

Agile Learning Center:

New York 2022-2023 Annual Report



In this year of adaptation and creativity, we focused on growing our capacities as individuals and a collective.

For the fourth school year, we developed a covid management plan, informed by both research on the virus and on the guidance of disability justice advocates. We continued use of air filters, increased ventilation, masks indoors, and an ongoing option to participate remotely.

This year we had a good mix of returning students with clear ideas about how they wanted to spend their time, new older students finding their rhythms, and new younger students who shared inspiring energy and earnestness. Particularly later in the year, the return of younger students to the space invited older folks to reflect on their assumptions, what scaffolding can look like, and on our modeling. After having mostly mellow preteens and teens when we returned to in-person school last year, this year's cohort brought complexity and dynamism that felt like the beginning of a return to the school being as delightfully age and ability-mixed as it was before covid.

By June, we were welcoming new community members, connecting families, enjoying visits from former students, and feeling grateful for another year together.

Landmarks/Milestones:

- We released our plan for the year in early summer '22 to help families plan.
- Favorite offerings from previous years that continued included Dungeons and Dragons, Maths, Geoguessr, Chess, History, Minecraft Time, and Gardening
- New offerings included Rock Climbing, Sustainability Support Group, the improvisation game "Poop Smoothie," Music Theory, and Drawing [Kittens]
- Skills folks worked on between formal offerings included scootering, music production, computer repair, Spanish, playwriting, digital drawing, 3D printer maintenance, baking, fort-building, media analysis, and lots of reading.
- We visited art galleries, museums, the Bronx zoo, city parks, Rockaway beach, and the Palisades
- Families stepped up to substitute when facilitators got sick or stuck traveling, and they revived several of the working groups that went quiet in the early years of the pandemic
- Ryan supported facilitators north of the city and in the UK as they started projects inspired by our school
- Abby supported an ALC in Atlanta through a leadership change and brought our work to gatherings of folks with complementary projects



Meditation, shark tag, lava monster, rock climbing, park trips, museum visits, sustainability,



Dungeons and Dragons, Minecraft, Geoguessr, gardening, and history were favorite offerings!



Among the Students...

This year we really spent a lot of time collaborating in our virtual, relational, and material worlds. Pokemon Go, Minecraft, Roblox, Zelda, Super Smash Bros, and online chess regularly brought diverse groups of kids (and grown-ups!) together. Indie games came in and out of the mix. In-game conversations about resource sharing and strategy were lively, as were beyond-game conversations about chat moderation and data collection norms. While the normalization of AI text and image generators has some adults calling for restricting kids' tech use more and more, we stand by our approach of accompanying them in learning to engage, discerningly and critically, with the tools expanding our worlds.

Social-emotional skills building, self-awareness, and intentionality in relationships are foundation at an ALC in any year, and they were focal areas of practice for many in our community this year. Additionally, as we began to connect with the wider world again, our sustainability support group asked how to care for the environment, our makers and designers experimented with creating the changes they dreamed of, and we welcomed visitors and partnerships with delight.

Among the Community...

We began the year with Ryan and Mel as full-time facilitators and Abby away for consulting work, missing September for the first time since the school started. Financial uncertainty at school led to a December decision that Abby would continue to be part-time for the rest of the year, splitting time and focus between the school and other work.

The parent community really stepped up in this moment of flux. They volunteered as support and substitute facilitators when Abby was gone but Ryan and Mel needed help in the fall. They emailed event reminders, organized calls, co-hosted information sessions, answered each other's questions, donated supplies, forwarded grant information, checked in with facilitators, got to know each others' children, and referred people in their wider circles to the school.

In the second half of the year, we welcomed visitors from other ALCs, as well as some adults who are interested in starting their own learning centers. We hosted calls, met folks from complimentary organizations, and welcomed Nahla Simone and Arthur Velwest as supportive apprentice facilitators.

Finances

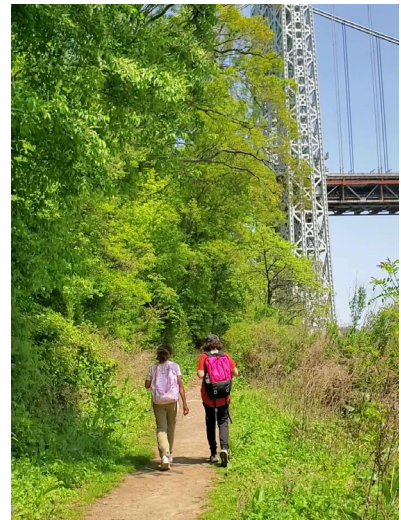
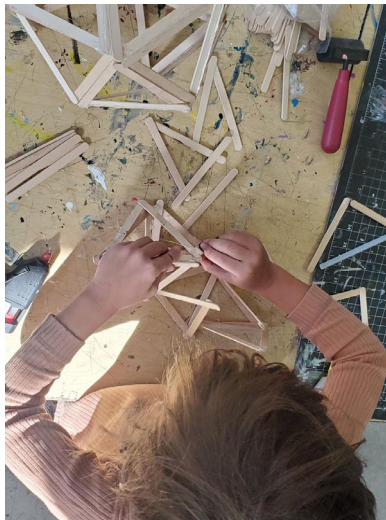
The school continued to offer sliding scale tuition, ranging from \$22,500 to \$4500 annually based on reported family income. New enrollments, unrestricted grants from the VELA fund, and winter holiday fundraiser donations supplemented the anticipated tuition payments. Many thanks to those who contributed and continue to contribute to help make what we do possible.

Abby's financial planning commitments for the year were to ensure we could keep Ryan and Mel steadily paid and insured through the year. This required her switching to being on site part-time and taking parallel consulting work. The arrangement was intended to be short-term, but it continued through the year and will be ongoing through the 2023-2024 school year. Other measures to increase the school's financial stability in the coming year include raising the tuition scale range to \$25,000 to \$4800 annually, hosting fundraising events, continuing to apply for grants, and hosting ALC trainings.

In the ALC Network and the Self-Directed Education Movement

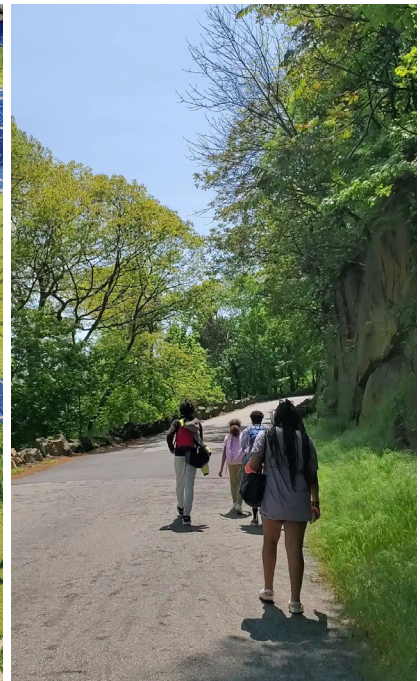
When Covid-19 arrived in New York and then began spreading to other places where there are Agile Learning Centers in spring of 2020, our community led the way for other centers to adapt quickly, centering both collective safety and the social-psychological needs of the young people we serve. These efforts continued through the 2020-2021 school year, then in 2021-2022 we brought our focus back to our own foundation. In 2022-2023, our 10th year, we had hoped to be ready to celebrate with everyone who we've collaborated with or inspired around the world over the past decade. The reality was that our staff were still recovering from holding so much over the past few years and our families were too new to each other -- and covid was still too present locally -- for us to orchestrate a big birthday fest during the year. We chose a slower opening and return to outreach offerings instead.

We started welcoming visitors and nurturing partnerships with complementary organizations again. Kids visited from other ALCs. Adults visited with questions about starting their own learning centers. While the online learning cohort for aspiring facilitators that Abby tried to put together over winter in response to folks' requests was canceled due to low registration numbers, the facilitators stayed busy supporting folks at other ALCs and self-directed education projects. Mel arranged podcast interviews, Instagram reels, and conversations with folks running camps popular with unschoolers. Ryan coached facilitator teams in the UK and the Northeastern US. Abby spent significant time this year with the folks from Philly ALC, Heartwood ALC, and Our Resilient Community. In mid-winter, she met with members of Enspiral and discussed approaches to regional decentralization at scale. She'll be connecting with folks from the Latin American ALC Network at a gathering in Mexico in August. She's arranged 3 summer trainings and is exploring partnerships with the Microsolidarity Network, Attention Labs, and CollectiveUp for next year.





"I loved seeing my kid reading on top of a bookcase..."



It's been a real joy to get to know some of the kids
and to start to feel part of a community myself." - first year parent



<i>People</i> <i>Staff</i> Mel Compo, facilitator & librarian Ryan Shollenberger, co-director & facilitator Abby Oulton, co-director & facilitator-admin <i>Support</i> Arthur Velwest, games and facilitation Nahla Simone, trips and facilitation <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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