The Studio Thinking Framework Eight Habits of Mind were developed by Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Quoting directly from the web site, “Project Zero's mission is to understand and enhance learning, thinking, and creativity in the arts, as well as humanistic and scientific disciplines, at the individual and institutional levels.”

One of the best known names associated with Project Zero is Howard Gardner and his theories of multiple intelligences. Project Zero researchers have also collaborated with teachers from the schools of Reggio Emilia in Italy where energizing and inspiring work is being done with children six and under. A key component of the Reggio Emilia schools is an atelier or studio in every school. Art materials and practice are seen as valuable ways for young children to communicate their understanding of the world around them. The philosophy of the Reggio Emilia schools has informed my own study and practice and I am a strong believer in the unique nature of a studio setting for fostering learning. The habits of mind seem to offer a fitting framework for organizing my observations of young children and their process.

In this document I will quote the Project Zero descriptions of the habits of mind directly and then offer some description of how I see the photos from the parent/child art classes relating to the ideas.

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Develop Craft
Learning to use and care for tools (e.g., viewfinders, brushes), materials (e.g., charcoal, paint). Learning artistic conventions (e.g., perspective, color mixing).

Project Zero

The development of craft relates to the physical development of fine and gross motor skills and hand/eye coordination in young children. On a cognitive level they are being introduced to artistic conventions and learning about cause and effect and sequencing. Children are also introduced to how tools are used and are able to experiment with trying these tools in interaction with various materials.

KHC
Engage & Persist

Learning to embrace problems of relevance within the art world and/or of personal importance, to develop focus and other mental states conductive to working and persevering at art tasks.

Project Zero

Cognitively, young children develop problem solving skills as well as an ability to focus and concentrate through engaging in art tasks. The parents’ role as a facilitator is important in this process as the child is able to take the lead as artist supported and witnessed by a care giver. This to me is the most magical part and the part that motivates me to take pictures to reflect this process back to parents and children.

Emotionally, engaging in the creative process in a supportive setting builds self-esteem; it offers an opportunity to work through challenges and frustration and to experience the joy and wonder of discovery. Children are able to express preferences and to develop a sense of mastery and control.

KHC
Envision

Learning to picture mentally what cannot be directly observed and imagine possible next steps in making a piece. Project Zero

The printmaking process pictured above connects well to envisioning. Children place objects and make marks in the fluid painted surface of the printing tray. They experience the wonder and surprise of seeing what emerges in the finished print.

Working in collage, children practice making choices to make meaning as they select items for their sculptural creations.

Art is a key to expressing understanding and ideas at a young age because it provides an accessible non-verbal vocabulary for young children. The materials become their languages for expression.

KHC
Express
Learning to create works that convey an idea, a feeling, or a personal meaning.

Project Zero

Creating art gives children an opportunity for self expression. In a group setting there is also the opportunity to share their work with others, practicing socialization skills and developing relationships with adults and with peers. Children build vocabulary by talking about what they see, how they feel and what they do as they create and view the artwork of others.

KHC
Observe
Learning to attend to visual contexts more closely than ordinary “looking” requires, and thereby to see things that otherwise might not be seen.
Project Zero

Children build thinking skills by noticing and talking about attributes of the materials they work with: color, texture, transparency, etc. They explore the tactile sensations of different materials and compare their physical qualities based on how they feel in their hands. For young children the act of observing is extended to all five senses, as they interact with new materials. The light box is a tool to help children see things in a new way and notice transparency. Clay and textured collage pieces are observed with hands as much as with looking. For very young children, the act of making a mark on large paper allows them to see a record of the physical energy of their gesture and action.

KHC
Reflect

*Question & Explain:* Learning to think and talk with others about an aspect of one’s work or working process.

*Evaluate:* Learning to judge one’s own work and working process and the work of others in relation to standards of the field.

Project Zero

Reflection often begins with the spontaneous excitement of creation and wanting to share what one has made and done. With very young children, adults also model by questioning and asking for explanations. Open-ended questions invite young children to tell us more about their product and their process.

The idea of evaluation is not to judge the finished product but perhaps to challenge and invite a child to add more to what they have made or to extend the idea in some way. This is where the group setting for art making is so rich for social learning. Children imitate each others process and challenge each other's ideas. Nurturing interactions among peers can encourage this interaction and make it an opportunity for growth.

KHC
Stretch and Explore
Learning to reach beyond one’s capacities, to explore playfully without a preconceived plan, and to embrace the opportunity to learn from mistakes and accidents.
Project Zero

Young children naturally play with art materials, the interaction is often as much about play as about art making as they name, animate and make up stories about the objects they create. Materials are presented in a way to encourage exploration and to stretch to try new things. Noticing how heavy the clay is prompts a clever strategy to lift the clay using the cloth it is on. Paint and mark making is explored through toys and small objects familiar to children but not usually used for art. Materials are explored playfully and creations can be playful collaborations between adults and children.

KHC
Understand Art World

Domain: Learning about art history and current practice.

Communities: Learning to interact as an artist with other artists (i.e., in classrooms, in local arts organizations, and across the art field) and within the broader society.

Project Zero

The children’s books and art reproductions used to begin class link our practice to the artistic practice of artists and illustrators and help to introduce materials. The pictures taken of the children are brought to class to reflect and revisit their own artistic practice.

The most important social learning comes from being a part of a community of young artists and supportive adults. Children work side by side, observe others at work and are encouraged to interact and collaborate using materials. Working together can produce imaginative discussions about the subject and meaning of the work.

KHC