

Agile Learning Center: New York 2020-2021 Annual Report



In this year of adapting and practicing collective care, we kept trying our best and offering each other grace.

From July of 2020, we released a research-based and dynamic plan for the year, where we imagined low case numbers would let us gather outdoors together, in small groups, larger groups, travelling groups, and then indoors.

We started in September, online and with outdoor pods. As we saw covid spikes arrive with the cold, our plans to shift to riskier programming formats were put on hold again and again.

While community events and online offerings shared with other ALCs were less attended than last year, we had fun with the folks who did show up. We also talked a lot this year about how we carry grief, anxiety, stress, anger, and all the other feelings that come with surviving ongoing social crises.

By spring, case numbers were going down and folks were getting vaccinated, but we were on a roll with a full online offering schedule and our days enjoying the lovely weather with city park pods.

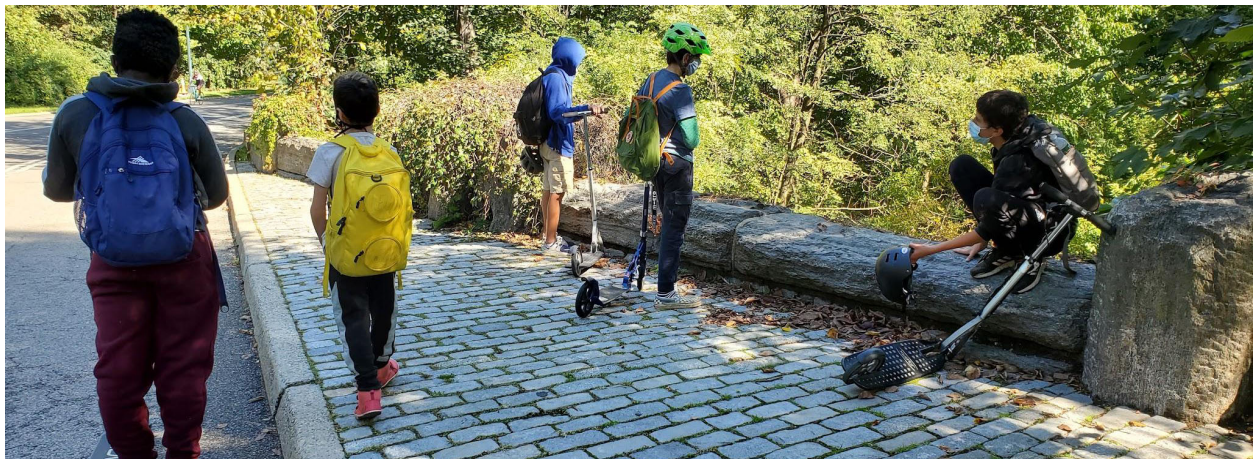
We stayed off-site, enjoyed a new kind of end-of-year celebration, and hope to be back together soon.

Landmarks/Milestones:

- We released our plan for the year in July 2020 to help families plan.
- We ran a \$10,000 fundraiser, with a video many community members contributed to, that exceeded its goal in late December!
- Favorite offerings from previous years that continued included Cooking with Nancy, Dungeons and Dragons, Maths, and Crochet.
- Offerings shared with folks from other ALCs included Geoguessr with folks from Greenhouse in the UK and poker with folks from Mont Libre in Canada.
- New offerings included Voice Acting, Ecology, Astronomy, Party Games, Tiny Zines, Pokemon, Scratch, and Book Club!
- Our outdoor adventurers met for pod days all through the winter! They kept a log book and took lots of photos.
- Mel and Ryan's interviews were the most listened to on the "Holding Unfolding" podcast for 4 months straight.
- "The Agile Learner" student newspaper reached issue #50!
- A community panel of students and facilitators presented at the ASDE Self-Directed Education Weekend international conference in May.



Central Park. Randall's Island. Thomas Jefferson Park. Marcus Garvey Park. "Close" Park.



Morningside Park. Columbia Campus. Prospect Park. Hudson River Park. Gracie Mansion.



Among the Students...

While navigating the stressors of the year meant some of us needed extra rest while others sought out all kinds of things to do, our community encouraged and supported both.

Online offerings that were popular included Maths, Ecology, Geoguessr, Dungeons and Dragons, Poker, Astronomy, Fiber Arts, Art History, Tiny Zines, Voice Acting, Story Writing, “Hyphen” Music Production, Scratch Chat, and Party Games.

Outdoor adventurers got out around the city all year! Brooklyn pod went to Prospect Park, Greenwood Cemetery, and the Brooklyn Botanical Garden. Manhattan pod went all through Central Park, Randall’s Island, Marcus Garvey Park, Columbia Campus, Morningside Park, and more. They read, painted, climbed, fished, played soccer, watched birds, talked, made fires, drank cocoa, rowed boats, and more! Outdoor adventurers also took some long walks to go see the new Kehinde Wiley at Moynihan Train Hall, the Rockefeller Center tree, and the Morris Jumel Mansion.

Among the Community...

While our engagement for assembly meetings, showcases, working groups, and other community events was the lowest it's ever been with folks’ energy going towards managing all the challenges of the year, we are prepared to rebuild that “community as a verb” feeling that we’d gotten to before the pandemic.

A number of parents, students, and community members really stepped up and maintained their commitment to showing up powerfully to keep our shared spaces vibrant, dynamic, and engaging even when folks were starting to struggle with not being able to socialize like in previous times.

Shout out to Nancy Hooper for another wonderful year of cooking together. Shout out to the kids who showed up to panels, interviews, and showcases. Shout out to family members who jumped in to offerings, meetings, info sessions, phone calls, and celebratory email threads. And shout out to our friends at Greenhouse ALC in the UK and Mont Libre in Canada for playing online games with us!

Finances

The school continued to offer sliding scale tuition, ranging from \$22,500 to \$4500 annually based on reported family income. Abby’s financial planning commitments for the year were to ensure we could keep Ryan and Mel steadily paid and insured through the year while also allowing kids whose families were behind on tuition payments due to pandemic-related hardship to finish the year with us anyway, to minimize stress on them during an already difficult time.

Between tuition income, income from other programming, a very successful December crowdfunding campaign that raised over \$10,000, PPP loans of over \$60,000, Bonfire shirt sales, a number of generous donations through the year, and a number of other small initiatives, we end the 2020-2021 school year with a month’s worth of buffer funds in the bank and fundraisers on the way having kept those commitments set in the fall.

In the ALC Network and the Self-Directed Education Movement

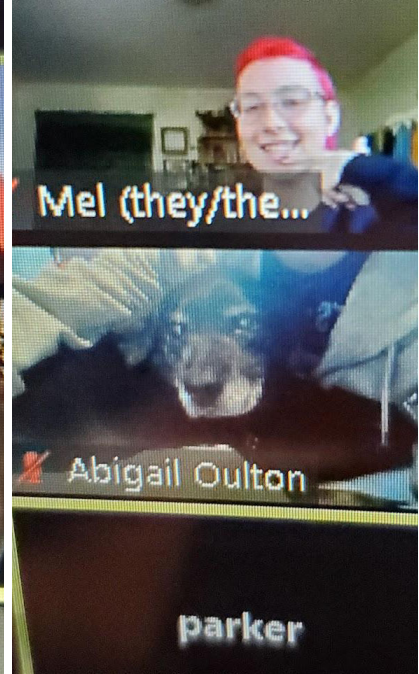
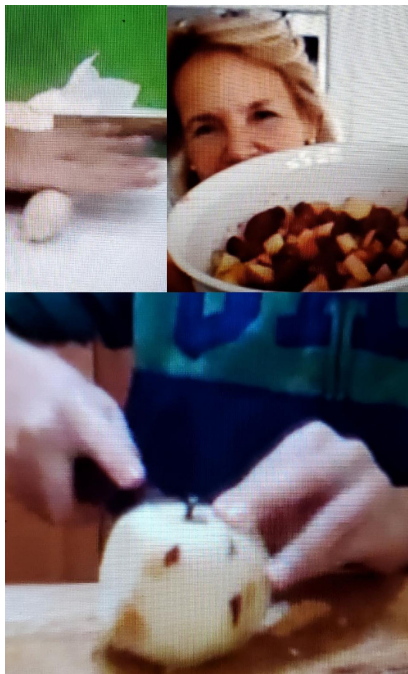
When covid-19 arrived in New York and then began spreading to other places where there are Agile Learning Centers in spring of 2020, our community let the way for other centers to adapt quickly, centering both collective safety and the social-psychological needs of the young people we serve. We shared our templates and checklists, made videos explaining research we were reading and how it was impacting our choices, posted resource lists for parents and caretakers, hosted support calls for center staff, organized a webinar series, and collaborated with centers around the world in sharing access to our online offerings to give youth an abundance of opportunities for socializing, studying, playing, and learning.

While we had fewer folks from other ALCs collaborating with us on online offerings, we still welcomed folks from the UK and Canada into our Geoguessr and Poker sessions, and we sent a couple of learners to an acting class hosted by a UPenn theater professor based out of the Philly ALC. Even so, our community made significant contributions to the ALC Network and the broader Self-Directed Education movement this year. Mel hosted support calls for facilitators and shared their zines of educator reflections. Ryan hosted coaching calls for facilitator teams. They both supported a group of students presenting as one of the most popular panels at the international conference hosted by the Alliance for Self-Directed Education in May, and they both offered interviews to a podcast of facilitator interviews that Abby started called "Holding Unfolding." She project-managed the publication of a translation of Akilah Richards' book *Raising Free People* and the rewrite of the ALC Network Starter Kit, both with collaborators from Educambiando, an ALC in Veracruz, Mexico. Friends at other projects have expressed that they are looking forward to when we can host trainings and they can host our travelling students again, and in the meantime over 1000 of them follow our updates on social media.

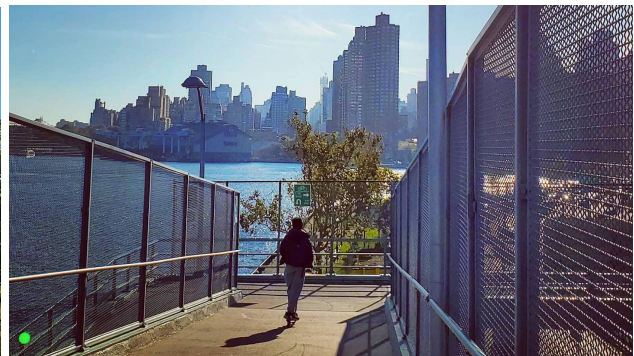




“My opinion is that I actually — I actually feel like I haven’t missed anything. The only thing I miss is kind of the space. And I’m hopeful that we’ll get back to it soon, but of course, I want to take all the precautions that we need to.” -reflection from 13yo student



“It’s just been what we had to adjust to. But I was saying that I’m grateful to you guys for just giving us that space to not have...added pressure.” -reflection from a parent



<i>People</i> <i>Staff</i> Mel Compo, facilitator & librarian Ryan Shollenberger, co-director & facilitator Abby Oulton, co-director & facilitator-admin <i>Regular Guest Teacher</i> Nancy Hooper, offering cooking <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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