

Ofer Shorr, Teacher, “The education system and the war on Gaza”, 31/8/2025

Introduction

Hello everyone, and here we are at the first gathering of week 11 of *Eyes on Gaza*. When we launched this series, we hoped—perhaps even believed—that it would last no more than a month. We thought the war with Iran was a kind of deranged climax in Israel’s endless cycle of wars, and that we could keep our focus on Gaza until the destruction there stopped, and the hostages returned—something we all hoped would happen very soon. Now we are approaching three months of meetings, and the end is still nowhere in sight. Gaza is once again under heavy bombardment, and in Israel another school year is set to begin tomorrow—a date that highlights the anomalous ability to construct a routine within an impossible reality. In Gaza, by contrast, children have not gone to school for two years. Buildings that once served as classrooms have become ruins, and more often targets of bombing that wipe out entire families.

Today, on the theme of back-to-school, we welcome Ofer Shor, a teacher and activist, who will speak about an education system that raises children for whom nationalism, militarism, and fascism appear as fate; and for whom questioning the assumptions that enable the destruction of the people in Gaza is experienced as an existential threat. Ofer personally experienced the indifference and violence of the Israeli education system when, after October 7, he was attacked at the school where he taught in Nesher because of a personal Facebook post in which he declared his refusal to serve in the army. The attempts to dismiss and silence him—involving supervisors, principals, and even the mayor of Nesher—were ultimately overcome. Today he will share with us his perspective on this. But he will also tell us about the price we all pay for an education system that sees its mission as producing only obedient children incapable of challenging the idea that “forever we shall live by the sword.” Thank you very much, Ofer, for joining us today. As usual, we will hear you for eight minutes and then open a discussion. Please feel free to write your questions in the chat.

Talk

Hello, thank you very much for inviting me here. My name is Ofer Shor. I have been a teacher for ten years. I am an educator. I teach literature, history, and civics in high school, from junior high through 12th grade. Today I will speak about the education system in the context of the war in Gaza. Exactly one year ago, at the start of the previous school year in the last school where I taught, in Nesher, someone discovered that a few months earlier I had posted on Facebook that I was opposing the war in Gaza. Among other things, I wrote that if I were called up for reserve duty, I would refuse. In response, students confronted me in the hallway and in class shouted at me and announced they would refuse to study with someone who supports Hamas and opposes Israeli soldiers. The mayor published a Facebook post calling on the minister of education to fire me. I was suspended, and after a long struggle—including a court injunction demanding my reinstatement—I managed to return to teaching and finish the year. The day before I returned to teaching, the head of the city’s education department summoned me. I sat with her for an hour as she attacked me, painting me as a fifth column inside the system, undermining the values of the school. I asked her what those values were that I was supposedly violating, and the only one she could name was harming IDF soldiers. Meanwhile, the principal, the inspector, and the heads of the entire education complex in Nesher sat in the room, listened, and did not utter a word.

My story is not exceptional. I know dozens like it. Usually they are contained inside the school, but the pattern is always the same: a teacher says something in class or posts something online. It can be something seemingly innocent, like supporting the release of hostages, expressing shock at the war, or showing compassion for children in Gaza. Then parents, students, or other teachers complain to the administration or local authority—sometimes about the remark itself, sometimes demanding that “politics be kept out of school.” The minister of education, who invests enormous effort in silencing and neutering every dissenting voice and in shameless flattery of the [Likud] base, seizes the opportunity to threaten hearings or inquiries. Often it does not materialize. In most cases it does not. But it always has a paralyzing effect.

The education system is largely a castrated, fear-saturated place: a home to rampant nationalism, spreading religiosity, political persecution, and, on the other side, frightened silence. Students and parents incite and are incited, working together to smother any thought or action that does not align with the government. The rest censor themselves in terror, afraid the same might happen to them. No teacher wants a protesting student in the hallway outside their classroom. No principal wants angry messages from the mayor or parents. No inspector wants the school's name linked with the word "leftist" in Facebook or WhatsApp groups, or on TV Channel 14. So teachers think twice and three times before speaking in class, and usually prefer silence, retreating to the easiest and safest option: saying nothing, conducting daily life as if there is no Gaza, no starvation, no destruction. Of course, genocide is unmentionable—literally. At best they will speak of returning the hostages, and maybe, in a few central schools, of ending the war. But that is all. The result is collapse of the education system where there is no education and no free thought, only indoctrination, fear, and persecution.

A perfect example is the Gag Law passed last year. It allows the ministry's director-general to fire, without notice, any teacher who identifies with or calls for an act of terror. It also allows cutting budgets from schools that host or permit expressions of support for a terror act or organization, subject to a hearing. This law is completely unnecessary. Its only purpose is to silence, intimidate, and frighten teachers—especially Arab teachers, who since October 7 have lived in constant fear and faced harsher persecution than I or my Jewish colleagues experienced. This is no accident. It is the result of deliberate government policy, both this one and its predecessors, which starved the education system to produce ignorant graduates lacking basic listening skills, critical thinking, or social and emotional capacities, abandoning them to toxic social media discourse, street incitement, and the fascism of the extreme and messianic right. Why? Because it is easier to rule that way. Whoever never learned to think or to question will swallow whatever story they are fed.

We see the results of this anti-education in the systematic dismantling of Israeli democracy, the violent suppression of protest, the persecution of Palestinian citizens of Israel, the dispossession and robbery in the West Bank, and of course the support for, and indifference to the horrors unfolding in Gaza. And whether we commit the atrocities ourselves, encourage them, deny them, or recoil from them while doing nothing, we cannot deny that much of our behavior is rooted in what we learned—or failed to learn—in school. Yes, us too, not only our children. This system has been sick for many years. The soldiers who kill, destroy, and bomb were pupils only a few moments ago. And the masses who do not take to the streets, who turn their gaze away, or who enlist without question—these too are graduates of an education system that never taught them how to refuse the idol of "meaningful service": service in the IDF, to which the education system is wholly enslaved.

And here I return to Gaza. Because the education system reflects society to a large degree, Gaza is, in its view, a black hole—the place where the most moral army in the world wages one of the most justified holy wars ever fought, to eradicate and annihilate the Nazis who attacked on October 7 with barbarity and inexplicable innate hatred. And of course, there are no innocents there. In conversations with students, they usually echo the most extreme and shallow discourse that exists. And that is understandable, since no one bothers to try to speak with them about these issues.

When my story exploded, I told the principal this was a golden opportunity to talk about it. It was a civics lesson from life itself, not from a textbook. But no one wanted to touch it. Everyone just wanted to bury their heads in the sand and wait for it to blow over. Later, he told me about the whole episode: "It was too big for us." But it is "too big" only if we make ourselves small. From my experience, you can talk with children about everything—absolutely everything—with respect. With patience, listening, and openness, even the most terrible things can be discussed, and they will listen. But that requires will and faith in the power of education—and that is precisely what is lacking today.

Thank you.