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| **Centers / Studios** | |
| GOALS | * Children activate, grapple with, expand, and apply their knowledge related to unit content and other concepts. * Children choose and access a variety of tools, media, and processes with which to investigate phenomena and communicate their understanding. * Children experience and develop agency and autonomy. * Children share materials, ideas, and strategies and contribute to collaborative projects, developing executive function and social skills. * Children develop and apply their aesthetic sensibility. * Children experience the satisfaction of building on their work over time. * Children practice unit-related and discipline-specific vocabulary and apply discrete skills in authentic ways. * Children plan and evaluate their own work. |

*In guided play, adults initiate the learning process, constrain the learning goals, and are responsible for maintaining focus on these goals even as the child guides his or her own discovery. This latter point is critical. While adults might initiate the play sequence, children direct their own learning within the play context.*

Weisberg, Hirsch-Pasek, Golinkoff, “Guided Play: Where Curricular Goals Meet a Playful Pedagogy.” 2013.

In Centers and Studios, children learn through guided and free play, sustained exploration, and collaborative inquiry with diverse materials. They apply their developing skills in literacy and language; their thinking as scientists, historians, artists, and mathematicians; and new vocabulary in every discipline. Together, children and adults engage in a culture of creativity, exchange of ideas, and problem solving. As they choose, plan, launch, and develop their work, children draw on experiences both in and beyond school; probably at no other time in school do children’s cultural, linguistic, and family assets manifest more fully. Activities suggested in the curriculum offer paths by which children might investigate the Big Ideas of the unit of study and make connections to other parts of the day (Read Aloud/Text Talk, Writing, Science and Engineering, Literacy Stations). Centers/Studios provide the ideal conditions for the consolidation of knowledge and extension into new thinking. Ideas children play with and refine in Centers/Studios thread their way back to whole class and small group discussions and into their writing. Skills practice in Stations bolsters project work. During a study of erosion by water, for example, children explore watercolor painting; during a study of animals, children build animal sculptures and tell, write, draw, and act out stories featuring animals.

While teachers supply initial ideas and raw materials for activities in five to seven Centers (PreK and K2) or Studios (first and second grades), the *children* are the drivers of their learning. As children engage in activities, they might identify additional materials to enhance and extend their work. New possibilities for the topic of study emerge from the discoveries and questions that arise as children direct their activity with purpose, seriousness, and playfulness. Adult observation, peer collaboration, and ongoing feedback all contribute to high-quality work.

*Structure*

Each Center or Studio is set up as a distinct area in the classroom, with needed materials, tools, visual supports, and work space. Each week’s activities are connected and related to the topic of study, offer various means of communicating ideas, and are responsive to the particular children in a classroom. Children choose from among these activities, which include experiences grounded in visual art, building, drama, research and investigation, and writing/drawing. (See specific grade-level Centers/Studios below.)

This time of day places cognitive, social, and self-regulatory demands on children. To set children up for successful, productive, and collaborative activity, teachers facilitate a short, whole group meeting. Here, teachers make connections to texts; introduce novel materials and processes and model activities; reinforce vocabulary; and relaunch activities that might have been abandoned or that could be approached in a new way, perhaps referencing children’s comments from a previous Thinking and Feedback session. Children think and talk together to plan their work, anticipating challenges and identifying materials, spaces, and collaborators and possible strategies, before beginning their work. At the beginning of the year, Centers/Studios may be opened all at once, or gradually, over the first couple of weeks of school.

*Choice*

At very few points in their school days (and outside of school as well) do children have the chance to make decisions about what they will do next. Being able to choose from among Centers/Studios supports children’s executive function and engages them authentically in work they care about, with materials that are intuitively challenging, aesthetically pleasing, and inspiring. Children’s investment in their work is intrinsic and profound. Teachers may sometimes suggest that children experiment outside a preferred, familiar studio, both to stretch their capacities and broaden their skills, and to afford other children space in a coveted area. However, teachers do not force children to produce something in a particular studio or to visit each studio presented.

*Collaboration*

Children contribute to each other’s work as they sink into compelling tasks: they exchange ideas about how to approach materials and activities, evaluate together the success of their evolving projects, offer suggestions to one another, and put new vocabulary to use. They might move around the classroom to see what others are doing, make connections, offer advice, and celebrate successes. Children are encouraged to work on extended projects, as this is how they will be able to design, research/explore, work, revise, get feedback, revise again, and come to a satisfying completion.

*Observation and facilitation*

Teachers spend time during Centers/Studios circulating to observe, listen, document, and offer appropriate support and challenge. They draw children’s attention to each other’s work and to the developing expertise of their peers to encourage collaboration. This facilitation supports children to settle into their efforts and reach satisfying outcomes. Some children will naturally dig into a project with great focus and stamina; others may tend to move quickly from one center to another and benefit from support in persisting through challenges. The language teachers use in Studios can appropriately complicate children’s thinking about how a task might be approached and make problem solving an accepted—not frustrating—part of learning. Teachers can remind children that Centers/Studios provide opportunities for everyone to be working on a shared idea or question in various ways, so that children see the connections among their efforts and develop respect for each other’s approaches and ideas. Of course, teachers are also responsible for keeping materials replenished, refreshed, organized, and accessible. Studios spaces and materials should be consistently inviting.

*Learning Standards*

Because this is a time of day when children are working primarily with each other—exchanging ideas, making discoveries, and solving problems—Centers/ Studios experiences provide time to foster unconstrained skills—those skills and dispositions not typically measured by standardized means: self-regulation and self-expression, creative and critical thinking, collaboration, and communication (often called 21st Century Skills). Children’s socioemotional engagement is stimulated by invitations to make personal connections to the topics of study and through multiple points of entry via diverse materials and modes of expression. Further, with writing and drawing tools available in each area and texts anchoring the activities, children naturally practice writing and reading skills, as well. Social studies and Science and Engineering standards, along with Arts standards are addressed depending on the particular kinds of work children undertake.

With agency in their learning, guided in positive and productive habits, and given supportive structures, the children reveal themselves as competent, innovative, and engaged. They make meaningful connections to all aspects of the curriculum. All members of the classroom community, children and adults alike, find themselves immersed in joyful, vigorous work.

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| Specific to **PreK** and | **Kindergarten (K2)** |
| * Centers duration: 60 minutes daily. * Centers begins with an additional 10-minute Intro to Centers meeting beforehand and a 10-minute Thinking and Feedback meeting following. * Centers: **Art Studio** (Easel and Table), **Blocks**, **Discovery**, **Drama**, **Library & Listening**, **Science & Engineering**, **Writing & Drawing** * Systems and routines provide structure and support as children move among centers, including *Number Limit Signs, Turns Lists*, and *“I will be right back”* signs. | |
| Specific to **First Grade** | Specific to **Second Grade** |
| * Studios duration: at least 45 minutes, at least three times per week. * Each week, Studios time opens with a *brief* whole group meeting to introduce new materials, highlight a successful technique or strategy, or pose a challenge. * Studios: **Art**, **Building**, **Drama**, **Library**, **Science and Engineering**, and **Writing and Drawing** * Activities generally continue for more than one week. | * Studios duration: at least 30 minutes, at least three times per week. * Each week, Studios time opens with a *brief* whole group meeting to introduce new materials, highlight a successful technique or strategy, or pose a challenge. * Studios: **Art**, **Building**, **Discovery**, **Research**, and **Writing and Storytelling.** * Activities generally continue for more than one week. |