

Craig Medvecky
4410 Grand View Ave.
Baltimore, MD 21211
crmedv@gmail.com
414) 220-0377

Teaching Philosophy

As a teacher in the Humanities I present modes of academic inquiry that encourage students to think critically about what they value, and by extension, how the literary, aesthetic and intellectual experiences of the past and the present create and maintain such value systems.

In this endeavor, more often than not, I and my students are gathered around a table or seated in a circle of chairs shoulder to shoulder. If I am not there among them, I am at the blackboard capturing key elements of the discussion or laying out the day's concepts for further examination. As students dive into the material, I encourage them to bring their own experiences and identities to class as a means to reflect critically on the principles that they discover, enact and carry forward. In the process, I invite students to consider the course material as part of the personal and political transformation that higher education represents.

By sharing my own concern for critical inquiry and close-reading, I foster a lively climate of discussion in which students are free to speak and respond to one another. At the same time, I strive to create and maintain a safe and open space in which discussion and deliberation are balanced with equipoise and introspection.

From David Bartholomae's *Writing on the Margins* and Alice Horning's *Revision Revisited* I take the notion of a continuum of writers ranging from beginning to expert in respect to the conventions of any given discourse community. For Bartholomae and Horning what bridges these writers is their awareness of the set of linguistic structures that range from simple syntactic constructions to more complex, generic forms. Like Bartholomae, I acknowledge that these distinctions are theoretical at best. Nonetheless I find them useful, because in the process of bringing their thoughts into formal being, writers must engage the invisible and conceptual. In that sense, writing becomes a tool for making individual thoughts apparent to a wider audience. In all my classes—creative writing, composition, and literature—elements of these disciplinary subdivisions intersect wherever the students are steeped in forms of writing, as both readers and producers. Blending both situated and overt instruction with de-centered and student-centered activities, my classes help students to understand writing as a medium in which ideas transform as they move. In the process, students examine the course specific content as it travels through public space. They “see” through their writing and discussion to the interplay between ideas and action, and they become effective negotiators by learning to engage socially with the forces that radiate around their individual and collective voices.

When I approach writing pedagogy in this manner, as a technology for thought, I find that students learn to develop their own independent practice of awareness. They begin with observation and discussion but move on to write about what they have seen and heard, before returning to read

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about what they have formerly observed *and* finally to re-see what they have formerly read from a new vantage point. At each stage, sequenced assignments and in-class activities help students access the cycle of reading and writing and create more finely nuanced awareness of an idea and its potential forms of expression. Formal worksheets such as those proposed by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein complement experience-based investigation such as those suggested by Anne Wysocki or Janet Burroway. Along the way, students demonstrate not only increased awareness of disciplinary conventions, but they also become sensitive to the processes by which those conventions privilege some forms of knowledge at the expense of others. They learn to question their own choices and practices productively; to justify their decisions and values as part of a responsible and effective written communication; and to record those developmental processes through meta-linguistic moments of reflection.