

Agile Learning Center:

New York 2019-2020 Annual Report

While we are always living history and shaping the future, there are seasons that fix our awareness on this promise and responsibility in especially striking ways.

In this year, our seventh, we started out unsettled and unsettling. Over the summer, we hosted the first wholly youth-facilitated ALC summer training. Through the fall, we participated in actions for climate justice and tracked news about changing school laws. Over winter we followed impeachment proceedings federally and organizing to guarantee accessible public transit locally. All the while, our days stayed equally full of field trips, art-making, biology lessons, epic shark tag games, and the sound of falling D&D dice.

When the pandemic arrived to decentralize us in March, the need to release so many of our spring and summer plans to be together was devastating.

We say we're about adaptability, creativity, support, and intentionality, but had we been practicing enough to be ready for a global pandemic? Did our years of liberation education, relationship building, and staying curious about the world prepare us to then also meaningfully engage with the uprisings? 2020 has asked, and, reflecting on the joy in our 1000+ pre-covid photos, the engagement through 15 weeks of InterALC online offerings, our 4 new students, and innumerable ongoing acts of care, it seems we get to answer "yes."

Landmarks/Milestones:

- Cooking, Dungeons and Dragons, poker, history, science, videogame tournaments, piano, art jam, and Pokemon chat were especially popular offerings this year.
- "The Agile Learner" weekly student newspaper went from an idea to a paper to a website with an archive!
- We took field trips to Wave Hill, the Union Square playground, MoMA, the Met, Cooper-Hewitt, Harlem Grown's urban farms, XR's Rebel Fest, Greta Thunberg's Battery Park address, and Swing-a-Ring. We saw the Kehinde Wiley sculpture in Times Square, the natural disaster themed escape room exhibit at the Franklin Institute, and the subway graffiti exhibit at the Bronx Museum of the Arts. Some of us also went to see Star Wars, to taste some winter snacks at Brighton Beach, and to discover new board games at events and cafes.
- A grant from the Japan Foundation of LA allowed our Japanese classes to incorporate taiko drumming this year!
- We co-organized the pandemic efforts to get offerings from ALCs around the world online and available to all students, collaborating with our network to keep the months of not being able to safely gather full of options and social time for kids (and adults!) seeking that.



"Where are you taking all the markers?" - J, 10

"To draw a conspiracy board. Where else?" - E, 13



"You're a magical door! A door to another dimension!" - J, 10

"I am a Pikachu in a tuxedo." - S, 8



Among the Students...

It is fairly normal that kids bring their interests and passions into the space, where others then either become fascinated and drawn in or keep doing their own thing but with the new insight that someone in their circle is knowledgeable about, say, LMMS or flute. That said, this year felt especially shaped by folks inspiring each other. Inspired by a friend, folks read up on Pokemon, Steven Universe, and the very detailed rules of Dungeons and Dragons. Kids practiced writing, recorder, taxidermy, video editing, and Brawlhalla to be able to play with our friends. People traded books, app recommendations, usernames, and art supplies. They collaborated studying US history units online, cooking big lunches, and making all kinds of colorful projects in the makerspace.

When school went off-site, some kids stayed in touch with friends outside of school offerings. Some dropped in and out as they needed and some stayed super engaged online. Folks self-directed and coordinated, as usual.

Among the Community...

After a summer and early fall really considering together whether it would make sense for us to move, to become a family co-op, to open a cafe, or do any number of other things in response to the changing needs and interests of community members, we settled into our rhythm by October. The Parent Community and Fundraising working groups merged and pulled off amazingly fun events. They hosted a grand bake sale, karaoke night, a game night, and support groups. Behind the scenes, they worked to onboard and support newer families, to make sure parents dealing with sickness had backup, and to intentionally set up continuity plans for the work groups out of recognition that following a kid's self-direction sometimes means being ready for the day they decide to move on.

The community offerings and support continued through the early pandemic and then the start of the uprisings. Challenging as this time has been, folks have really risen to the challenge.



Financial Information

The school continued to offer sliding scale tuition, ranging from \$22,500 to \$4500 annually based on reported family income. With the usual summer transfers, folks leaving the city, and additionally families leaving the school due to city law changes, we went from 31 kids at the end of the 2018-2019 year to 21 in September of 2019. This was both emotionally and financially challenging, but we decided to fundraise and tend admissions with purpose then check on our progress in February. The thought was we would know in February if we needed to really gear up our admissions outreach and fundraising efforts in the spring. Early fundraising efforts included a Chipotle day, Teespring campaigns, a Bake Sale, a Facebook Giving campaign, and making and selling calendars. In total, those efforts raised \$1176.84. Abby won us a \$900 grant from the Japan Foundation for supplies for Yasushi's classes, and Diane secured technology upgrade donations for us.

As February came and went, world events had our situation looking more and more uncertain. Then Ryan, who had been managing admissions, lined up a number of new enrollments for the spring and next fall. Abby put together an online fundraiser to replace our cancelled spring events, bringing in \$7840, and secured a PPP loan from the credit union we bank with to help cover payroll and other expenses while we navigate the pandemic.

Uncertain as the future remains, we feel confident in the community's ability to adapt to handle whatever comes. We are deeply grateful to the many folks whose care and contributions sustain our work both in years of abundant ease and in these more challenging years. Thank you.



"I felt your accordion music in my heart, stomach, and pancreas." - chorus of teens



"We were just doing Tiny Zines and listening to bossa nova...Good luck on your quest!"



Summer Program

Last year's teen-run ALF Summer was a success! We had been looking forward to doing it again in 2020, excited as always for time with parents, welcoming new folks, connecting with facilitators from other ALCs, and welcoming kids back to the space for "bonus school" summer days. We'd also been planning to participate in the international facilitator gathering, planned for the end of June, and to host another unconference inspired by the really positive feedback from 2019. Instead, we started online fundraisers, extended the school year so kids needing a structured schedule and non-parental check-ins would have that support, and supported network efforts to get offerings available online through July and August for kids whose camp and summer work plans were cancelled in response to ongoing safety concerns. We've been putting together resource lists on both navigating the pandemic and on protesting safely, both from home and from the streets.

This summer isn't looking quite like we had planned, but we'll stay agile and keep working to care for the community as best we can. We're ending the school year researching what our options will be when it is time to resume programming -- from school, home, or parks -- in the fall.

Network

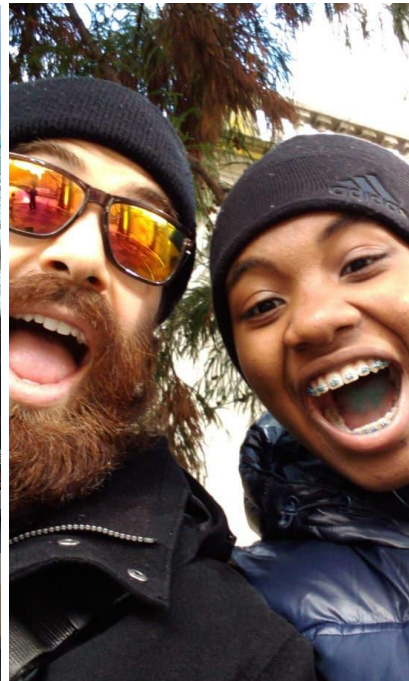
One of the distinctions that sets our Agile Learning Center apart from other centers is that we are in active collaboration with other ALC communities around the world.

In the fall, we started planning an exchange with friends from the center in Montreal. We spent a little time with Philly ALC friends and looked forward to a longer visit with them in the spring. Kids from Charlotte and Atlanta wanted to visit us; we wanted to visit them. We called friends in California, Oklahoma, Texas, Veracruz, Ghent...and when the pandemic dashed our hopes of visiting each other in person, we found ourselves on videocalls with our InterALC friends *more* regularly than before. On one hand, connecting together around campfires and Werewolves games will have to wait. On the other hand, the regular communication and collaboration over the past few months has strengthened old connections and opened new ones. We really feel and feel gratitude for belonging to such an expansive, supportive, and creative network.

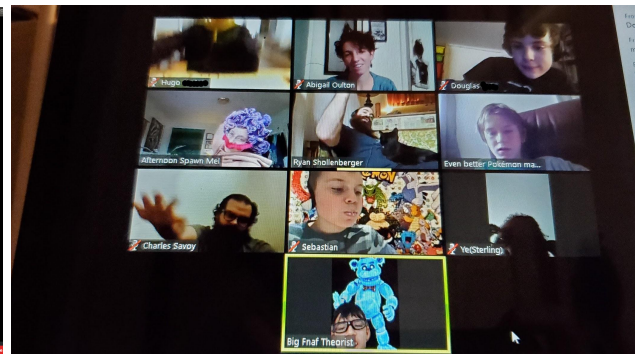
Abby continued tending the network in parallel to tending the school: administrating, organizing events, coaching, consulting, mediating, resourcing folks, and cheering on all movement efforts towards collective liberation. Mel co-hosted their second year of regular support with Amber Sawyer from Oklahoma, and they helped with attempts to plan an international retreat. Ryan offered a webinar as part of a series from facilitators across the network, Mercer continued serving as president of the Network board, and Katherine ran year 2 of weekly Book Club meetings!



Suddenly finding ourselves unable to gather or field trip through the city made us especially grateful that we filled the months before the pause with togetherness, excursions, and so many adventures.



We look forward to resuming our trips to playgrounds, libraries, museums, game cafes, and other ALCs again someday. In the meantime, we'll keep finding ways to stay in touch!



<i>People</i> <i>Staff</i> Mel Compo, facilitator & librarian Charles Savoy, facilitator & maker Ryan Shollenberger, co-director & facilitator Abby Oulton, co-director & facilitator-admin <i>Regular Guest Teachers</i> Nancy Hooper, offering cooking Yoni Kallai, offering acro-balance Yasushi Tamaki, offering Japanese language Rachel Landsberg, offering Climate Justice <i>and shout out to the whole ALC Network that participated in hosting 30+ offerings weekly online through our quarantine months!</i> <i>Non-discrimination Statement</i> The Agile Learning Center does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, national origin, or ethnic origin in administration, admission, or any associated activities.	<i>Mission</i> New York City's first Agile Learning Center is an independent school for self-directed learners. Students at Agile Learning Center individualize their learning within the context of a supportive community. We have adapted simple tools for self-organization and intentional culture creation to better support young people in engaging with their passions and curiosities while shaping the environment of the school. <i>Address</i> 115 East 106 Street Second Floor New York, NY 10029 nycagile.org
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