

It's Your Time You're Wasting: A Teacher's Tales Of Classroom Hell

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Frank Chalk is a teacher in a poor inner city school - a school where the kids get drunk, take drugs and beat up the teachers... when they can be bothered to turn up.

He confiscates their porn, booze and trainers, fends off angry parents and worries about the few conscientious pupils.

Terrifying and hilarious, IT'S YOUR TIME YOU'RE WASTING is Chalk's real-life diary from the front line of the modern edukashun system.

It's Your Time You're Wasting: A Teacher's Tales Of Classroom Hell Details


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SJ says

I was trained as a teacher in the US and after a brief stint as a substitute (supply) teacher, I realized fairly quickly that I had picked the wrong profession despite 4 years of university and lots of debt. This decision was, in part, because of the issues this author raises in this amusing and highly sarcastic book. And so, you'd think that I would find myself aligned with this author. That was, interestingly, not the case.

I just really disliked the writer on a personal level throughout this book. He admits that the entire book is a whinge, and I get that. He has legitimate issues with the whole system and acknowledges that not all schools are as messed up as his, provided that there is a good leader at the helm. Yet, he honestly sounds like a whiney jerk who would rather bash on people who are doing their best with what's been handed them than jump in and try taking on a more connected role in the school. He seems to revel being there so that he can poke fun at everyone save a few that he feels are inferior to him. It made for a difficult read, despite the book pointing out some basic truths. I also reject the author's notion that anything new is bad. Badly implemented, yes. But that doesn't mean some of what's out there couldn't be fine tuned if the foundations for learning are in place.

Anyhow, regardless, probably an important read for new or aspiring teachers so that you can't say nobody warned you... Not only of the treatment you may receive from parents, children and administrators, but also from jerky know it all colleagues like this author.

Jennifer says

Very entertaining, if somewhat devastating view into the life of a teacher in a fairly poor, "bog standard" UK comprehensive school. Mr Chalk's views are far from Politically Correct and he is certainly not at the forefront of current Educational Research but he has the advantage of speaking from experience, which too often is the one thing that the politicians, academics and assorted others involved in the education debate do not have. The book also makes more general comments about the changes in UK society, family life, attitudes to authority figures, etc. that have occurred since most of us reading this book were in school. All I can say is, if even half of what he discussed is true, then it is quite simply heartbreaking to think of the wasted lives and opportunities of a large proportion of kids today. Until everyone buys into changing the status-quo though, all the tinkering by successive governments will do nothing. Politicians need to take a longer term view than the next election; parents need to step up and take responsibility for their kids and, if they don't, need to be made to (speaking as a parent myself); teachers and their unions need to face up to the fact that in every job there are some that should not be there, and stop damaging more and more children by keeping truly awful teachers in their jobs but in return they should be backed up when they are genuinely under pressure or are attacked or abused by pupils and their parents in the same way as other professions are (why is there zero tolerance to violence against hospital staff but pretty much anything goes in some schools?); the authorities generally need to recognise that softly-softly, touchy-feely has gone too far and, when a pupil's behaviour is unacceptable, he or she should be treated accordingly; and pupils themselves should realise or be made to realise that what they do (or don't do) has consequences on themselves and others. Letting them get away with bad behaviour just builds up into worse bad behaviour. Kids, as Chalk says, will always push against boundaries (it is part of growing up) but what sort of adults will they grow into if every time they push, the boundary falls over or is moved? Sorry, I seem to have got on a bit of a soap-box here! I realise this is just supposed to be a review but let's say that this is a book that, while it is

very amusingly and entertainingly written, also raises issues and concerns that really should get all our blood boiling.

Bel Murphy says

'... (What's this book, after all, if not an extended whinge?)'

Says it all, really.

Trish says

Totally non-PC, but often made me laugh aloud, which is a joy. I agree with much of what he says, certainly not all.

The ridiculous language of modern education, shared by NHS managers, fools him not; not me either. The horrors of mixed ability teaching, the imposition of "academic" subjects on children whose talents lie elsewhere and the dumbing down of maths, science etc to ensure that "standards rise year upon year" rings true. School was tedious enough in my childhood, even with selection, streaming and setting, but at least we all sat in rows, and classes were large enough to permit reading under the desk when life got dull. (Wish we'd had Kindles then!) 51 kids, one teacher- bliss for us at the back!

Kristy says

I work in a school and deal with kids every day but I'm not a teacher (thank God). The school I work in is a vast improvement on the one in this book but there are some kids who are as stupid and disrespectful. I've often thought that it was never like that in my day, which makes me sound old and I ain't that old (32). This book is a real eye-opener for non-teachers and especially for those who don't come across youths it will be a complete shocker, not just the kids themselves but the way schools are run (again though the school in this book seems to be a really extreme example of bad management). I laughed at many parts partly because they sounded familiar and nodded my head in agreement to some of the opinions expressed. It is just that however - opinion - and the author is very opinionated and very jaded, some parts I totally didn't agree with.

This is the sort of teacher I respect though; fighting a losing battle to instill some respect and work ethic, calm but firm (I love that if a disruptive kid refuses to leave the room he just throws their stuff out the door and watches them follow it), trying to help the kids who do want to learn (they really do exist). What happened to the days when kids just knew they had to do as they were told? Okay, I do sound old...

Zee says

As someone who has recently finished teacher training and is about to be unleashed into the English comprehensive system, this is a book I felt I had to read. And it was one I could heavily relate to - although I've had no experiences in schools quite like St. Jude's, it's amazing how many times I smiled or nodded knowingly, having either experienced something very similar or heard a story from someone else who had.

This paints a scarily accurate, no-holds-barred look at the English school system. There are a lot of schools much, much better than the one described here - yet there are a lot of schools that are very similar, or even worse. I have no doubt that some of the stories in this book were exaggerated for comic effect; in schools with behaviour problems, the senior leadership team are normally much more supportive and much stricter systems are normally in place. Potentially it's changed. It probably has.

But there's a lot of lessons to be learned here. There are schools that need a lot more funds put into them. There are pupils leaking through the cracks in the education system that are leaving with no qualifications and no future. There are pupils with special educational needs that are not suited to life in a mainstream comp. It's a bleak picture painted and one that is, despite what many people may like to think, our government included, true.

I enjoyed it, though. It's well-written, amusing, and the writer's personality bursts through. Here is a teacher that I can learn a lot from. And he skydives! We're a rare breed, us skydiving teachers.

However, I can't give this more than three-stars due to the sheer amount of rants that go on. I love a good rant, but I don't need one every couple of chapters. He's also very cynical about a lot of educational initiatives, and while I'll agree that some are useless for certain pupils, that doesn't mean they're quite as redundant as he implies.

I also dislike the end. There could be a very uplifting message to be taken from this, but it very much ends in a way that is thoroughly depressing and disappointing, particularly for readers actually involved in the education system. Just because that school was terrible, it doesn't mean the whole education system is a failure. There are things that can be done, Mr Chalk, and I'll wager they have been done. He should have stuck to what this book delivered well on, amusing yet slightly shocking anecdotes of daily life in a school, and not launched an attack on the entire system. Cos it ain't coming down any time soon.

Ceri says

DNF'd at 20% because, Mother of God, this is awful.

I'm a teacher so don't get me wrong - I know this profession is frustrating. We are overworked and underpaid & get zero respect. The British school system is a joke and most of our state schools are way underfunded. As a result, we do often need a good whinge. That's why I generously awarded 1 star to "Mr Chalk."

Here is what killed the read for me though:

"Stella (it's amazing how many kids are named after alcoholic drinks) ...

Kat (seriously, that's what her parents called her) scrunches up her label..."

You know when a celebrity names their kid something unusual like Apple or Dweezil or North West and people are like, "That kid's going to be picked on in school!"?

No. Most kids don't realise a name is unusual unless they hear an adult mention it. That adult should **never** be a teacher. Unless the teacher's a right prick.

"If there's one thing I can't cope with it's crying kids."

Then what possessed you to become a teacher?

"Do judge by appearance. It has become an article of faith in our politically correct world that you should never judge a book by its cover. This is completely wrong. ... You can spot them a mile off, whatever anyone says. Earrings, tattoos and outlandish hairstyles mean only one thing: sit them at the front, on their own, before they've even had a chance to muck about."

Words fail me.

"Know your enemy. With a new class, always get the troublemakers' names off another teacher, with descriptions."

If you expect trouble, you're going to get trouble. If you treat a kid like they're a troublemaker before they've even done anything, they're going to see that you expect the worst of them and play up to it.

"Affect an accent that is posher than the pupils' (Not difficult). This will worry them because you are obviously 'Not From Round Here.' As most will never venture more than half a mile from the Cherry Tree Estate (once a fortnight to sign on, plus Court appearances or burglary outings) they find this quite disturbing."

You can expect this classist attitude from Mr Chalk throughout the whole book - I checked.

"...and Tracey applying makeup to her hideous face."

This is a teacher talking about a child. A **child**.

"(I must add that after 15 minutes I still haven't spoken a word to any of them – I'm a great believer in non-verbal communication.)"

Fifteen minutes into the class, the teacher has written all the work (including answers) on the board and not said a word to the class. He's smugly not bothering to acknowledge them as human beings. And then he wonders why the academic scores for the school are so low.

It's because teachers like him think they are too good for working class comprehensive schools.

I couldn't deal with anymore from this tool.

Kirsty Thomas says

I'm only giving it 1 star as I don't have the option to give it 0. Rude, preachy and arrogant.

As a teacher, I have experienced many of the issues that are expressed and have every sympathy for the staff and students who face these on a daily basis. But the sympathy comes from my experience and not from the writing. Things need to change but writing a few hundred pages of complaining isn't going to do that.

Jo says

When I was at school, Mr Chalk would have been the kind of teacher that I liked and respected. He helps the good kids and has great methods of dealing with the naughty ones. It's just a shame that the government have taken away all the powers of authority for anyone in the public sector who has to deal with kids. They know we're unable to discipline them and this makes them worse. I tell the ones who come to where I work that if they're naughty they'll wake the resident ghost who'll get them but Mr Chalk likes to imply he's served time and this gets him instant kudos. From reading this I have to say that I could never be a teacher

Rachael Taylor says

What a negative, cynical man who clearly has nothing but contempt for the children he was "teaching." The educational system in England is all the better now he is no longer teaching. The type of school he was working in deserve teachers who genuinely care about the children instead of insulting them, their parents and where they live. His anecdotes were neither funny or clever. I stuck with the book hoping that it would get better but instead we had "Mr Chalk" on his soapbox, recommending a return to traditional teaching and a tripartite system. Apparently, modern teaching methods will never work. Utter drivel and a number of hours of my life I will never get back. I wish I could give it 0 stars.

Redfox5 says

This book would be funny if it wasn't so depressingly true.

This book was published in 2006, I finished school in 2004, which means this book was properly written about kids that were at school the same time as me. Now even though I am not middle class, I did grow up in a middle class area and therefore went to a middle class school. And I thought that was a shit hole. But it's nowhere near as bad as I imagine a poor inner city school must be like.

The sad thing is, I recognise the cast. The same people disrupting every lesson, getting away with it over and over. The same kids on report all the time, it did sweet FA. The poor excuses for teachers and the ones who were good teachers but never actually got around to teaching us anything. I can think of two, maybe three teachers who always had control of the class. One of these was a maths teacher, I am terrible at maths but that year I had her, I actually learned things. Unfortunately I never had her again so my maths standards sunk shortly after. I also had Greg Davies from Inbetweeners fame as my Drama teacher, great comedian, bad

teacher. Chalks descriptions of Drama reminded me of his lessons.

I think teachers should be given more control over the children they teach. Discipline should be harsher. And there should be some sort of hell hole boarding school where they send the naughty kids.

I have great respect for Chalk for sticking it out so long and to all the other good teachers like this who keep going day after day. This book is outdated now, it must be worse today. I'm on the same wavelength as Chalk! I can't wait to read the other book reviews from the people that arn't!

Alex Mctaggart says

Frank Chalk is talking about our "broken society". He has clearly pointed out THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM. Poorer schools are being set up to fail. Bravo Mr Chalk.

Our society isn't "broken", in Mr. Chalk's view it is spoilt and as a result - badly behaved - especially at the lower end of the spectrum. This is what happens if you take away consequences, and reward nothing with something. Any (good) parent can tell you that.

Anyone who feels the character "Frank Chalk" is a negative influence on teaching and learning has not read the book critically... enough.

After 30 years of trying (I stress the trying) to run the UK education system like a private company, our idiot politicians have produced a system that consistently fails those at the lower end of the social demographic. And the worst part is, it fails them by meaning to help them. Mr. Chalk is talking about social malaise and the deadly combination of New Liberalism and PC politics.

I personally went to a school much like St. Judes in Inner-city London in the mid 1980's - that school even then was not far from what St. Judes is now. I shudder to think what the children of those I went to school with are getting up to in class, when their parents (my then classmates) dealt drugs, carried knives, disrespected teachers, brutalised each other every day and lived on benefits - 30 years ago!

I am literate in my own language only because my time at that school was limited to one year - and it was possibly the worst year of my life. I also went to a private prep school, an LEA sixth form, a Waldorf school, and a state primary. It is because I have seen British education from several sides as a student, that I can whole heartedly agree with about 90% of what the author of this book writes.

1. Children find safety in rules and structures and yes, believe it or not, discipline.
2. The parents of most "poor" children are probably not providing security, love, nurture, rules, and consequences.
3. Teachers are no longer figures of respect.
4. The "Leadership" in schools fails teachers and students daily by being ineffective and inconsequential - because of govt. policy.

Occasionally the author comes out with very negative sweeping statements, but then, I suspect that is a narrative ploy to express the levels of sheer frustration teachers at the lower end may feel. No, Mr. Chalk, not all modern teaching methods are rubbish - they will merely not work in every context.

Mr Chalk is saying: "Give these kids a chance, teach them what they need to know for life. Teach them to be on time. To be polite. Basic numeracy and literacy. Let them learn skilled professions and be proud of their

work - don't teach them French when they are not fully literate in their native language. Don't hope they will go to University and study XYZ Studies to leave it with 60, 000 pounds worth of debt and no career options."

Television, video games, and superficial role models complicate matters for children.

Take the Finnish system, supposedly the best in the world. They have people on benefits, free schooling, and a very inclusive society - but!!!!!!!

1. They only recruit THE BEST university graduates as teachers.
2. They pay them on a level with other high-level professionals.
3. As a result they are respected much like doctors or barristers.
4. They are constantly given meaningful training, and plenty of autonomy in the classroom.

In the UK doing a PGCE (that's teacher training college) is a last resort option for people who did badly at uni or have no other options. The real talent rarely makes it into a PGCE course because the prospects are too depressing. Having said that, some excellent graduates are driven to become teachers because they are passionate about it (thank God for them!), but in the rule, they are the exception.

In my view, Mr Chalk was a teacher who taught to make a difference, and the whole point of his narrative tone is to make readers realise what "the system" will eventually do to any teacher who tries to make a difference.

They become a part of the system - and work the system - and look for ways to get out of the system

Anna says

I bought this book from a charity shop on a whim, as it seemed like a suitable joke gift for a friend who has just started teaching at an inner city high school. As I don't like giving books to people without having read them myself, I did so. It is a very quick read, I'm guessing based on a blog? It certainly has the format and tone of the public-sector-frontline blogger subgenre. I'm not going to be giving it to my friend, though, as the teaching itself is stressful enough as it is. 'It's Your Time You're Wasting' is very depressing, despite being written in a chatty style and including moments of great hilarity. I don't wish to further stress my friend with tales of teachers getting verbally and physically assaulted by their students.

The pseudonymous narrator Mr. Chalk (which sounds vaguely Tarantino-esque) is a supply teacher who is wholly disillusioned with uncontrollable teenagers, incompetent teachers, and impotent managers. He lambasts 'benefits culture', bureaucracy, and excessive political correctness in a manner which became very common during the Labour government. Now that we have a coalition who cut benefits, slash education funding, and allow 'Free Schools' to do what the hell they like, I wonder if any of this has actually changed. I don't imagine that things have got any better. As a first hand account of the gruesome teaching experience, this book is good, but the analysis of how things got so bad is pretty simplistic (which is fair enough). It also reminded me that I really don't like children and am lucky to be able to avoid them.

Mothwing says

I'm always thrilled when I find once more that inner city schools are similar the world over. I find myself agreeing with many of the basic observations he makes, though I think that his language towards his students is too harsh in some passages.

Elizabeth says

This was a fun read, if a little dated. Frank Chalk goes from being a full time teacher to a casual teacher in a low socioeconomic area British high school. He tells amusing anecdotes about those bizarre teaching moments we all have. It made me glad to be teaching in an Australian school, but also cringe at the similarities. Turns out, kids are kids, no matter which country they're educated in
