

ALF (Agile Learning Facilitators)

Training Handbook 2014.2

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Introduction to the culture and language used in ALF training

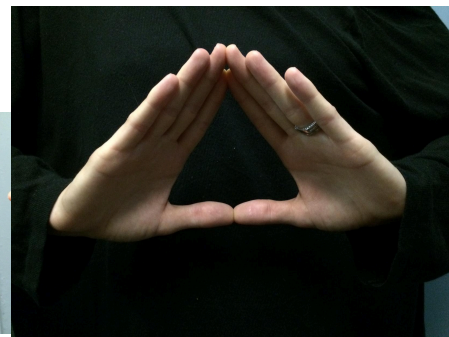
In this training setting we will work to create the same intentional culture that we do in an Agile Learning Center. The goal is to provide maximum support with minimal structure and to open a space where all participants feel safe and empowered to contribute. The structure we do employ is used with this goal in mind.

Group Agreements

When we decide together what structures to use and practices to engage in, we make agreements to highly value those things. We can only trust the group when these agreements are upheld. Punctuality and passing a talking stick are two examples of group agreements that demonstrate the value that we place on respect of the group.

Hand Signals

In order to keep discussions productive and efficient, we employ hand-signals that serve as visual communication. When we speak one-on-one with each other, we rely on non-verbal communication cues that don't always translate well to a group setting. Hand signals supply the group with instant feedback without interrupting a speaker. Hand signals make non-verbal communication explicit and deliberate by replacing subtle cues with intentional, well-defined ones.



“Delta /Change-up” - a call to attention that the group process may need to be GameShifted or that the current process agreements are not being honored. A person can give this hand signal so others can have a chance to wrap up what they're saying before they say what change-up they see is needed. Sometimes the sign is enough to shift people's awareness and behavior back on the intended track.



“Twinkle fingers / This friend speaks my mind” - this signal is done with wiggling fingers and demonstrates strong resonance with what is being spoken.



“Got ya / You have been heard” - This signal is held over the heart and means that the listener has understood the speaker’s point. It includes a gentle nudge that the speaker may move on and release it to the group. It is often helpful when the speaker is repeating a point in different words. If they know they are understood, they know they can move on. For example, this explanation may have warranted a “got ya” sign a sentence or two ago. The explanation continues in order to be sure the point is driven home, but if someone was here to utilize the “got ya” sign, it would have saved us all some valuable reading time.

Icebreakers, Energizers, and Connection Exercises

Icebreakers are activities that help us start the process of getting to know one another. Energizers include a physical activity component and serve to increase the energy of the group. Connection exercises help establish relationship and foster trust between participants. There are too many possible activities to list, but we provide the following as suggestions:

Pass the clap - In this energizer we start by standing in a circle, and one person claps once toward the person to either the right or left. The clap is passed around the circle as quickly as possible, moving from person to person in a circular fashion. The direction can be reversed by blocking the clap by crossing arms in front of the chest. In slightly more advanced play, the clap can be “shazam-ed” across the circle by making eye contact with any person in the circle and clap-pointing toward them while saying the word “Shazam!” When played well, this game can create a fun energy and interesting sound and visual effects.

zip-zap-zoom - Very similar to pass the clap, the goal of this game to pass an imaginary relay baton around the group for as long as possible without letting it drop. The relay baton can only be passed using the instructions “Zip,” “Zap” or “Zoom.”

Zip = pass the relay baton in the same direction of travel.

Zap = change the direction of travel of the relay baton.

Zoom = jump the relay baton to anybody by keeping eye contact.

The group stands in a circle and the relay baton is passed around using the “Zip,” “Zap” or “Zoom” instructions. Passing the relay baton must be with lots of body movement and hand gestures.

Trust falls - Most people are familiar with trust falls: one person closes their eyes and falls, and others catch them before they hit the floor. It is a challenge to the person falling to trust that they will be caught in time. A trust fall is a simple energizer and connection exercise combined.

“ME!” - The game of ME! turns trust-falling into a group activity. The entire group moves around the space in a random fashion, and when someone is feeling ready, they raise their hand, say, “Me!” and start to fall. It is up to the group to move quickly to catch the person. As soon as they have been caught, the group starts to move randomly again. Sometimes two or more people declare “Me!” at the same time, which can create a fun challenge for the group. People fragile in their physical body might choose to abstain from this activity.

“If you really knew me...” - Described as “Truth or Dare without the Dare,” this is a challenge to share something about yourself with the group that is as personal and authentic as possible.

Belly-laugh-jiggle game - One person lies down on their back, and another person lies their head on the first person’s belly. This is repeated until everyone is lying their head on another person’s belly. Then everyone starts to laugh. The laughter may be forced at first, but will shortly become genuine.

Animal noises - Participants stand in a circle and take turns stating their names and favorite animal. In a second go around the circle, everyone makes the noise that their animal makes. Then, for about two minutes, everyone moves about the room pretending to be their animal.

Clearing

When we arrive in the morning, we are often carrying with us stresses and/or preoccupying thoughts. In order to let those things go so we can focus on the tasks at hand and be present in our relationships with each other, it can be helpful to “clear” and release anything that might be weighing us down mentally or emotionally. Clearing is usually done in a circle in a pass-the-stick fashion and might include statements like, “I got stressed out due to heavy traffic on my way in this morning,” or “It was hard to leave my baby today.” Clearing should not be viewed as an

opportunity to share stories of trauma or elicit pity; anything shared should be for the purpose of letting that stress go, so we can get back to the purpose for which we came.

Clearing is an opportunity to practice awareness of and responsibility for our state of being. This way, we can get a sense of one another that day and be prepared to be present and creative together.

Speak and Release

We can say, “That ALF speaks my mind” instead of or in addition to “twinkle-fingers” if we feel a strong need to reiterate what someone else has said. Rather than repeating a thought in our own words, we can use this shorthand to say, “This is what I wanted to say myself.” We trust the group to hear this statement as a valuable contribution on its own.

Sense of the meeting

In discussions, instead of requiring individual votes to reach unanimous decisions, we often use a concept called “sense of the meeting.” The “sense of the meeting” is generally expressed by the facilitator during a discussion. Once a topic has been covered, and the facilitator has a feel from the group that a general agreement moving forward has been reached, they may say, “I have a sense of the meeting that we are comfortable with the decision to take (x) action related to this topic.” The facilitator can clarify with the group to be sure of the sense of the meeting, and disagreeing group members may bring an aspect of the topic back into discussion, but generally the “sense of the meeting” is stated after all viewpoints have been discussed. The sense of the meeting statement provides a clarifying summary of the decision reached through the discussion so that the decided upon action is made explicit at the conclusion of the topic.

Introduction to Agile Culture Model of Education (ACME)

Agile Culture is a management philosophy concerned with the intentional design of culture within a group, using tools from lean management and agile software development.

The Agile Culture model of education is an approach characterized by self-direction, generating sharable value, and creating an intentional culture of autonomy and engagement.

History

ACME emerged from the intention to bring the heart of “free schooling” and unschooling into the 21st Century, leveraging leading-edge practices in self-organization and culture design proven in the business world. The Manhattan Free and Mosaic schools both found themselves bogged down by rules and lengthy processes which seem embedded in the democratic free school approach. Since their goal was to maximize learning opportunities, they needed to help the students reclaim their time and creative energy from lengthy meetings, and streamline decision-making and organizing in light and agile ways.

Entrepreneur Arthur Brock stepped in as director of the Manhattan Free School in September of 2012. He brought practices from his background in Agile software development and culture-hacking tools from Emerging Leader Labs. Some simple steps, such as quick stand-up meetings for sharing intentions; making requests and orchestrating schedules; implementing kanban boards for supporting, tracking and documenting those intentions; and using Gameshifting to streamline meetings and keep everyone engaged in the process, brought rapid transformation of the culture. Students had more time to follow their passions, relationships within the schools improved, and a culture of clarity and intention was created.

About

In Agile Culture we often talk about “holding space” for the community of learners. We can illustrate this with a mental picture of an empty room versus a full room. In a room full of things, you can ask, “what can happen in here?” and there could be many possible answers of all sorts of things you could do with the things in the room. (For example, “I see blocks, we could build a house.” “I see art supplies, we could make a poster.”) But in an empty room, if you ask, “What can happen in here?” the answer is, “Anything.” This is what we mean when we say we are “holding the space for children to explore.” Once we put a bunch of our own stuff in the room, we limit the room’s potential. Instead, we let children decide what to bring into the room, so anything is possible.

Traditional education assumes that all children of a certain age should have the same basic knowledge and skills. In our model we look to the individual child; they know what they are ready for and when by self-selection of activities.

21st century education

The world is exploding with new information and high specialization. For children to learn to navigate this fast changing landscape, they need a chance to actually be at the helm of their learning experience, to practice making decisions and discover their gifts, talents and passions.

Children are natural learners. They are at their peak of mental flexibility and ability to assimilate ideas, insights and exploration. It is senseless to consume their days and evenings with the memorization and regurgitation of data for standardized tests on a narrow selection of subjects.

We live in an age where information is at our fingertips. Far more important are the skills of finding it, filtering it, integrating it, and using it in new and creative ways to build something valuable.

The ability to quickly translate a vision or idea into tangible results has always been a valuable skill. In today's rapidly evolving world, it is a fundamental capacity of the leaders in every field. Daily activity at an Agile Learning Center is organized around this understanding.

Collaboration

Most major projects can't be done alone, but working together can be frustrating and dysfunctional when the conditions are contrived and the participants not invested. Effective collaboration happens when people care about what they are doing and have the tools to adjust the social dynamics so they can work together successfully to produce results. When collaboration can be experienced in this manner, people access each other's strengths and experience a deep sense of accomplishment.

Purpose

Many adults express regret that they were unable to identify their passion earlier in life. What are you here to do? How do you discover your purpose? One thing we know is that you won't find it without ample opportunities to explore. If you can't try doing what you think you might love, you won't find out whether or not you really love it.

We regularly hear from parents that they wish they'd had the opportunity to explore their passions a lot earlier so they could have developed a greater sense of purpose.

Maybe they didn't need to change their college major 5 times, graduate with a degree they didn't really use, then finally figure out what they're about in a mid-life crisis.

By high school age, most of our students have figured out what their core passions are and are actively organizing their future around those things. The sooner a child is given the time and space to pursue their talents and passions, the sooner they can develop mastery in one or more of these domains. The achievement of mastery is itself a transferable skill which provides confidence to move through the world with a sense of purpose and awareness of the difference you can make.

Self-generative autonomy

In the last twenty years, the American workforce has completely changed. 80% of new jobs are in small business and freelance. Gone are the days of plentiful jobs working for large businesses, in manufacturing, and assembly lines. Our educational system was designed for the old economy, where some of the best skills a child could master would be to show up and do exactly as they were told. We now need creative thinkers who identify needs, think of solutions, and know how to make things happen. An effective learning cycle will fully integrate those skills.

Learning 2.0

The cycle of learning is not complete until it is shared with others. Many people experience that it is upon teaching someone else that they have fully integrated what they have learned themselves. In today's world, this teaching can be extended in the form of words, images, video, and digital interaction with others. In this way, children can provide value to the greater world at a scale previously not possible. The 21st century demands that we generate some evidence that learning has taken place. Our upgrade to the "report card" model includes the creation of digital portfolios.

Digital Literacy

Literacy in the form of reading and writing is a fundamental necessity for a democratic society. As more communication, collaboration, and decision-making move online, native fluency in digital media is just as vital to participating in the world as textual literacy has been for recent generations. The vast amount of facts and figures we now have at our fingertips replaces the need for memorization with a need for navigation and critical thinking skills. Digital literacy is not just material to be taught in a weekly computer class. We integrate technology into the daily cycles of learning, providing our children with citizenship in the digital society.

Culture Creation

Many people imagine that culture is something that we must simply accept, that it is unchangeable. The fact is, we can create and change culture intentionally, especially within a smaller community, such as a business or school. This phenomenon has become more apparent since the advent of the internet, which made a variety and diversity of subcultures more visible. Embedding values and behaviors into the culture allows us to operate without an oppressive number of rules or overbearing structure. When the created culture becomes the new norm, the need to manipulate others' behavior through punishments, incentives, or rewards is diminished. Because everyone is participating in the culture creation, everyone is invested in supporting it. Tools that facilitate intentional culture creation serve to make implicit cultural norms explicit, help us practice new patterns of behavior through social agreement, and enhance accountability using increased visibility of intentions and results.

Agile Culture Model of Education Four Roots

The Agile Culture model of education holds these four values at its core. They drive all that we do.

1. **Learning:** Learning is natural. It's happening all the time
2. **Self-Direction:** People learn best when they make their own decisions. (And children are people!)
3. **Experience:** People learn more from their culture and environment than from the content they are taught.
4. **Purpose:** People grow through cycles of intention, creation, reflection, and sharing.

Structures and Tools of ALCs

Kanban

Kanban is Japanese for "card signal." A basic Kanban is divided into Backlog, Ready, Doing, and Done columns and utilizes sticky notes to populate the board with ideas, intentions, work in progress (WIP), and items that have been done. The Backlog

consists of things students want to do, explore, or create. On a daily basis, each person's list of possibilities are evaluated, prioritized, visualized, and eventually pulled into the "Doing" column. The kanban board is a flexible tool that can be adjusted according to what works best for its user.

Two guidelines of Kanban are Visualize Your Work and Limit Your Work In Progress (WIP). When we visualize our work, it creates a path for actually completing what we intend. It helps us to stay focused and creates accountability for ourselves. We limit our work in progress in order to deeply engage in what we are doing. Using the Kanban teaches us how to effectively prioritize and honor our time by making conscious choices about what we are engaging in.

Here is a simple sample Kanban board:



Set-the-week Meeting

Set-the-week is the first stand-up meeting of the week, which includes introducing and creating the schedule for any opportunities that week. If resource people are coming in to the school at a particular time to hold a class, it is important that this make it onto the schedule so other more flexible activities can be planned around the special offerings.

This is also the time when we identify projects that are going to take multiple days to accomplish, and set weekly intentions. We might set time aside each day to work

toward that goal. This is sometimes referred to as a “weekly sprint.” For example, the students may want to perform a play at the end of the week. At the set-the-week meeting, they might decide that every day at 10am, they will hold rehearsal until lunchtime. Milestones can be set so we can track progress toward the goal, ie. on Tuesday we will do blocking, by Thursday everyone must know their lines. At the end of the week, we assess the progress that was made and document it.

Offerings Board

The Offerings Board lists available class offerings, opportunities, and resources. ALFs, resource people in the community and the children themselves can contribute offerings. A resource person in the community may offer to teach their craft or host a field trip to allow children to experience it. The offerings board is discussed at the weekly set-up meeting. It can inspire kids to expand their horizons.

Stand-up meeting (morning intentions)

The daily stand-up meetings happen in the morning and are conducted, not surprisingly, while participants stand. Standing keeps the energy up at the beginning of the day and gets everyone in the mode to **do**. In this meeting, each group member states their intentions for the day and makes any requests for support they may need. A whole-group kanban board is often used at this meeting. This simple process takes only about ten to fifteen minutes, but serves an important purpose of starting each day with intention and accountability. By continually engaging in this practice, students are cultivating highly useful skills in time-management, teamwork, self-awareness and self-assessment.

Scrum

A scrum is a period of about five to ten minutes before a stand-up meeting in which people do the groundwork for setting the schedule and deciding what they intend to do, so they are ready to announce intentions when stand-up starts. Scrum is the time to make requests of others pertaining to activities for the day. Scrum is usually noisy and seems a bit chaotic as everyone seeks to quickly prepare for the stand-up.

Closing Meeting / Afternoon Reflection

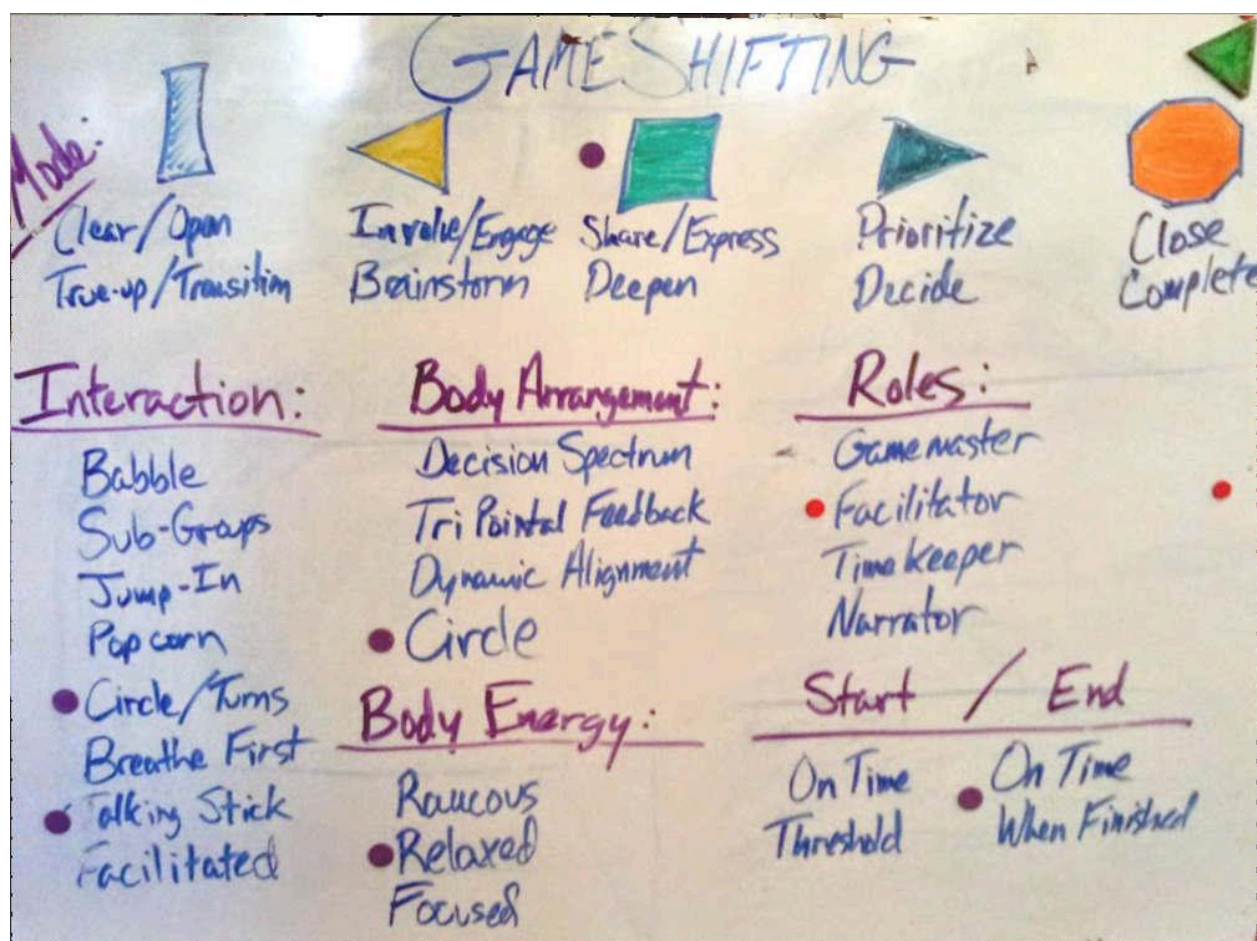
The feedback loop that begins with Morning Intentions comes full circle at the end of the day with a sit-down meeting. We take this time to ask, “Did we accomplish what we intended to?” If so, how? If not, why not? This is an important bookend to the morning Stand-up meeting, allowing for daily reflection on individual and group productivity. This feedback cycle that provides each learner with the awareness they need to constantly improve. The Afternoon Reflection takes about 20 minutes and

gives everyone an opportunity to share what they did that day, gratitudes, and any other reflections. A talking/listening stick is often utilized.

Gameshifting

Gameshifting is a tool that allows a community to better facilitate meetings. Part of its purpose is to make the implicit social rules explicit, and thus give permission to change them. It can help the group alter its dynamic so it can function more efficiently to accomplish different sorts of tasks. The fancy word for this is “polymorphism”: taking many forms. Groups often get stuck in singular patterns: the teacher is in charge, the boss must be pleased, tip toe around the executive secretary, some people talk and others listen. When groups get stuck in those patterns, creativity and the ability to adapt are impaired. While a singular existing pattern might be usable for one type of outcome, it limits the group to that one kind of outcome. Being able to intentionally change the patterns helps groups engage polymorphically: they can take many forms, and achieve many kinds of outcomes. The gameshifting process takes the individual cycle of intention, creation, reflection, and applies it to group dynamics. Students learn how groups can rapidly change forms to accomplish different things, and can apply these skills to resolve conflicts and create and explore together.

The Gameshifting Board is a visual aid to assist in gameshifting. They are adaptable to many different kinds of groups and meetings. A sample whiteboard is divided into categories like Mode, Interaction style, Body arrangement, Body energy, Roles, and Start/End. A good example of what each category might mean is the Start/End section, which says Start: on time, threshold, attendance. A marker (a small magnet works well) is placed beside the convention we decide to follow, whether the meeting will start on time at 9am, or when we feel we have enough people to start, or when the required attendees show up. If we decide to follow a different convention, we can move the marker. This helps make intentional culture, makes group dynamics smarter, and helps us alter the dynamics as needed. For example, are we jumping in, or are we raising our hands? The Gameshifting Board both asks and answers that question as we make use of it, and helps us be intentional about the dynamics we are working in.



For more information about Gameshifting, see
http://EmergingLeaderLabs.org/Gameshifting_Overview

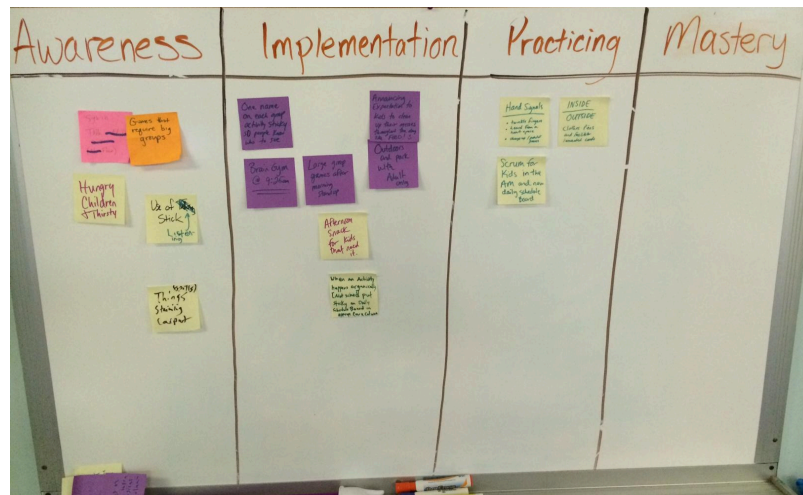
Change-up meetings

Change-up meetings are attended by the whole community at a frequency determined by the individual community. They are characterized by the use of the Community Mastery Board to initiate, implement, and evaluate issues or problems that affect the community. Issues (called “awarenesses”) are brought up, solutions are brainstormed, and an action is decided upon (using “sense of the meeting”). This isn’t a time to flesh out all the reasons why a solution may be a good idea or not, just a quick brainstorm and a decision to try something for a week. It is suggested that any change-up meeting cover only a manageable number of awarenesses - three is a good rule of thumb.

Community Mastery Board (CMB)

A CMB is a tool by which culture is created. It is divided into 4 columns: Awareness (community-wide problems that need resolution), Implementation (the decided-upon

action for each awareness), Practicing (the changes we are currently practicing), and Skilled or Mastery, which means the change has then become the new established norm, and a bit of culture has been created.



Culture Committee (CC)

Culture Committee serves to bolster open communication and intentional culture creation and is comprised of both ALFs and students. Its role is two-fold: to help solve conflicts and to brainstorm ways to improve the culture of the learning community. In engaging in this process, the culture becomes stronger and more cohesive.

Conflict Resolution: When a person finds themselves in a conflict, the first step is to stop, take a breath, and think about how to handle it. Then they can talk through the problem with the other party and/or ask for help in talking with the person. When a problem cannot be solved with these basic steps, a person can fill out a Request to Meet form to be sent to the Culture Committee. The Culture Committee meets on a regular basis and will talk through the conflict with the requester in order to come up with an action plan. If necessary, the other party may be brought in to the meeting to facilitate the resolution.

Improving the Culture: The “preventative care” of the Culture Committee is to create conditions that minimize conflict, finding the root cause and underlying cultural conditions that need change. The committee might find issues that they think need to be addressed within the community, which they can then bring to the Change-up meeting that is attended by all of the learning community members.

Certifications

Certifications help us keep children safe by ensuring they master a level of skill before moving on to a higher skill level activity. An ALC might have certifications for bike safety with level-ups for higher difficulty rides. In order to go on a certain type of bike ride, the student must achieve certification to that level of bike safety mastery.

Creative/Reflection Post/Blog

A Creative/Reflection Post is blog-type documentation that students contribute to on a regular basis (weekly or bi-weekly suggested). This fulfills the cycle of learning by creating sharable value. Documentation is a blank slate and allows for words, audio, video, or images; prompts or ideas are available if desired. It can be visible only to the staff, student, and parents, or it can be made public to varying degrees.

Portfolio

The Creative/Reflection Posts serve as our upgrade to the report card. This record becomes a digital portfolio of work that is student-generated. This compendium of interests and accomplishments serves as a feedback loop so students can see what they keep returning to, and recognize patterns in their own learning. It can serve to provide parents with a sense of security and safety, because colleges and employers will look at an online portfolio. The President of Harvard recently addressed parents on the topic of how to get their children into Ivy League schools: “Encourage children to follow their passions as a way to develop an interesting personality.” The portfolio is an innovative way for our students to demonstrate how interesting they are.

Coaches

Coaches are non-ALF, non-staff support persons selected by each student for their personal mentorship. This person takes on a life coaching type role, listens and reflects with the child, supports, clarifies goals, helps the child see the longer arc of their learning, and helps provide direction. Children typically choose a relative or family friend that they are comfortable with and admire. They meet about twice a month for an hour each time, at a time and place that works for the coach and student. The coach fills out a feedback form that goes to the school. It is sometimes mutually beneficial for teens at the school to be coaches for young children.

Level-ups

Some learning goals require extended persistence, such as learning a language or mastering an instrument. Level-ups are a concept that help children identify and reach incremental objectives along the way to achieving a larger goal. Level-ups provide checkpoints along the way as well as visible feedback of having accomplished past objectives. The child can be facilitated in designing a motivating level-up

scheme to support their longer-term goals. This process helps make the necessary persistence into a kind of game and foster focus. Level-ups are individualized to the student by the student and awarded as they see fit for the goals they identified.

Loud/Quiet room

Some rooms are designated as loud spaces and others are designated quiet. This respects individuals' needs to enjoy a space with the audible atmosphere that feels comfortable to them and supports the activity they are enjoying at the time.

Examples might include a "library" room that is designated quiet, and the eating room designated as loud.

Noise Alarm

Maintaining a noise threshold for a particular room can be enhanced by a gadget called a "noise alarm." In the Manhattan ALC they use one that comprises an arduino computer chip, a microphone, and some twinkle lights. (Making a noise alarm is inexpensive and fun! Tutorials are available online.) When the noise in the room reaches a certain decibel level, the lights flash. This provides visible feedback for noise level getting too loud. Rather than an audible alarm, which might encourage getting even louder to be heard above the alarm, the visual cue is a gentle, automatic reminder.

Stop rule

It is the role of everyone in the community to keep one another safe and make sure that all community members are respected. To this end, we have the "Stop Rule." Any adult or child can say, "Stop" (or, as it happens in practice, "Stop Rule") as a kind of "safe word" to anyone invading their experience or space with noise, teasing, or other unwanted interaction. That person is expected to immediately stop their behavior. We find that respecting the Stop Rule prevents a lot of conflicts from escalating; however, it is best used as more of a last resort and not an immediate reaction.

Language That Moves Things (Requests)

"If I say, I need sticky notes, or I wish I had some sticky notes, I might or might not get them. But if I say, 'Aldo, I request that you pass me some sticky notes,' [Aldo throws Arthur a pad of sticky notes] see, that's language that literally moves things." This concept is about influencing a group to get things done and be clear. Instead of

descriptive language such as “I think such and such is a good idea” or “I think we should do this,” we can replace it with declarations, promises, and requests.

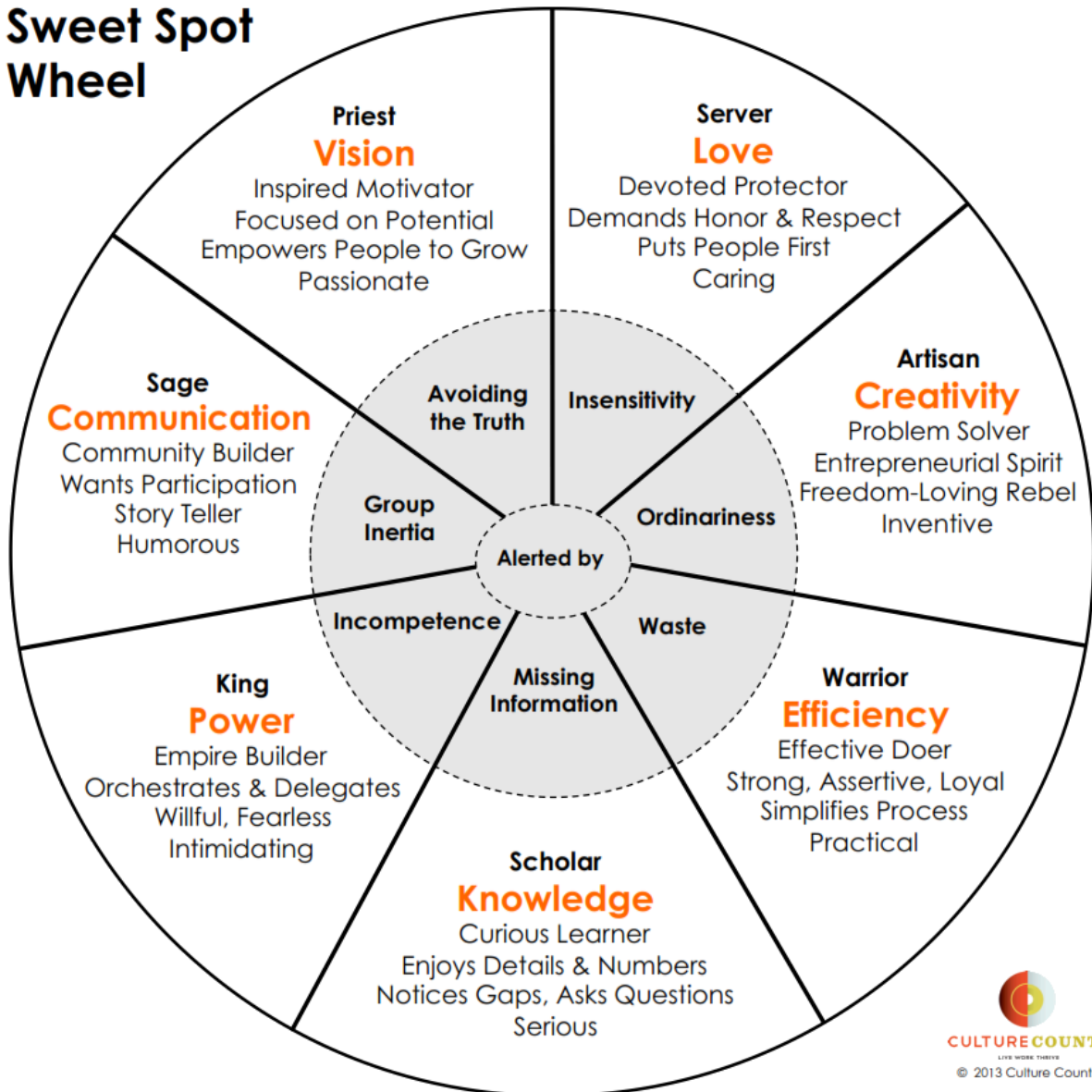
A declaration (“I am going to do xyz”) creates a clear, intentional path or makes things true (“I am a graphic designer.”) A promise can also come in the form of a declaration. A promise generally includes what one intends to do and a deadline of some kind. A request can turn non-moving language (“I wish you wouldn’t leave legos on the floor”) into something more likely to be accommodated (“I request that you put away the legos after you use them.”). A complete request generally includes a deadline or time frame. There are three ways to respond to a request: 1. Accept, 2. Decline, and 3. Counteroffer. Examples: 1. “I accept. I will put the legos away.” 2. “I decline, I am not willing to put the legos away.” 3. “I don’t want to put the legos away by myself, but I counteroffer to do it at the end of the day with your help.”

Requests should be followed through and “closed.” The word “request” may be in a state of overuse if there is no follow-through or closure (ie, calling down the hall “I request that you stop running!”). Knowing that others will ask when something is needed helps the culture because we don’t have to wonder if needs are being met and can operate under the assumption that everyone has what they need to do their work.

Archetypes (Personality Types)

The Seven Roles archetypes model was used at the Emerging Leader Labs and is useful to help get human chemistry right. Personality tests and learning style categories can provide some insight to how groups of people work together. They can help us understand how we all play different roles because we have different strengths, and that is something to appreciate and work with and utilize.

Sweet Spot Wheel



The seven archetypes consist of:

Server:

- Especially dislikes insensitivity.
- Compassionate, warm, nurturing, selfless.
- Doormat, overworked.
- Characterized by love. The individual inspiration role.

Artisan:

- Especially dislikes the ordinary.
- Expressive, imaginative, inventive, original.
- Moody, picky.

Characterized by creativity. Individual.

Warrior:

Especially dislikes waste.

Focused, efficient, practical, gets things done.

Blunt, intimidating.

Characterized by efficiency or action. Individual.

Scholar:

Especially alerted to missing information.

Objective, logical, curious, understanding.

Arrogant, passive.

Characterized by knowledge. Neutral.

King:

Especially dislikes incompetence.

Commanding, strategist, leadership, charismatic.

Controlling, overbearing.

Characterized by power. Group.

Sage:

Especially alerted to group inertia.

Entertaining, verbose, expressive, fun.

Demands attention, gossips.

Characterized by communication. Group.

Priest:

Especially alerted to avoiding the truth.

Visionary, spiritual, enthusiastic, inspirational.

Vague, impractical.

Characterized by vision. The group inspiration role.

Few people fit only one type, but most can identify one or two roles that fit them better than the others. As each role is discussed, it is interesting to see in what ways we relate to each role, and which ones are especially difficult for us to relate to. Appreciating that we play different roles and see the world in different ways helps us learn to work together, play upon each others' strengths, and be more compassionate toward our weaknesses.

The exact personality/learning style activity can change and still meet the same goals. Possible alternatives include the Values In Action (VIA) survey, the Myers-Briggs Personality Types (E/I, N/S , F/T, P/J), or Gregorc Learning Styles (Concrete/abstract, sequential/random).

Positive Psychology

Emphasizing strengths

Unlike the traditional focus of psychology of identifying and categorizing human mental weakness and trying to fix it, Positive Psychology focuses on identifying and embiggening human strengths. Research bears out that when we figure out what specific value we bring to the world and then exercise those strengths in new ways, we become upgraded versions of ourselves. We are not only more competent in our strengths, but happier and more satisfied as people.

ALFs have the privilege of assisting children in identifying their strengths and exercising them. We help children find opportunities to use their strengths in different and innovative ways. Rather than looking for deficits in people (ie, “Billy hasn’t learned algebra,”), we focus on what positive and exciting abilities are present. To learn more about how to utilize positive psychology, the book Authentic Happiness by Martin Seligman is a great jumping off point.

Flow

“Flow” is a concept developed by Mike Csikszentmihalyi (pronounced “cheeks sent me high”), and his book Flow is excellent reading. Flow describes the state of being totally absorbed by an activity. Examples of an activity that can be experienced in flow (and flow activities vary from person to person) include running, writing, closing a business deal, playing music, painting, teaching, crafting. The activity might not even seem “fun” at the time, but when it is over, it leaves the person with a sense of deep satisfaction. While in flow, people sometimes find that they lose track of time; they may enter a state of deep concentration or euphoria. Csikszentmihalyi’s research indicates that the more time people spend in flow, the higher their sense of wellbeing, life satisfaction, and happiness.

The concept of flow is important to understand because respecting someone’s flow is a huge priority in a self-directed environment. If a kid is deeply engaged in designing a video game, allowing that to play out naturally is much more valuable than trying to impose moderation in how s/he spends time. Also, as we help kids to identify and exercise their strengths in new ways, we help open the door for them to have more flow experiences. When a person can organize their life to maximize flow in both work and play, that will result in a more satisfying life.

The Role of Play (and competition)

We have an idea that school is supposed to be a scholarly and serious pursuit, and that kids would rather “just play.” We write off play as if it is trivial. But we need to challenge that idea. **The years we play the most are the years we grow the most,** and stagnation in adulthood could be the direct result of our loss of ability to play. Kids become fully engrossed in play; they are in a state of deep engagement. Rather than seeing play as something light and frivolous, we ought to see it as an ability to fully engage without an attachment to an outcome.

Traditional education engages children primarily through outcomes: get the right answer, get good grades, get good test scores. We suck the play mentality out of kids, and replace it with outcomes. But if we can learn to highly value the power of play and see it as a state of deep, authentic engagement, we can accept the limitations of outcomes and not be paralyzed by them.

Play is required for optimal learning across all disciplines. Traditional education tends to acknowledge this to a point when they say, “We need to make learning fun.” But we can take that further by saying that if we aren’t having fun, we aren’t doing our best learning. Many people may think we simply need to jazz up force-fed content with gamification, ie make our curriculum fun and game-like. Our idea is to find where kids are playing, where their interest is already residing, because that is the opportunity for deep engagement at that moment.

Occasional boredom is inevitable no matter how engaging an environment. Kids declaring boredom is not a problem for us as adults to solve. Being bored gives children an opportunity to figure out for themselves what they are interested in doing. Feelings of boredom can be acknowledged without yielding to the temptation of finding something for them to do, and thus solving the problem for them. The ability to find something to do when you are bored is an important skill that kids must develop.

Finite and Infinite Games

When children play, there are two types of games they might play - finite and infinite. Finite games are games that have an end goal. They are played for the purpose of winning. Examples of this might be tug-of-war, dodge ball, or capture the flag. These games have an object that, once achieved, ends the game.

Infinite games are played with the goal of continuing play. An example of this is pretend play games like “playing house.” There is no end goal; the purpose is the play itself. As play continues, rules may be changed, conditions invented, or new players and playthings introduced that help the play to continue. While finite games can be fun and rewarding, infinite games are where creativity is tapped and where players fully engage with each other socially. The power of this kind of play is that it provides full, deep engagement without a player feeling paralyzed by the need to reach a specific outcome.

This concept can be extended to a wider context. In life, there are many experiences in which we take part that have an end goal in mind. We may take a trip to the grocery store with the goal of buying milk. Once this is achieved, this particular “finite game” ends.

An example of an infinite game in life may be that of being a friend to someone. As you experience the relationship with your friend, you make plans with each other, you have disagreements and resolve them together, and you adjust your interactions along the way to help continue your friendship.

However, in life there are not always clear distinctions between finite and infinite “games.” Most of the time, in fact, the difference is in our own perception. We all probably know someone who has viewed a relationship as a finite game that is to be won instead of an ever-changing, flexible experience. The ability to fully engage and understand each other is lost in a perspective like this, and the relationship probably does not last.

When we consciously choose to perceive our experiences as parts of an infinite game, we gain the freedom to respond flexibly. We become resilient when things don’t go as planned. We become creative when we reach a point we didn’t expect. We also develop stronger relationships with the people around us with whom we are playing as we elicit their help to continue to “play.” While someone with a finite mindset dwells on obstacles and gets bogged down by difficult situations, those with infinite mindsets are motivated to find solutions to problems so they can move on.

In the context of an Agile Learning Center, a facilitator needs to have an infinite mindset. There is no “winning” when it comes to learning. Traditional education views learning finitely: memorize this fact, regurgitate it on a test and you are done. But the point of learning is in the process. There is also no “winning” when it comes to facilitation. Instead of questioning the “right” way to do things, we must think of

what best serves the continuance of the game - or - what best nurtures the relationship with a student and what aids the perpetuation of their learning.

We also need to help the children to see infinitely. They can make finite games infinite by changing the rules, and they can learn to play finite games with resilience and grace because they see past the game itself. They will be able to play the finite games of attending university or landing a job with an infinite attitude. When we foster this viewpoint, children see their power in the world to make things happen, adjust conditions, work with others, and change how they interact in an effort to continue learning, cultivate their relationships, and keep playing the game.

For more information on this topic, read [Finite and Infinite Games](#) by James Carse.

The Medium is the Message

In traditional schools, a lot of thought and planning goes into exactly what information is going to be imparted to the students. There are rigid ideas about the precise ages when students are “ready” to digest particular kinds of information. Meanwhile, there is a “hidden curriculum” that the students are really learning. That includes concepts like: “Your job is to submit to others and do what they say you should do.” “Learning is boring, but it is something we have to do, so you might as well accept the boredom.” “If you are loud, or move your body, or get distracted, you are not good at learning things.”

At an ALC, we have no traditional curriculum. The hidden curriculum consists of concepts like, “Every person’s thoughts and feelings have inestimable value.” “Following your interests and passions provides value to you and to others.” “People are different one from another, and that is not just ok, it is fantastic!” We believe that this hidden curriculum is vastly more important than any specific information alone could ever have.

Respectful Communication Skills

Adapted from: [How To Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk](#) and [How to Talk So Kids Can Learn](#) by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish

Some people communicate respectfully without much effort. Perhaps they were spoken to respectfully all their lives and it is a “native tongue” for them. Others need some help figuring out what to say to children to help them learn, cope, get along

with others, and develop a healthy sense of self. Following are some skills and examples for practicing respectful communication with children:

Dealing with upset feelings

Avoid:	Statements like this often evoke feelings like:
Denying feelings: “You’re getting all upset about nothing.” “You don’t really hate your friend.”	“Don’t tell me how to feel!”
Philosophizing: “No one ever said life was fair.” “Sometimes that’s how things go.”	“You’ll never understand.”
Advice: “You shouldn’t let stuff like this get you down.” “Just brush it off, don’t sweat it.”	“Don’t tell me what to do.”
Questions: “Why do you think she did that?” “What are you going to do about it?”	“Your questions are annoying.”
Defense of the other person: “Well, I can see his point of view.” “She had a good reason to feel that way after what you did yesterday.”	“You’re taking everyone’s side but mine!”
Pity: “Oh, you poor thing!” “You must feel just awful and embarrassed, how terrible!”	“I’m a loser.”
Amateur psychoanalysis: “You probably wanted that to happen on some level.”	“That’s the last time I tell you anything!”

Instead, try one of the following skills:

Skill:	Examples:
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Putting the feelings into words	“It sounds like you’re not interested in playing dinosaurs.” “It sounds like you’re feeling left out.”
Acknowledge the feelings with a word or sound	“Hmmm.” “Oh.” “I see.”
Give in fantasy what you can’t give in reality	“I’m hot too, I wish we had a swimming pool we could jump into right now!” “What if we had the world’s largest plate of cookies and we could just gobble them all up?”
Accept feelings, even as you stop unacceptable behavior	“I can see how much you want to talk. Right now it is time to respect the talking stick.” “I see you’re ready to run! Right now we need to walk together to stay safe.”
Accept and reflect feelings and wishes	“You sound angry.” “I see, you wish you had worn different shoes today.”
Offer physical comfort	“Would you like to sit on my lap?” “May I hug you?”

Gaining the cooperation of children

Avoid:	Examples:
Blame	"Look what you did!" "How dare you slop paint on the carpet!"
Calling names	"You're a messy little pig!" "You're being a whiny baby!"
Threats	"Do this now, or else!" "If you don't, you'll have a big consequence!"
Giving orders	"Stop that whining!" "Quit leaving your things lying around!"

Instead, try one of the following skills:

Skill:	Examples:
Describe what you see	"I see toys all over the floor." "I see a table covered with dirty lunchboxes."
Say it with a word	"Shoes!" "The door!"
Give information	"If the door is left open, all the heat flows outside." "When spills don't get wiped up, it can attract insects."
Describe how you feel	"I feel uncomfortable when you climb on me." "When I see art projects getting stepped on, I feel disappointed and sad to see them being destroyed."
Offer a choice	"You can put your shoes on, or walk to the park barefoot." "You can either cross the street with me, or you can wait for the next ALF."
Write a note or make a sign	"Don't waste water! Turn off faucet when you're done." "Enjoy the apples; remember to put the cores in the compost!"

Preteach (Note: Asking “Ok?” and securing a verbal “Ok” in response is usually helpful!)	“We are going into the art museum in just a minute. Everyone remember that in this museum, we only touch the art with our eyes, ok?” “We are going to the playground, and when it is time to leave, let’s not have any whining, ok?”
Be playful	“Let’s see how fast we can get all the dinosaurs in the bin. Ready...set... go!” “Me hungry bag... me hungry for blocks!”
Have child-appropriate expectations	One child might be able to check items off a to-do list; another child might only be able to handle one request at a time.

Praise and Criticism

Praise:

Avoid evaluating :	Instead, describe :
“That’s a very good drawing. You’re a great artist!”	“Look at all the different colors you used in the flowers. And that grass is quite realistic!”
“You’re such a good girl to be so honest.”	“You made sure that wallet got back to its rightful owner. That was an honest thing to do.”
“Great job, you’re a genius!”	“You worked hard on that. You must be very pleased.”
“Good job!”	“You worked hard on that project until it was all finished.”
“Beautiful work. Very nice.”	“You marked all the points and drew very straight lines. Everything is labelled too!”
You’re a terrific runner!”	“You came in under six minutes, your best time yet!”

Criticism:

Instead of pointing out something negative:	Describe what's done and what still needs to be done:
"You aren't ready to go: your shoes aren't on and you don't have your lunchbox!"	"You've got your water bottle and you look ready to go, all you need are shoes and your lunchbox."
"You still haven't finished cleaning this room, I see lots of junk on the floor!"	"It looks like all the dolls and stuffed animals are put away. Now the only things left are the books and the blocks!"

Freeing a child who is locked in a role

Look for opportunities to show students a new picture of themselves.	
Role:	New picture:
Poor listener	"You must have been paying close attention because you followed the directions exactly."
Dawdler	"You didn't waste a single minute getting your project ready to work on today."
Clown	"I know you were joking, but that's actually a really important point too."
Nervous	"Everyone was all riled up, but you were calm enough to realize the lights needed to be turned off. Thanks!"
Put students in situations where they can see themselves differently.	
Role:	Situation:
Undependable	"I'm counting on you to make sure the pet turtle gets fresh food every day."

Short attention span	"This younger student wants help finding these countries on a map, would you be willing to help her?"
Shy	"Would you please show the new student how the art supplies are organized?"
Sneaky	"Could you go get my wallet for me?"
Let students overhear you say something positive about them.	
Poor impulse control	"I'll ask Rory to go with you. You can always count on him for help if you need it."
Slow learner	"She was so fascinated with the engineering game. I can tell she has a real knack for figuring out how things work."
Model the behavior you'd like to see.	
Procrastinator	"It's really tempting to put this paperwork off until next week, but I know once I get it done I'll feel better about relaxing this weekend."
Remind students of their past accomplishments.	
"I'm a scatterbrain."	"I don't think of you that way. I noticed you remembered to bring your water bottle every day last week, and you also remembered to take it home every afternoon."
"I'm so shy."	"I remember when we were at the park last month you made friends with a neighborhood girl very quickly. You walked up to her and asked if she wanted to play."

Problem Solving (Alternative to rewards and punishments)

Adults often want to know, "How can I make a child do what I want them to do?" The

typical response will be to utilize punishments or rewards in order to manipulate the child into the desired behavior. However, there is another option. We can change the question to, “How can I help this child solve the problem?”

What’s wrong with using punishments? People react to punishments in four basic ways. The first one, “I’m sorry for what I did, I’ll be good from now on” is the reaction that is desired, but it is actually the least likely one to occur. More likely, a child will feel: “You’re mean, I’ll show you!” or “Next time, I’ll make sure they don’t catch me!” or even, “I’m bad, I deserve to be punished.” None of those reactions contribute positively to a working relationship. They can lead to lying, poor self-image, or a desire for revenge.

What’s wrong with rewards? People who are being rewarded come to expect a reward every time, or they lose incentive. Rewards don’t teach children about right, wrong, or cooperation. And finally, if the reward isn’t enticing enough, you have to keep upping the ante.

Steps for effective problem solving:

1. Listen to and acknowledge the child’s feelings and needs.	“You were angry with Alli. She took your truck and ran off, and you were not done playing with it.”
2. Avoid criticism.	(“Well that’s no excuse.”) (“That was a bad choice.”)
3. Sum up the child’s perspective.	“So, the problem is that Alli keeps taking your toys.”
4. Briefly state your feelings or needs.	“It upset me that you hit your friend. I need all the kids to get along without hurting each other.”
5. Invite the child to help work on a solution.	“Let’s see if we can work together to fix this problem, ok?”
6. Write down all ideas without comment. Let the child go first if possible.	
7. Decide which ideas you like, and which you don’t, together. Make a plan that satisfies you both.	

8. Shake hands or sign an agreement.
9. Revisit as necessary.

Problem-solving is a useful skill for children to learn for relating to siblings and friends. When children are having trouble getting along with one another, rather than mediating every problem, encourage them to problem-solve with their peers. Try expressing confidence that the children can work things out themselves.

Alternatives to Punishments

Point out a way to be helpful.	(To a child being disruptive:) “Would you be in charge of putting the sticky notes on the board?”
Express strong concern.	“Throwing sand near peoples’ eyes is dangerous and hurtful!”
State your expectations.	“When you want to use my computer, I expect you to ask me first.”
Show the child how to make amends.	“Here is some carpet cleaner and a rag; please let me know when the juice spill is all cleaned up.”
Give a choice.	“You can take the baseball to the park to play, or you can play something safe indoors.”
Take action.	“I’m going to put the paints away.”
Allow the child to experience the consequences of misbehavior.	“I understand you want to go to the library. Last time I was disappointed in this disruptive and destructive behavior there, so I don’t want to go today. Maybe we can try again next week.”

Role of the ALF

ALF vs. Resource Person

ALFs are co-players, co-discoverers, co-learners, and co-creators with the children. Their primary responsibility is to develop functional relationships with the kids so they can support them. They set an example of lifelong passionate learning and creating for the children. They invite children to teach them about their passions. They see sparks of interest in the children and find ways to nurture them.

Resource people bring their ideas and projects into the space of the school for children to enjoy. Resource people provide great value to the community by sharing their knowledge, skills, and passions. ALFs can do that too, but that is not their primary function; their focus should be on supporting the children in their own pursuits. If a child has offered an activity or class, ALFs should make a concerted effort to support that offering and give the child a chance to teach them.

Boundaries/freedom

Adults often want to know, “Just how much freedom do the children have?” The answer is, quite a lot! Our communities set boundaries primarily based on safety, legality, and respect for others. As long as a pursuit or a choice is **safe, legal, and shows respect to the community**, children will generally be supported in that choice. Because we emphasize good relationships with one another, there is generally not a need to generate a lot of “rules.” We create a culture of caring for one another so the children won’t need rules imposed upon them to behave in an acceptable manner. We utilize nonviolent communication and avoid the use of punishments and rewards to manipulate behavior. When a difficult issue arises, we utilize conflict resolution tools and enlist the input of others to handle the situation in a way that affirms all parties.

Credentials

The model of Agile Culture is distinct from individuals. When people ask what kind of credentials our “teachers” have, we point toward the model, and therefore the credential of Certified ALF. Instead of emphasizing any staff member’s past accomplishments or special skills, we emphasize all staff’s commitment to the Agile Culture model. For example, whether a person has a 4-year education degree or has no traditional educational training at all, within this model all ALF staff are equally qualified to facilitate. Each staff member engages in the intention-creation-reflection cycle of learning within the framework of the Agile Learning Network on a constant basis, and that is what makes an effective facilitator.

So the answer to “Are your teachers state-certified?” is “Our staff is trained/certified in Agile Learning Facilitation.”