A.1 Educational Philosophy

Camino Montessori seeks to create a school community which is absolutely child-centered and built upon an ever deepening understanding and respect for the individuality and spirit of each child. All of our school's activities will be guided by our

- ***shared vision*** *of an education model based on the complete development of the child—cognitive, social, emotional, physical and spiritual.*
- ***shared set of core beliefs and values*** *which are rooted in Montessori pedagogy and validated by scientific research and discoveries in brain and cognitive science.*
- ***shared dedication*** *to preserving the values of Montessori education and to the strong scientific evidence that children learn best through active, experiential learning.*
- ***shared commitment*** *to create a school culture grounded in cycles of inquiry and action and focused equally on the processes and the products of learning and living.*

Our Philosophical and Theoretical Roots…

Dr. Maria Montessori was part of the education reform movement of the early and mid 1900's that espoused more *progressive* thinking about educating children. The term *"progressive"* was originally coined to distinguish this new pedagogy from the widespread traditional ("industrial") methods of the 19th century, which were rooted in classical preparation for the university and strongly *differentiated* by socioeconomic level. Jim Nehring (University of Massachusetts at Lowell) observed, "progressive schools are the legacy of a long and proud tradition of thoughtful school practice stretching back for centuries"—including hands-on learning, multiage classrooms, and mentor-apprentice relationships—while what we generally refer to as traditional schooling "is largely the result of policy changes that have calcified into conventions". ("Progressive vs. Traditional: Reframing an Old Debate", *Education Week*, 2006)

Early on, while practicing as a physician, Dr. Montessori became interested in how children learn. Her observations resulted in her belief that children "build themselves from what they find in their environment" and led to her desire to learn more about the mind-body connection in child development. Fueled by this desire, as well as formidable training and background in the fields of medicine, anthropology, psychology and philosophy, in 1906, Montessori established her first school in the slum district of Rome, Italy, with the task of educating tenant children considered "beyond teachable and incapable of learning". Her scientific observations revealed that these "at risk" children seemed to possess an *innate drive to learn*, what she came to describe as *"the self-creating process of the child*" (Maria Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*). This accidental discovery inspired Dr. Montessori to dedicate the remainder of her life (over 50 years) to education reform and laying out the foundation for what is now often referred to as the "Montessori method".

It is interesting to note that during this same period, Jean Piaget was developing his *developmental stage theory*, Lev Vygotsky was focusing on the *socio-cultural nature of learning*, and John Dewey was studying *constructivism*—all inherent aspects of progressive education, in general, and Montessori education in particular. They shared a common belief that learning is "an active, constructive process", which contrasted with the widely-accepted behaviorist view of learning as "passive with learner responses caused by external stimuli, e.g., "stimulus-response" (B.F. Skinner, Ivan Pavlov, et al). Maria Montessori, Jean Piaget, and John Dewey knew of each other's work, and were influenced by, or influenced the other at different times throughout each of their life's work.

Progressive forms of education and thinking continued through the end of the 20th century with the birth of "cognitivism" by Noam Chomsky. Cognitive science views learning as composed of "inner mental activities" and believe *mental functions* (thinking, memory, knowing, and problem-solving) can be understood". Out of cognitive science came the "humanist" views of Abraham Maslov and Carl Rogers, who included *affective* variables in their learning model—learning is "a personal act to fulfill one's potential". Learning is "student-centered and personal",

and should be facilitated by teachers with the goal of developing "self-actualized people in a cooperative, supportive environment".

Jerome Bruner's later analysis of developmental psychology became the core of a pedagogical movement that introduced the "Discovery Learning" model to education. Bruner believes learning is strongest when "students discover facts and relationships for themselves" and is best facilitated through "inquiry based instruction" (constructivism).

The "Experiential Learning" model , developed by David Kolb, is based on a four-stage theory of learning that presents a "holistic" view of the learning process that combines experience, perception, cognition, and behavior. "Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience". (Kolb)

Progressive child-centered approaches to education continue to be supported and enhanced by recent brain and cognitive research and findings. Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences theory (Frames of Mind), for example, proposes there are at least seven "pathways to learning", or types of intelligence—musical, spatial, kinesthetic, etc.—which are fluid throughout one's life—in other words, "diverse forms of understanding". He proposes an educational system that focuses on enhancing and strengthening these pathways within the developmental framework of the child through active participation, community involvement, and culminating projects. Gardner's MI theory has had a tremendous impact on current learning theory and practice. Mel Levine (All Kinds of Minds Institute) provides a neurological schemata and framework that identifies the eight fundamental systems, or components of learning which has further promoted the practice of considering individual learning styles in curricular planning and design.

Other theorists and scientists continue to influence further research in learning and cognition, as well as inform educational "best practice" and methodology. For example, Daniel Goleman argues a "different way of being smart" which he refers to as *"emotional intelligence"* (EI). EI is not fixed at birth; it can be nurtured and strengthened. EI presents a "new vision of intelligence" and a "new curriculum for life". In Goleman's words, "emotional intelligence adds far more of the qualities that make us more fully human". (Emotional Intelligence: Why it Can Matter more than IQ, 1995); Alphie Kohn has provided valid argument against, and viable alternatives for, reward-punishment strategies that consider *extrinsic vs. intrinsic motivations* for learning. David and Robert Johnson (founders of the Cooperative Learning model) identified the *elements essential* for problem solving, reasoning, decision-making, planning, organizing, and reflecting.

Common Core Principles of Progressive Education

- ☑ *Emphasis on learning by doing – hands-on projects, expeditionary learning, experiential learning*
- ☑ *Integrated curriculum focused on thematic units*
- ☑ *Strong emphasis on problem solving and critical thinking*
- ☑ *Group work and development of social skills*
- ☑ *Understanding and action as the goals of learning as opposed to rote knowledge*
- ☑ *Collaborative and cooperative learning projects*
- ☑ *Education for social responsibility and democracy*
- ☑ *Integration of community service and service learning projects into the daily curriculum*
- ☑ *Selection of subject content by looking forward to ask what skills will be needed in future society*
- ☑ *De-emphasis on textbooks in favor of varied learning resources*
- ☑ *Emphasis on life-long learning and social skills*
- ☑ *Assessment by evaluation of child's projects and productions*

(Alphie Kohn, *"Progressive Education—Why It's Hard to Beat, But Also Hard to Find"*, Independent School, 2008)

Although Dr. Montessori may not have considered herself as an active member of the *progressive* educational movement in her time, per se, she was deeply committed to education reform and her pedagogy is in harmony with, and incorporates many of the core principles that have come out of this educational paradigm and continue to be validated by an abundance of current brain and learning research.

Our school founder's philosophy of education is rooted in this rich history of education reform, research, and practice. Our methodology reflects these *core principles* (see table above) in our practice.

Camino Montessori Education

Camino Montessori's philosophy emphasizes *building children's positive attitudes and feelings towards learning as the primary outcomes of education with the ultimate goal of becoming an adult who is better prepared to contribute to the world community.* Our *educational aim*, is to produce students (who eventually become adults) who are *moral beings; confident & competent learners; independent & autonomous; intrinsically motivated; academically prepared; socially responsible; free within limits; spiritually aware; able to handle external authority; and, citizens of the world and stewards of the planet.* (American Authentic Montessori Handbook, N. Rambusch & J. Stoops) Every attribute of Camino Montessori's educational program will be grounded upon an understanding of these qualities--a view of the *"whole child"*, and the idea that education is not just about academics, nor is intellectual growth limited to verbal and mathematical proficiencies.

In addition to the Montessori framework for curriculum design and implementation—*"Cosmic Education" (See Section A.3),* at Camino Montessori, we believe the following essential (core) elements and characteristics are equally important in maintaining the integrity and authenticity of our instructional practices.

A Community of Learners Montessori classrooms are composed of two, three, or more age levels into a 'family-oriented' classroom community. Children of mixed age levels and of different abilities work together for several years. Typically, only a small portion of older students, who are developmentally ready, move on to the next level. Children learn with and from one another in a caring community, and this is true of moral domains of learning as well. Interdependence is equally as important as independence. Our focus is on 'inclusion' at all levels.

Since Kindergarteners are typically the "elders" of the Montessori primary level (ages 3-6 years), including them in our first Elementary I level is a compromise we must make due to initial funding restraints and requirements. Although our vision includes adding a primary program, it will be several years away. We will continually evaluate and implement the most optimal groupings based on the needs of our students as our program matures.

Attitudes and Behaviors that Reflect Cooperation and Collaboration Children and adults are expected to treat one another with kindness and respect. Students will be taught and encouraged to use cooperative strategies for learning and as a guide for their behavior. Because children are encouraged to learn at their own pace, teachers will avoid comparing students against one another, and work to minimize this type of competition within the whole school community.

Mindfully Prepared Teachers & Learning Environments We will ensure that our classrooms are warm, inviting, and aesthetically pleasing spaces. Emphasis will be on promoting a strong *sense of community* in which children are learning how to live and *work in partnership* with their peers and adult mentors. Elementary classrooms will be *democratic*, focused on consensual decision-making, and are run to a large degree by the children, with adult guidance given as necessary to ensure order and safety. We believe in promoting an *emotionally safe environment*, where students are able to *take risks* in all areas of their learning. We envision classroom environments where children learn to do things for themselves, solve problems together, learn how to master new skills and knowledge, and engage in their own *self-discovery* as individual members of humanity.

Since the child learns to glean information from many sources, instead of being continually directed by the teacher, it is the role of our teachers to prepare and continue to adapt the environment and to link the child to it through carefully planned lessons. All materials and resources within the classroom will be set out and displayed for easy access by the child. The *hands-on materials* will be arranged in a logical sequence, for example, from the most simple to the most complex, or from the most concrete to those that are more abstract. We believe that an especially important aspect of the *Montessori materials* is that they offer multiple levels of challenge and can be used repeatedly at different developmental levels. Montessori learning materials are *tools* used to guide children into logical thought and discovery.

A Flexible Schedule Our daily schedules will allow for flexibility, and provide for at least one uninterrupted 2-3 hour work period ("Great Period"). Children will be supported in selecting their own work, and progressing at their own pace. We believe that when group lessons are kept at a minimum, periods of concentration are protected, and children are exposed to the amazing amount of work at the elementary level, not only are the state curriculum requirements easily met, but our children will work and learn at a much deeper level, often surpassing typical benchmarks.

A Personalized Instructional Approach The focus of activity in our classrooms will always remain on the current community of students—who each one is, what their interests are, as well as their *unique styles of learning*. We expect our *teachers to act as "guides"* who provide direct and indirect learning experiences whenever possible. Our teachers are always in the *role of "model"* as a lifelong learner.

Camino Montessori will nurture and respect all intelligences and styles of learning. Learning begins with the child, and each child is unique. Montessori teachers are taught to use specific *scientific observation techniques* in order to *continually assess* each child's interests, abilities, and styles of learning. Effective observation provides the teacher with the appropriate insights to ensure that all aspects of the learning environment are conducive to positive growth and development. Teachers are committed to their own continued growth and education, and continually review their practice in terms of current research and "best practice".

Hands-on and Experiential Learning Camino Montessori classrooms will not be text-book driven, nor will they rely too heavily on workbooks and seat work. Rather, emphasis will be placed on direct, personal hands-on contact with educational materials and/or concrete models that bring abstract concepts to life, and deepen our children's level of investigation, exploration, and discovery.

"Spontaneous Activity" Children have an *innate* tendency to touch things and explore their environment. Our school environment will be one that encourages children to move about freely within reasonable limits of appropriate behavior. Our students will be supported to choose work that captures their interest and attention. Our teachers will also strive to draw their attention and interest in new challenges and areas of inquiry. Although we promote an atmosphere of *spontaneous activity*, our students will be aware that there are *basic skills and competencies* which they are expected to master in spite of their possible lack of interest

Active Learning & Participation Our students will be viewed as *active participants* in their learning process, and they will be offered *choices* in their activities, which are fueled by their need to be competent and to have some sense of control. Children will be encouraged to *progress at their own pace*, moving on to the next step in each area of learning as they are ready.

Our students will play a vital role in helping to design the curriculum, formulate questions, seek out (and create) answers, thinking through possibilities, and evaluate how successful they have been.

Self-Directed Opportunities for Learning & Activities Our students will be encouraged to work independently, alone and/or with peers, with minimal teacher-direction once they have been introduced to a new concept or skill.

Control of Error & Self Discovery At Camino Montessori, we will strive to facilitate children's independence and ability to learn at their own pace. Many learning activities (specifically those utilizing Montessori materials) are designed with built in *control of error (self correction)*, which allows for more independence and *self-discovery* of errors, and which not only deepens the learning, but facilitates a *sense of ownership* for one's learning. This characteristic is one of the essential keys to developing a habit of working toward quality, mastery and precision.

Clear and Precise Instruction and Guidance In many cases, learning tasks are carefully and *logically sequenced* and programmed so that each new step is built on what the child has already mastered. All of our lessons and learning

activities are specifically designed to increase the child's *self-confidence* by minimizing frustration, confusion, and uncertainty.

We promote deeper levels of understanding as a primary outcome of learning—*learning how to learn*. Facts and skills do matter, but only in *a context* and for *a purpose*. Our curriculum is integrated and organized around global themes ("Great Lessons") which present students with real problems, real questions, and opportunities to share what they have learned through projects. The point is to not merely challenge students, but to invite them to think deeply about issues that matter and help them understand ideas from the inside out.

"Freedom within Limits" Camino Montessori children will enjoy a considerable amount of *freedom of movement and choice*, however, within *well-defined limits* on the range of their behavior. Working in cooperation, students will be actively involved with establishing *ground rules* for the community. Camino Montessori believes in a positive discipline approach that is guided by a deep respect for the child and responds appropriately to where they are in their development. Research shows that we learn best when we have a sense of control in the process. We consider the child's elementary years to be the "sensitive period" for developing one's sense of fairness and social justice.

Intrinsic Motivation Critical to Learning We wish to continually promote a love for learning ("joyful scholars") and our focus is always on this long-term disposition rather than just improving short-term skills in order to move to the next level. Research shows that children learn best when they are interested and *actively engaged*. Therefore, we will not adhere to the conventional practices of assigned homework, external and arbitrary grades, and excessive and/or unnecessary testing. To ensure our learning tasks are implemented with purpose and application in mind, our guiding question for our educational policy and practice will always be, "What's the effect on students' *interest* in learning, their *desire* to continue reading, thinking, and questioning?"

The Child as a Spiritual Being Our teachers will consciously design social communities and educational experiences that cultivate the child's *sense of wonder*, independence, self-respect, love of peace, passion for self-chosen work done well, and the ability to respect and celebrate the interconnectedness of all people and life. We believe that children in this stage of development want to explore meaningful roles in society. That they want to know how everything came to be, the history of the universe, the world, humans and why they behave the way they do. They ask "big questions", and want answers. Our curriculum is designed to "*capture the imagination* of the child in pursuit of the answers to these fundamental questions and inspire a *passion for learning"*. (Duffy, *Children of the Universe: Cosmic Education in the Montessori Elementary Classroom*, 2002) We educate for good character and a strong sense of morality, continually nurturing and encouraging their desire to help others and to make a difference.

Stewardship of the Earth At Camino Montessori we seek to instill in our children a reverence for our planet--its nature, its systems, its interdependence, its diversity of life—as well as a deep *sense of stewardship* for the environment based on the conviction that each of us has responsibility for the beauty of the land and the health of our ecosystems. (N. Rambusch & J. Stoops, *The Authentic American Montessori School*).

Universal Values All Camino Montessori personnel will seek to instill in all of our students basic *universal values* and essential patterns of polite behavior and social mores within the core of the child's personality. These values include self-respect, acceptance of the uniqueness and dignity of each person we meet, kindness, peaceful conflict resolution, compassion, empathy, honor, individual responsibility, and courage to speak from the heart, and to "do the right thing."

Social Development Our classrooms will offer social settings based on a strong sense of community—*a microcosm of society and democracy*. Emergent skills will be harnessed for the good of the whole group. *Cooperation* and *collaboration* will be encouraged as a way of supporting one another in efforts of learning and mastery. Comparisons between children will be avoided. The individual will be viewed as an integral member of the group. There is an expectation that all children will develop over time, and that they will master the social system and curriculum to the

best of their ability. Non-violence, non-aggressive behavior, and respect for self, others, and property will be the norm of our school.

Global Awareness and Understanding To a large degree all Montessori schools are "international" schools. They not only tend to attract a diverse student body that represents many ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds, but they actively celebrate cultural diversity. Our *curriculum is international in its heritage and focus*, and consciously seeks to promote a global perspective. We believe that the study of at least one foreign language and culture is critical to developing global awareness, and plan to offer a strong Spanish language and cultural program.

Social Responsibility A spirit of *service to others* is a core value at Camino Montessori. Our students will be provided with support and many opportunities to not only learn about, but to take action and participate in service oriented experiences, ranging from daily contributions within the classroom and school environment, to community, national, and/or globally focused outreach.

Camino Montessori is committed to implementing an *authentic* Montessori education program for students and families in the City of Maricopa area for several reasons. First, there is currently no private or public option for a Montessori elementary level. Legacy Montessori is a preschool that has been serving families and children in this community for about seven years, and they are actively supporting our efforts to open Camino in Maricopa. On many occasions over the past year and a half, our founder has met with families both from Legacy Montessori and from the community at large who support our mission to expand the Montessori continuum in Maricopa. Several members of local businesses and leadership agree a Montessori education option would benefit the community.

Second, the current choices for an alternative to the district schools are limited to primarily traditional models ("back to basics", college prep, etc.). We believe that a Montessori education not only provides our children with the necessary foundations for achieving higher learning goals—middle school, high school, college—but more importantly, that it is an effective scientifically-based model of teaching and learning that responds to each child's developmental needs and tendencies, in turn leading to our ultimate goal of early education—children who become life-long learners, fully actualized adults, and responsible and caring global citizens.

Third, approximately 1,200 K-12 students leave Maricopa each day to attend elementary and high schools in the Phoenix area, and we believe this erodes the sense of local community on many different levels. We believe that providing a Montessori option in Maricopa will not only meet the needs of some of these diverse learners going elsewhere, but will also help to strengthen the community on wider economic and social levels. Finally, a *Montessori* education in the United States has historically been a private option for parents, with tuition too steep for many parents to manage. Part of our Founder's mission is to remove this potential barrier by providing an excellent public Montessori elementary program open to all children and families regardless of socio-economic, racial, ethnic, religious considerations.