



# TODAY'S INTERVIEW

Interview with Cory-Ann Notari, Program Manager at Cap Canaille



Cap Canaille's daycare centers have as their basis the philosophy of providing more than just childcare; indeed - they give infants and young children the opportunity to start their lives in an environment which is safe and secure, while stimulating their imagination about the world around them and building the foundation for language and numeracy skills. Cory-Ann Notari described Cap Canaille's innovative approach, common to its 5 childcare centers in Suisse Romande.

***What are the main pillars of your pedagogical program at Cap Canaille?***

**CORY-ANN:** Cap Canaille's core values are Bilingualism, Pedagogy/Curriculum and Flexibility. At Cap Canaille we believe that each child must be able to develop and learn at his own pace. We do not teach children – rather we accompany

them in their discoveries. We propose a stimulating bilingual environment for the child where each child is free to discover the world around him at his own pace. When a child trusts the people around him and his surroundings he will learn without realizing he is learning. We are firm believers that, "Children are born ready to learn the language or languages of their environments without confusion or delay." (Werker & Byers-Heinlein, 2008).

One of the most important benefits of early bilingualism is often taken for granted: bilingual children will know multiple languages, which is important for travel, employment, speaking with members of one's extended family, maintaining a connection to family culture and history, and making friends from different backgrounds. But bilingual daycare can also make children more creative, tolerant and better at solving problems. Research increasingly

demonstrates the benefits of bilingualism in young children, "Bilingual preschoolers seem to have somewhat better skills than monolinguals in understanding others' perspectives, thoughts, desires, and intentions." (Bialystok & Senman, 2004; Goetz, 2003; Kovács, 2009).

We focus on the child's well-being - in particular, building each child's self-confidence, self-esteem and autonomy. A child who is equipped with these three things will be confident and succeed in any school. We ensure that we adapt to each child's needs and learning style, flexing our approach accordingly. We also recognize the need for flexibility in accommodating changes in scheduling, for example. We try to adapt as much as possible to respond to parents' needs, which is the reason our daycare centers are open from 6h30 to 18h30 (or even 19h30, upon request) and also why we are

open throughout the year (except during the Christmas period).

**This sounds like an ambitious objective. How do you do this in different age groups? What skills do you aim to develop at different stages?**

**CORY-ANN:** In all three age groups (infants, toddlers and pre-school), we emphasize building autonomy in the child. If a child is encouraged to do things on his own, he or she will be proud of his achievements and want to do more.

**Infant group:**

In this age group, the aim is to allow children to access different milestones of their development at their own pace (i.e.: sitting up, crawling, walking).

- Inspired by the work of Emmi Pikler, caregivers build a respectful relationship with infants, through individual attention, focused tender care moments, a naturally paced motor development, free movement and uninterrupted play.
- We work to reduce frustration in newborns through the use of basic sign language.
- Caregivers are focused on observing the child's needs and proposing toys and activities geared to each stage in his or her development (balls for grasping, a mini motor obstacle course, different sounds and textures; focusing on the five senses and the seasons).

**Toddler group:**

This can be a difficult age, with frequent tantrums - sometimes called the "no" stage.

- In this age group, we emphasize heightened imaginary and creative process.



- Drawing on the work of Emmi Pikler, Maria Montessori and the Rikiko Theater Method, children explore through sensory play and movement (Youp'labouge).
- Free play is also an important priority.
- There is an emphasis on language development through songs and finger-puppet plays.
- Activities are built around different themes revolving around seasons, color, the alphabet, numbers, shapes, the weather, repetition of themed vocabulary.

**Preschooler group:**

The curriculum is more elaborate and structured. We work on basic writing skills, arithmetic, and nature / the seasons.

- There is a focus on more creatively complex activities and exploring different artistic techniques.
- We also take the children on excursions, to deepen and extend the exploration of different themes.
- Our objectives during this stage are to build self-confidence, collaboration and language skills through moments of show and tell.

We take our inspiration from Montessori, Steiner/Waldorf activities. In the words of Maria Montessori: "This is the first duty of an educator: to stir up life but leave it free to develop." The phrase which guides Montessori

educators (and resonates with our approach) sums up this philosophy from the perspective of the child: "help me to do it alone".

**This is a very thorough and integrated set of pedagogical objectives, but we know children are very different. How do you do this concretely - taking into account individual children's needs and abilities? Are there specific methods you use in order to build on children's natural curiosity / stimulate inquiry?**

**CORY-ANN:** We aim to help the child learn on his or her own through experience and trial and error. We do this by allowing the child enough space and time to discover new things. By observing the child closely we are able to propose a wide variety of activities specific to his or her stage of development and interests. We offer a balance between more structured activities and free play.

Since no two children learn in

the same way, we propose a variety of different activities revolving around specific themes, in order to cater to the visual learner, the tactile learner, the auditory learner, the musical learner the physical learner, etc. For example, some children will wish to sing the alphabet, some will wish to start tracing letters in sand, while others will wish to draw pictures relating to letters and others will want to dance the alphabet. By adapting to different learning styles, we attempt to maximize children's engagement.

**You welcome children from many different backgrounds and cultures into your daycare centers. What do you do to leverage this multiculturalism among children, to embed a respect of different cultures into your activities?**

**CORY-ANN:** Cap Canaille caters to roughly 1000 families; each one has its own history and background. The norm today is that children come to the daycare with already two languages and cultures. We welcome different cultures and take time with each family to get to know them as well as their child before they integrate the daycare center.



Supporting diversity in a daycare setting is a continuous and ongoing process aimed at helping children to feel good about themselves, learn about their backgrounds and learn about the background of people different from them. It also encourages cooperative social skills. "Preoperational children learn through concrete experiences" (Jean Piaget) therefore children need to learn about themselves through being exposed to people—children of each age group go out regularly into the community whether it be a visit to the local market, to

- Group crafts and sensory play
- Symbolic play
- Story telling

**Preschool groups:**

- Board games
- Flashcards
- Plays
- Story time
- Show and tell
- Excursions
- Outdoor activities
- Sharing and patience

*„We propose a stimulating bilingual environment for the child where each child is free to discover the world around him at his own pace.“*

walk around the neighbourhood, or more elaborate excursions to a fire station, a farm or a village party. Cap Canaille’s annual summer picnics, Song Gardens, Christmas parties and regular outings bring families together, and to allow for this exchange to take place.

***We know that collaboration is an increasingly important skill and schools are paying attention to fostering this skill among learners. What kinds of activities do children at Cap Canaille centers work together on to develop collaboration skills?***

**CORY-ANN:**

**Infant and Toddler groups:**

- Dancing together for circle time
- Going out for a walk as a group
- Holding hands
- Having a meal together

***It seems like there is an emphasis on giving children individual attention. Typically how many children does one childcare giver look after? And what is the background and training of the educators?***

**CORY-ANN:** We believe in the importance of small groups, so that educators can give children the attention they need. This ranges from 4 to 5 infants per caregiver in the infants group, to 6 to 7 per caregiver in the toddlers group, and 6 to 10 children per caregiver in the pre-school group.

Most of our caregivers within our daycare centers hold a degree in early childhood education. A smaller percentage have a child education CFC degree (Certificat Fédéral de Capacité d’Assistant socio-éducative). We also have some caregivers who are considered daycare assistants or auxiliaries. At Cap Canaille, they are all fluent English or French speakers with

degrees in teaching, child psychology, and/or many years’ experience in a daycare environment. Often they are in the process of getting their foreign degrees authorized in Switzerland. Along with these educators are interns or students completing work experience before entry to the Ecole Supérieure en Education de l’Enfance (ESEDE).

***Integration is often a delicate time of adjustment for both children and parents. How do you handle integration into the daycare? Are there key differences to how do this at different ages?***

**CORY-ANN:** Each child who enrolls at Cap Canaille is assigned a primary educator. This educator meets with the parents and the child before the child begins their adaptation into the daycare. She spends time getting to know the child and the family. This first meeting can be up to 90 minutes.

The educator helps the parents to complete the different forms regarding the procedures within the daycare center and asks pertinent questions about the child and his or her routines and habits. The educator explains the pedagogy and shows the parents the environment the child will be in, introducing them to the educators who will also be caring for their child. During this time the child is free to explore the new environment and get to know his primary educator. Regardless of the age

of the child, this meeting is an important first step.

The adaptation into the daycare usually begins a few days later. It is gradual. The first day parents can stay with their child, then each day the time the child spends within the daycare is lengthened. This adaptation usually lasts 5 days, but can be stretched to 10 days depending on the child (as well as the parents’) readiness. We believe it is important to take time necessary for this stage, and not to rush the child or the parents.

***There is increasing evidence that children’s emotional well-being is key to their ability to learn.***

***What attention do you give to fulfilling the emotional needs of children?***

**CORY-ANN:** Each child is different and this difference is respected and valued. In the **infant group**, a child may need to be held and comforted a little longer before going down for a nap. The Emmi Pikler pedagogy favours a one-on-one relationship during nappy changes, mealtime and nap time; it also values verbalizing each one of the educator’s actions and allowing the child to anticipate what is coming next.

In the **toddler group** through story time, puppets and Rikiko children are encouraged to explore their emotions. For example: by holding a puppet show, with two puppets - one under the table, one asking the other to come out - we can help children to explore their







individual emotions. For one child, these puppets may represent their parents in conflict, while for another it represents a game of hide and seek, and for yet another it represents that their parent is often in a rush at the end of the day and has no time for the child. The educator uses words and facial expressions and puppets to help to help each child deal and understand their emotions.

In the **preschool group**: children are encouraged to verbalize their emotions, to talk instead of grab, to ask instead of push, to voice their disagreement instead of screaming or fighting. Storytime and short plays help children explore all of their emotions through role-playing, discussion and other means of expression.

**Educators are attempting more and more to foster a "growth mindset" in learners. Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck's research shows that learners who believe their ability can be developed through dedication and hard work, nurture a love of learning and resilience, which is**

**essential for great accomplishment. What do you do to help children to develop a growth mindset?**

**CORY-ANN:** Making the development of the autonomous child a key part of our approach in developing a growth mindset. We do this in the following ways:

- Knowing the child, observing the child and setting the child up for success, i.e. not placing the child in situations where we know he will fail, be frustrated and give up.
- Allowing children to achieve their milestones on their own.
- Positive reinforcement which is not exaggerated. Allowing children the space and time to find their own solutions.
- Letting children deal with frustration and know that frustration is normal.
- Allowing children to create, explore and discover through freeplay.
- Organizing team work and group activities with a common goal.

**The approach you describe is a holistic one, paying attention to the child's well-being in all aspects. What is your approach to physical health, for example exercise and nutrition?**

**CORY-ANN:** Cap Canaille has the „Youp'la bouge“ label. This is a program promoting the health of young children through:

- Favouring physical activity indoors and outdoors. Children go outside at least once a day.
- Healthy meals provided by a caterer are well-balanced and varied..
- Activities revolving around different cultures and food preferences are organized as well.

**There have been many different approaches to bilingualism. What is your approach?**

**CORY-ANN:** The most important aspect of bilingualism is the ,one person - one language' rule; caregivers do not switch from one language to another.

All documents given to parents

are in both languages and parent evening are organized in both languages.

- Infant group: bilingual groups, one person one language, more for the parents than for the children, song booklet.
- Toddler group: separate languages rooms and immersion, one person one language, songs repetition, fingerplays, vocabulary booklet, song booklet, storytime.
- Preschool group: separate language rooms and immersion, one person one language, role-play, show and tell, vocabulary booklet, worksheets, storytime, songs and fingerplays, hands on vocabulary games, rhyming and repetition, excursions organized around different language themes.

**Do you accommodate children with special needs? What is the level of support do you provide?**

**CORY-ANN:** Our educators often work with parents, paediatricians, speech or physical therapists to offer the

best care for the children enrolled at Cap Canaille. Each daycare centre is wheelchair friendly and extra support educators can be included in a child's daycare experience when needed.

***If there are siblings and/or twins in the nursery together, are there any special considerations to how they are treated?***

**CORY-ANN:** During the adaptation interview parents and educators decide on the best solution for the family with regards to siblings and/or twins. Because Cap Canaille caters to children under the age of 6, our educational team does not require twins to be in separate groups. Parents and educators decide together on the best solution for the children. A

discount is given to siblings enrolled at Cap Canaille.

***This is a very different approach to early childhood learning than is common in other Swiss daycare centers and nurseries. What are the key differences that you see?***

**CORY-ANN:** Our values: bilingualism, pedagogy and flexibility as well as the holistic view of care for the children. Most Swiss daycare centers include one or two of these aspects but it is rare to find a daycare that encompasses all four. Children graduating from Cap Canaille are well-rounded, confident and curious individuals who have shared and learnt from different languages and cultures. Our educators have helped them discover and develop all the necessary tools

needed to succeed in their scholastic future.

***In the spirit of paying attention to the whole child, what kinds of activities can parents do at home with children to support the learning they do at Cap Canaille?***

**CORY-ANN:** Parents can show their interest in the activities organized within the daycare. They are encouraged to:

- Get to know your child's caregiver
- Take the time to visit the daycare regularly with their child.
- Participate in the parent evenings or parent friendly activities organized during the year.

- The song and vocabulary booklets compliment their child's day at the daycare and can regularly be read with their child.
- To help with language development we also suggest listening to English or French songs at certain moments of the day or reading regularly to their children.



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