

Agile Learning Center: New York 2023-2024 Annual Report



In this year of fresh starts and new growth, we focused on reflecting, experimenting, and figuring out how to adapt to better meet each other and our context in response to how we and the wider world have changed.

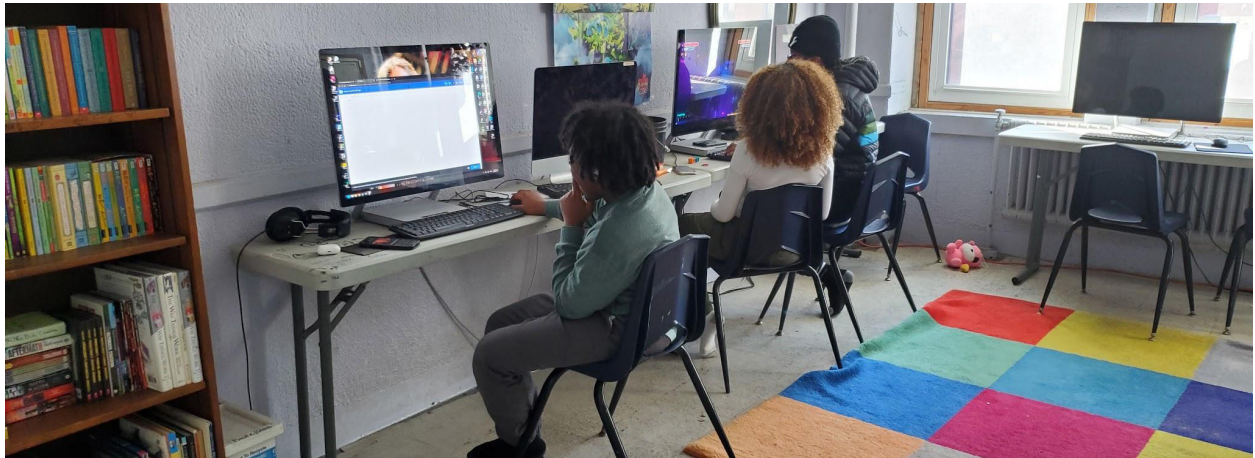
In the school's eleventh year, the presence of many new community members invited us to reflect on how we want to grow and change together, as well as what aspects of how we do what we do are ALC-NYC fundamentals that we want to stay committed to. While regular cycles of clarifying our intentions, experimenting with our practices, and reflecting on our evolution are already part of our design as an Agile Learning Center, staff welcomed this year's invitations to pause a little longer and reflect a little more deeply, allowing us to ensure we're growing intentionally towards our dreams for our next seasons. New requests from governmental agencies for documentation and supporting research complemented this process, prompting expansion of our website to include more resources and explanations. We explored new partnerships, submitted updates to the network website, and published an e-book. Additionally, we set a collective intention to maintain practices the covid-19 pandemic taught us can help minimize the spread of illnesses in the community: running air filters, offering options to participate in programming online from home, and offering optional masks. It's been work, and will be ongoing, but the clarity feels refreshing.

Landmarks/Milestones:

- We welcomed new facilitators, teachers, and visitors this year!
- Favorite offerings from previous years that continued included Maths, Geoguessr, Chess, History, Minecraft Time, Sustainability Support Group, Pigeon Rescue, and Gardening
- Offerings that returned after a pause included Kickball, Meditation, Super Smash Bros, and Japanese
- New offerings included Brazilian Cooking, Urban Hiking, Foosball, Film-Making, and Dance
- Skills folks worked on between formal offerings included painting, Scratch coding, scootering, music production, computer repair, Spanish, French, facilitating group games, literary analysis, bead art, weaving, pull-ups, understanding machines, writing, wax art, playwriting, digital drawing, 3D printer maintenance, baking, fort-building, media analysis, ice skating, basketball, and lots of reading.
- We listened to a lot of music! We played a lot of music! We made so much music...and shared it.
- We took a whole school trip to watch the eclipse from Central Park!
- We visited museums and parks, as always. We did neighborhood walking adventures this year, exploring parts of the city we weren't familiar with yet!



Some of us focused on leveling up our chess, Japanese, piano, and writing skills this year!



Some of us focused on building confidence to try new things and make new friends!



Among the Students...

This year we worked together to better understand and decide how to engage with the various worlds that influence our day-to-day experience.

We explored frameworks reflecting our emotional experiences, and we explored tools and practices for taking care of ourselves and our relationships while in different emotional states.

We practiced navigating the city and the various social interactions it prompts, from placing an order at the deli counter to changing subway trains or cars to sharing swings and playing tag around neighborhood babies at the park.

We analyzed celebrity culture, fandoms, music, movies, and social media trends, attempting to see clearly the agendas of the designers of those worlds so we can figure out how to engage -- if we want -- without forfeiting our self-determination. We helped each other learn video games, build forts, and make a film, team activities that require negotiating conflicting preferences and diverse abilities, but are satisfying in the end.

Among the Community...

In planning for the year, Ryan and Abby decided it was time to attempt returning to our pre-covid practice of intentionally bringing new facilitators to our space for practice and mentorship. Abby continued splitting time with other jobs to help make this happen.

We welcomed Arthur back, for more days and more time not devoted specifically to offerings. We welcomed Nahla as a full time facilitator. We welcomed Isa, first as a volunteer and then as a full time facilitator. And partway through the year we welcomed Charlie as a chess teacher, Japanese teacher, and occasional kickball player.

We also enjoyed visits from former students, staff from other centers, and even a couple of aspiring start-up teams.

The admissions working group and parent community working group became more active after years of covid fragmentation and then needing to re-cohere with almost entirely new community members. Facilitators are excited for those groups to fine-tune their practice and potentially re-vitalize the fundraising and space care groups next year.

Finances

The school continued to offer sliding scale tuition, ranging from \$25,000 to \$4700 annually based on self-reported family income. For the first time since 2020, we were projected to be able to cover our standard expenses with tuition and regular fundraising. Then affording to bring multiple new adults in the space, something Abby and Ryan valued doing as ALC Network flagship stewards and recognized as necessary once it became clear we had multiple students who required more continual 1-on-1 support than we were set up to provide, presented a challenge. To manage expanding the team while maintaining our co-directors' availability to tend administrative tasks on top of facilitating, Abby needed to continue external contracting work, and along with other staff attempted organizing revenue-generating events. Summer training income and ticket sales for our attempted chess and online seminar fundraising events were low, so mid-year, we put out a more urgent fundraising call. People responded generously, so we broke even at year's end.

In the ALC Network and the Self-Directed Education Movement

After a 3 year hiatus, we were delighted to return to hosting summer trainings in 2023. Ryan, Nahla, and Abby hosted 7 guests, including facilitators from 2 other existing self-directed education centers, for some theory days followed by two weeks of Bonus School adventures. It was clear that people really needed to connect with each other and have a shared social space to express themselves in. After the training, participants were more active about staying in touch than in previous years, continuing to visit and chat, to the delight of our facilitator team.

We welcomed other visitors during the school year: previous students, previous facilitators, graduates from other ALCs, students and facilitators from other ALCs, and a few aspiring facilitators.

Abby continued to work with Heartwood ALC, the Latinamerican ALC network, and projects on attention, learning, and belonging with folks from local universities. She brought community members to events hosted downtown by All Tech Is Human and The Strother School for Attention. She published an e-book with the content from ALC-NYC's "Introduction to Self-Directed Education" online course -- *Self-Directed Education and the Agile Learning Approach* -- and she published audio versions of the chapters to Soundcloud, Spotify, and Apple Music.

Ryan collaborated with her and folks from European organization CollectiveUP to produce an online seminar series covering topics like "Facilitating for Emergence" and "Creativity in Learning." He helped connect chess-loving students with Levy Rozman, Charlie Rosado, and tournament opportunities in the city.

We're looking forward to hosting a summer training in July again for 2024, as well as supporting a summer training in Atlanta in June and further remote sessions for CollectiveUp.

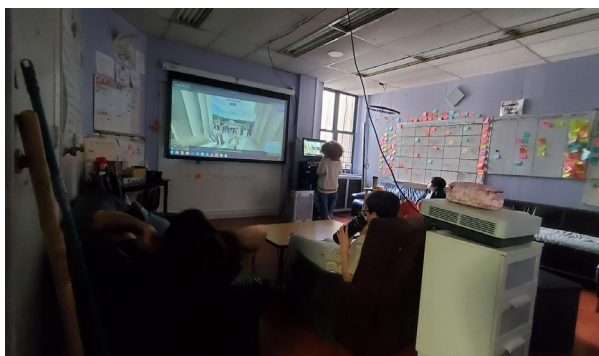




"Fort Agreements: ask before cleaning up the fort, follow the volume rules of the room,



...leave at least one couch for people to sit on, no arbitrary exclusion of people, no destruction."



<i>People</i> <i>Staff</i> Ryan Shollenberger, co-director & facilitator Nahla Simone, facilitator Isa Frost, facilitator Abby Oulton, co-director & facilitator-admin <i>Support</i> Arthur Velwest, games and art facilitation Charlie Rosado, chess and Japanese teacher <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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