times, «socialism» 23 times, «socialist» 23 times, and «communist» 24 times.

All Ukrainian educators of that time, whose obituaries were published in Soviet pedagogical journals, acted within the strictly regulated framework of the Soviet totalitarian regime, and scholars of education wrote and published their works guided by Marxist-Leninist methodology. It can be argued that it was the teacher's devotion to the communist ideology that was a condition for the publication of an obituary in Ukrainian

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 183, 196.

Ukraine's history, to find out what is valuable from that period and what should be rejected and condemned.

Here is an example of such a reconsideration based on a decolonial approach, using the text of an obituary for the Ukrainian educator Vasyl Sukhomlynskyi (1918-1970). The short obituary (1 page) contains the obligatory information for that time: he was born into a poor peasant family, participated in the Great Patriotic War (the name of the Soviet-German war of 1941-1945, which was used in the USSR and is now used in Russia), wrote more than thirty books, his work was highly appreciated by the party and government, and was awarded two Orders of Lenin, the Order of the Red Star, and numerous medals²³. At the same time, the obituary does not say that Sukhomlynskyi was a child writer and wrote more than 1500 fiction miniatures (fairy tales and stories) for children, which are «a concentrated expression of both his artistic perception of the world and his pedagogical ideas»²⁴, nor does it mention his main book, *I Give My Heart to Children*, which was first published in Berlin in 1968²⁵, earlier than in the USSR, which was a precedent in Soviet times. The book was immediately published in the USSR the following year, 1969. The obituary also does not mention such works by Sukhomlynskyi as *Believe in Human* (1960), *The Spiritual World of the Pupil* (1961), and *Human is Unique* (1962), the very titles of which distance their author from official Soviet pedagogy, which was engaged in the construction of the «Soviet person». For Sukhomlynskyi, respect for the child, and unconditional support for childhood was a pedagogical truth that contradicted the trends in education at the time. Currently, the heritage of V. Sukhomlynskyi is being studied by scholars (in the period 1991-2021, thirty-two theses on his heritage were defended in Ukraine) and used by modern Ukrainian teachers in their pedagogical work. The reason for this is that although Sukhomlynskyi lived during the Soviet period and accepted the Soviet identity as the official identity of the time, he remained in the history of Ukrainian education because of the fact that his Ukrainian identity outweighed the Soviet one. That is, it was his Ukrainian, not Soviet, identity that gave him the opportunity to generate and embody the ideas of humanism, spirituality, and family education in his pedagogical work, relying on the culture of the Ukrainian nation, where «historical memory and an expressive cultural component (artistic, literary, musical) are always present»²⁶.

As we can see, the decolonial approach allows us to get rid of the mono-identity doctrine. Can we consider only Soviet identity to be important for teachers of the Soviet period? Obviously, no, we cannot. However, we cannot mechanically “drag” every teacher of the Soviet era from one identity to another, from Soviet identity to Ukrainian identity. But we can definitely emphasize the presence of Ukrainian identity in many teachers of the Soviet period. That is, we can add the identity that was not accepted in Soviet times,

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 218-219.

²⁴ O. Sukhomlynska, *Deiaki aspekty evoliutsii spryiniattia tvorchosti V. Sukhomlynskoho: doroha dovzhynoiu v 40 rokiv*, «Istoryko-pedahohichnyi almanakh», n. 1, 2012, p. 62.

²⁵ W. Suchomlinski, *Mein herz gehört den Kindern*, Berlin, Volk und Wissen, 1968.

²⁶ O. Sukhomlynska, *V. Sukhomlynskyi pro patriotyzm: teksty i konteksty*, «Pedahohichnyi poshuk», n. 4, 2016, p. 7.

including in obituaries, and, taking into account the Ukrainian identity, try to look at the heritage of the Soviet-era teacher from a new perspective and evaluate this heritage from new methodological positions.

Conclusion

After analyzing thirty-five obituaries for Ukrainian educators published in eight pedagogical journals in the 1920s-1980s, we came to the following conclusions:

- obituaries of famous educators and ordinary teachers of the 1920s are the most informative: they fully describe the life of the deceased and contain a reasonable assessment of his or her pedagogical heritage;

- in the 1930s, obituaries for educators were almost never published, which we explain by the formation of a totalitarian regime in the USSR, which was established by means of political repression and the Holodomor of 1932-1933 organized in Ukraine, a genocide of the Ukrainian people that led to huge human losses, including among educators;

- since the 1940s, the texts of obituaries have been less and less reflecting the individuality of the educator, and are written according to the standard scheme «born – studied – a member of the of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union – author of such works – list of soviet awards»;

- obituaries for ordinary teachers gradually disappeared from pedagogical journals; since the 1950s, they have been exclusively obituaries of famous scholars, professors, and writers;

- the ideologization of Soviet education in the years 1930-1980 is reflected not only in the content but also in the language of obituaries, which are filled with Soviet rhetoric;

- some obituaries have authors, some – without authorship or signed with cryptonyms or impersonal constructions such as «editorial board», «group of comrades». There are obituaries signed by a large group of people;

- obituaries prove that education in Ukraine in the 1920s-1980s was Ukrainian Soviet education, which was gradually becoming less Ukrainian and more Soviet;

- the application of the decolonial approach to the analysis of obituary texts makes it possible to objectively assess the contribution of a Soviet-era educator to the development of Ukrainian education and schooling.

In the future, obituaries of Soviet-era teachers can be used to analyze changes in pedagogical theory and practice in the years 1920-1980 and in biographical studies based on a decolonial approach. Another interesting area for further research is the comparison of obituaries for Ukrainian educators of the 1920s-1980s published in Ukraine and abroad, in particular in the publications of the Ukrainian diaspora in the United States and Canada.