



**Charter Schools: Lessons in School Reform.** Liane Brouillette. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2002. 270 pp.

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Researchers have most often focused on charter schools from the perspective of politics. That is, scholars have looked at charter schools through lenses more suitable to policy makers, reformers, or political change agents. Brouillette, however, has taken a unique perspective as an anthropologist who has studied several charter schools. Because the author places the charter school debate in larger educational and political contexts, academicians interested in the disciplines of anthropology, education, management or leadership may be interested in reading her work. Scholars who study academic achievement, educational excellence, organizational culture, as well as organizational change and the reform movement, will find value in reading *Charter Schools: Lessons in School Reform*.

In addition, academics teaching courses in qualitative or ethnographic research will discover a supplemental text that includes ethnographic case studies for school culture discussions, action or field-based research topics, and discussions on methodological approaches to qualitative research. The book is well-documented for the academic, but also has an easy, readable tone-it could help a graduate student, interested parent, teacher, or future charter founder understand the charter movement to better guide creation of, implementation of, and/or evaluation of a charter school.

Brouillette brings the reader along to learn what it is like to create a charter school, what motivates those who initiate such schools, and what lessons are learned from those who have founded charter schools. The reader is privy to five case studies sharing knowledge about seven charter schools. From a broad perspective, the author provides in the first two chapters a background of charter schools: definitions, characteristics, and a history of the charter school movement. Brouillette also discusses the debate over charter schools. The reader is provided the needed historical, sociological, and political context to better understand charter schools, the charter school movement, and the seven schools described in the case studies. Background information is well balanced, providing the reader with needed contextual information, yet not so much as to overwhelm the reader with excessive, obscure research jargon or information.



In the concluding two chapters, the author provides both successful and less successful strategies common to all seven schools that were used to address challenges posed by the charter schools. Experiences of stakeholders, including founders, parents, and teachers, are addressed. In addition, the author compares the results and conclusions of her study to previous research on charter schools and suggests to the reader a rationale and possibilities for the importance and the future of the charter school movement.

If the text has a weakness, it is the uneven writing among cases, which were written by three different scholars. However, a strong argument could be made for the necessity of the differences among the cases. The cases were uneven, in part, because of differing site characteristics and foci of researchers at particular sites, which is expected and appropriate in anthropological research. While the differences in data collection techniques may be a bit disconcerting to a research scholar, the differences in grade levels, foci, content, or context may be the factors that are most interesting to someone who wants to learn as much as possible about charter schools.

Brouillette delivers no less than what she promised: to help the reader better understand the challenges facing those who create new educational settings, and to better understand the perceptions and concerns that motivate charter school initiators, teachers, and parents. Louis Armstrong, the great jazz trumpeter, once noted, "If it hadn't been for jazz, there wouldn't be no rock and roll" (<http://tinpan.fortunecity.com/riff/11/quotes.html>). Brouillette's theory, research and findings, like jazz, provide a grounding and foundation to better understand the cases and issues surrounding charter schools and the charter school movement. The cases and charter schools can be sung or played as rock and roll most appropriately when they are understood with the jazz underpinnings. The book is readable, clear, easily understood from both a lay perspective as well as an academician's-it was a joy to read.

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