



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.