

that Rebecca will be entering her fourth year as a coteacher in a third-grade classroom at Bancroft Elementary School, a neighborhood school that has been around for more than ninety years. Whereas Molly is just entering the profession and all experiences feel quite new to her, Rebecca has her instructional routines established and is starting to wonder about pursuing a career other than teaching.

At times it can be tedious to keep track of the large ensemble of teachers, principals, school directors, and parents; yet, the book's rich descriptions of these two schools and the educators who teach at them helps Chaltain portray how choices and experiences are both similar and different for those dedicated to ensuring schoolwide success. The principals of Mundo Verde and Bancroft both battle the anxieties of achievement pressure, community relations, parent satisfaction, and teacher retention. Teachers in both schools assess the effectiveness of various instructional strategies and simultaneously struggle to discover where they fit (or don't fit) professionally in the field of education. Prospective families evaluate the benefit of charter versus traditional public schools and question the type of learning community that would best suit their children. The tribulations and jubilations experienced by the staff at each school are heartwarming and seemingly indicative of "real life" for educators. Teachers are elated to discover when a reluctant reader finally catches on, principals hold their breath in hopes that their school achieves the scores it needs to stay open another year, and parents puzzle over which environment is most educationally and culturally appropriate for their children.

However, it is unclear how Chaltain ascertained the personal details from his subjects. Did he conduct interviews? Were the subjects asked to keep a journal? The reader wonders how the author was able to delve into the minds of the educators in order to relay their thoughts and feelings. While the descriptions of schools and teachers are believable and feel authentic, *Our School* would benefit from an introduction that clearly describes how Chaltain collected and then analyzed data, as well as an explanation for why he selected these two schools over the many others in the DC area. Additionally, when *Our School* ends, it is still relatively unclear how or why parents decide to pursue a charter school over other options, or if there are any benefits for teachers to working in a charter school over a traditional public school. While these questions are not fully answered, the reader is better equipped with knowledge of the different challenges faced by charter and traditional schools, as well as what types of questions one should ask as a family or aspiring employee.

It is not until the epilogue that Chaltain describes his motivations for writing the book and offers constructive advice for school reform. He confides that he "wanted to see what it was like to be a teacher in 2012 . . . but most of all [he] wanted to put a human face on the modern landscape of school choice" (p. 166). After reflecting on what he had learned throughout the course of this year, he offers a substantial list of suggestions for how school reformers can more successfully retain teachers, more humanely evaluate school progress,

and more effectively develop a democratic method for introducing school choice to families. For example, he states that “every teacher [he] observed over the course of writing *Our School* said she felt unprepared for the challenges of the classroom, and for understanding how to meet the myriad needs of her students” (p. 167). In response to this concern, Chaltain recommends that all teacher preparation programs adopt a model that teaches *developmental sciences* to provide foundational knowledge of the social, emotional, and physical needs of children and *learning sciences* to provide teachers with an understanding of how children learn. This step, he argues, could serve to ameliorate challenges schools face when trying to retain quality teachers. Strategies such as this and many others are offered in an intelligent and easy-to-digest tone that could be helpful to more than just school reformers.

While the book and its descriptions cannot be generalized to all existing schools in the United States, *Our School* does offer a compelling snapshot into what life is like in the world of one charter and one traditional public school in Washington, DC. Given its careful and comprehensive examination of these two environments, *Our School* enables its readers to better understand the real-life challenges and triumphs of those who strive to make these schools a success. *Our School* could benefit any parent who is struggling with the school choice process and any educator who is deciding which type of educational environment suits their teaching style.

T.E.

References

- Friends of Choice in Urban Schools [FOCUS]. (2010). Retrieved from <http://focusdc.org/charter-facts>
- National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13_216.20.asp

LABORATORY OF LEARNING: HBCU LABORATORY SCHOOLS AND ALABAMA STATE COLLEGE LAB HIGH IN THE ERA OF JIM CROW

by Sharon Gay Pierson

New York: Peter Lang, 2014. 308 pp. \$42.95 (paper).

In *Laboratory of Learning*, Sharon Gay Pierson illuminates African American educators' powerful leadership in the quintessentially American process of aligning their children's educational options with their own vision and values. Her work inspires questions of contemporary relevance—namely, who has the power to determine curriculum content, and whose purposes are served by the curriculum in use? Pierson focuses on the evolving role of laboratory schools at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in the provision of prestigious, high-quality secondary education for African Americans from 1920 to 1960. She emphasizes the deep commitment to engaging in the *process*