



Spark Studio Learning Design

Spark Studio at Hero Schoolhouse is designed for ages 4 to 7 and combines the best of the Montessori and Emilia Reggio approach to learning, emphasizing inquiry-based, child-driven learning, within a Hero's Journey narrative. Your child will **learn to learn, learn to do, and learn to be** through the components of our learning model.

Here are some of our key beliefs about learning that shape our approach:

- 1) **Children are capable of constructing their own learning.** They are driven by their interests to understand and know more.
- 2) **Children form an understanding of themselves and their place in the world through their interactions with others.** There is a strong focus on social collaboration, working in groups where each child is an equal participant and has their thoughts and questions valued.
- 3) **Children are communicators.** Communication is a process, a way of discovering things, asking questions, using language as *play*- playing with sounds and rhythm and rhyme; delighting in the process of communicating.
- 4) **Children are natural investigators.** They are encouraged to use language to investigate and explore and to reflect on their experiences. They are listened to with respect, believing that their questions and observations are an opportunity to learn and search together in a collaborative process.
- 5) **The environment is the third teacher.** Open spaces, filled with natural light, order and beauty, where every material is considered for its purpose, and every corner is ever-evolving to encourage children to delve deeper and deeper into their interests while facilitating collaboration, communication and exploration.
- 6) **The adult is a mentor and guide.** The adult is not the giver of knowledge, rather our role is to observe children, listen to their questions and their stories, find what interests them, and provide them with opportunities to explore these interests further.
- 7) **The process of learning and thinking should be made visible.** Children's thoughts and progression of thinking is displayed and documented with photographs, transcripts, notes, and artwork.

Learning to Learn - Core Skills Core skills are the basic toolkit that students need to master to become lifelong learners. Students will spend their mornings in the studio, engaging in math, reading, and writing, practical life, art, and cultural activities of their choice. The environment is carefully prepared with Montessori materials and various “provocations” (or inquiry centers) for the students to explore and investigate.

Math: Students work through a progression of Montessori materials to show mastery in the following mathematical areas: Number Sense, Operations, Fractions, Money, Geometry, Time and Measurement.

Reading: Our goal is to have young people who love to read. We do not assign books or readings, but allow students to start by reading anything they enjoy – even comic books. Students work through progressive stages of the Waseca Reading and Spelling Program, reading books on their level, and engaging in group read-alouds.

Writing: Our primary focus at Hero Schoolhouse in writing is to write with a real-world purpose in mind as well as for self-expression. Students in the Spark Studio will be given opportunities to progress in both handwriting and the initial steps of process writing (prewriting, drafting, editing, and revision).

Communication: Oral communication is developed through daily Socratic discussions. These discussions occur during our morning and afternoon circle times, and at other times deemed necessary by learners. The purpose of a Socratic discussion is to come to a new or deeper understanding of oneself, others and the world through an authentic wrestling of thoughts, information, and ideas. Our discussions in the Spark Studio could focus on developing an understanding of studio processes, habits of mind, and character traits. Young learners practice listening, asking good questions, giving quality feedback, and communicating their thoughts verbally. These are foundational skills for life and for transition to the Discovery Studio.

Learning to Do - Play Play comes naturally to children. It is a means to express themselves, to learn, and make sense of the world around them as they hone social and communication skills. Through daily outdoor loose parts play, students in the Spark Studio experiment with setting their own boundaries, respecting the boundaries of others, negotiating, taking turns, brainstorming, and resolving conflicts.

Learning to Be - The Hero's Journey In the Hero Schoolhouse Spark Studio, students are encouraged to frame their choices through the narrative of the Hero's Journey - that they are active agents in their own life, ready and able to tackle challenges, discover emerging passions, and ultimately find that place where their gifts and joy intersect with a deep burning need. Through discussion, interaction, observation, and practice, students will identify the essential character traits needed to reach their goals and be guided in developing the habits required of a hero prepared to explore their calling and impact the world.