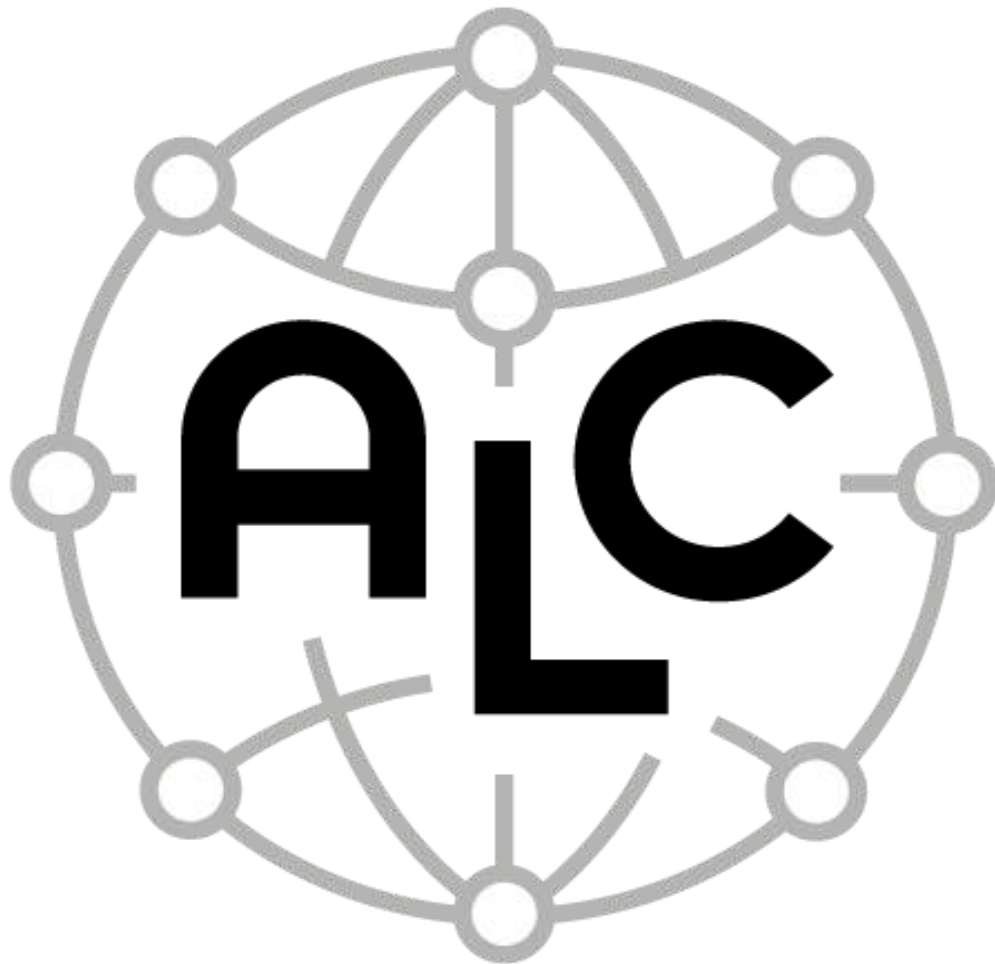


Agile Learning Centers: 2024 Report





The background of the page is a faded photograph of an outdoor basketball court. In the upper right, a basketball hoop and backboard are visible. The court is surrounded by lush green trees. In the lower center, two people are partially visible on the court, one appearing to be in motion. The overall tone is bright and natural.

Who We Are

The ALC Network is a grassroots, open-source organization that ultimately is working towards a world where young people -- and people of all ages -- are free to learn and grow in supportive, diverse communities.

To this end, we keep growing ourselves, tend our local projects, connect with our broader ecosystems, share lessons, offer inspiration, and celebrate invitations to collaborate with partners around the world.

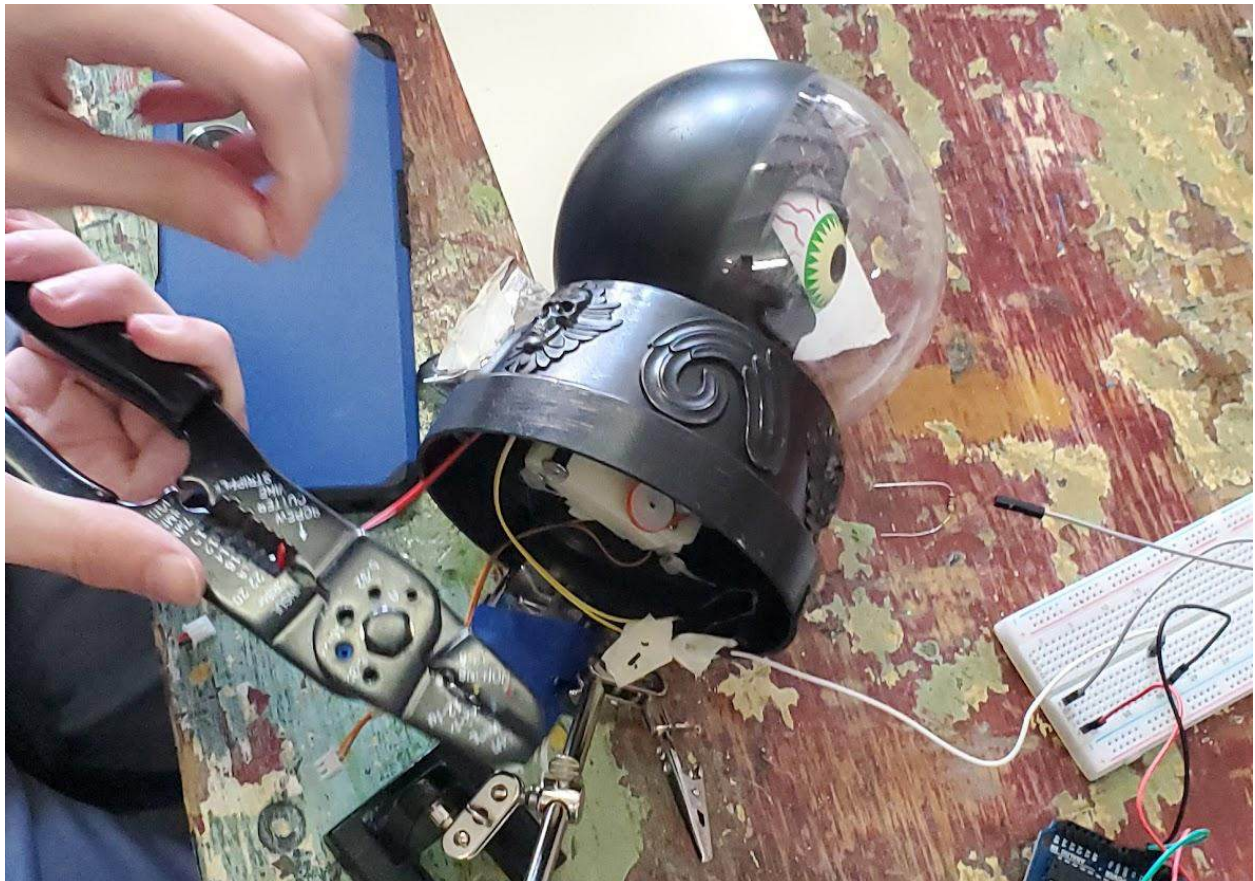
Most ALC Network work has been and continues to be carried out by facilitators and ALC community members who volunteer to share their gifts and energies in support of the larger network and our mission. We host calls, exchanges, and resource shares. We write reports, make graphs, and produce training events. More than the easily measurable work, though, we focus on trusting, accompanying, potentiating, and co-creating. As we imagine and practice for more liberated, fulfilled, and transdisciplinary futures, we intentionally prioritize the care and relational labor that, though broadly devalued at this moment in time, increases the joy, resilience, and meaning-making learners of all ages access through their lives.

Mission

Our mission is to support the operation of Self-Organized Learning Environments. The US registered 501c3 nonprofit Geronimo Education, DBA: “Agile Learning Centers,” is also the holder of the ALC educational model as applied to early childhood, ages 8-18, and continuing education.

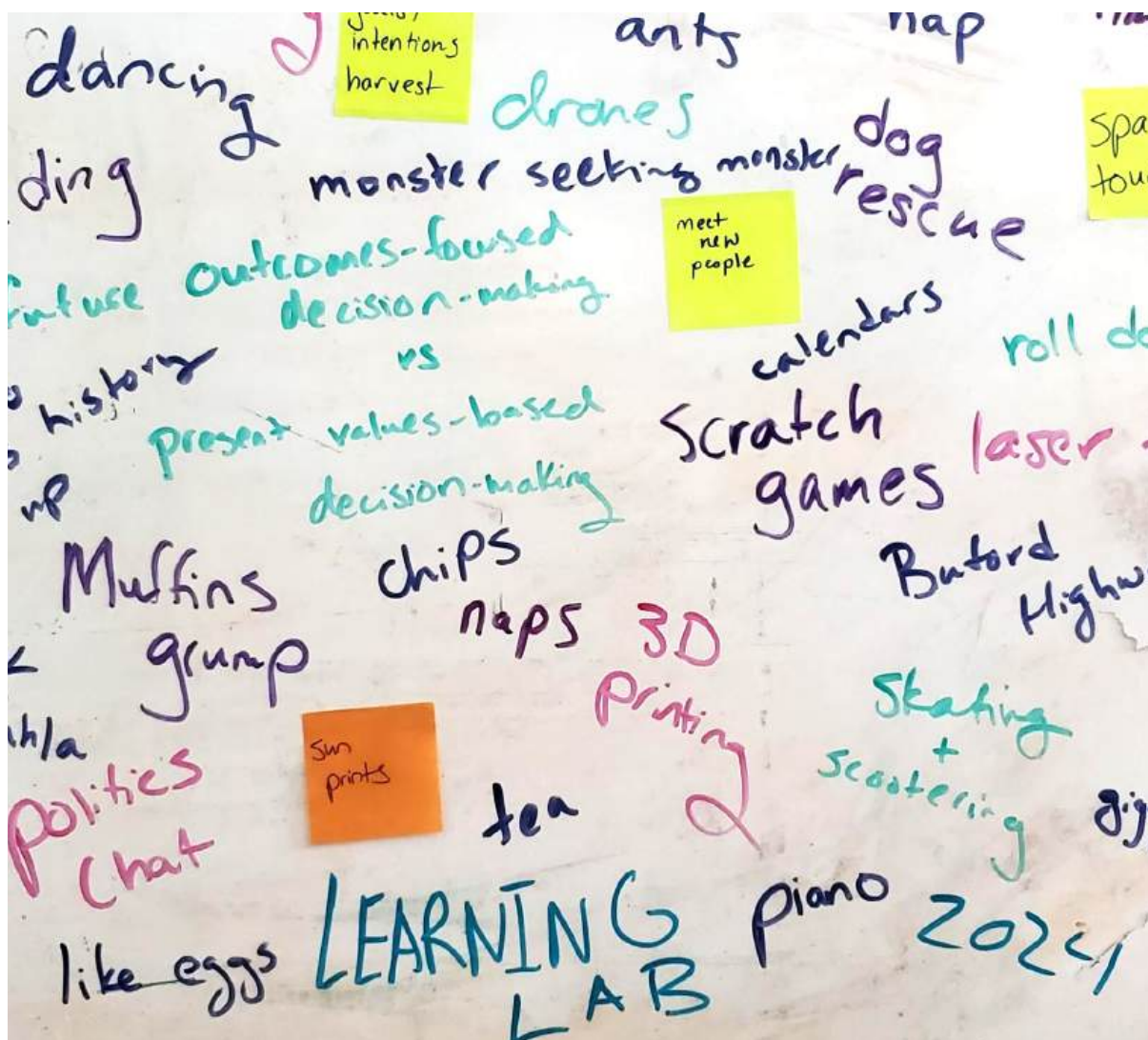
Vision

We envision a future where the understanding that learning is happening all the time radically redefines education. We are building toward the possibility for every person to practice self-direction, self-expression, and community co-creation as they grow. Finally, we imagine that facilitating reflection and sharing among learning communities will aid them in adapting with our continuously changing world.



Path

Established in 2014, the Agile Learning Centers Network continues to grow as a community of learning and practice with each passing year. By building relationships and connections across learning communities, we increase the accessibility of community wisdom and support for all involved, improving the impact, sustainability, and resilience of all projects. By practicing reflection, adaptation, generosity, trust, care, transparency, and responsibility together, we create and practice living in a changed world. Finally, by intentionally nurturing a generous culture and ongoing sharing to increase access to the knowledge held across the collective, we potentiate each other, facilitating ongoing learning, innovation, and adaptation.





Education Evolved

New York City's first Agile Learning Center is an independent school for self-directed learners. Students at Agile Learning Centers individualize their learning within the context of a supportive community. We have adapted simple tools for self-organization and intentional culture creation to support young people in engaging with their passions and curiosities while shaping the environment of the school.



- Located in New York City, NY, NY, US
- Established in 2013
- Open 5 days a week as a full-time microschool serving kids 6 - 18

We're in an expanding year, with facilitators sharing specialized skills, a growing tween cohort, and lots of chances to practice the crucial NYC skill of navigating shared spaces! We currently have 21 kids, 3 full time facilitators, and 2 part time facilitators. And support for admin and foreign languages.

This year we're doing a lot of writing, wax carving, tinkering, and going to the park. We're playing chess, cards, piano, movies, and some classic video games. We're learning to move intentionally when using the internet, playing games with others, and walking to the deli.

Our team includes Ryan Shollenberger, Isa Frost, Nahla Simone, Abby Oulton, Arthur Velwest, and Caitlin McCormick! We post on Instagram when we feel like it. But we publish narrative annual reports every year! Find them and our other publications at: nycagile.org



ALC Mosaic is a Self-Directed Education community anchored at our urban campus in East Charlotte. We provide an environment for liberation where: personal growth flourishes when directed by an individual's own interests and talents, social responsibility emerges from intentionally designing and evolving our culture, and community results from diverse people of all ages practicing consent, conscious communication, and radical love.

- We are in our 12th year of operation, with around 80 students
- This year we purchased over an acre of land adjoining our current property of 1.7 acres
- As Charlotte's urban density increases, we are grateful to have secured enough land to allow us to expand our play yard and have a natural outdoor area
- Legislation in NC allowing for school choice ensures we are able to serve families from all economic backgrounds and have a sustainable future.
- This year we have launched a safe campus initiative and have staff members dedicated to providing resources and learning opportunities for adults and students to examine and dig into our values of inclusion.



**Mosaic
2.0**

What we hold space for:

- A "Schoolhouse" where offerings are made. Facilitators choose what to offer based on student feedback & sometimes we throw in something new to try! The schoolhouse is only open for these offerings to keep the atmosphere calm. Students make their own schedules to decide on what balance of commitment offerings and unstructured time or personal interest pursuits works for them.
- A play yard that holds ample space for outdoor unstructured play, drop in experiences of art, music, sensory play, active games and more. We have climbing structures, climbing trees, swings, slacklines, boulders, tires, a woodworking area, mudkitchen/playhouse, outdoor kitchen & art areas.
- An indoor playroom for literacy activities each morning and open play in the afternoon, with dramatic play, blocks, sensory play, books, art, etc.
- A co-space with a large multipurpose space for gymnastics, indoor group games, large block building, rolling toys, theater & dance offerings.
- A co-working space for adults or teens in the community to work together.

WHO

Our staff includes 20 people overall. Amber & Nancy serve as co-directors. Lacy, Jamie, Doug are full time facilitators. Heather is our admin coordinator and music teacher. Jenique, Anna, Kate Vanessa, Kit, Miguel, are part time facilitators. We have specialty facilitators focused on niche areas as well: Ashlyn & Tyleen (art), Nick (guitar), Katie (anatomy, flow, theater). Sarah provides a daily snack and cleans and beautifies our spaces. Michael deep cleans on the weekends. Tomis is our Director of Operations. And last, but absolutely not least, we have a paid student intern, Luke, who facilitates every afternoon in the play yard and on park trips.



Ad Astra's commitment to self-directed learning and a strong emphasis on community collaboration, positions us as a compelling choice for families seeking a more holistic and engaging educational experience.



- Located in Chuluota, FL USA (East Orlando area)
- Serving Ages. 10-18 years
- Mon.-Thurs. 10 am-3:30 pm
- Occasional Friday field-trips

At Ad Astra ALC, learners set the day, give presentations, and collaborate on group projects and play lots of games. The facilitators lead offerings such as Math Circles, Science experiments, Arts and Crafts, Socratic Circles, and a weekly Cooking Club. This year we have parents leading weekly lessons in Spanish and Neuroscience.



Learners have been interested in 3D printing, coding, crocheting, improv theatre, chess, hiking, group games and more.

This year we have been using Skype a Scientist. We hired an ELA instructor to come in 1 hour twice per week. Ad Astra has been empowering young people to live joyful lives full of wonder for more than four years now!

Meet the Team

3 full time facilitators:

- Marcia Ballentine - Founder
- Joyce Maddeaux - Director
- Hallie Shrestha - Science instructor

Parent volunteers

Paid and unpaid workshop facilitators

22 Learners



Website: adastraalc.com

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/AdAstraALC/>



Maquique Agile Community Center

Maquique is a physical space located in Xalapa, Veracruz, Mexico. It is a community where people can learn, work, collaborate, cocreate, evolve, share, and come together as we uphold the philosophy, tools, and practices of the agile learning model, and other wisdoms we have gathered along the way. The Center is available to hold activities 7 days a week from 6 am to 10 pm

Currently, 10 members sustain the space and rhythms of the communal interactions, and the center is open to receiving new people with varying degrees of involvement. We have a web page where people who are interested in becoming new members can find all the necessary information and we are constantly advertising the activities that are open to the public on our Instagram profile



<https://www.instagram.com/maquique.xalapa/>



<https://www.laria.org/maquique>



We opened our doors to the public in June of this year, however we had been planning and designing since 2023. In 2023 we received a microgrant from an anonymous donor which allowed us to start moving the energy to make this project happen.

Before opening we held four MaPas de Crianza gatherings, a project that was born at about the same time as Maquique with the intention of gathering parents in ALCs and other alternative education modalities to share common experiences and knowledge.



During 2024 we cleaned and organized the house that now is our home. We have held game nights, communal work days, community potlucks, ice plunges, meditation sessions, workshops and community laboratories.

These laboratories are spaces where we invite people to come live an "agile day" where we play together, connect, cocreate, clean, and share intentions and reflections together.



Mont-Libre: Centre éducatif agile de Montréal



Mont-Libre is an agile learning centre downtown Montreal. The notions of democracy, agility, consent and self-direction guide how our bilingual community operates. Mont-Libre is part of the Agile Learning Network. At the centre, children are free to be the authors of their own path.

We currently have 21 kids, 1 fulltime facilitator, and 3 part-time facilitators.

The activities that take place and that are chosen by our youth tend to vary from one season to the others. During warmer times, we spend more time playing games like dodge-ball, basket-ball, Marco Polo and our new hide-and-seek tag infection. During the winter, we try to go to the rink to skate and on a hill nearby to go sledding. Otherwise, in general, many are playing D&D, cards, chess, foosball, ping pong, video games, attending workshops on different topics (current events, history, coding, writing...), cooking, painting, making buttons, taking

part in bake sales,



Nerf-gun battles, cushion fights and book clubs. Different democratic processes shape how we go about our days both at the centre and on our online community on Discord.

- Montlibre is located in Montreal on the St-Hubert Plaza
- Open 4 days a week to registered homeschoolers serving kids 9-18.
- Established in 2017



Our team includes Christine Perry, Seiko Watanabe, Kai Dobbertin, Camille Price-Piché and Marc-Alexandre Prud'homme. We post on Instagram and on Facebook when we feel like it. To learn more, you can visit our website: www.montlibre.org.

Heartwood ALC



Self-Directed Education that Empowers and Liberates

Heartwood Agile Learning center is an independent school for self-directed learners. Our community embraces the joy of learning, the variety of young people's paths and goals, and the creative potential of collaboration.

- Located in Clarkston, GA, USA (metro Atlanta area)
- Established in 2016
- Open 5 days a week as a full-time microschool serving kids 6 - 17

We're in a re-building year, with new staff, new students, and new governance experiments in that we're excited about. We currently have 13 kids, 2 full time facilitators, and 2 part time facilitators. And 1 cat.

This year we're doing a lot of painting, dancing, making music, and sculpting with clay. We're playing gaga ball, kickball, and table top games. We like being together, especially when there's food and singing involved.



Our team includes Gabby Williams, Abby Oulton, Crystal Byrd Farmer, B. English, Kathryn Brannon and lots of supportive folks from our broader community! We post on social media sometimes, but it's not our thing. Check out our website: heartwoodalc.org



Fut Infinito exists as the first ALC dedicated to Fútbol (soccer) . We started in 2023 in rural Yucatán, MX as a Self-Directed Learning Community that uses Fútbol as means to create contexts for de-polarization and Unity. We play in peace and evolve through play.

2024 brought great things for our project!:



We had our first Summer Camp and Facilitators Immersion!



And we started our Learning community in the Gift Economy in Rancho Viejo, Veracruz!!! Currently with over 30 members...



Much gratitude to everyone who supports us to continue creating this spaces for peace and play!



To Meet Change,
Make Change,
And Shape Change...



To whatever extent we can, we influence, prepare for, witness, and respond to constant changes in and around us. It can feel, sometimes, overwhelming.

Barry Lopez tells a story in *Arctic Dreams* about learning that icebergs sometimes roll and flip in the water, suddenly and dramatically disturbing everything around them before settling down again. This, to him, seems like it would be an exceptional event and a crisis for those impacted. A terrifying change. Something to be dreaded. But then he discovers the local guide he's listening to doesn't share this perspective. Yes, a rolling iceberg brings upheaval. And to know the place is to understand that they just do that sometimes. Occasional upheaval is an anticipated, prepared for, and collectively acknowledged part of life, not a disruption from outside of it.

Learning to expect cycles with change and also rest in the in-between times, accepting that at some unknown point in the future things will always spark, shudder, and then settle once again, helps us stay engaged and adaptable as we meet whatever futures unfold around us. With this more open and relaxed attention, we can learn to recognize rhythms and phases. We can notice the transformations that accompany each new iteration of a cycle. We can practice a kind of alchemy, creating rituals to help us make meaning of our lives and our relationships. There is, in murkiness and upheaval, exquisite possibility waiting for those of us who move through with acceptance rather than resistance.

-Abby Oulton

**We choose
practices that let
us see ourselves
and our
surroundings more
clearly.**



“Our earth is round, and, among other things, that means that you and I can hold completely different points of view and both be right. The difference of our positions will show stars in your window I cannot even imagine. Your sky may burn with light, while mine, at the same moment, spreads beautiful to darkness. Still we must choose how we separately corner the circling universe of our experience. Once chosen, our cornering will determine the message of any star and darkness we encounter.”

— June Jordan



**We support our
own adaptation
and resilience.**

“she wasn't doing it to be recognized.
she did it because it filled her up.

she just carefully planted those
seeds.

she just kept picking up those
pieces.

she just kept visiting those old ones.
she just kept speaking her language
and sitting with her mother.

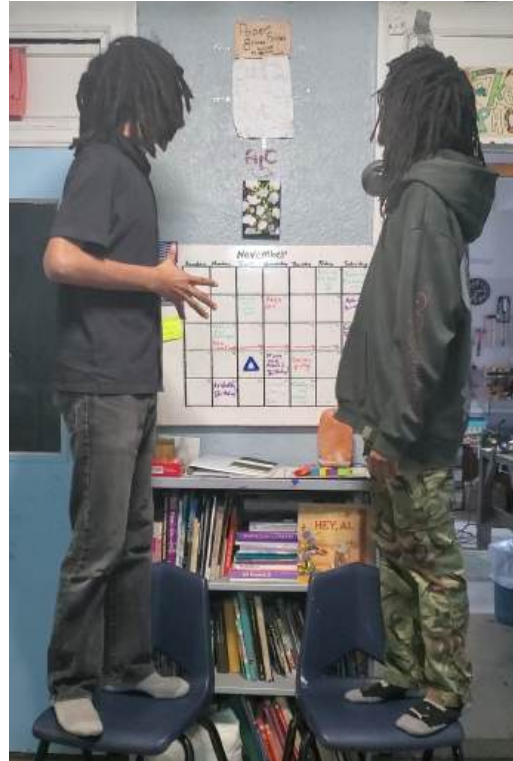
she just kept on lighting that
seventh fire every time it went out.

she just kept making things a little
bit better, until they were.”

— Leanne Betasamosake Simpson



**We help build
collective
intelligence and
wisdom, tending
our connections
and ties as we
bring each other
along.**



“Help and be helped. Service is a form of human connection that reminds us of our value and purpose in life. Giving and receiving, both, strengthen our social bonds—checking on a neighbor, seeking advice, even just offering a smile to a stranger six feet away, all can make us stronger.”

— Vivek H. Murthy



Those in ALCs have many different practices to support ongoing co-creation. Communities often set norms of meeting daily in small groups to share intentions and updates, gathering every cycle as a whole group to coordinate scheduling and check-in on the group's culture, regularly hosting staff and community meetings to orient the organization, and maintaining shared spaces so they invite inspiration and action. Scheduling pauses for reflection personally, in small groups, and as a collective supports folks' belonging, understanding, and sense of purpose. Establishing curiosity, experimentation, and generosity as foundational to life sets communities up to meet change as a familiar ongoing state we participate in. And of course we still find lots of time to play, work, and learn together in spontaneous ways around our regular practices.

2024, among facilitators in the ALC Network and beyond, brought into focus issues that echo those we considered in our first years but that have taken on new complexity and weight in the past 10 years. The technology and information landscapes have changed dramatically. Studies on anxiety and loneliness, in general but particularly among young people, indicate a deepening crisis. Education spaces face increasingly extreme fluctuations in restrictions and resource access as politicians, corporations, and families vie for authority over the public's options. What are engaged and caring people, particularly those committed to stewarding youth-focused centers and programs to do?

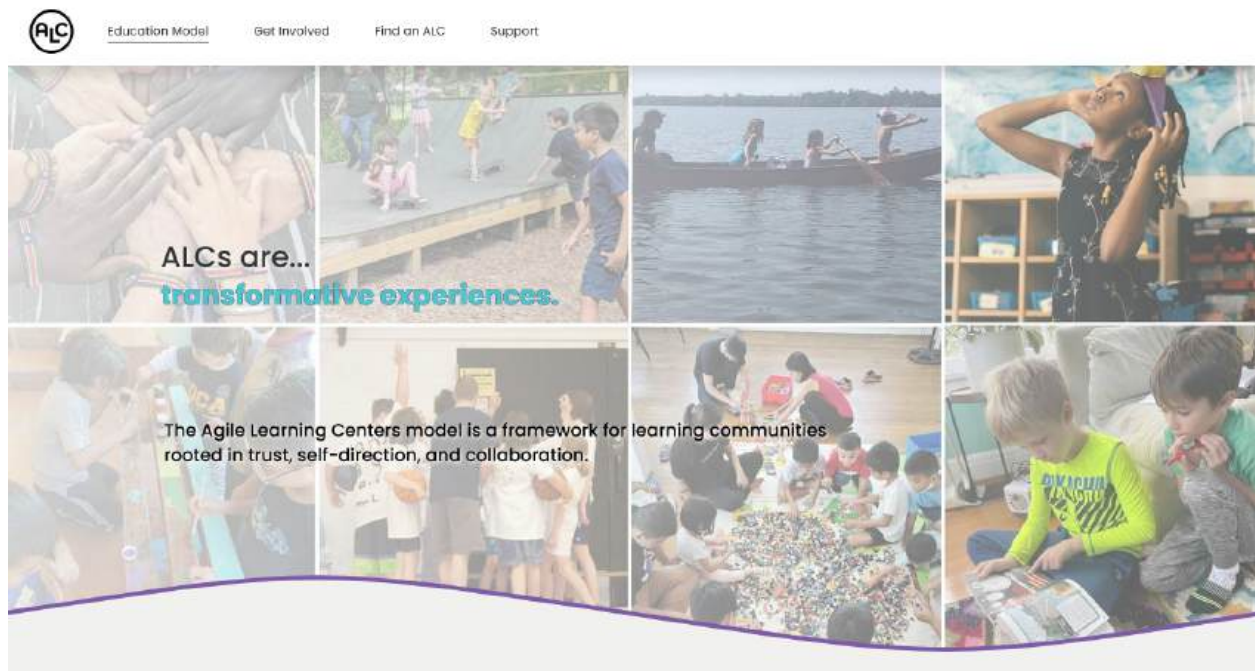
The network started with folks who were enthusiastic about supporting young people's agency and self-possession in the changing world, their mental and emotional well-being as they and the world change, and their access to education spaces designed to nurture rather than diminish their complexity. In a way, we've been asking related questions about what to do, how to move and be given these goals and the movements of the wider world, continually since our start. We have been and will continue to carry these questions.

Most recently, Douglas Rushkoff stated in an interview that in the face of recent changes, particularly where technology and its influence are concerned, he's most hopeful about responsive spaces and practices that denaturalize the asymmetrical power dynamics we've normalized, that spark agency or reconnection to their agency in people, that let us coordinate "re-coding" the world to co-design it differently around us, and that inspire awe in us so we stay connected to our humanity and hope. Listening and watching across the ALC Network, and trusting there's much more happening than what's observable from any one position, it seems like we're generally meeting Rushkoff's criteria. In the coming year, we'll need to reflect on how we're doing and how we can better apply what we've been learning. We'll study and experiment and reflect and share. We'll keep working, separately and together, aiming to sustain ourselves and keep growing as we build towards the better futures we're dreaming of for our young people... and ourselves.



Some 2024 Highlights

- Gatherings in 2024 included trainings in New York City and in Atlanta, Radical Learning's deschooling intensive in Charlotte, the LATAM network's annual encuentro in Veracruz, and more!
- Agile for Collaboration published their repository of agile learning resources, adding to the content they already created in the course of achieving all the objectives for their multi-year project. The repository and more can be found at agileforcollaboration.eu.
- Abby Oulton converted ALC-NYC's *Self-Directed Education and the Agile Learning Approach* web course into an e-book and the Starter Kit into an audiobook. Both projects are up at nycagile.org.
- Tomis Parker moved our website and gave it an updated look after 10 years! Up at agilelearningcenters.org.



Mapping Our Reach

The ALC Network has grown to include over 120 official members around the world, as well as many collaborators or adaptors who are less official but just as welcome. Members include learning centers, schools, part-time programs, homeschool resource centers, families, cooperatives, practicing facilitators, field trip meet-up groups, and more!



ALC Network Member Organizations as mapped November 28, 2024

Since last year's report, our Starter Kit was downloaded 479 times, bringing the total number of recorded downloaders to date up to 7069. Version 3.0 of the Starter Kit and Facilitation Guide are both available for free in English and Spanish on our website.



Holding Unfoldi...

9 40

Listen to version 3.0 of the Agile Learning Centers Network Starter Kit, from 2021!
Original text in English and Spanish at agilelearningcenters.gitbook.io/agile-lea...-kit-v3-0

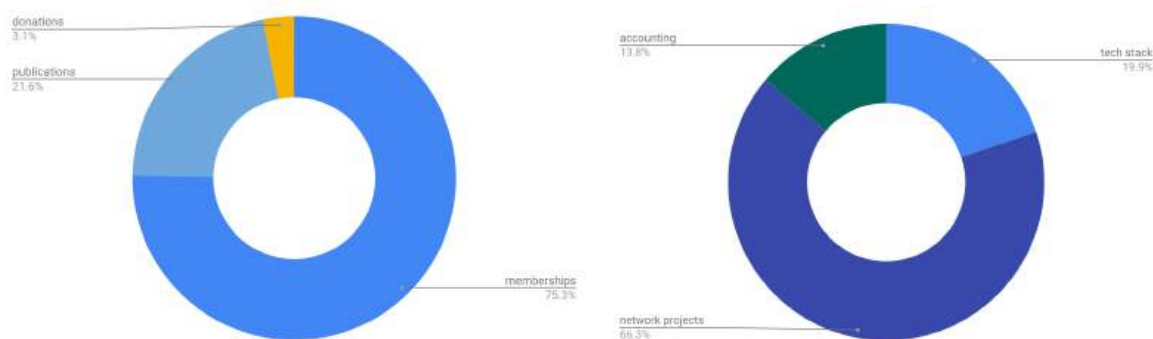
- | | | |
|---|--|------|
|  | 1 Starter Kit: Opening | ▶ 30 |
|  | 2 Starter Kit: So You Want to Start an ALC | ▶ 25 |
|  | 3 Starter Kit: Tools | ▶ 24 |
|  | 4 Starter Kit: Principles Update | ▶ 21 |

Now the Starter Kit is also available as an audiobook through podcasting websites!

Finances

As of the composition of this report, 2024 expenses for the ALC Network totalled \$9,113 and income totalled \$10,164 (USD). Spending this year mostly went to upgrading our tech stack and financially supporting groups of facilitators in hosting gatherings, particularly folks in Latin America. Compared to previous years, we received fewer donations and made more from our publications.

In previous years, providing micro grants to support retreats, gatherings, and exchanges has been a significant budgetary priority for us, with such events also inspiring increases in donations and membership registrations. With this year's focus on updating, maintaining, and publishing new resources, we received less of that new interest in membership and the related income than in previous years. This is to be expected during years where we focus more on internal matters and documenting than on gathering and broadcasting. We still end the year having received more funding than needed to cover our expenses.



Breakdowns of our 2024 cash flow: revenue (left) and expenses (right)

* After the preparation of this section, we made additional payments for ongoing administration and the translation of this report into Spanish. *

Our Board



Mercer Carlin is a founding parent from the original Agile Learning Center in East Harlem, NYC. Mercer's passion for and commitment to self directed learning were much of the reason the Manhattan Free School was transformed into the first Agile Learning Center rather than simply folding in 2012. Her son graduated from the school in June of 2020.

Mercer spent 21 years in corporate America as an Executive at a company named TRANZACT. She has also done coaching, consulting, and facilitation work both as a freelancer and with an organization named ThinkHuman. Her passion has long been to create human focused, empowering cultures in the workplace.

In 2016, Mercer joined our board, left her job, and began focusing on community building in and among ALCs. She currently co-hosts a number of calls connecting change-makers from within the network with folks from partner initiatives, offers mediation and coaching, attends and supports facilitator trainings, and is a vocal self-directed education advocate, both online and in the world.



Tomis Parker has been working directly with self-directed education models since 2008. After 4 years with the Manhattan Free School and some freelancing in EdTech, Tomis worked as part of the ALC-NYC founding team to transform the Manhattan Free School into the first Agile Learning Center. In 2013, Tomis began running the ALC in NYC, where he remained the Director through the 2015-16 school year. During that time, he oversaw the launch of the Agile Learning Centers brand, trained new leadership, consulted with start-ups, co-organized the first ALC Facilitator training program, and co-founded the ALC Network. In 2014 he began working out of ALC Mosaic, where he was instrumental in the school purchasing their current property and constructing their co-working space. He continues to serve ALC Mosaic as Director of Operations. In 2016, he project-managed the launch of the Alliance for Self-Directed Education, and remains a board member of that organization. Outside of his work in Self-Directed Education, Tomis also does facilitation, coaching, and consulting with Grow Dialogue, and project management for a peer-to-peer web project called Flux Social.

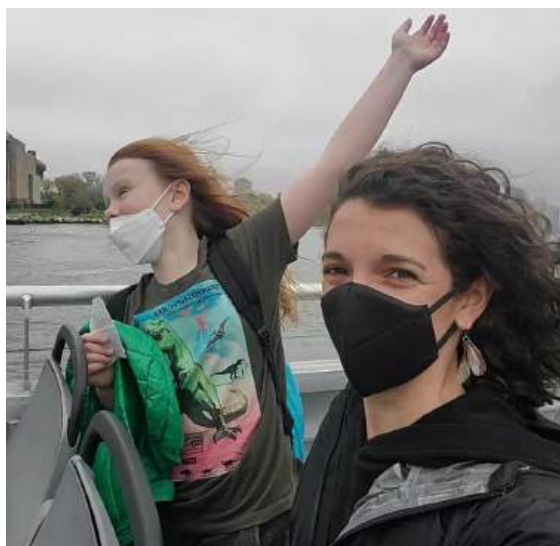


Rubén Darío participated in the 2012 Emerging Leader Labs where ALCs, among other projects, went through incubation. There he became familiar with self-directed learning and the intentional creation of culture. Since then he has continued to facilitate the creation of self-directed learning fields and communities..

He has incorporated practices and principles of agility and self-direction to organizations of different natures: sports teams, recreation groups, government, families, companies, artistic projects, intentional communities, etc. around the world.

Today he holds spaces for deschooling and true expression, in diverse formats, and continues seeding contexts and infrastructures for compassion, play and Love, in order to facilitate transitions from separation to Unity.

www.rubendario.fun



Abby Oulton started volunteering with ALC-NYC in the fall of 2013, and joined the staff a year later. She had just finished 6 years of exploring how formal and informal education projects change societies -- and spending lots of time with kids.

After becoming one of ALC-NYC's directors, she started planning and co-hosting trainings, providing support for facilitators across the network, and sharing stories from the NYC flagship as the network grew. In summer of 2017 she joined the ALC Network board with the intention of adjusting operations to better reflect the scale and diversity of the expanded community.

She continues to mentor, consult, mediate, research, write, have too many spreadsheets, and accompany folks in their learning... both at ALCs and in other collaborative learning spaces.

Next Steps

Ongoing Goals

1. Reflect and adapt network resources and priorities to better support projects succeeding in a context full of possibilities and precarity that weren't impacting projects the same in our first decade.
2. Support those struggling to legitimize self-directed education and ALCs to their local institutions by continuing to create and share relevant publications.
3. Support cross-project gatherings and trainings, both those designed to deepen the learning of those already involved in ALCs and those intended to offer an introduction to curious folks from the general public.
4. Increase accessibility and usefulness of our communication platforms and websites by intentionally translating and changing them in response to community needs.
5. Continue to increase coherence by strategically funding maintenance work and regional retreats for facilitators across projects to connect and play together.

Support our work!

1. Practice authentic and respectful relationships with learners of all ages (that includes you, too!)
2. Become a member of the network to get access to calls, Slack, emails, gatherings, and other events!
3. Donate by going to agilelearningcenters.org and clicking "Support"
4. Get in touch about sponsoring an upcoming conference or training
5. Share our resources, social media posts, and story with your friends

Connect with us!

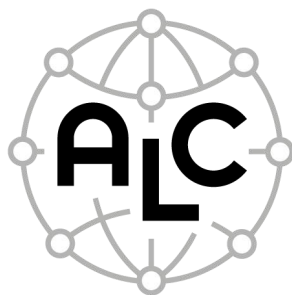
1. Check out the free, open-source publications shared on our website
2. Sign up for an individual or organization membership
3. Host a workshop or training in your community
4. Find a local ALC or ALC Start-up and say "Hi!"
5. Attend a workshop or training



Thank you!

**Feeling curious, inspired, or generous?
We'd love to hear from you.**

**Find us at agilelearningcenters.org
or email us at info@alc.network!**



Compiled by Abby Oulton and Rubén Darío

December 2024