



## Academic and Program Overview

### Who was Maria Montessori?

*Maria Montessori was a doctor, research scientist, and educator from the late 1800's – early 1900's who made observations about how children learn. The Montessori Philosophy of Education* is based on Dr. Maria Montessori's observation that children have a natural desire to learn and that stages of development exist for which there should be corresponding educational environments and trained adults who prepare these environments. Children can learn independently in a prepared environment with teachers who guide and serve as the links between the student and the environment. By providing freedom of choice, this enriched learning environment cultivates individuals who learn to make independent decisions and to solve problems creatively. They learn to develop healthy social relationships, to develop skills in concentration, and to master basic academic and life skills. At CMP students are challenged to create, explore and imagine.

*Montessori Education* provides children with a lifetime gift – the opportunity to fully develop their innate intellectual, physical, social and emotional potential. CMP encourages parents to be an integral part of their child's education by learning about the Montessori philosophy, observing in the classrooms, and volunteering in the school.

### *Montessori: "A Cosmic Approach to Education"*

The Montessori philosophy was originally developed in the early nineteen hundreds by Dr. Maria Montessori to enhance a child's opportunities for learning, relevant to the student's relationship to the world around him/her. Over the years, the philosophy has evolved to challenge the whole child's personality and intellect in a variety of multicultural settings. Her teaching system is based on a strong integration of adult to child observation and practical hands-on activities. From her observations, she designed functional learning environments created to support and enhance a child's innate desire to learn about the world around him/her. Classroom materials offer learning experiences in a clear, concrete manner. Students are encouraged to use motor and intellectual discovery when working with these materials. There is an emphasis on the sequential and orderly acquisition of both motor and cognitive skills. This ordered work method also allows for individualization and usually offers a two to three year age span within the classroom; enabling students to work and learn at their own pace, as well as in group settings. The integration of varied age spans allows older students to gain confidence by working and role modeling materials with younger students. Collaborative learning and projects completed in groups encourage students to teach and learn with each other. This combination of order and freedom is facilitated by what is called "*the prepared environment*".

***A well prepared Montessori learning environment is given careful attention***, allowing and encouraging the child accessibility to all materials she/he needs in performing and experiencing the step-by-step process of individual work. The classroom is thus arranged in a series of easily accessible shelves designed to accommodate specific work areas. This framework of organization gives accessibility to the necessary learning materials and frees the student to concentrate on the work, allowing an increase in independence and responsibility. This, in turn, decreases the need of direction from the teacher. As a result, children develop internal rather than external referencing. The teacher is also better able to observe the total classroom environment. Within the California Montessori Project, each classroom follows Montessori's concepts and is carefully designed to provide for the developmental needs of its students.

***The areas of the classroom*** consist of materials to support learning in the core subjects of language arts (reading and writing), mathematics, and geometry while also providing concentrations in the areas of history, geography, and natural sciences (biology: botany, zoology; astronomy, etc). Cultural subjects such as art, music, second languages and physical education are interwoven. Each class contains materials that teach specific concepts for the particular age range. The materials are designed in a logical sequence of skill acquisition and concept building while reinforcing the development of abstract thinking. In this way, the students observe and experience a movement toward self-set goals. The learning materials initially isolate knowledge to one concept at a time in a concrete manipulative style. Eventually, the child progresses toward an abstract, more divergent level of evaluation.

The Montessori teacher acts as a facilitator of information and is always responsible for what is called "making the match". Through observation and standardized assessments, the teacher assesses the needs and level of each student to guide him/her towards a path to meet his/her individual interests, maturity levels, capabilities and educational needs. As a result of these assessments, teachers can make adjustments in individual learning plans, both academically and behaviorally. The student who is in a period of self-directed activity can be given much freedom regarding choice. All students can work at their own speed and must demonstrate mastery of material before moving on.

The California Montessori Project offers these prepared classrooms in a variety of age/grade combinations. In the early grades, students receive the foundation of the Montessori curriculum by learning and practicing the cornerstone concepts of:

- Care of Self,
- Care of Environment,
- Control of Movement, and *very importantly*,
- Grace and Courtesy

The elementary or cosmic approach to learning introduces educational opportunities in a new and exciting light. It is designed to begin with the aspects of impressions. For the first six years of life (first plane of development), the child has absorbed the world around him/her: visually, auditorally, and tactually. Mastery of concrete experiences has taken place. Moving into the second plane of development, we can now begin an adventure of building abstractly on these early concrete experiences.

The following information is an overview of CMP's philosophy for elementary (second plane of development) and middle school (third plane of development) Montessori programs. For this experience to be a successful adventure, it calls for a fully participating and committed team. We look forward to working with your child/ren and your family and we welcome you as a member of this team dedicated to providing the most optimum learning environment for your child/ren.

### **Planes of Development**

Developmental levels consist of distinct planes with certain characteristics that should be considered in formulating a plan for the child's education. These varying characteristics may be considered from four distinct aspects:

**Intellectual                      Social                      Emotional                      Moral**

**Intellectual:** Dr. Montessori identified two sensitive intellectual periods during the second and third planes: Imagination and the understanding of the abstract. Imagination is the great power of this age. This special mental ability enables us to imagine what exists or has existed but cannot be seen because of time or distance. Not only can imagination travel through infinite space but also through infinite time. So, the child aged 6 to 12, and then 12 to 16, uses a creative imagination based on reality in order to psychologically conquer the world.

At these ages, the student's need to assimilate concepts using the concrete Montessori materials is still prevalent, and many appropriate materials are provided. The elementary and middle school-aged child develops the ability to move from the concrete into abstraction of a concept, based on this repeated opportunity for concrete experience.

Between the ages of 6 to 16 is the period of life during which the elements of all science should be given. This time frame could be called the "sensitive period of culture." In the early years of life, the child takes in her/his immediate environment. After the age of six, the child becomes involved in the greater community, growing into global awareness. In Montessori education the child is able to do this through "Cosmic Education".

**The starting point of Cosmic Education is to introduce a vision of the world as a whole. To offer culture in terms of a cosmic vision means to show the intimate and interrelated relationship between things, living nature, and humankind. It also means the ability to understand the cosmic task of each element and of each force in the cosmos, including our human society and each of us as individual members of society.**

**Social:** In the second and third planes, the group beyond the family, the peer group, now attracts the child. Children begin to form a society of their own peers and resist adult control as far as possible. The basic moral principle in operation during these periods requires a commitment from the individual: The commitment of the individual to the peer group.

**Emotional:** The child aged 6 to 16 is generally less accommodating to adults. Dr. Montessori explained this developmental change in terms of Nature's logic, whose aim is to arouse in the child not only a hunger for knowledge and understanding but also a claim to mental independence, a desire to distinguish good and evil by one's own power, and to resist limitation by arbitrary authority.

**Moral:** During the second and third planes, a sensitive period of morality comes to the forefront. A concept of **justice** is born at this age, together with a growing understanding of the relationship between our acts and the needs of others. Children at these ages will react strongly against anything they regard as unjust or unfair.

According to Dr. Montessori, nature has equipped the children of this age (6-16) with the qualities of loyalty, generosity, a sense of responsibility, a strong sense of justice, admiration for what is outstanding and progressive, and a distaste for trivialities. The children of this age want to become self-sufficient, prove their new independence, and help their neighbor.

One of Montessori's basic principles is that the adult should understand the natural tendencies driving the child at each plane of development and cooperate with those tendencies rather than go against nature.

### **Basic Academic Areas of CMP's Montessori Educational Program**

Montessori education offers a wide variety of academic study for all students, in a way that interrelates each subject to the others, which in turn supports the development of a better rounded individual. One of the classic components of the Montessori approach is to provide uninterrupted units of work time for the students, to allow them ample opportunity to work through various academic tasks each day. At CMP, breaking the academic day into two distinct parts provides these units of work time: Core academics (Language Arts, Math, and Geometry) are most often presented in the morning, and cultural subjects, such as History, Geography, and Science are usually presented in the afternoon. Practical Life lessons are practiced daily (care of self, care of environment, control of movement, grace and courtesy), and subjects traditionally referred to as cultural in nature (fine art, performing art, second languages, etc.) are interwoven throughout the week.

#### **CORE Academics:**

**Reading and Language** are essential for all areas of learning. Children learn phonetically through the use of tactile materials such as sandpaper letters, through auditory repetition and visual identification. Then they progress into reading and working independently through study cards (e.g. Albanesi) that give direction to their individualized program and to their researches. Reading and language are integral parts of all cultural lessons.

**Writing** is used in almost every academic experience. Printing and cursive are developed in the early years, as the child is ready. Later, students develop formal writing and composition skills.

**Basic Math** facts (counting, addition and subtraction) are stressed as the prerequisite for accomplishing the more-advanced math that follows: fractions, long multiplication and division, powers of numbers, systems of numeration, squaring, and cubing.

**Geometry** is studied as it assists in the development of a creative capacity in the child. It is the foundation toward the construction of reality. This progression flows naturally from the 3-6 year old experience with sensorial materials.

### **Cultural Subjects:**

**Subjects such as History, Geography, and Science are referred to as Cultural Lessons** and are studied as interrelated aspects of the same world.

**History** begins with the concept of time and evolves each year through a study of the Fundamental Needs of Humans, the Timeline of Life, and Stages in the Progress of Civilization. **Geography** continues from the preschool period with completed work in maps. Successive work includes a study of landforms and their classified nomenclature in conjunction with the study of the earth as our home. **Geology** continues this study of the earth and its historical relationships.

**Science** encompasses units of study in areas such as Biology, Astronomy, and Chemistry in the later grades, and is presented in a way that allows the student to explore and observe the world around him/her. **Biology** is initially presented to younger students through dual studies divided between **Botany** and **Zoology**; beginning with Botanical and Zoological Classified Nomenclature. These units of study continue with experiments on vital functions of the plant kingdom and a comparative study of the vital functions of the different phyla and classes of the animal kingdom, progressing into a study of human functions and structure, and culminate in the later years with family life studies and sexual health education.

### **Research and Projects:**

Within the Montessori method, opportunities for study and projects on various levels of thinking are essential. Critical and creative-thinking skills are an integral link to the Montessori Cosmic philosophy and curriculum. Furthering a child's study and understanding of concepts is accomplished by applying their learning in research projects and presentations.

### **Homework Policy**

Homework is not necessarily a traditional component of the Montessori philosophy because it is difficult, at best, to re-create the Montessori classroom environment in each student's home. However, CMP acknowledges that homework is a valuable way to extend the classroom lessons, giving students more time to practice and review concepts they have learned. Homework benefits the student by developing good study skills, discipline, and responsibility. It also provides parents the opportunity to be involved in and stay current with their child/ren's education.

Homework assignments may consist of weekly math drills, spelling practice, reading or research projects. It should relate to classroom instruction, reinforce and extend learning, promote immediate recall of basic skills, and match the student's needs and academic level. CMP teachers have developed their own homework practices that will be shared with parents during orientation at the beginning of each school year. When there is no assigned homework, we recommend that you encourage your child to read.

**Character Education and Peace Education:  
Teaching Students to Become Contributing Members of Their Society**

CMP recognizes that the role of the parent/guardian is paramount in developing civic values and ethical behavior in their children. Montessori curriculum is developed to encourage and support students in the further development of the civic values and ethical behaviors that support them to become responsible and caring citizens, family members, and workers within society. Character education is interwoven throughout the educational program and fosters qualities such as: honesty, respect for self, others and property, morality (understanding what is right, legal and ethical), responsibility, human dignity, empathy, justice, civility, courage, and concern for the common good. CMP encourages all students to participate in community service projects to learn the importance of giving back to their community.

CMP believes in the dignity of all and that everyone, including students, families and staff, should be treated with dignity and respect. There is a great deal of diversity in the families we serve, and we strive to ensure that everyone feels welcome within our schools. Differences are celebrated! As a part of Cosmic Education (a study of each cosmic unit in relation to the whole), Maria Montessori was an advocate of Peace Education: the idea that the study and understanding of different cultures and societies would lead to acceptance and peace between nations. The breadth of the Montessori curriculum is designed to provide students with this exposure to a variety of cultures, societies, and beliefs, and to support students to be good citizens, as well as, progressive and compassionate thinkers and high-level communicators.

In accordance with this aim, CMP will not tolerate behavior by students, families, staff or visitors which is insulting, degrading or stereotyping of any race, religion, gender, disability, physical characteristics, ethnic group, sexual preference, age, or nationality.

**The Montessori Classroom Environment**

**In Montessori education, the total child must always be considered. Thus, it is in the best interest of the student that home and school environments are consistent.** For positive development of the body, mind, and spirit; the physical, mental, emotional, social, and academic needs of the child must constantly be taken into consideration. At CMP, this is our first priority. To be successful, staff AND parents need to be committed to the following precepts:

- CMP has chosen to implement the philosophy of Dr. Maria Montessori versus a traditional educational approach. Therefore, CMP classrooms and school environment will operate using the concepts and methodology of Montessori.
- CMP believes that children need pro-active and positive affirmation regarding self-image and esteem.
- CMP provides guidance in the area of behavior and attitudes; and recognizes that each child has a unique personality, likes and dislikes, values, strengths and challenges. Uniqueness of the child will be honored while providing guidance.

- Each class establishes rules within the first week of the school year. It is the expectation that these rules are set with the understanding that everyone will respect and follow them. This provides the child with ability to reason and think for her/himself and to experience natural consequences for her/his choices.
- At CMP, children are encouraged to communicate in a respectful, assertive and socially acceptable manner. An atmosphere in which students feel safe to express their differing viewpoints will be provided, as well as guidance with conflict resolution.
- All levels and styles of learning are encouraged. CMP schools reference both Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theories and Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognitive Thought Process structures to enhance the critical thinking skills of all students.
- CMP conducts Albanesi inventories to assist in making academic assessments. Placement, pretests and posttests are conducted in language arts, mathematics, and geometry. Reading assessments will be conducted for reading readiness.
- At CMP, personal responsibility and accountability is taught and practiced. Guidelines, limits, freedom of choice, and consequences will be made understandable to the students.
- CMP will provide clear and timely communication to families in all areas of the educational program.

**Kindergarten Program: (culmination of ages 3-6)**

Kindergarten is the culmination of the early childhood program which addresses the needs of the child during the first plane of development. Within the Kindergarten class, students transition from parallel play to an attitude of cooperative play. During this stage of development, the child gravitates toward a desire to work along with her/his peers. The Kindergarten classroom allows these concepts to develop naturally through the role modeling of the teachers as well as the integration of age levels and interests.

In the Kindergarten environment, the students *explore Montessori materials*. In mathematics, the Golden Bead Material is used to introduce the decimal system and progresses into the four mathematical operations (addition, subtraction, multiplication and division) in a concrete fashion. The Sensorial area concentrates more on geometry that eventually ties in with concepts in math. Language and reading materials guide the child toward recognition of the alphabet both by letter name and phonetically. "Sight words," those words in the English language not phonetically pronounced, are introduced gradually.

Upon mastery of the above foundational tasks, pre-reading and reading skills are integrated with the use of small primer books designed to allow the child to read successfully at their own level. Writing extensions are now integrated to strengthen the interest in reading. D'Nealian style manuscript handwriting is incorporated in all areas of the classroom, both in pre-writing or tracing activities, along with actual experience stories. The students move through writing of lower case letters first, and follow with the upper case, capital, letters.

The Practical Life area of the classroom enables the child to extend her/his concentration, coordination, and independence into a stronger sense of order for the future. In Kindergarten, the cultural lessons explore the areas of zoology, botany, geography, history, art and music. Within each area, specific units of study are presented. Physical Education is also explored within a group process, both indoors and out.

**Junior (Lower) Elementary Program: First through Third Grade Levels (ages 6 to 9)**

The California Montessori Project focuses on the aspects of the Cosmic curriculum of the Montessori philosophy. We work toward continuously increasing self-direction and independence of the junior child, age 6-9 years. In achieving these goals, the students gain strong self-concepts and effective roles of direction in self-responsibility. Our staff believes that in order to provide an appropriate learning environment for the child, we must encourage opportunities for reflective thinking, problem solving, and critical evaluation. Our environment provides opportunities for creative expression and encourages divergent thinking skills. We are able to allow and encourage your child's personal rate of learning, and can vary our teaching strategies to accommodate the needs of each individual student.

The curriculum is specifically designed with the elementary child in mind. We integrate the structure of Dr. Montessori's methodology, by using the core subjects of Language Arts, Mathematics, and Geometry, within the Cultural Subjects (including but not limited to: History, Geography, Zoology, and Botany) as our foundation of knowledge. Exposure to computer technology to familiarize students with the workings of a computer, keyboarding skills, and simple research are available in each classroom. Physical Education is based on California standards and occurs within the school week.

CMP integrates the expectations of the California state academic standards for this age and developmental stage and has paid careful attention to aligning the Montessori curriculum with state standards across the board. If you would like to view the curriculum for a particular level, please feel free to ask the teacher.

**Upper Elementary Program: Fourth through Sixth Grade Levels (ages 9 to 12)**

The philosophy of Montessori education is to encourage the student to classify, analyze, and evaluate information based on the introduction of any given academic subject matter from an impressionistic viewpoint. The goal for the student is to take information and apply it to real life experiences. These experiences then create opportunities for critical thinking and logical analysis.

The upper elementary curriculum continues to be specifically designed with the elementary child in mind. Core subjects of Language Arts, Mathematics, and Geometry are integrated throughout the Cultural Subjects (including but not limited to: History, Geography, and Science) as they remain the base for further knowledge and deeper exploration. Computer technology and research skills are taught to enhance the students' academic experience and prepare them for future academic and professional applications. Physical Education is a regular component of the curriculum, as well.

The upper elementary expectations of the California state standards for this age and developmental group serve as a minimum standard, with the Montessori curriculum often surpassing these minimum standards and offering students personal challenge toward academic excellence.

**Middle School Program: Seventh and Eighth Grade Levels (ages 12 and older).**

According to Joan Lipsitz, a leading adolescent psychologist, “Young adolescents undergo more changes during the middle school years than at any other age except for the time between birth and age 3. If the social and emotional needs of children this age are ignored, little happens cognitively.” A strong part of the Montessori philosophy is to consider the unique developmental stages of adolescent students in order to support their changing needs.

In addition to continuing the acquisition of core academic information, Montessori Middle school students extend their grasp and stock of abstract interpretive concepts. Our students use a form of Socratic discussion to interpret core data in terms of the social and environmental issues of the world, past and present.

Classes are taught in cycles of 6-week durations. Each cycle emphasizes a specific part of the curriculum and provides students with the opportunity for in-depth study, exploration, and research. During the last week of each cycle, the students participate in an “immersion experience” in which they spend time away from the classroom participating in applicable hands-on learning in the real world (known as field lab trips).

Class structure is based on collaborative learning and research based projects. The Middle School program structure guides each student to develop his/her own abilities to become highly effective young adults. Technology based multi-media is also integrated throughout this period of learning.

**“Normalization”**

Dr. Montessori used the terms “normal” and “normalization” to describe a unique process she observed in child development. When children are allowed freedom in an environment suited to their needs, they blossom. After a period of intense concentration, working with materials that fully engage their interest, children appear to be refreshed and contented. Through continued concentrated work at their own academic level, children grow in inner discipline and peace. This progression of self-development and harmony is what Dr. Montessori referred to as the “normalization process”. Dr. Montessori cited “normalization” as “the single most important result of our work” (“The Absorbent Mind”, by Dr. Maria Montessori, 1949).

At the beginning of each school year, you will hear teachers and other staff members refer to the period of normalization. This is a time when students are acclimating to their new environment, their new teachers, and their new classmates. This is also the time when students will be learning how to use the bulk of new classroom materials and working to establish expectations and order within their classroom peer group. Once students have had a chance to “normalize”, parents will begin to observe a very wonderful routine and structure to the daily and weekly classroom activity.

## **Choosing Montessori Materials and Other Instructional Materials for the Classroom**

CMP has developed a process for carefully reviewing and selecting all of the instructional materials, textbooks, and library books used in our school. Our review process is very important to ensure that your children have the best possible instructional tools and to assure consistency throughout our program.

### **Montessori Materials in Kindergarten and Junior Elementary:**

For the younger students in the Montessori classroom, learning materials are arranged invitingly on low, open shelves. The materials are beautiful and inviting, increasing the child's interest in using them. During specified periods of uninterrupted work time, children may choose from all the lessons that have been demonstrated to them, particularly those that attract their interest, and work with them as long as they hold the child's interest (independence and freedom of choice). When students have finished with each lesson (job), they return it to the shelf from which it came (care of environment and self-responsibility).

Each lesson in a Montessori classroom isolates one specific quality. In this way, the concept that the child is to discover is presented more clearly. Moreover, the materials are self-correcting. When a piece does not fit, or is left over, the child easily perceives the error, thus eliminating the need for adult correction. The child is able to solve problems independently; building self-confidence and analytical thinking skills, and earning the satisfaction that comes from accomplishment.

### **Montessori Materials in the Upper Levels:**

For the older students, instructional materials are appropriate to their level of learning and a higher level of independent work takes place. New concepts are introduced using the Montessori materials, and as understanding takes place, the students move to abstract work with the concept. Many of the same Montessori materials introduced in the lower grades are utilized once again in the upper elementary classroom, but are used for more complex curriculum.

### **Movies shown in class**

Occasionally educational movies will be shown at school. These movies have been reviewed by staff and are shown specifically for their educational content in conjunction with the relative curriculum. "G" rated non-educational movies may be shown on occasion. Appropriate PG movies will require prior parental permission. No movies rated PG-13, R, X, or NC-17 by the motion picture industry are shown at any grade level.

### **Instructional Use of the Internet: School Use of Internet Services is a Privilege**

CMP recognizes the necessity for students of today to be computer literate, and computers are provided in each classroom for student use. Before students may use the Internet at school, they must have parental permission on file and meet with their teachers to review school policies regarding Internet use, along with the consequences for not following these policies. Students wishing to use the Internet will sign an agreement to abide by these policies. The policy

statement details what is expected of anyone using the Internet, email services, designing a webpage, researching, or using education programs online. Content filters are installed by CMP to eliminate exposure to undesirable Internet sites.

**School Use of Internet Guidelines include:**

- Use of the Internet is a privilege.
- Those under 18 may not reveal their last names, addresses, or phone numbers.
- The user acknowledges that email has no guarantee of privacy and all content on school computers is subject to periodic review.
- Messages related to or supporting illegal activities will be reported to authorities, and messages are subject to the same restrictions as any material prepared for distribution.
- Transmission or reception of copyrighted material; material protected by trade secret; product advertisement or political lobbying; material that is obscene, libelous, slanderous, gang-related, incites students and/or staff to create a clear and present danger by promoting unlawful acts on school grounds, violation of school regulations, or disrupts orderly operation of school are prohibited and will result in termination of the user's Internet privileges. Additionally, the user will be subject to all applicable consequences.
- Acts of vandalism, such as knowingly downloading or uploading computer viruses, will result in termination of the user's Internet privileges and will subject the user to all applicable consequences, including but not limited to financial restitution from the family to repair/replace damaged equipment and resources.

The Technology Use Agreement signed by students, parents, and teachers may be viewed on the CMP website.

**Special Education and Services**

CMP desires to meet the needs of all of our students. California law requires public schools, including charter schools, to provide a free and appropriate public education to all students, including those with exceptional needs. Although most students' needs are met through the traditional Montessori curriculum, occasionally supplemental services are needed. CMP may arrange for outside agencies or a neighboring school district to provide these services if they are not available at the CMP campus. If your child has special needs, please talk with her/his teacher and with the Principal so we can address these needs.

**Section 504 Accommodations**

California law requires schools to provide a free, appropriate education to qualified disabled persons. When a student qualifies under Section 504, an accommodation plan is designed to meet the student's special needs.

***CMP is committed to providing students with a highly professional environment where they are safe to grow and learn, and which nurtures a love of learning. CMP honors each student's learning style and developmental level.***