

**Schroeder, Christopher.** *Diverse by Design: Literacy Education within Multicultural Institutions.* Logan: Utah State UP, 2011.

Reviewed by Veronica Pantoja

Focusing on the complex connections between multiculturalism and higher education, Christopher Schroeder's book is a case study of the special admissions program for Latino students at Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU) called Proyecto Pa'Lante (PP), which is designed to recruit students who do not meet general admission requirements but who show potential for academic success. With NEIU's status as an Hispanic-Serving Institution and as the "most ethnically diverse university in the Midwest" (33), Schroeder investigates the program's impact on students while highlighting its attempts to bridge complex issues of education, literate practices, and cultural identity, issues already complicated by the stance toward diversity in the U. S., where citizens "believe in the rights of individuals to their own languages . . . [yet] sponsor a single common language—monolingual and standard—for participation and communication" (5). Against this backdrop, studies indicate many college students are unprepared for college, and the traditional approaches to the literate practices that higher education requires could be even more alienating, especially for the students typically in PP.

Moreover, Schroeder's study also attempts to address a lack of scholarship in composition studies about Latino students. Through the use of quantitative and qualitative data, institutional reports and ethnographic methods, his book traces these students as they encounter a university culture. Part One of his book includes some historical context for the university and PP, while Part Two adds credibility to the study by including accounts from participants in the PP program, including two students and an instructor. Part Three includes Schroeder's suggestions for addressing some of the failures he discovered in the program.

Ultimately, Schroeder finds that while NEIU and PP provide opportunities for its ethnically diverse student body, through his analysis of the data and with students' experiences presented in the book, the project might not be offering the solutions it intended.

Schroeder frames his study by first describing NEIU's somewhat turbulent history regarding race. Among cultural shifts in 1960s Chicago and the university's mission to serve the Chicago Public School system (the university began as a teachers college, Chicago Teachers College-North), NEIU faced challenges with the diverse student populations it was attempting to attract. As a result of the city's burgeoning immigrant citizenry, NEIU was dedicated to "socially relevant education" (45) and so it opened the Center for Inner City Studies to prepare teachers to work with minority communities and later opened El Centro, a center for Latino communities. The Hispanic Servicing Institution (HSI) designation was established in the 1980s, and while Schroeder states that some find the designation misrepresentative because of NEIU's low graduation rate in 2005 (17%, the lowest among comparable HSIs), it did offer NEIU opportunities in the form of federal Title V funds that led to the development of the Center for Teaching and Learning and \$2.8 million to revise its first-year composition program, to establish a Center for Academic Literacy, and to implement writing intensive courses. The latest grant will be used to address the troubling statistic that showed the six-year graduation rate in 2005 as the lowest among comparable HSIs and as last among graduation rates in the state of Illinois for African American, Asian, Latino, and white students. As the NEIU Center for Teaching and Learning discovered in its report, the institution struggled with "effectively utilizing the educational benefits of its diversity" (qtd. in Schroeder 62). For instance, it found that "many students have little knowledge about what it takes to function effectively in our global society" and that "there is probably little agreement on the university's role in not only helping students acquire critical knowledge but also *acting* on this knowledge and the resulting beliefs and values"

(qtd. in Schroeder 63). Suggestions to address these challenges are offered through workshops from the Center for Teaching and Learning, but Schroeder notes that “these suggestions conspicuously neglect issues of language and literacy, which are places where educational access and social equity are contested and negotiated” (63).

Part Two of the book includes statistics about Proyecto Pa’Lante (PP). PP provided these students with academic advising, career and personal counseling, and assistance connecting with the institution for the purpose of ensuring success and eventual graduation. To remain in the program, the students in PP had to demonstrate academic progress and participate in a special first-year seminar course specifically designed to help them learn positive study habits and other strategies for success in college. Schroeder includes his observations of the classroom interactions among the students and the PP staff, noting that students often struggled with their writing assignments and discussed with their instructor what is perhaps the true purpose of the course: to help students learn the culture and expectations of higher education. One instructor of the PP seminar described her role: “I am able to condition and coach students into learning life skills, like skills that are tailored to NEIU and becoming a successful college student, which I hope will eventually influence their lives as professionals and becoming productive citizens” (78). The class involved students discussing financial aid processes as well as composing literacy biographies, academic plans, and PowerPoint presentations about themselves in which they described their past, present, and future. Initially, the program resulted in positive graduation and retention rates, as PP students were more likely to return for a second year. However, in the four academic years tracked by Schroeder, he notes that two trends emerged by year two: PP students generally completed fewer hours and earned worse grades than their peers at the institution. Although the PP students have a successful first year at NEIU, they tend to be less successful overall during the next three years. As one possible explanation for these results, Schroeder

explains that almost ten in ten PP students were enrolled in a remedial writing course during their first semester, which requires that they take additional courses before moving on to the required introductory level writing courses. However, Schroeder indicates that this issue may have more to do with the contested placement procedures at NEIU, where the Coordinator of Assessment and Testing wishes that the assessments could be offered in other languages and in a computerized format to allow for more accurate assessment. Additionally, Schroeder explains that students are often faced with faculty who may believe that ethnolinguistic diversity interferes with reading and writing. A recurring theme in Schroeder's analysis may be the stymying of NEIU's efforts due to a combination of factors that work against each other where they were intended to help.

To provide more accounts of literacy encounters at the institution, Schroeder also includes in Part Two narratives from an instructor and two PP students. They each share similar stories of attempts to engage with the institution, typically with less than positive results, as their diverse literate practices don't always seem appreciated by the institution. As a result, the narratives also demonstrate a basic argument in Schroeder's book: that the institution should be more open to its student populations' literate practices.

In Part Three of his study, Schroeder explores the predicament of the mismatch between ethnolinguistic minorities' belief in education and the failure of the educational system to assist these students—policies about language and literacies that “discriminate against the very ethnic diversity they profess to value and respect” (201). It is this national focus on Standard English ideology (SEI) that Schroeder claims continues to produce misunderstandings about the literate practices of most students generally and ethnolinguistic students in particular. When most teachers cannot always agree what constitutes “good writing,” students are further challenged to meet institutional expectations that at times appear to “discriminate against the very ethnic diversity institutions and disciplines seek and value” (206). Potential solutions lie with

reframing students' linguistic challenges as "intellectual resources to exploit" (201) through a "pluralist integration" approach (209). This perspective "would recognize the realities of standardized Englishes and dominant literacies and the proficiencies of power that students want to learn and the realities of multilingual and multiliterate communities as sources of cultural identities to be supported by schools and other social institutions" (208).

Schroeder highlights the institutional contradictions at work through descriptions of NEIU's efforts to help students overcome obstacles enacting literate practices within an institution that simultaneously questions and values these literate practices. Schroeder explains that, while NEIU embraces the benefits that come from a multicultural education with its commitment to PP, the program still fell short in several ways. The students in the program were more successful in their first year than their peers, but they did not necessarily persist nor graduate any sooner. At times, they felt alienated or undervalued by the institution; this is illustrated by the debate that Schroeder describes regarding the revision of the writing program through the Title V grant the institution was awarded because of its HSI status. Schroeder criticizes the Standard English ideology that the revisions endorsed. One reason for PP's failure might be what Sophia López, one of the PP instructors, expresses as a central dilemma: "around here, everyone wanted to talk about diversity and multiculturalism, but no one wanted to talk about issues of race, power, and inequality" (159).

While Schroeder presents intriguing data about the complex interplay among institutional and curricular demands regarding literacy and higher education, questions persist: how can writing instructors address ethnically diverse student needs while also assisting them to meet the demands of college? Because these students "use more than one language, and thus have more than one way to express experiences and examine environments, [they] have more resources than those who have only one language at their disposal" (7). How can institutional practices be developed

to help ethnically diverse students take advantage of their educational resources?

As an English instructor in a community college where approximately 60% of its students are classified as Hispanic and where almost half of the graduating class of 2009-2010 had taken at least one developmental course, I also question how the institution is supporting its diverse student populations. Schroeder's book poses pedagogical questions about how what kinds of literacy expectations I place on all my students. What can I as an instructor do in the classroom to support multiliterate students as they negotiate the academic expectations they will encounter? The case study Schroeder presents encourages writing instructors and writing program administrators to re-evaluate curricula as well as their departmental assessment practices. Incorporating student background data into departmental assessments that are conducted every semester would add a richer dimension to the assessment and can perhaps even uncover some tacit beliefs about literacy.

Ultimately, these kinds of discussions could lead to more meaningful curricula for all students. While neither NEIU's PP program nor Schroeder can fully address these questions, the analysis in *Diverse by Design* challenges readers to closely analyze issues of language, student rights, student readiness for college, and college literacy expectations.