EXPERIMENTS IN EDUCATION

“Human activity consists of action and reflection: it is praxis; it is transformation of the world.”
– Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed

In 1933, after John Andrew Rice was fired from his job as a faculty member at Rollins College in Florida, he decided to found his own educational institution. Black Mountain College, whose campus was in the Blue Ridge foothills of North Carolina, encouraged students and faculty to seek learning in “human contact, through a fusion of mind and emotion.” Students and instructors learned together in non-hierarchical classrooms and worked alongside one another to construct the university’s new buildings. There were no grades, no requirements, and students alone decided when it was time for them to graduate (many chose not to graduate at all).

What does it mean to learn? In this class, we will examine the assumptions that underpin learning at an institution like Yale and ask how we got here: what histories, preferences, biases, and assumptions inform our learning here? What alternatives to this model—in which students learn inside classrooms, from an instructor, based on a pre-established syllabus, and receive grades based on “academic achievement”—have existed in recent history, and why have these been discarded (or how do they survive today)? We will consider democratic, anarchistic, and decolonized education, “unschooling” and “UnCollege,” forest kindergarten and outdoor education, and specific alternative models such as the Escuela Moderna in Barcelona, Montessori schools, the Schule Schloss Salem and Outward Bound academies, and Black Mountain College. We will conceive of our classroom as an experimental space that allows us to explore some of the models and questions raised by our readings, and we will take our cue from Paulo Freire, who in his Pedagogy of the Oppressed invites us to ask: when you come out of an educational institution, who will you be? Who decides what you are allowed to learn? What determines the courses you take each semester? And when you are learning at a particular place, where is the power that controls your life?

Course Materials

There are no required materials for this course; readings will be provided on Canvas. I would suggest that you purchase the following writing guide, which will serve you during our class and beyond:

Course objectives

This writing-intensive summer course will attempt to:

1. Contribute to your “writing toolkit” by focusing on your individual writing process and encouraging you to examine, expand, and reinvent it where useful;
2. Enable you to construct a compelling argument;
3. Allow you to approach writing from a variety of disciplines with confidence and excitement;
4. Cultivate your creativity and empower you as a persuasive, engaging, and lucid writer with a unique voice, whose experiences and interests can make vital contributions to scholarly discussion;
5. Develop and complicate your notions of what “learning,” “education,” and “teaching” might entail, in ways that enrich your own academic and creative work and allow you to contribute to your intellectual and personal communities;
6. Invite us all to experiment with what and how we learn in the context of our own classroom, by putting into practice the theories we encounter together.

Assignments and Assessment

Grading Distribution:

- Essay 1 (3-4 pages) 15%
- Essay 2 (4-5 pages) 25%
- Essay 3 (6-8 pages) 30%
  (A 1-page research proposal with a working bibliography will be worth 5%; a peer review and partial draft will be worth 10%; the paper itself will be worth 15%)
- Presentation 15%
  (A 5-minute presentation about an alternative educational institution or model. On the day that you present, you will also help lead the class discussion.)
- Participation 15%
  (Attendance and class participation will make up 10% of this. At the beginning of our course, you will set individual writing objectives with and aim to meet them as the semester progresses; you will assess yourself at course’s end for the remaining 5% of the participation grade.)

Due Dates:

- Essay 1, draft: Thursday, June 2, 12pm EDT
- **Essay 1, final**: Monday, June 6, 12pm EDT
- Essay 2, draft: Thursday, June 9, 12pm EDT
- **Essay 2, final**: Tuesday, June 14, 12pm EDT
- Essay 3, prospectus and bibliography: Friday, June 17, 11.59pm EDT
- Essay 3, partial draft: Tuesday, June 21, 11.59pm EDT
- Essay 3, peer feedback exercise: Friday, June 24, *in class*
- Essay 3, full draft: Saturday, June 25, 11.59pm EDT
- **Essay 3, final**: Friday, July 1, *in class*
- Oral presentations: Throughout the semester

A note on deadlines: Please note that the deadline for the drafts of Essays 1, 2, and 3 will be extremely strict: due to our compressed schedule, I will aim to have your drafts back to you before start of class the
next day. If your paper is not in at 12pm EDT, I will not be able to return it until the weekend, which will significantly cut into your revision time.

Course requirements and policies

1. **Attendance.** Please do your best to attend all classes, and let me know straight away if you won’t be able to make a session. The discussion and workshop elements that are at the center of this course cannot be made up, and the summer semester moves at an incredibly fast pace, so regular attendance will be helpful to your learning. With this said, if you require an accommodation regarding attendance, do not hesitate to reach out so we can discuss.

2. **Preparation and Participation.** Come to class prepared to discuss the readings and participate in writing exercises and workshops. A good way to ensure you are engaging more fully with the readings is to take notes on what you read, even if only in the margins. In-class peer revision will provide you with valuable opportunities to give and receive feedback on writing assignments. I will ask you to **kick off and lead our discussion** in one of our classes, by preparing a short presentation about an alternative educational institution or model and asking a few questions about the reading. This will be part of your participation grade.

   Class participation gives your classmates access to your thoughts and interpretations, which are likely different from theirs in some way, and this will allow our group to develop the fullest possible understanding of the questions we wish to explore. If you find class participation difficult or uncomfortable, please come see me during office hours so we can discuss some strategies for engagement with your peers that will feel enjoyable and constructive for you.

3. **Remote Learning and Zoom Etiquette:** If we must meet in a remote format due to public health conditions, the live discussion sessions will be held through Zoom. Most of us are familiar with remote learning at this point, but here are the basics: to access live sessions, click “Zoom” on the left side of our class’ Canvas page. Once you click the link, you may be prompted to install a small application necessary for Zoom. Once you do so, you will be taken directly into the Zoom meeting room. You can then use the audio and video settings menu (bottom left corner) to ensure the correct input/output sources are chosen. For more detailed information of Zoom operation, refer to the user guide in the Technical Support page in the "Modules" tab on Canvas. Try to ensure you are in a quiet location for the live sessions; this may not be easy if you are not on campus, so please do approach me if there are any aspects of your learning environment that you’d like me to know about so I can support you.

   Unless your internet connection is struggling, I ask that you keep your camera on. If you can’t turn your camera on for any reason, please just let me know. I would also like you to **keep yourself unmuted:** we will be a small class, and we will practice being attentive to each other and trying to keep our class conversation flowing organically. Feel free to mute yourself if there is unexpected noise on your end of the connection; you may also want to use a virtual background on Zoom if this is helpful. I will not be using one, and you may see my dog in the back of the frame. I ask that we all be flexible and respectful of each other if we catch glimpses of each other’s houses or working spaces and/or home lives.
Expectations

Essay Submission
You will submit essays through the “Assignment” page on Canvas. Please submit papers as Word documents, not as pdfs; I’ll be commenting using tracked changes. When I set paper lengths, I’m envisioning that your papers will use Times New Roman 11 or 12-point font; you can use whatever font you prefer, as long as the paper roughly meets the page count if you convert it to Times New Roman 12.

Academic Integrity
One of the goals of this course is to help you understand how to use published research – the final product of someone’s hard work – to support your own thinking. Plagiarism, in brief, is the submission of work that contains uncited instances of language and ideas that are not your own. Any instance of plagiarism or any other form of academic dishonesty, such as unauthorized collaboration, has severe consequences at Yale. If you are unsure about how to cite something, or have any other related doubts, please ask! You may also wish to acknowledge any help you have received on your papers in a footnote, whether it’s from the Writing Center, a friend, or someone else. You can consult Yale’s policies on academic honesty here.

Access
If you need some form of accommodation not already provided, have a medical condition, or have any other information that you feel I should know, please inform me as soon as you can. It is my job to make the classroom accessible for you; I will always be grateful for any information you share that can help me do that. Additional information and resources are available at the website of Student Accessibility Services. You can always ask them to contact me directly on your behalf, too.

Email, Office Hours, and Assistance
I will answer emails within 24 hours on weekdays and 48 hours on weekends. Please be respectful when corresponding with me; I will always be respectful with you. I won’t take questions about grades by email, and if you have a particularly complex question or conundrum, it would probably be better to talk it out with me during office hours.

Writing Support
Yale’s Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning also offers a range of assistance to student writers. They are there to support you, and I encourage all of you to make use of their services and expertise. You can sign up for online tutoring at this link. You need to upload a draft through this same scheduler at least two hours before the tutoring session, so that your Writing Partner can read it beforehand. You need not have a draft, however; writing partners can work with you to brainstorm or strategize before you begin writing.

Celebrating Diversity
There will be zero tolerance of comments or behaviors intended to threaten, marginalize, or otherwise diminish others: it is our joint responsibility to make our classroom a space where intellectual conflict can occur in a context of curiosity and absolute respect. We will collaborate to make our classroom a “brave space,” meaning a place where people who are differently vulnerable can approach difficult or uncomfortable topics and realities with honesty and sensitivity. For more information on “brave spaces,” click here.

We will work actively on figuring out how to create a class environment that generates lively discussion, allows us all to learn new things, and challenges our preconceptions. Creating the conditions for good exchanges will be an active concern of the course: please respect your peers and their contributions by
listening carefully, responding thoughtfully to their interjections, not interrupting unnecessarily, and ensuring that all voices have an opportunity to be heard. Help your peers express their ideas when it seems as if they would benefit from your support; ask for help from your classmates if you are struggling to articulate what you mean. We will aim to be generous, sensitive, and productively critical of each other, and there will always be opportunities during class to consider or discuss how we are working and interacting as a group.
Schedule of Meetings

This schedule is subject to change as we work our way through the semester. All handouts and texts in blue will be available on our Canvas page.

Unit One: Why do we learn?

Monday, May 30
Session 1, 9:00-10:10am
Group Introductions, Course Introduction, and Syllabus Review
Handout: Introduction to Key Terms
Handout: Essay 1

Session 2, 10:15-11:15am
Exercise: Close Reading Claims
Class Discussion: High School in the Community
Handout: Reading Scholarly Texts
Handout: Finding a Good Essay Question (Poorvu Center)

Wednesday, June 1
Session 1, 9:00-10:10am
Handout: Discussion Questions
Discussion: Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Chapter 2
Exercise: Summarizing vs Analyzing
Handout: Presentation Assignment

Session 2, 10:15-11:15am
Handout: As She Herself Puts It
Exercise: Staying with a Quote
Handouts: Working with Quotations 1-3 (Poorvu Center)

Thursday, June 2
Rough Draft of Essay 1 due, 12pm EDT

Friday, June 3
Independent Experimental Education Research Day
Reading: John Dewey and Evelyn Dewey, Schools of Tomorrow
Chapters 1 and 2
Asynchronous Writing Skills Lecture—Bringing it all together:
Strong Body Paragraphs and Their Structure
Handout: Body Paragraphs
Handout: Recursive Writing (Poorvu Center)
Handout: Introductions (Poorvu Center)
UNIT TWO: How do we learn?

Monday, June 6

Session 1, 9:00-10:10am
Setting Our Terms of Discussion
Handout: Conversational Moves
Discussion: D.C. Phillips, “Theories of Teaching and Learning”
and Dewey and Dewey, *Schools of Tomorrow*

Session 2, 10:15-11:15am
Exercise: Placing Sources in Conversation
Handout: They Say, I Say
Handout: Conversation Verbs and Clauses (Poorvu Center)
Handout: Essay 2
**Essay 1 (final draft) due, 12pm EDT**

Tuesday, June 7

Screening, 7pm EDT
*Into the Wild* (This screening is not mandatory; you may watch
the film independently, but by holding a formal screening I hope
to make the film accessible to all students) Please read Joan James
and Theresa Williams, “School-Based Experiential Outdoor
Education: A Neglected Necessity” before watching the film.

Wednesday, June 8

Session 1, 9:00-10:10am
Student-led Discussion: Maria Montessori, “Our Own Method,”
James and Williams, “School-Based…” and *Into the Wild.*
Exercise: Developing Transitions
Handout: The Segue in Scholarly Conversations
Handout: Stitching—Signal Words (Poorvu Center)

Session 2, 10:15-11:15am
Writing Skills Lecture—Changing the Lens

Thursday, June 9

**Rough draft of Essay 2 due, 12pm EDT**

Friday, June 10

Session 1, 9:00-9:40am
Student-led Discussion:
Carol Wren and Thomas Wren, “The Capacity to Learn”
Jal Mehta and Sarah Fine, “The State of Deeper Learning in
American High Schools”
Exercise: Introductions—Setting the Stage and Stakes
Handout: *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*

Session 2: 9:45-10:25am
Peer Review Workshop, Paper 2 (introductions)

Session 3: 10:30-11:15am
A Glance at Conclusions
Handout: Conclusions (Poorvu Center)
Writing Time and Individual Instructor Consultations
UNIT THREE: Where do we learn?

**Monday, June 13**

Session 1, 9:00-10:10am
Midterm Review: Assessing Our Conversations
Student-led Discussion: Simon Beames, Pete Higgins, and Robbie Nicol, *Learning Outside the Classroom* (Introduction)
and watch “From Farm to Food”

Session 2, 10:15-11:15am
Exercise: What Motivates Us?
Picking A Research Topic and Developing a Proposal
Handout: Motivating Moves (Poorvu Center)

**Tuesday, June 14**

**Essay 2 (final draft) due, 12pm EDT**

**Wednesday, June 15**

Session 1, 9:00-10:10am
Student-led Discussion: Rob Reich, “Common Schooling and Educational Choice”

Session 2, 10:15-11:15am
Library Visit: Identifying Sources
Handout: Essay 3
Handout: Working with Sources (Poorvu Center)

**Friday, June 17**

Session 1, 9:00-9:40am
Student-led Discussion: Mira Debs, *Diverse Families, Desirable Schools: Public Montessori in the Era of School Choice* (excerpt)

Session 2: 9:45-10:25am
Writing Skills Lecture—Establishing Your Voice
Handout: “And Yet”—Distinguishing What You Say

Session 3: 10:30-11:15am
Building the Research Paragraph
Handout: Research Paragraphs (Poorvu Center)
Writing Time and Individual Instructor Consultations

**Research Proposal and Working Bibliography due, 11.59pm EDT**
UNIT FOUR: Assessing what we learn

Monday, June 20
Session 1, 9:00-10:10am
Student-led Discussion: Adrienne Rich, “The SEEK program at CUNY”

Session 2, 10:15-11:15am
Exercise: Keeping It Complicated—Destabilizing Interlocutors
Handout: “Skeptics May Object”: Planting a Naysayer

Tuesday, June 21
Essay 3 (partial draft, with introduction, claim, and at least 3 body paragraphs) due, 11:59pm EDT

Wednesday, June 22
Session 1, 9:00-10:10am
Student-led Discussion: Winston Owusu, “Unschooling, Uncollege, and Anarchic Learning”

Session 2, 10:15-11:15am
Writing Skills Lecture—Strategies for Revision: Lingering, Deepening, Cutting, and Expanding
Handout: Revising Efficiently and Effectively (Poorvu Center)

Friday, June 24
Session 1, 9:00-9:40am
Student-led Discussion: Grading Models and Report Cards (primary source analysis)
Handout: A P3 Model for Critical Reading

Session 2: 9:45-10:25am
Peer Review Workshop, Paper 3 (structure, transition, claim)

Session 3: 10:30-11:15am
So What? Saying Why It Matters
Handout: Funnel In, Funnel Out
Writing Time and Individual Instructor Consultations
Peer feedback exercise due (in class)

Saturday, June 25
Essay 3 (complete draft) due, 11:59pm EDT
# UNIT FIVE: Transforming Learning/Transformational Learning

**Monday, June 27**

Session 1, 9:00-10:10am  
Concision, Clarity, Polish  
Exercise: Lean Prose  
Handout: Lean Prose

Session 2, 10:15-11:15am  
Discussion: Wayne Au, “Decolonizing the Classroom”

**Wednesday, June 29**

Session 1, 9:00-10:10am  
Discussion: Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*  
(selection)

Session 2, 10:15-11:15am  
End-of-term Review: Assessing Our Conversations and Writing Goals  
Experimenting with Education

**Friday, July 1**

Session 1, 9:00-10:10am  
Presentations, Panel One

Session 2, 10:15-11:15am  
Presentations, Panel Two  
Class Conclusion

**Essay 3 (final draft) due, in class**