Writing Home-Schooled Students into the Academy[1]

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This qualitative study examines the recent arrival of home-schooled students on public college campuses. Transitioning from their private homes to the public spaces of higher education, home-schooled students are writing themselves into the academy and making important rhetorical choices for how to perform their public identities. Within the next several years, college faculty will realize the consequences, if any, of the home-schooling phenomenon, which, along with virtual learning programs and other "education management organizations" (see Molnar), reflect the increasing privatization of K-12 education. Though no current statistics on the number of home schoolers in public post-secondary institutions exist, a 2003 government study reported a 29% increase in home schooling from the four previous years at the K-12 level and estimated a total population of 1,096,000 home-schooled students (National Center). More than likely, many of these students are now studying at public colleges and universities. The fact that the popular student networking site, Facebook, consists of more than 500 home-schooling groups may be one indication. Another may be that many institutions, including the one where I teach, are paying more attention to home-schooled students as a potential market and devoting websites to them.

English studies faculty, and composition practitioners in particular, should be aware of the home-schooled students entering their classrooms who may bring with them new literacy values and educational assumptions. Homeschoolers, possibly more than any other group of students, experience the challenges of departing from a highly home-contextualized notion of private values and beliefs and confronting the new public values and secular beliefs of the university. Home-schooled students may have little experience with the pedagogies that are commonplace in writing instruction, such as collaborative learning, peer workshops, revision, or portfolios. They may distrust student learning objectives that ask them to challenge their home beliefs and grapple with perspectives that are different from their own. Additionally, as the reading experiences of some home-schooled students may be limited to Christian value-oriented readers published by Bob Jones University Press and A Beka Books, these students may also resist the content of course readings. Home-schooled students may refuse to historicize their textual interpretations and to examine characters without condemning their moral choices (e.g., see Goodburn).

These challenges indicate conflicting definitions of and commitments to the public values of the university, and, although I am wary of subsuming

home-schooled students under the monolithic label of Christian fundamentalism, these types of literacy conflicts account for why home-schooled students may confront the same assumptions that Christian fundamentalist students face regarding their educational, social, and literacy attitudes. According to Ronda Dively and Lizabeth Rand, among others, college instructors may resist these fundamentalist students, defining their way of thinking as naïve, backward, monological, and highly dualistic. Christian students may feel that they need to suppress their religious identity, keep their faith outside their texts and interpretations, and, if possible, overcome their religious thinking—these beliefs that harm their writing and cognitive development (Dively 56; Rand 358; Stenberg 278).[2]

An underlying concern of this paper, therefore, is to balance the pedagogical obligations that public and secular instructors have towards their students with the secular commitments they need to maintain in their classrooms. As I define them, pedagogical obligations promote Gerard Hauser's rhetorical criteria of meaningful public spheres (77-80), which, in pedagogical contexts, include granting students access to literacy resources, making sure they are treated equally, and tolerating their differences; these obligations determine how we characterize students, value their languages, encourage social interaction, and evaluate them. The secular commitments of public instructors are official commitments to maintain healthy public spaces, in which they need to insure that a single perspective or belief system, or one dominant voice, neither inhibits dialogue nor silences differences (67). Instructors' secular commitments enable them to meet their pedagogical obligations to all students.

One practical experience I have had with balancing these different commitments was, as part of my role as the director of a writing program at a public Midwestern university, when I evaluated students' attitudes towards a first-year writing course that asked them to write about identity, gender, and white privilege. In that study, 16% of students reported that they felt "somewhat uncomfortable" and 7% felt "very uncomfortable" with the curriculum content (Marzluf 206-07). Though administrators were largely pleased with the evaluation data, they did express concern with this "comfort level" and asked me to insure that all students could relate to the curriculum. Yet, this ideal of comfort, though strongly related to the inclusive ethic of pedagogical obligations, begs many questions about the public role of writing classes. To what extent should writing classes be asked—or not asked—to unsettle students' political, social, or religious perspectives and identities? To what extent should the official, public space of the classroom provide opportunities for students to question the ideologies of their private beliefs and values, as well as those of public spheres? This study, in part, was motivated by my desire to answer these types of questions and ascertain how home-schooled—and Christian fundamentalist students in general—developed strategies to negoti-

ate their values in this first-year writing course and in other writing-intensive courses at public institutions.

In this interview-based project, I examine the post-secondary transition of six predominantly home-schooled students who profess the importance of their Christian faith. I analyze their writing for hints about how they negotiate the ideologies of post-secondary education. I am interested in how and to what degree these students navigate the public university, its particular ideologies, and the expectations of their professors. As a committed secular educator, I am also eager to understand and identify with these students, whose beliefs and values at times considerably clash with my own. In the following section, I briefly show how home schooling has been characterized, discuss how composition scholars construct the conflict between fundamentalist students and secular instructors, and outline the methodology of this study. After that, I describe the rhetorical strategies used by the home-schooled students in order to negotiate their transition from the private to the public and confront new, possibly uncomfortable ideologies. Finally, I discuss several implications from the interview data, arguing that, though the home-schooled study participants demonstrated they could adjust smoothly to the literacy expectations of the university, faculty need to temper their enthusiasm for transforming these students' social values as well as their commitment to the college community. Moreover, public writing instructors need to reflect upon moments when their own pedagogical obligations to home-schooled and fundamentalist students may begin to surpass their secular commitments.

Before I continue, let me offer two caveats. First, I am by no means an advocate for home schooling nor am I interested here in critiquing the cultural and social values that shape its pedagogical values. Home schooling troubles me to the same degree as other attempts to privatize K-12 education and, for that matter, public higher education. Second, this study does not attempt to compare the college-level performance of home-schooled students with that of their public- or private-schooled peers. Though research like this exists (e.g., Rudner), it is difficult to generate valid conclusions from the variety of pedagogical approaches that constitute home schooling as well as public and private educational contexts.

The Conflicts and Contexts of Home Schooling

The research on home schooling reveals the ideological conflict between liberalism and fundamentalism that Sharon Crowley describes in *Toward a Civil Discourse*. On the one hand, according to Crowley, there are the liberal, Enlightenment values that privilege tolerance and inclusiveness, in which people are asked to free themselves from "motivation by desire, interest, or life situation" (42); on the other hand, there are the exclusive, hierarchical,

and monological values of fundamentalist faith and apocalyptic rhetoric. Critics of home schooling emphasize its unhealthy desire to isolate families from a more heterogeneous public culture and to inoculate individuals from the possibility of persuasion (cf. Mol's rhetorical definition of religion [5]). It represents, for Crowley, an exaggerated form of the "single-mindedness" that marks the values of apocalyptic rhetoric and is a pedagogical method that insures "those who are situated in the habitus in such a way [...] seldom hear or read arguments that carry sufficient force to change their beliefs" (193-94). Crowley argues that such forms of social and pedagogical isolation must be challenged. Invoking the term "cocooning," Michael Apple similarly argues that the home schooling movement distrusts "cultural and intellectual diversity, complexity, ambiguity, uncertainty, and proximity to 'the Other'" (262) and thus retreats from the growing racial and ethnic diversity in certain parts of the United States. Considering that home schooling is becoming more popular in areas of the South and the Southwest that show a large spike in immigration (Sikkink 62-63), the motivation of home schooling may represent another sort of "white flight"; in this case, parents do not move out of the neighborhood, they just pull their children out of the local classrooms.

Home-schooling proponents downplay such responsibilities to community and values of inclusiveness, emphasizing instead the benefits of economic, legal, and political independence. Brian Ray, proud of these families' desires to remain independent of the government, states that home schoolers "do not excessively depend on their villages, their communities and the state" for the educational needs of their children (88). Ray privileges the autonomy of individual families, which provide children with a "coherent worldview" (90-94) and do not present financial burdens to the government (100-101). Gary Bauer's *American Values* website underscores this conservative message of family independence: "Parents are children's foremost authority and first and best teachers. They, not Washington bureaucrats, should decide how and where their children are to be educated" ("Education—Home Schooling"). As an educational movement, especially its conservative "Ideological" variant (see Van Galen), home schooling proponents focus education back on the family, call for more local control over curricular decisions, and promote fundamental, Judeo-Christian values. These advocates distrust mainstream intellectual elites, curricula that encourage diversity and multiple perspectives, and post-modern, relativistic epistemologies (e.g., Budziszewski). As a highly conservative social movement, home schooling possesses its own partisan organizations, such as the Home School Defense League or National Home Education Research Institute, which attempt to legitimize home schooling both in the courts and in terms of public opinion (Lines 83).

In composition scholarship, these disputes between the obligations of public and private spheres—between Crowley's binary of liberalism and

fundamentalism—resurface as the conflict between liberal, secular instructors and their conservative, Christian fundamentalist students.[3] Rand and Shari Stenberg contend that religion is the final identity factor that secular instructors, especially those who are committed to critical pedagogy, feel free to publicly discriminate against. Presenting examples of secular discrimination, Joonna Smitherman Trapp describes how her professors silenced her and belittled her belief system (18), and Rand narrates the experiences of graduate students who felt ashamed because of their Christian faith (279). Priscilla Perkins argues that this distrust of secular teachers for their fundamentalist students is not simply a cultural prejudice, but an indication that there is dissonance between conflicting types of literacy and intellectual values: "Teachers respond negatively to students who do not tolerate viewpoints or modes of living different from their own, and they do not know how to teach critical thinking and argumentation to students whose approach to textual authority runs so counter to mainstream cultural literacies" (586). Though this inquiry about religion does not necessarily touch upon all home-schooled students—some of whom would reject the "fundamentalist" label—it is important to note that many of them may be entering English classes with these same values in question.

As I mentioned in the introduction, these conflicts between fundamentalist students and secular teachers reveal a dissonance between pedagogical obligations and secular commitments. In *Negotiating Religious Faith in the Composition Classroom*, for example, Elizabeth Vander Lei nicely articulates the pedagogical obligations that she feels towards students of faith: "[W]e are optimistic that by acknowledging the presence of religious faith in our classrooms—maybe even by inviting it in—we can do a better job of helping students recognize and respond to inappropriate rhetorical uses of religious faith in both academic and civic discourse" (3). Vander Lei expresses several commonplace pedagogical values of composition studies, including the following needs: to address the particular identities of students (in this case, the "presence of religious faith"), to start from students' frames of reference, and to emphasize the rhetorical and socially situated nature of teaching practices and students' literacy development. Overall, Vander Lei pronounces the important role of composition teachers who must not only transform their teaching practices and understanding of evangelical students—that is, "do a better job"—but must transform and save fundamentalist students, helping them to negotiate the language of their religious beliefs within the academy. Rand, who comments upon the missionary zeal of composition studies (356), hints that instructors should ignore their own secular identities as teachers in order to meet their pedagogical responsibilities:

> Even if we don't finally believe in the Absolute Truth or perhaps in a God that asks of us to be "born again," we should recognize that many of our

> students do and that approaching their texts with more knowledge about their religious identities might be the most effective and inviting way to connect with them as people and as writers. (353)

Again, Rand implies that composition teachers need to transform themselves and understand the religious identities of their students in order to better serve them (see also Perkins 586; Stenberg 272). Indeed, this interview project with home-schooled students follows a similar impulse, representing a model, I hope, for how teachers and researchers can listen to home-schooled as well as other students of faith and examine the ways they negotiate their university experiences.

Yet, these pedagogical obligations to invite and transform students' identities and home beliefs may challenge instructors' commitments to preserve their secular and public classroom spaces. The discourse of Christian fundamentalist, especially that which manifests the exclusive, hierarchical "single-mindedness" that concerns Crowley, threatens the public space of the writing classroom because of its inability to participate meaningfully in the types of publics that Hauser imagines: fundamentalist discourse may not tolerate differences (79); may block access of other members, voices, or discourses to the public space (77); and may demand a passive adherence to a single perspective or belief system (77-78). According to Hauser, what constitutes a healthy public space—and a space, I believe, that is necessarily a secular one—is that which demands an active response from all of its members: "Social actors must hear multiple voices to realize that they can do more than respond—they can choose" (78). Thus, when Perkins describes a colleague's classroom, in which a "nonfundamentalist student" is "barraged from every corner of the room by 'proof-texts' on the sinfulness of homosexuality" (592), that is a sign, despite the instructor's best efforts, of an unhealthy public, secular space. The classroom, obviously, like all other public spaces, cannot be constituted by emotionless, passionless, and disinterested students; they necessarily arrive with their own values, commitments, and ways of seeing the world. Hauser imagines public spaces that do not resemble the venues of rationalist discourse but that are participatory, emotional, active, changing, and tolerant of differences. The secular commitments of instructors are commitments to nurturing, maintaining, and, at times, policing the diverse talk that makes up these classroom publics.

There are several examples of researchers whose pedagogical obligations surpass their secular commitments. For instance, in order to help students bridge their religious identities to the expectations of the class, Rand suggests instructors pose a series of questions: "If human beings are 'sinful,' are they limited in their understandings of a Supreme Being in any way? How are you limited in your understanding of Truth?" (353). These questions, unfortunately, may lead to unproductive statements of students'

allegiance to their faith and promote "witnessing talk" (359), confessions, and testimonials. Another example is Amy Goodburn's conflict with her now infamous case study participant, fundamentalist "Luke." Luke values an intensive literacy model, one focused solely around the Bible, the only authentic text, which reveals only one true interpretation (339). Luke's literacy values are imbedded in his sense of rhetorical time. He is unwilling to respond within the particular contingencies offered by the texts as he privileges a universal present Biblical time, in which the authentic text necessarily stands outside of historical and social forces (344). Though I admire Goodburn's care to continue to find ways to identify her and Luke's conflicting epistemologies (350), she demonstrates an over-commitment to Luke's private world; in short, her salvationist urge to reach him leads her away from her secular commitments as an instructor at a public state university. She does not acknowledge Luke's responsibility to negotiate how his "private" beliefs conflict with the different literacy and audience expectations of the secular classroom.

In order to contribute to our knowledge about home-schooled students and their transition from their private home lifeworlds to their public identities as college students, I interviewed, during the 2005-2006 academic year, seven predominantly home-schooled students, of whom six pronounced the importance of their religious faith.[4] The students who participated were Ashley, Jeff, Aaron, Jeremy, Kevin, and Blake.[5] The first five students were home schooled throughout their entire K-12 educational careers, though three of these students took community-college courses in their junior and senior years. All participants were now studying at a large, Midwestern land-grant institution. Following the literacy research methodology of asking participants to narrate "life stories" (Brandt 12), I questioned the home-schooled students about their educational attitudes, their reading and writing activities, their interactions with their classmates and professors, their responses to their professors' feedback, and their identification of campus ideologies. I interviewed each home-schooled student participant four times over the course of a semester. I digitally recorded their responses and transcribed significant portions. Additionally, I collected all the writing they produced in their university classes as well as those texts they wrote previously for introductory composition courses at regional community colleges.

Home-Schooled Students Negotiating Public Spaces

The interview data reveal the home-schooled participants' educational values, their rhetorical strategies for making connections between their home and public selves, and their ability to read the ideologies of their university. Not surprisingly, the home-schooled students' educational identity is tied strongly to their families and their religious faith. Their narratives for why

their parents chose to home school them are instructive. Although they relate a variety of practical, pedagogical, and spiritual motivations, they all point to a danger lurking in the public schools: rowdy classmates, dangerous schools, mediocre teachers, and noxious educational policies and values. Ashley, a history major and a member of a sorority, was educated at home in rural western Kansas; she lists Bible quizzes and local Christian organizations as significant educational and social experiences. Jeff, who claims he did not live up to the stereotype of smart home schoolers, describes himself as a hands-on learner; he is majoring in the university's athletic training program. Aaron, a Spanish language and economics major, experienced the most formal, organized home schooling events. He participated in Christian mission trips and attended courses in constitutional law and writing. Jeremy, an engineering major, was educated in a home environment in which he was able to focus on mathematics and music. Kevin, from a family with eleven home-schooled children, hopes to become a sports journalist; when he was fifteen years old, he experienced a traumatic spinal cord injury. Also, as the home-schooled participant who most strongly centered his self around his faith, Kevin described the educational choices of his parents by placing them in a context of his parents' sense of divine responsibility: His parents "felt that children were a gift from God and that it was their responsibility to bring us up . . . with a strong belief in God and a strong foundation in scriptures and an understanding of why we believe what we believe." Finally, Blake, an animal science major, describes negative public school experiences until his parents began to home school him in second grade; he is an avid reader of politically conservative websites such as Townhall.com.

The home-schooled students demonstrate their ability to negotiate the transition from the private to the public space, in which rhetorical choices about how to articulate religious, political, and social beliefs are necessary. Their composition texts reveal several strategies that interconnect their private literacies with those of their post-secondary institutions. The most obvious strategy for home-schooled students, especially in writing and speech classes wherein they are unsure of their instructors' expectations, is to choose topics and perspectives that easily accommodate their home ideologies. The ubiquitous benefits-of-home-schooling paper or speech, for example, often appear in the home-schooled students' lists of topics. Jeff's composition papers, which he wrote in a mode-based composition course at a suburban community college, show his conservative home ideology. He wrote a "concept essay" on the negative consequences of abortion, a research paper on how crucial parents are for nurturing their children, and a comparison-contrast paper on working mothers versus stay-at-home mothers. Similarly, Ashley, who fulfilled her composition requirements for another mode-based writing course at a rural community college, wrote a "cause-and-effect" paper on the benefits of home schooling, a research paper on the unfair legislation

of public religious expression, a proposal advising her church congregation on how to fund a preschool, and, finally, an argumentative paper describing the problems of Fidel Castro's Cuba. The teachers' reactions to these papers demonstrate that this strategy works: except for Jeff's anti-abortion paper, the instructors praised the students' topic selections and did not comment upon the use of evangelical outside research sources.

Kevin provides another interesting example of how to interconnect his home beliefs and literacies with those of the academy. Kevin transformed a sacred text—in this case, his Christian testament read out before relatives and family friends at his home school graduation ceremony—for a paper in the diversity-based university writing course that I mentioned in the introduction. The assignment guidelines asked him to write a personal narrative and then analyze what it revealed about his social identity. Kevin's original text described his acceptance of Jesus Christ and then narrated the traumatic spinal cord injury that left him paralyzed. The last section of the paper contextualized his injury—and his acceptance of the injury—in terms of his Christian faith:

> But God, in His infinite wisdom, when knitting me together in my mother's womb, designed me with a temperament and a mind-set that looks past the limitations of my present situation and sees advantages. I realize that James 4:14 is true: our life is just like vapor that appears for a little while then vanishes away. Our God is truly amazing and I look forward to finding His plan for my life.

Kevin's testament follows, according to Jeannette Lindholm, the genre elements of the Christian conversion narrative: Kevin provides a challenge to his faith, his spinal cord injury, which he then uses to reaffirm his faith (61-62).

In his first-year expository writing class, Kevin transformed the testament and, in the narrative of his injury, invoked religion only two times, once when he asked for "God" to help him during the time of his accident and a second time when he described his religious faith in the hospital, "joyfully praying and thanking God for sparing [his] life." In the analysis section of this paper, Kevin avoided any reference to his Christianity and, following the dictates of the assignment, explained how his "disabled" identity overrode all of the other identity characteristics: "No matter what my race, gender or class, the only thing that matters right then is my chair with wheels. It also brings up an interesting point. The fact that I'm in a chair minimizes my perceived race, gender and class. When somebody looks at me they don't see that I'm a white male of the middle class, to that person I'm disabled." What Kevin demonstrates here is not only his ability to transform a religious text to a secular one but that he can recontextualize the most challenging experience of his life, his accident, from one of an experience of faith to one of social identity.

Another literacy practice that focuses attention on the religious-secular boundary is the use of Biblical quotations, or "proof-texting," a mark of fundamentalist discourse in which Biblical quotations are cited to meet certain rhetorical exigencies (Lindholm 62); it rarely appeals to secular audiences. Writing for his required sophomore-level persuasive writing course, Aaron provides an example of proof-texting when he included a Biblical quotation from Proverbs, "where there is no vision, the people perish," into a proposal addressed to the local city commission regarding its preparedness for natural disasters. The intention of the quote was to motivate his audience to act and to represent a "call for action," a concluding element that the assignment called for. Aaron admits that his instructor's marginal comments questioned the necessity of the quote but claims he wanted to include it because of the importance of its message: "It's a verse that meant a lot to me, where, you know it also says in Proverbs, 'in a multitude of counselors, there is safety,' so it's talking about how, you know, it's important to be ready for all different kinds of things in life." After discussing whether this quotation is appropriate and relevant for the purportedly secular city commission, Aaron returns to this challenging issue when he describes the importance of warrants: "I think the idea of a warrant might come in when we were talking about this King James quote; the warrant that needs to be looked at is whether the use of the Bible is, what do I want to say . . . ? I mean it's relevant, I know it's relevant, it's just, whether it is accepted to the audience." Similar to Kevin's transformation of his sacred testament, Aaron is negotiating the literacy values between these religious and secular spheres. Having demonstrated his ability to proof-text, Aaron is now coming to grips with audiences who may find such a literacy practice unacceptable. He still wants to emphasize, however, the legitimacy of this quote and this particular literacy practice.

As these students negotiate the public space of the university, their growing awareness of secular genres, audiences, and expectations is one aspect of their development in reading and responding to the university's political beliefs and social values. They become sophisticated at identifying ideological hotspots in what, according to most of them, is a biased space. The participants listed several of the biases they encountered in their classrooms, including the bashing of President George W. Bush, assumptions about social inequality expressed in a Spanish language textbook, attitudes towards the inviolability of evolutionary theory, stem cell research, and, in one instance, a concern about an overemphasis upon the careers of women. Importantly, Blake shows that these ideological hotspots are not necessarily always biased towards the left. In his food science courses, he claims that there is a significant conservative bias towards the agricultural industry, expressed both by professors and the majority of students; in one of his

classes, the nine students who were thought of as "organic" were silenced in the classroom.

Although Aaron expressed some concern that the university did not express the "viewpoint of the country in general," it is important to note that these students thought that moments of bias and dialogue concerning political beliefs and social values were reasonable challenges of the university experience. Consequently, a student like Blake, who had the most negative experiences in his few stabs at public education and who proudly defines himself as a politically conservative Southern Baptist, can still sound like someone who embraces the pluralism of a liberal arts education (or, at the very least, a libertarian perspective of the free and open exchange of beliefs). When responding to the question of what advice he would give to a fundamentalist home-schooled student who was considering enrolling, Blake emphasized the role of the university as an open, public space for presenting and exchanging ideas:

> The evolution thing, abortion, that's another thing that got talked about in animal science—that was a fun class—they might get a few people angry at them, but, hey, college: exchange of ideas—what we're here for. I don't really thing there is a need to just hold back on your beliefs or your opinions just because they're not either mainstream nor popular. I would just tell them to speak their mind; it's college, we encourage it.

Fundamentalist students, defined by Blake as people who are intolerant and close-minded to the extent that they cannot engage in a public discussion about a controversial subject, may be incapable of engaging their peers and instructors in these sorts of open dialogues. Blake and several of the other home schooled participants also indicate that these students cannot expect the culture of the university to accommodate them. Kevin, quite possibly the most devout Christian in the study, provides this advice to a hypothetical fundamentalist home-schooled student who is thinking about entering the university:

> Having an open mind and not being so overtly, "Woo! Evolution! Ooh! Satan!" but understanding that people are going to have different views from yours and that you are not going to be able to change them, change their minds, by condemning them and freaking out about every single time you hear that, but that you are going to have to deal with it, so get a firm belief and know what you believe, and then keep an open mind about people's beliefs and don't feel that you will be automatically able to change it.

Kevin's commonsensical pragmatic advice, "you are going to have to deal with it," is a strong reminder that home-schooled students—and funda-

mentalist students in general—are responsible for adopting rhetorical strategies to represent themselves.

These additional rhetorical strategies consist of self-silencing (see Vander Lei 8), the avoidance of controversial discussions, the compartmentalization of religious beliefs, and the pragmatic tolerance of beliefs that they do not accept. Blake's response to the university's privileging of evolution is one example. A strong advocate of creationist beliefs, Blake cannot comprehend how a practicing Christian, such as his favorite professor, can adopt an evolutionary stance; yet, in his science classes, Blake is able to approach a subject like evolution pragmatically: "We'll talk about evolution...I don't believe it occurred, don't believe it is occurring, but if they start talking about evolution, I'll take down the notes, because I have to know it, but it's not something that I'm really going to need for my major." A final example is Ashley's compartmentalization of her identity and her beliefs. When she visits her rural Kansas hometown, she has to be mindful about how she presents herself as a member of a sorority, for the word itself is a codeword for "snobbery" in her home community. In her sorority house, on the other hand, she needs to be mindful about how she articulates her beliefs in creationism, practicing avoidance strategies when "pre-Ice Age and all that stuff" come up in conversations.

Our Limitations to Transform

> I have seen students try on new ideas and new appearances, but rarely have I witnessed full-blown Road-to-Damascus conversion experiences of any kind. (Bérubé 107)

> "Real" college culture remained beyond the reach of university institutions and personnel, and centered on the small, ego-based networks of friends that defined one's personal and social world. Academic and intellectual pursuits thus had a curiously distant relation to college life. (Nathan 100)

The two quotations above, from Michael Bérubé's *What's Liberal about the Liberal Arts* and Rebekah Nathan's *My Freshman Year*, invite readers to temper their expectations about the transformative possibilities of college experiences and post-secondary literacy events. Bérubé distrusts professors who align themselves with the pedagogy of liberal revelation (12). Nathan's observations of first-year college students suggest an overall skepticism about university educational experiences as well as attempts to form a campus community (42-48). My research conclusions also share this skepticism: the home-schooled students' attitudes towards their post-secondary experiences do not indicate rich negotiations between private and public life. They do not express the importance of literacy events in connecting their private

and public worlds; they do not parallel, for example, Anne Dyson's primary school study participants who "compose a place for themselves" amid their personal, official, and pop-cultural worlds (18). The home-schooled students showed their allegiance to their private worlds in other ways. Four of the home schooled participants still live at home or report close interaction with classmates or friends who were also home schooled. Jeremy, one of the strongest advocates of home schooling, claims that his college experience closely approximates his earlier independent learning experience as a home-schooled student. That is, the public university conforms closely to Jeremy's private expectations.

The home-schooled students demonstrated their ability to adapt to secular writing and reading situations; importantly, they did so without fomenting the ideological and literacy conflicts described by Goodburn, Perkins, and others. Home-schooled students do not expect a university that is free of ideological conflicts. For example, Blake, who was proud of his conservative argumentative skills, and Aaron, who was glad that he possessed a "parallel conservative education" that enabled him to defend his belief system, are willing to engage in public dialogue over particularly controversial issues and diverse viewpoints. Yet, the university rarely transforms or impacts these students' ideological perspectives. Instead of conflict, the home-schooled students use strategies to neutralize the university's ideological hotspots. Also, instead of change, these students articulate the value of tolerance, though they may prefer a weak version of it: they are willing to articulate their positions—and accept the positions of others—as long as they are not asked to change or to commit themselves to these other perspectives.

Tolerance for the home-schooled students, therefore, does not only suggest respect for other people's beliefs, but also respect for their desire to opt out of university experiences that they feel contradict their own beliefs and values. Jeremy, for example, admitted his concern about the diversity focus of his first-year expository writing class, as it might push "leftwing ideals" and a "homosexual agenda." He thought about dropping the class until he discovered that the husband of his instructor was a member of his church band. Kevin held similar concerns about this same course, one that he felt overemphasized women's equality. Relying upon a fundamentalist Christian perspective, which also closely coincides with the roles of his teacher-mother and principal-father in his home schooling, Kevin claims that there are definite, divinely-sanctioned roles for men and women, which they should neither attempt to exceed nor swap.

Additionally, Aaron can agree with his expository writing instructor's rhetorical reasons forbidding such topics as abortion, religion, and homosexuality, "not because she doesn't want us to argue about them, but because for the purposes of these papers, it's pretty hard to cover all that and get any audience to agree with you." Yet, at the same time, he claims that universities

are so ideologically biased towards liberal politics that he understands why home-schooled and other fundamentalist students hesitate before applying. Aaron, replying to a question about how administrators could aid home-schooled students' transition, provides the following suggestion:

> We've talked a little bit about kind of a leftwing view . . . as portrayed by textbooks, occasionally by professors, mostly by the texts; [I] noticed that in my history book's portrayal of Ronald Reagan . . . It would help to understand . . . that were that to change, you could also change a lot of home schooled families' reservations about college. Some people have the view that it's a dangerous place to go because they are going to change your entire worldview, which doesn't have to be the case, but there is something to be said for the viewpoint as portrayed by a large portion of the university as opposed to the viewpoint of the country in general. I think it is safe to say that it is a little more liberal than any other venue.

Unlike the value of tolerance expressed by several other of the home schooled participants, Aaron is suggesting here for the university to reflect upon its own obviously leftwing perspectives and to more fully align itself with the supposed conservative values of the majority of the United States. If the university is unable to do this, Aaron warns, fundamentalist home schooled families will continue to look for other options.

What do the home-schooled students' interview data suggest for composition instructors and researchers? First, we must not stop what we are doing, despite our fears, perhaps, that we are failing to accommodate students whose literacy experiences and social and educational values are far different from ours. We must continue to meet our pedagogical obligations, challenging our home-schooled students' notions of difference, their commitments to their classmates and to their college community, and their well-entrenched assumptions about how to read the world. In short, we need to treat home-schooled students, as well as fundamentalist students, the same as we treat all students. Yet, we need to be aware that home-schooled students' reinterpretation of such values as tolerance, inclusiveness, and free methods of inquiry limits their force, granting students freedom to express their opinions only if they are able to opt out of experiences that disturb their social and cultural perspectives. Many readers will certainly be frustrated with how these attitudes restrict the transformative possibilities of critical pedagogy; however, we may at times need to accept these restrictions. For home-schooled students, it is a "reasonable accommodation," the type of classroom negotiations that Bérubé describes with his politically conservative students "whose standards of reasonableness are significantly different from yours" (19). Moreover, extrapolating from Hauser's defense of the public sphere, instructors do not need to search for a final consensus, as if they were looking for a way to unravel and extinguish the differences

that exist among their students, as well as between themselves and their students (54-55). Instead of consensus, Hauser writes, a public space bases itself "on the sharing of a common world, even when understood and lived differently by different segments of society" (69). We have to recognize our pedagogical limitations: we cannot save these students from themselves. Instead, the reasonable accommodation stipulates that we tolerate our students' fundamentalist identities, yet do so without asking students to demonstrate their religious allegiance or requiring other members of the classroom community to identify with their beliefs.

Second, we need to meet our secular commitments, reflecting upon how we define what constitutes secular as opposed to faith-based writing and persuasive appeals and, in addition, critical as opposed to fundamentalist interpretations of literary texts. Douglas Downs provides useful language to determine this definitional boundary, describing, on one side, a faith-based "Discourse of affirmation," in which students use epideictic strategies to declare and celebrate their faith as "true believers" (48); on the other side, acting as "real scholars," students practice a "Discourse of inquiry" (42), the type of intellectual commitment to researching and writing that Downs expects. Jan Worth's practical advice similarly divides students' invention between religious-private and secular-public spheres, two different directions that motivate their rhetorical choices of evidence, style, and audience appeals (25-26). Because the home-schooled students revealed their strategies of recycling stock issues (e.g., abortion and the benefits of home schooling), revising texts written in sacred home situations, and proof-texting, they may require guidance on how to transform these texts to meet the expectations of public and secular audiences. Along with Downs and Worth, I am not advocating that instructors completely surrender their pedagogical responsibilities and, consequently, ban all religious topics in a writing class or deride these students' ways of seeing the world and interpreting texts. They should continue to listen to their home-schooled and fundamentalist students and ask them to reflect on their ways of arguing and researching and on their readers' expectations; if necessary, instructors should not hesitate to demand that students revise drafts that code-switch from secular to religious discourse. Again, students' religious discourse cannot silence their classmates' talk nor, for that matter, demand any type of allegiance or identification.

Finally, research examining the educational transition of home-schooled and fundamentalist students needs to continue. Additional case study and empirical research needs to be conducted in order to challenge or develop the findings and exploratory conclusions from this study. For example, how do the educational and social values of home-schooled students impact their reception of challenging texts? How do their instructors respond to their writing, especially if it is trespassing the boundary into faith-based writing?

How do home-schooled students' weak reinterpretations of such liberal values as tolerance and inclusiveness change how they conceive of themselves as college students, if not citizens? As home-schooled students continue to enter the academy, and as the public university becomes increasingly private, composition researchers will need to revisit such questions. At stake are the definitions of how we define our own expectations and values.

Notes

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2. Although it is unfair to contend that all home-schooled families base their educational choices on their Christian faith (see Welner and Welner par. 6), it is still largely a Protestant, white, middle-class, and Southern and Western educational phenomenon (McDowell, Sanchez, and Jones 125; Rudner). Out of Jane Van Galen's taxonomy of home-schooling parents, which consists of "Pedagogues" and "Ideologues," it is the latter group of parents, emphasizing the conservative social, cultural, and spiritual qualities of home schooling, who now clearly dominate its discourse.
3. I am using "fundamentalist" in its general, popular sense, and I do so in order to situate this study within the conversation of religious faith and composition studies. I am not singling out any particular Christian faith, and I am aware that I am creating a monolith of the wide variety of mainstream and heterodox religious identities that students express.
4. The experiences of the seventh home-schooled student were also not comparable with those of the other participants because he was home schooled only up to ninth grade, at which time he entered a private Catholic high school.
5. Pseudonyms have been chosen for study participants. Their interview responses have been slightly edited to enhance readability.

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