Living inside the Bible (Belt)

Shannon Carter

eaching writing in the Bible Belt for the past five years has taught me a number of things. Most significantly, perhaps—as much as I hate to admit—it has taught me the limits of my own tolerance for difference. In fact, the evangelical Christianity with which a number of my students most identify functions—rhetorically, ideologically, practically—in ways that appear completely and irreconcilable at odds with my pedagogical and scholarly goals. The social and cultural theories with which I most identify celebrate difference both empathically and explicitly, yet much of the traditional conservatism through which evangelical Christianity resonates seems to embrace familiarity above all else, representing difference not as a benefit to embrace and learn from but as a threat to overcome (see Kintz). A key objective of my writing courses may be critical consciousness: awareness of one’s subject position and the partial and socially situated nature of one’s understanding of the world. However, the goal of “witnessing talk” or “testimonial” appears to be quite the opposite: to “convert” the listener to the speaker’s ways of knowing and living, a conversion completely dependent upon the acceptance that the speaker’s own subject position is far from “partial” or “socially situated” but rather universal, right, and—above all—“True.”

Critics like Amy Goodburn, Priscilla Perkins, and Lizabeth Rand, however, have identified several rather ironic parallels between the critical position with which I most identify and the Christian position my Bible-believing students may use as, in Rand’s words, “the primary sense of selfhood [. . . they] draw upon in making meaning of their lives and the world around them” (350). In comparing the agenda of

Shannon Carter is assistant professor of English at Texas A&M University–Commerce, where she directs the writing center and the basic writing program and teaches basic writing and graduate courses in composition theory. She is author of The Way Literacy Lives: Rhetorical Dexterity and the “Basic” Writer (forthcoming) and articles forthcoming in College Composition and Communication and the Journal of Basic Writing. A version of this article was given at the 2006 Conference on College Composition and Communication meeting.

College English, Volume 69, Number 6, July 2007
critical education with that of a Christian witnessing for Christ, for example, Rand suggests that both “act as witnesses hoping to convert others to the faith” (360). According to the former, “evil” results from a lack of critical consciousness, a blind faith in individualism and the myth of meritocracy that ignores the function of community and material conditions in determining our life paths; according to the latter, “evil” results from “a drive to make ourselves the centre of our world,” ignoring the function of God’s plan in determining our life path (Taylor, qtd. in Rand 360). Among the many similarities Goodburn points out is that both “desire to convert the ‘other,’ to persuade those whom they define as either ‘unsaved’ or ‘uncritical’” (348). As my neighbor put it once after returning from a trip to India with the Church of Christ, the ultimate goal of his missionary work there was “to save [them] from themselves.” So, too, it seems my goal as an educator has often been to “save” my openly religious students “from themselves.”

Despite the surprising number of similarities between these communities of practice, however, the fact remains that many evangelical students find the academy to be openly hostile to their faith-based ways of knowing, being, and expressing themselves. Likewise, much evangelical discourse seems openly hostile to already marginalized groups (homosexuals, women, those of non-Christian faiths, for example). For Luke, the Christian student who was the subject of Goodburn’s study cited earlier, “valuing difference in perspectives leads to tolerating those whose lifestyles he finds irreconcilable with his religious beliefs. To tolerate difference undermines his faith that an individual must be saved in order to be accepted” (346). As Luke himself put it in a taped interview, “I don’t need the university telling me that I should tolerate everybody [. . .] because not everybody’s tolerable!” (qtd. in Goodburn 346).

It is a gap that liberal academics and evangelical Christians may find impossible to traverse—intolerable, in fact. Chris Anderson tells us that that “as academics, it’s time that we were more aware that our position is not beyond point of view” (20). More recently, Priscilla Perkins asserts that “teachers write off evangelical students much too quickly.” She suggests that instead we teach evangelical students to “put [their] reading[s] of the Bible into dialogue with sometimes competing, sometimes complementary sources of secular, academic knowledge” via “an explicitly hermeneutical approach” (586). Contributors to the recent collection Negotiating Religious Faith in the Composition Classroom address the disconnect between the academy and religious faith by encouraging students to “learn to use tension between faith [. . .] and academic inquiry as a way of learning more and learning better” (Vander Lei 8). Goodburn suggests we might best negotiate the gap by making use of what she sees as “the common thread between the discourses,” which is “the language of social critique” (334); Rand contends that “we should invite students to explain why [. . .] [evangelical] discourse has had such significance in their lives” (364).
I argue that inasmuch as these believers “live in a world always already biblically written” (Kintz) and large segments of the academy are likely to remain hostile to faith-based ways of knowing, we would do better to help students speak to and across difference by employing what I have called elsewhere a pedagogy of rhetorical dexterity, an approach that trains writers to effectively read, understand, manipulate, and negotiate the cultural and linguistic codes of a new community of practice (Lave and Wenger) based on a relatively accurate assessment of another, more familiar one. That familiar community of practice may be one associated with “play” (like fantasy football or quilting), or “work” (like plumbing or computer programming), or even, as I will explore here, one’s faith (perhaps evangelical Christianity). While I agree that it is important for such students, as Rand suggests, to “examine the reasons evangelical discourse has had such significance in their lives,” I believe rhetorical dexterity may be of more immediately practical value to students as it explicitly asks them to think of literacy in terms more conducive to maintaining both their faith-based and their academic literacies without being required to substitute one for the other. Rand suggests that our questions for students “might include: How does the struggle to overcome sin affect your life and the decisions you make about yourself or others?” and, perhaps, “How are you limited in your understanding of Truth?” (353). Though I can certainly see how responding to such questions might generate in our religious students the critical consciousness we desire, I can also see how some students (like Luke) might feel compelled to generate responses more defensive than reflective. Moreover, as so many of my students have said, true faith is a “feeling” that cannot be explained, so articulating the reasoning behind one’s faith in terms the secular world can understand may seem impossible. As Chris Anderson puts it, faith is “a leap that cannot be justified to anyone who hasn’t made that leap,” making “religious experience [. . .] like a difficult language” (22, 26).

In the rest of this essay, I attempt to articulate the ways in which rhetorical dexterity might enable our students to use literacies they already possess (like deep knowledge of the Bible and its applications in day-to-day life) to negotiate those the academy expects them to exhibit. I begin with “James,” a basic writer for whom, at least within his first semester of college, the Bible represented his primary sense of “selfhood.” In that much of the current argument rests on the tensions between a community of practice that “lives inside the Bible” and one that is often perceived to be openly hostile to it, I continue with the stories of two graduate students in our program who—though they were able to maintain deep ties with both their religious communities and their academic ones—experienced some rather painful lessons early on about the irreconcilability of Christianity and the academy. The following section takes a much closer look at conservative and evangelical literacies as articulated in public discourse within and beyond the academy. Given the com-
plex political, rhetorical, and intellectual maneuvers that conservatives and evangelicals have made to defend the conservative, evangelical student against those perceived to be threatening, we would do well to understand the conflicting epistemologies that fuel this perceived—and, in fact, often quite real—threat. Academics, particularly those of us in the humanities and social sciences, appear to many conservative and evangelical leaders as promoting agendas of “secular humanism” and “cultural relativism,” agendas they view as antithetical to their own position. Building on the tensions and the conservative rhetoric that exposes these, I then return to James, who—despite our class’s attention to “literacy” and my regular attempts to validate his Christian literacies—still found this biblical worldview slipping away from him. I end by discussing what I think may have contributed to this loss and how a pedagogy of rhetorical dexterity might have helped James “learn to use tensions between faith [.] and academic inquiry as a way of learning more and learning better” (Vander Lei 8).

Communicating across Difference

When I asked students in a basic writing class two years ago to describe an object that best represented literacy for them, James started with what seemed most obvious to him: the Bible.

Before I was [just] a child that went to church. I believed the Bible was something you read if you weren’t sure that you were going to heaven [.] so I never read it. But one day I started to mature from a child that went to church to a churchly child. I started to understand the older Christians and the purpose of being a Christian and the role that the Bible played in a Christian’s life. All because one day [.] I felt it was my job to be the clown. [.] When my mother [.] saw me acting like a fool she came slapped me in the back of the head in front of all my friends and maid [sic] me go to the front of the church to sit with the senior saints. [.] I couldn’t even fall asleep because the old ladies wouldn’t let me because they would either pinch to wake me or be making to [sic] much noise praising the Lord so I had to listen to the message. [.] I mean don’t get me wrong I always heard the Message but I actually listened that time. [.] That’s how the front pue [sic] saved my life. (emphasis mine)

That semester, James taught me the difference between “a child that goes to church” and “a churchly child”—an emotional shift as profound for him as it is valuable to the other “churchly” members of his “House.” He was, however, surprised to hear that anyone could be so confused about what that difference might be, and it was only after several meetings with him that he began to understand the disconnect I experienced in reading his essays because of my own illiteracies in that community of practice. As James explained it to me when we met in my office to discuss revisions of the previous essay:
It's like this. A child who just goes to church is an illiterate Christian because he can't feel it. He may feel something somewhere else, like in school with his friends or at work, but that feeling ain't the Lord because he's not in his House. A churchly child, though, he [is] literate because he can feel it. Like I felt it.

From him, I learned that “living inside the Bible” the right way is a “feeling” that can “save” a person’s life, but it is also a perspective that can be understood and truly appreciated only by others who have likewise experienced the “Message” in this way, a feeling that only other literate Christians can experience or understand and one that is central to who the person is—in the classroom, in the church, at home—everywhere, in fact. It is a feeling intimately connected with “the Lord's House” and one the person can “stay close to” only by reading the Bible—a book that, as many have found, is largely unwelcome in the academy.

In our rural East Texas university, graduate students are often no less likely to rely on a “spiritual identity as the primary source of selfhood.” However, as English graduate students “Alex” and “Mona” explain, early in their college careers the disconnect between the same Bible-based reasoning with which they most identify and the hostile ways in which that Bible-based reasoning was received forced them to keep their Bible-believing identities “in check.” These painful experiences taught them the impossibility of revealing their lives lived “inside the Bible” in terms legible to readers unconvinced of the Bible’s “infallibility” (or even of its relevance to contexts extending beyond the churches that reproduce its value). This process is never easy, I am told, and many such students believe themselves to be playing an artificial role in academic contexts. Moreover, as Alex and Mona taught me, an awareness of the negative ways in which the Bible is viewed in the academy is often hard-won.

Alex, a PhD student in English who “for the past fifteen years” has been “continuously enrolled in school” (completing high school a year early and her BA in just two years) has experienced this dissonance rather sharply and consistently, despite (or perhaps because of) her ambition and intelligence: “I grew up in a Southern Baptist family [. . .]. When I was four, my bass-playing father changed his life from one of rock and roll at smoky night clubs to Black Gospel on Sunday mornings.” From that point on, as Alex describes it, her “religious family functioned as either a well-oiled machine or a cult [. . .] I'm not sure which one.”

The disconnect Alex experienced between the tacit expectations of the Baptist church and more secular ones was vast, but it was also a dissonance necessitated by her faith. As she explains,

Because Christians are to go into the world of the unsaved, my cousins and I were sent to public schools[, . . .] an unsaved place where we were always to set a good example for our teachers and peers. School provided us an opportunity for witnessing and possible conversions; we were told to carry a Bible with us to school daily so that when the time came, we would use it to help others become saved.
But though her Bible was very much a part of her family, her church, and in fact her sense of self, she learned rather quickly that within many communities of practice in the academy, its use is strictly forbidden.

Once I turned in a paper in which I used Biblical passages as an argument. I failed. After meeting with the teacher, I got the feeling that the reason I failed came directly from my choice to quote the Bible. I did nothing but remove the quotes and my paper received an “A.” Even in a personal opinion paper, I was not allowed to use evidence that appealed to me. I am outraged by this incident to this day.

Despite the insensitivity of her professor’s actions, however, Alex persevered, becoming a very successful undergraduate English major and, now, a top graduate student. Much of her ability to, in her words, “mesh my faith-based religious views with my fact-based academic view of the world” can be attributed to her hyperawareness of context. This is an ability, as Deborah Brandt puts it, to “amalgamate new reading and writing practices in response to rapid social change” (“Accumulating” 651).

An evangelical Christian herself, graduate student “Mona” articulates a similar point of dissonance between her faith and her schooling: “I was in a class several years ago when the instructor-led discussion drifted to the origin of mankind.” There, she witnessed a fierce but rather empty debate between the professor and two students, the former dismissing creationism as “myth,” the latter dismissing evolution in many of the same ways—neither, according to Mona, speaking with any real understanding of the opposition’s argument but obviously relying on, as she explains, “what they’d been told by others.” Still, believing the professor to be “a man of critical thinking and open-mindedness,” she “approached him after class.”

Instead of listening and discussing, however, he dismissed me and my arguments by telling me that the Bible is to be viewed like ancient Greek mythology [. . .]. I said no more, but realized that my academic professor and my Evangelical student peers had much more in common than they realized.

Despite the many—sometimes ironic and largely unconscious—similarities between these two communities of practice, however, the dissonance remains. And, like Mona, Alex is well aware that the battle between these rather different communities of practice is not her own and, in fact, that they are largely irreconcilable. Alex says, “I understand that academics look at facts and evidence. However, religion is mostly about feeling. If God wanted to, He could easily give us evidence that He exists. If He did, though, believing in Him and trusting Him wouldn’t be the same” (emphasis in original).

More than twenty years ago, feminists and other social theorists began treating feeling, emotion, and intuition as valid epistemological sites, taking seriously aspects of experience that a post-Cartesian worldview has regularly dismissed. Still,
even scholarship in areas like these routinely ignores the function of faith, likely assuming it to be “anti-intellectual,” “closed-minded,” or even counterproductive. Faith does not seem knowledge, but rather its complete opposite.

**Living inside the Bible**

In evangelical Christianity, the Bible serves as the primary source from which the power of familiarity resonates. As Linda Kintz explains, in this community of practice all “legitimate participants [...] live [...] inside a world of textual quotations and references to biblical passages, interpretations, and reinterpretations among a community of believers who know all the same stories and all the same passages [...] Liv[ing] inside the Book [...] gives believers a world always already biblically written” (33). Given that so many of my students “live inside the Book,” it should not be surprising that some rely on the Bible and its teachings to make their arguments. However, the function of the college composition classroom seems to be, at the very least, to enable them to speak to readers who do not, likewise, “live inside the Book”: readers like me, for instance. The goal of witnessing talk may be to “save” the listener so he or she will, likewise, “live inside the Book”; however, this is not an appropriate aim for academic rhetoric, whose goal is often pluralism. Inasmuch as, for our most religious students, this “biblically written” world is the one with which they most identify, it seems productive for us to ask that they think of what it takes to be considered literate within that world. To articulate this position would not require writers to accept the secular world as ultimately more valuable than the religious one (or even vice versa) but rather to help those not “Christian-literate” understand what it takes to be considered a literate member of the biblically written world. To articulate this position would require writers to think of literacy in much more situated, “people-oriented,” and active terms than most commonsense, school-based versions of literacy allow.

Understanding literacy as social rather than alphabetic, situated rather than universal, and multiple rather than singular requires writers to consider themselves to be simultaneously literate and illiterate in a number of different contexts. I am, for example, literate in writing center studies and associated contexts but largely illiterate in matters relating to chemistry or video games like *Grand Theft Auto*. My devout Mormon student is, of course, a deeply “literate” Mormon, but may know very little about the Baptist communities of practice in which some of her classmates are quite likely highly literate. In other words, as the findings of the New Literacy Studies have proven, literacy is not a set of stable, portable, rule-based skills that enable the user to encode and decode all texts “correctly,” regardless of the type of text, the conditions under which the text is encoded/decoded, the purpose of the
text, the people surrounding the text, the place in which the text is situated, or the experiences of the readers/writers who put the text to use. Of course, developing in our students the flexibility and critical consciousness necessary to negotiate the texts they will encounter throughout college and in their lifeworlds beyond requires that they begin to think of literacy in a different way. In this process of development, we treat literacy not as an abstract set of rigid standards but rather as a blend of mutable social forces deeply situated in time and place.

Literate practices, at least as I am seeing them here, are those sanctioned and endorsed by others recognized as literate members of a particular community of practice. As in any community, the literate practices of evangelical traditions in Christianity are those sanctioned and endorsed by other literate members. Those of us who are not literate members of this particular community of practice are less likely to be able to tell the difference between someone who truly does “live inside the Bible” (Kintz)—what James calls “a churchly child”—and someone who is going through the motions (a “child that goes to church”).

Literacy thus becomes both a set of socially sanctioned, community-based “skills” and content that is validated, produced, and reproduced within that same community of practice. Relevant content thus becomes shared knowledge among members of a given community of practice, and these members extend, reshape, validate, invalidate, reproduce, and archive the content most appropriate for them and their key objectives. From this perspective, developing new literacies depends not on a literacy learner’s ability to obtain autonomous skills, nor on any generic content-knowledge, but rather on rhetorical dexterity. The latter, as I noted earlier, calls upon students to effectively read, understand, manipulate, and negotiate the cultural and linguistic codes of a new community of practice based on a relatively accurate assessment of a more familiar one.

Rhetorical dexterity relies on two overlapping theoretical traditions: the New Literacy Studies and activity theory. “NLS approaches,” according to Brian V. Street, “focus on the everyday meanings and uses of literacy in specific cultural contexts and link directly to how we understand the work of literacy in educational contexts” (417). In other words, NLS is primarily concerned with the way literacy manifests itself in various out-of-school contexts and, through these findings, with exposing the artificiality and irrelevance of formal literacy education as it exists in most in-school contexts. NLS then redefines literacy education itself as a matter of reading and negotiating various contextualized forces that are deeply embedded in identity formation, political affiliations, material and social conditions, and ideological frameworks. This theoretical framework necessarily flattens hierarchies among literacies; instead of one literacy’s being inherently more significant or valuable than another, their respective worth is determined by appropriateness to context.
In this sense, the anti-Bible hostility Alex and Mona experienced may be better understood as a dispute over appropriateness, rather than as a question of whether they suffer from “false consciousness” or, as I’m (unfortunately and often) quick to see it, outright “ignorance.” The key issue becomes the ways in which the Bible functions in the communities of practice that reproduce themselves through the familiarity that resonates from that very same book, as well as how these activities (and the value-sets that perpetuate them) might conflict with activities and content reproduced within university communities of practice.

In any given community of practice—be it factory work or fishing, Xerox repair or midwifery, evangelism or the field of composition studies—some activities will be understood as appropriate and others as largely inappropriate, and most of these activities cannot be understood apart from the activity system in which they are carried out. Such systems are social and cultural rather than individual and objective. They are made up of groups who sanction and endorse particular ways of doing things and particular results, identifying some results and processes as innovative and valuable and condemning others as ineffective, inappropriate, or even unacceptable.

Thus Mona’s Bible becomes at once an irrelevant “book of myths” in her college classroom and the “baseline source [. . .] [for all] reasoning” (Ault 210) among members of her church. There is, of course, nothing terribly insightful about this revelation. However, further exploration of the specific ways the Bible functions in Bible-believing communities of practice might help us understand better the complications our Bible-believing students often face when they begin to appropriate university discourses and value-sets.

**Evangelism as a Community of Practice**

Like any community of practice, evangelism is organic and dynamic. Therefore, no single representation can capture how it is practiced by all faith traditions in all contexts. Even the most influential leaders of this movement are unable to reach a consensus about what it means to be an evangelical Christian. As *New York Times* reporter Michael Luo explains, “like any dominating force, evangelism is not monolithic.” As someone completely unaffiliated with any evangelical faith tradition and only marginally involved in Catholicism, I can at best offer a description of this community of practice as I understand it from an extensive survey of public and academic discourse on evangelism written by evangelists, as well as from informal interviews with students and colleagues who identify themselves as evangelical.

There does appear to be a set of largely universal tenets of evangelism. According to Mark Noll, “evangelical denominations” are those that “stress the need for a supernatural new birth, profess a faith in the Bible as a revelation from God, encour-
age spreading the gospel through missions and personal evangelism, and emphasize the saving character of Jesus’s death and resurrection” (9). Cal Thomas, a syndicated columnist and self-identified spokesperson for American evangelicals, offers a similar definition: “An evangelical Christian is one who believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and who has repented of sin and accepted Jesus as his or her savior. The evangelical believes he has the privilege and obligation to share the ‘good news’ that Jesus came to save sinners with others so they might go to heaven rather than hell.”

“Spreading the gospel” is a commitment to what many Christians call the “Great Commission.” Within this community of practice, it is widely understood that the Great Commission can be found in the Gospel of Matthew7 in what is considered to be the “last recorded personal instruction given by Jesus to His disciples” (“The Great Commission”); those “living inside the Book” and calling themselves evangelicals understand the duty of all Christians to be to “make disciples of all the nations” (Matt. 28.18–20). Some evangelists argue that the Bible itself is the product of successful evangelism, with the twelve apostles chosen by Jesus functioning as Christianity’s very first evangelists. As Robert Emerson Coleman asserts in the second edition of his popular instructional text The Master Plan of Evangelism, “the initial objective of Jesus’s plan was to enlist men who could bear witness to his life and carry on his work after he returned to the Father” (27).

So what, then, does this “Great Commission” have to do with the disconnect James, Alex, and Mona experienced as they attempted to integrate the Bible into academic contexts? Because we are concerned with practices that replicate the community, as well as with the community as a whole, it is useful to examine evangelical Christianity as both a community and an activity system. According to this theoretical framework, the “acts” of relying on the Bible for wisdom and guidance (as James has) and using the Bible as evidence for a personal opinion paper (as Alex has) may be understood as unacceptable when evaluated by the communities of practice associated with the academy, but as completely acceptable and even mandatory when evaluated by those associated with their faith. The disconnect is profound when experienced by those for whom the Bible represents their “primary sense of selfhood” and merely obvious when judged by those for whom the Bible represents at best naivety and at worst “closed-mindedness” or even bigotry. The disconnect between these two communities of practice is not something to be glossed over as a “given” and irreconcilable, however, as I am attempting to prove here.

When attempting to make sense of an activity system within an unfamiliar community of practice, I have found it useful to identify the community’s “input,” “tools,” and “output.” Every activity system includes these three categories. Furthermore, they as well as the artifacts created are mediated by a series of “rules” established by the members of that community, reproduced through related activities and training, and likewise shaped by rules governing economic, political, cultural, and social be-
haviors in other social spaces of which these members are most assuredly a part. As I understand the “Great Commission” of evangelism, then, the input would be a nonbeliever, the output would be a converted believer, and the tools would include, among other things, the Bible as the primary text communicating the teachings of Jesus Christ. In attempting to make sense of a chaotic world, James turned back to his Bible; thus, for him, the Bible is also the tool a Christian might use to “stay on the Lord’s path” or “keep close to Jesus.” Via the same analytical framework, then, the input here becomes the secular world and its challenges, the output a renewed worldview in keeping with biblical teachings. This also seems the way in which Alex made use of her Bible to support her personal opinion. Alex’s professor dismissed her “tool” as irrelevant; Mona’s professor went so far as to declare it heretical to the academic communities of practice he claimed to represent.

Alex and Mona attempted to use the Bible as a tool to support their own personal positions (where they are coming from), not as a tool to change the reader/writer in terms more in keeping with their Bible-believing identities (input—unsaved academic; output—saved Christian). For Alex, the Bible seemed an appropriate enough tool to integrate into her “personal opinion paper” because her personal opinion was shaped by the traditions perpetuated in Bible-based discourses. Mona attempted to make use of academic inquiry as tool to better understand—in community—the disconnects she’d just witnessed regarding the debate between her professor and two students (input—disconnect; output—understanding). The professor refused to entertain the debate on scholarly terms because, one must assume, he saw the debate itself (between creationism and evolution) as already settled and, therefore, not a product worth reproducing.

Among those for whom “Truth” is static, constant, and universal, speaking to and across our differences becomes a very different activity than what professors with critical consciousness as their goal might advocate. Among those for whom Bible-based discourses make up their primary sense of selfhood, the only reason to “communicate across difference” may be to change the minds of those who, for whatever reason, just aren’t getting it or who have untrustworthy liberal and/or humanist agendas. As conservative talk show host Rush Limbaugh explains in “How to Deal with a Liberal Teacher,” “Evidence refutes liberalism” (emphasis mine).

A rather common activity reproduced in evangelical communities of practice is organized training for future or current college students that works from similar assumptions about the role of evidence in debunking the liberal position. Each summer, for example, Summit Ministries in Colorado Springs trains recent high school graduates to “refute” the liberalism they are likely to encounter in college, guided by a mission to “equip them to defend the biblical worldview” (“Mission”). This summer training Thomas Barnett calls “Faith Camp.” As one “camper” puts it, “I
want to put on the full armor of God before I go into battle” (qtd. in Barnett, emphasis mine).

Though much less organized and formal, rhetorical “battle” strategies like these appear to be no less common among liberal academics working against conservative ideology and evangelical “dogma.” “Evidence,” we may insist, “refutes conservatism.” Evidence may even refute faith, as Richard Hofstadter argued more than forty years ago in his regularly cited book *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life.* “Learning and cultivation,” he asserts, “appear to be handicaps in the propagation of faith” (48–49). Thirty years later, *Washington Post* reporter Michael Weisskopf outraged members of the evangelical community by calling them “largely poor, uneducated and easy to command.”11

On the face of it, conservatism and evangelism appear to be completely at odds with academic goals like open-mindedness and a high tolerance for ambiguity (see Jost et al.). Yet while I accept a more liberal worldview as ultimately more conducive to values like pluralism and equality, it is important to examine the ways in which a more conservative, faith-based worldview may, in fact, coexist with the end-stages of cognitive development as articulated via William Perry’s model: relativism and commitment. To do so, we must examine the ways in which the evangelical community of practice makes sense of what many members of that community call the “Christian Mind” (see especially Nanez; Guinness; Lewis; Noll; Marsden; Budziszewski; Blamires).

**Evangelism and the “Christian Mind”**

Though matters of faith seem diametrically opposed to matters of the intellect, a growing number of evangelical academics and public intellectuals provide models for conflating this apparently artificial binary. Paul Anderson’s collection *Professors Who Believe: The Spiritual Journeys of Christian Faculty* includes essays from “members of the faculty at major secular research universities” who have “found meaning and purpose and value, the essence of life, in their Christian faith” (“Introduction”). Likewise, in *Two Different Worlds* Charles E. Garrison argues that the Christian worldview can coexist with a more “academic” one as “biblical statements are not at odds with the view of knowledge expounded by cultural relativists.” In fact, according to Garrison, “[t]he bible corresponds more to cultural relativism than absolutism in its presentation of knowing” (154).

By far the most compelling argument for the overlapping epistemological frameworks of Christianity and academic ways of knowing is, in my opinion, William G. Pollard’s *Physicist and Christian: A Dialogue between Communities* (1961). In it, this physicist and priest builds on the rather progressive assertion that “all knowledge is really imparted through community, and cannot be had in isolation or alienation
from the community within which a particular segment of knowledge is known” (viii). The idea that knowledge is “imparted through community” differs, of course, from a more social and critical view that knowledge is, in fact, created within that community. For Pollard, a universal “Truth” does, in fact, exist outside of community but is only accessible through community; in other words, knowledge does not exist entirely within the minds of individuals but rather is imparted and sustained within a community of knowledge seekers. While accepting that his articulation of community is largely irreconcilable with a more critical worldview, however, I argue that Pollard’s arguments are useful to teachers shaped by more social theories as we may find in them a common ground between these conflicting worldviews. Pollard’s perspective is, in fact, a view supported by even the most literal readings of the Bible (see Newbigin). As he insists, the Bible itself “is an integral part of the actual historic process by which a whole people came to know God in community” (Pollard 161). According to Pollard, “God spoke to Israel through the covenant relationship, and Israel, in turn, has spoken to us through the Bible” (162). Given that much of Pollard’s treatment of knowledge as “community-based” is very much in keeping with more social and cultural theories that claim that knowledge, language, and learning are socially situated, I devote the next several pages to his key arguments and what they might offer us in teaching students like James who derive their “primary sense of selfhood” from the Bible.

**Physics as a Community of Practice.** The term “physics,” Pollard argues, often brings to mind (or at least did in 1961) “a subject with a certain content dealing with matter and energy, space and time, force and motion” as well as “the instruments and apparatus which make up physics and are an integral part of it, such things as calorimeters, spectrosopes, galvanometers, Geiger counters, and cyclotrons.” However, as he explains, physics must be understood as no less a subject matter than as “the product and the achievement of a human communal enterprise.” Likewise, Christianity is “the product and the achievement of a human communal enterprise.” In both physics and Christianity, “the community is in an important sense prior to the subject matter content” (4).

Building on Harold K. Schilling’s treatment of “science as community” (1958) and using terms surprisingly similar to those that would be used by scholars like James Paul Gee, Brian V. Street, and other New Literacy Studies scholars more than twenty-five years later, Pollard describes the processes of becoming both a priest and a physicist as “processes of incorporation into a community” (3) and, from these descriptions, two interesting points of contact emerge: (1) Faith is no less an integral part of physics than it is of Christianity, and (2) in physics, as in religion, one may be considered “orthodox” and thus embraced by the community or a “heretic” and subsequently banished from that community.
**Faith.** According to Pollard, faith is an essential part of the physics community. All participants must have faith in the discipline itself, the current scholarship and infrastructure that supports it, the history of the discipline, and “the scientific method” that sustains it. As he explains,

The faith which is essential to the fruitful pursuit of scientific inquiry endows those who share it with the power to uncover and make manifest an underlying order and regularity beneath the surface turbulence of events by which these events are seen to be subject to the rule of universal turbulence laws. (16)

In similar ways, I must rely on my “faith” as both a teacher and a scholar in carrying out activities associated with my membership in the academy and relevant communities of practice. That is, I have faith in the principal tenets and values of activity theory and New Literacy Studies. Relying on these tenets and values in organizing a socially just classroom enables me to take risks and develop innovative course designs that others may find—at first glance—largely unworkable. When I lose faith in those theoretical frameworks to which I am most drawn—as I am beginning to with critical literacy—I find myself struggling in ways I find quite unsettling, but I have faith in the communities of writing studies and literacy studies (among others) and, therefore, I am able to learn from such experiences—perhaps locating a more appropriate theoretical framework, perhaps finding evidence that returns my faith to the original critical framework after I have temporarily lost my way.

Religious faith, according to Pollard, manifests itself in ways quite similar to this more “academic” version of faith. As he explains,

[T]he faith which is essential to a fruitful pursuit of the Christian life endows those who share it with the power to know and respond to the hand of God operative behind the same surface turbulence of events by which these events are seen to be subject to the rule of providence and judgment. (17)

As James was transformed from “a child that went to Church” to a “churchly child,” we may assume he gained the “faith” he needed not only to understand the “message” that day at the front of his church but also to apply it to his daily life. To put it to use. “A child that went to church,” on the other hand, is not someone who is fully integrated into the community. He’s someone who is, as James puts it, “just going through the motions.” As I moved through graduate school into the field, I, too, was transformed from someone who could make use of the information in the field (though at times, perhaps, just “going through the motions”) to someone who could apply it and, I hope, begin even to add to it. We both gained some level of faith in our target communities of practice and the value sets and expertise they represent.

**Orthodoxy.** In every community of practice, some activities and utterances will be understood by members as “acceptable” (“orthodox”) and others as absolutely unacceptable (“unorthodox” or even “heretical”). This is no less true in faith-based
communities than it is in academic ones. Consider the following definition of evangelism, this one offered by Mona:

A myriad of beliefs and, subsequently, subgroups abound within the vaguely defined borders of Evangelical Christianity, however the expected beliefs are those espoused by the largest protestant denomination in America. These views are touted by Christian programs, held as mainstays by the political activist Christian groups, and echoed by grassroots Christians in the workplace. It is these views to which you must hold or at least not contradict if you are to be considered a “literate” member of the mainstream Evangelical movement.

We can, I hope, see many similarities between this articulation of “Evangelical Christian literacy” and the various disciplines in the academic community. For example, if I’m to be accepted as a “literate member” of the communities of practice that make up composition studies, I must “hold or at least not contradict” the views dominating current composition scholarship (unless I have a darn convincing reason for doing otherwise, which can be risky). Within the “vaguely defined borders” of composition studies, the subgroups to which I “belong” (writing center studies, basic writing studies) have their own standards, by which they identify members; in writing center studies, for example, such standards are usually based on, among other things, a core belief in the importance of one-on-one teaching. Anything counter to such writing center “orthodoxy” may be considered “heretical”—not, in Lorraine Code’s words, “heard, understood, taken seriously” (xi), or at least not very easily.

According to Pollard, “[e]very community must have [orthodoxy and heresy] in order to be a community” (21). Sometimes the unorthodox, even the heretical, are completely aware of the “crucial loyalties, values, beliefs, and standards” maintained and reproduced in a particular community of practice. Yet they choose to violate them anyway. More often, however, the heretical behavior is not chosen but accidental. Alex included biblical evidence in her personal opinion paper and was punished for it. She removed the biblical materials and turned it in again and was rewarded for it. In many academic environments, she learned, the Bible is considered a heretical text. Orthodox behavior is determined by the communities of practice that validate, model, reproduce, and sustain it.

But how are we to give students like James some control over this environment, so that they don’t commit heretical acts within this community of practice that considers the Bible heretical yet aren’t required to give up that Bible entirely as their “primary sense of selfhood”? To this question, I now return.

Rhetorical Dexterity

During the semester in which James was enrolled, the basic writing curriculum asked students to think of literacy in terms more social than alphabetic.14 It did not, how-
ever, ask students to examine the very specific ways in which literacy manifests itself in different communities of practice. By reading and responding to things like J. Elspeth Stuckey’s *The Violence of Literacy* and Deborah Brandt’s “Sponsors of Literacy,” I asked students that semester to consider the ways in which literacy is often unfair; sanctioned and endorsed by those more powerful than us; and even at times “violent.” I did not, however, ask them to articulate the shape and function of literacy in a community of practice with which they were familiar (e.g., James’s Christian literacy), nor did I ask them to compare and contrast this literacy with a less familiar one (like those sanctioned and endorsed by various facets of the academy). In other words, I did not employ a pedagogy of rhetorical dexterity. If I had, perhaps James would have developed a better understanding of how he might make use of the tensions between his religious faith and the ways of knowing, being, and communicating perpetuated in much of the academic discourse he’s expected to value and imitate.

A pedagogy of rhetorical dexterity would have encouraged James to investigate the “rhetorical spaces” of the communities of practice that shape his biblical worldview. According to Code, “rhetorical spaces” are “fictive but not fanciful locations whose (tacit, rarely spoken) territorial imperatives structure [...] and limit the kinds of utterances that can be voiced within them with a reasonable expectation of uptake and ‘choral support’; an expectation of being heard, understood, taken seriously” (ix). A pedagogy of rhetorical dexterity would have guided James in articulating the “(tacit, rarely spoken) territorial imperatives” that separate those who “feel” it (a “churchly child”/the Christian-literate) from those who do not, likely by asking him questions like these: What does it meant to be a “churchly child” and how did you come to understand the valued status of the “churchly child” within the context under investigation? What are the “territorial imperatives” within this community of practice? That is, what are the “rules” that govern what one should or should not say, think, or feel in this context, as well as how one must behave, dress, and carry oneself in order to be considered a “churchly child” rather than merely “a child that goes to church”? How is membership in this context expressed? What strategies must one use to be “heard, understood, taken seriously” within this community of practice? In other words, what strategies or ways of being mark some children as “churchly” and others as children who just “go to church”? What can we learn from the fact that your faith tradition—according to you—calls members of the church “God’s children”? What kinds of things did you have to do before you could consider yourself Christian-literate? What should the long-term goals of literate members be, as determined by what this community of practice finds valuable and possible? How does an incoming member know when he or she has reached these goals? What might you have to learn, recognize, and embody in the academy before you may be able to feel literate as a writer and reader in various school-based contexts, too?
By treating academic literacies as a dynamic sign system and academic discourse as an experience in overlapping communities of practice, I might have taught James to develop the flexibility and awareness he needed to negotiate the increasingly complex literacy contexts he might encounter throughout his college career, without sacrificing that "primary sense of selfhood" he derived from his Bible. Instead, I merely (though unknowingly) perpetuated the singular, "autonomous" model of literacy (Street) that I thought we had been resisting all along.

**Keeping Close to Home**

James was a student in our basic writing program more than two years ago. The following term, I began developing a curricular model based on a then-quietly vague defined pedagogy of rhetorical dexterity—first as the graduate-level course in which Mona and Alex were enrolled, then as the curricular model for our basic writing program (and now as the theoretical framework for our new textbook *Literacies in Context* [Carter], designed for the second semester of first-year composition). It was not until the current term, however, that I was able to begin to make more direct use of rhetorical dexterity in the ways I wished I had been able to with James.

By the time Keneshia entered our basic writing program (August 2006), I had begun to develop a much better understanding of why so many of our basic writing students—despite our best efforts and an extensive focus on literacy as a social practice (the course theme)—continued to define literacy in terms much more in keeping with the autonomous model we were attempting to resist. It is this autonomous model—literacy as universal, portable skill-set and/or content—that led to the difficulties Alex, Mona, and James experienced in their attempts to integrate the Bible into academic communities. It was the autonomous model that may have led James to begin relying on his Bible less and less often.

The Pentecostal church in which Keneshia grew up is a close-knit one that functions as her "home" church in every sense of the word. Pastor Osborne is, according to Keneshia, "like my grandmother because she's always been there. [I] feel like I can really talk to her, [especially since] my real grandmother died." In fact, Pastor Osborne and her family were key fixtures in the Temple of God long before Keneshia was even born. Keneshia's mother grew up with the pastor's three daughters, the youngest of whom is Keneshia's godmother and all of whom (now with their own children) remain members of the church. For Keneshia, her church isn't just "like a family"; it is her family—literally and practically. They pray together, worship together, and play together; they spend their holidays together and eat many a meal together. "Every body in the church," Keneshia explains (quoting her Pastor) "is the body of the church. [. . .] We have unity at our church. [We are] 'loose knit
individual believers that are equipped, ready, and trained to yield to God (L.I.B.E.R.T.Y.).’ We even have a banner that says that!”

According to Keneshia, her choice to describe her church (as a familiar “community of practice”16) in her second formal essay written for our class stemmed from “the way you described how you felt when you went to that church last summer.” About two weeks before the fall semester began, I had visited an evangelical church within the same part of Dallas where Keneshia’s home church is located (a high-crime and poorer area of the city). This one (True Love Baptist Church) was the home church of one of the inmates involved with a prison literacy program I’m researching, and while I knew a little bit about the way this church might function (mainly from my reading of Beverly Moss’s work), my functional illiteracies in this community of practice were apparent from the minute I walked through the door. I was at once illiterate and completely in awe. It was a beautiful service—quite different from anything I’d ever experienced before or since. Overwhelming and powerful. Still, I felt uncomfortable throughout much of it as I was utterly aware of my lack of belonging (despite the warmth with which I was welcomed by church members). I didn’t know what I was doing. My clothing was too neutral (the colors worn by the members of this church were vibrant and alive), my knowledge of the Gospel lyrics sung was absolutely nonexistent (the songs were, almost without fail, sung without any reference to the hymnals tucked into the back of each church pew), and the seemingly spontaneous fainting, random screams, and crying exhibited by a few members of both the choir and the congregation (what I would later learn was called “being filled with the Spirit”) confused me. As I’ve already noted, most of my experiences in church-based communities of practice have been Catholic. For me, services have been scripted (whereas True Love Baptist appears to be largely spontaneous though guided by the church bulletin read to congregants at the beginning of the service). For me, parishioners sit quietly and very still unless called upon by the priest, as scripted in the Missalette, to kneel or stand (whereas True Love Baptist members wave their hands about, close their eyes, cry out with “Thank you, Jesus” and “Tell it, Preacher! Amen!” and even at times move into the aisle, becoming even more animated as they become “filled with the Holy Spirit”).

In that second writing assignment (entitled “What Makes Christianity Significant?”), Keneshia introduces her readers to her own very familiar, church-based community of practice by showing those of us unfamiliar with it what we would see were we to enter her church. In order to do this, she takes on the persona of an outsider entering the “Temple of God” for the first time:

When we finally arrived at church I walked into the building looking around noticing all these amazing colorful hats that the lady’s had on. Some were big, small, round, and even tall. I thought it was one of the amazing things I had seen in my life, then I
looked at my grandmother as she begin to put her hands in the air so did I.[.] [While] doing that, I looked up into the air as if I felt their were angels looking down up on me. As I looked out I seen people everywhere throwing theae hair all over the place, running as well, and some were even yelling out Lord I thank you.

Perhaps even more interesting and important, however, were the moves Keneshia makes or fails to make to help her uninformed readers begin to understand “the rules and commandments of being in church.” As she explains, “We all need beliefs [. . . ] because they make some of us the people we have grown to be today.” In this early draft of her second writing assignment, Keneshia offers an extensive quotation (labeled “Exodus 20: 1–17”) as evidence (“[f]or instances”) in support of her beliefs.

The problem here, of course, is one of conflicting communities of practice. Keneshia offers this extensive quotation, yet she fails to unpack it for readers who do not, like her and her church family, “live inside the Bible.” For me, the familiarity that resonates from Exodus 20 as quoted in her paper (“I am the Lord your God [. . .]. Ye shall have no other gods before me. [. . .] [F]or I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God [. . .]. [. . .] Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy. [. . .] [T]he Seventh Day [. . .] you shall not work [. . .]”) are stories of intolerance and the Blue Laws I witnessed when I first arrived in Texas back in the late 1970s. For this reader, the long quotation Keneshia includes means something very different from what it means to her and other members of this faith tradition.

My feedback on this early draft included the following:

Ambitious and so very interesting, Keneshia! I’m particularly intrigued by the ways in which you set your grandmother up as your guide into this community of practice. Powerful moment as we step into church with you and notice all those “amazing, colorful hats.” Then you move into the “Rules and Commandments” for Christianity in general and a long quote from the Bible, which, while I’m sure quite relevant, takes us out of the game of articulating the ways in which literacy in this particular community of practice might play itself out. In revision, I’d like [. . .] [for you to] show us how these “rules” as outlined in Exodus might play themselves out in your church. For instance, what value sets and literacies might a literate churchgoer display by wearing a big, round, “colorful hat”? “put[ting] her hands in the air”? “throwing their hair all over the place”? “running”? “yelling out”? In other words, reread this scene for us so we can learn how literate behavior manifests itself in this community of practice (and why).

This was certainly difficult for Keneshia, and I expected it would be because it forced upon her levels of critical consciousness only available to us after “reading our world” in the ways Paulo Freire tells us we must. I see in Keneshia’s notes on this draft in preparation for her revision the word “change” written above “Exodus 20: 1–17,” which may have been a suggestion to herself to either “change” (revise) the way she deals with the quotation and/or “change” the scripture used to describe the church behavior she illustrates. Ultimately, she chose to change the scripture itself,
first to something from the Book of Matthew (as indicated by her bracketing of the long quotation from Exodus followed by the word “Matt.”). In her next and subsequent drafts of this essay (completed near midterm and again near the end of the term), Keneshia decided to go with Psalms 100.1-4: “Make a joyful noise unto the Lord [. . .]. Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing [. . .].” As she explains, “[A]ll of these things we portray as Christians in my church. When entering the house of the Lord in my church, we do actually what it is said ‘making a joyful noise unto the Lord,’ just thanking him for waking us up to see another day. After we enter in, we have morning worship serving the Lord with gladness letting [Him] know that we give Him the entire honor and praise. Then we stand up and tell how the Lord has blessed us in our life.”

Here we can begin to understand how the shape and function of the church might be informed by, among other things, this passage from the Book that makes up the core guidance in this community of practice. We see that the “joyful noise”—as instructed—begins with “morning worship” and that the key activity reproduced in that “morning worship” is “praise,” “honor,” and “gladness.” However, it is still unclear to outsiders how this giving of “praise,” “honor”, and “gladness” might function—in other words, what does this literate behavior actually look like? From my single experience in a church that appears to function in ways somewhat similar to Keneshia’s church (though True Love is Baptist and Keneshia’s church is Pentecostal), I can begin to imagine that the behavior takes the form of high energy, laughter, loud music, and what members of the church call “praise dancing.” These are exactly the same things Keneshia began to describe in her later draft, drawing parallels between the “freestyling” she did to prepare for her writing assignments (freewriting in her journal and her notes) and the “freestyling” she did to develop the “praise dances” she performed at her church. As she explains, these “praise dances” had to “come from the heart”; she had to “feel” the dance rather than think too much about it, for otherwise it wouldn’t be “honest” (what’s “honest” “honors Jesus”). Likewise, she had to “feel” what she wanted to say in her essays and in her journals rather than “think too much about it”; otherwise she’d be saying what she thought other people wanted to read rather than what she wanted to say. As Keneshia explains, “I like to keep it real.”

Through all these drafts and face-to-face exchanges regarding her own faith-based community of practice and the academic ones she is attempting to enter, Keneshia developed ways to communicate across very different communities of practice (church-based and academic ones), attempting to make sense of her own Christian literacies in terms legible and accessible to those much less literate in Christianity as it manifests itself in evangelical churches like her own. But she also developed the “Christian mind” that evangelical scholars like Mark Noll, Rick Nanez, and J. Budziszewski (among others) tell us is the “good Christian’s” responsibility. Perhaps
by developing a deeper awareness of the various ways in which the Bible itself informs Christian literacy and the terms by which these faith-based activities are validated and reproduced, Keneshia is now in a better position to support her own faith- and Bible-based ways of knowing in communities of practice that may remain hostile to them. Perhaps these principles and the “Christian mind” she developed from them helped her better understand and begin to make use of an ideological model of literacy—treating secular and Bible-based literacies as situated, contextualized, place-based, people-oriented events. The ubiquitous autonomous model, on the other hand, would treat literacy as singular and, perhaps at some point, make her Bible-based ways of knowing seem as irrelevant to her as they appear to many of us representing university-based communities of practice (something we absolutely want to avoid). In any case, developing a deeper understanding of the way literacy lives in a particular context—among the people who reproduce themselves through a particular set of literate practices (time-based, situation-based, agent-based)—might enable Keneshia to develop the flexibility she’ll need to negotiate the multiple, rapidly changing literacies she’s likely to encounter beyond the overlapping communities of practice that made up her basic writing experience.

Notes

1. Of course an evangelical Christian is not necessarily a political conservative. Liberal, very progressive movements are actually surprisingly common among the communities of practice identified as “evangelical.” For me, the most intriguing of these progressive evangelical movements is Sojourners/Call to Renewal, a Christian ministry with a stated mission “to articulate the biblical call to social justice, inspiring hope and building a movement to transform individuals, communities, the church, and the world” (“Mission”).

2. It may also be significant that I am a fallen-away Catholic suffering from a somewhat unhealthy relationship with my own religious past and, perhaps, my deeply religious extended family (while I was growing up, my nuclear family was not very religious).

3. Please see the description of this pedagogy of rhetorical dexterity in my forthcoming book The Way Literacy Lives: Rhetorical Dexterity and the “Basic” Writer and article “Redefining Literacy as a Social Practice.”

4. As Maryann Whitaker, a devout Christian and current graduate student in our program, explained to me after reviewing a previous version of this article, only God can “convert” the listener, “not the evangelical.”

5. Jacqueline Jones Royster calls discourse a “people-centered enterprise.” As she reminds us, “all language use [. . .] is an invention of a particular social milieu, not a natural phenomenon” (21). In other words, “discourses operate at the hands and the will of a people, rather than instruments or forces of nature” (25, emphasis in original).

6. I am grateful for the many individuals who have been willing to share their insider perspectives from within the community of practice that is evangelical Christianity, especially Maryann Whitaker, a master’s student at A&M–Commerce, Chandra Lewis-Qualls, an instructor at Abilene Christian University, and Keneshia Coleman, a basic writing student at A&M–Commerce.

7. “Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the
Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:19–20).

8. Maryann Whitaker argues that it is not the evangelical who “converts” the “nonbeliever.” Thus, rather than a “converted believer,” “the output would be the communicated Word.” In that “communication” of “the Word,” however, as other evangelicals have suggested, God converts the believer. According to this line of argument, that very conversion is what confirms that “the Word” has been successfully communicated. The disconnect here brings to the surface the nuanced ways Bible-believing communities understand the rhetorical effects of “testimonial” in enacting “the Great Commission.”

9. Colorado Springs is quickly becoming a “headquarters” of sorts for conservative evangelical organizations, including James Dobson’s Focus on the Family, among others.

10. Leif Utnes describes a similar movement in left-wing circles whereby “[i]n their fight to catch up with the right, progressives are sending their young to boot camp.”

11. A flurry of calls and letters protesting this characterization forced the Post to issue a correction, noting simply, “There is no factual basis for that statement.”

12. Though it may seem counterintuitive to use a Catholic priest’s words to represent ways our evangelical students might locate points of contact between their faith and the tacit expectations of the academy, I do so here for at least two reasons. The first is that the dissonance Pollard experiences between the academy and his faith seems quite comparable to the ways in which a number of evangelicals are describing this disconnect. The second is that, according to Mark Noll, Catholic leaders are beginning to join forces with evangelical leaders—a partnership he applauds.

13. It is also important to note that Pollard views the community of Christians as “unique” and chosen by God; thus communities of practice that conflict with this Christian worldview are to be tolerated but understood as wrong and ultimately in need of saving.


15. In the graduate-level course, we read several ethnographic studies designed to expand this concept of rhetorical dexterity beyond basic writers and their teachers to include society at large.

16. Their second writing assignment was a “formal essay about the ‘rules’ and expectations governing ‘literate’ practices in a community of practice beyond those directly associated with school” (see http://faculty.tamu-commerce.edu/scarter/teaching.htm for additional information about this sequence, including copies of the writing assignments).

**Works Cited**


What experiences have you had with the kinds of issues this article analyzes? What do you think of the teaching strategies that the article proposes? Post your responses at our new interactive website, *College English Dialogues* (www.indiana.edu/~cedialog).