



### Grace Yang

Owner-operator of Bay Sky Montessori School in Oakland

📍 CALIFORNIA

## Planting 'Peaceful Seeds' in Children of All Backgrounds

I came to the United States from China in 2009. I had a bachelor's degree in media and I was working as a video editor, but I wanted to work with children. Soon after, I enrolled in a local community college and got my degree in early childhood education. Since 2010, I have been teaching children. Then, during the pandemic, when the bilingual Chinese-English Montessori school where I was working closed, several families asked if I could start a family

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child care and teach their children. I rented a small house for the business and I moved in there.

Getting my license during the pandemic was challenging. We are open from 8 a.m. until 5:30 p.m., and the house has to be very safe for kids. The playground had to be fenced, and everything set up so that children can transition easily to different activities. Some children are in circle time or getting a one-on-one lesson, while others are working independently in various centers. So there is a lot of movement, and we need to keep children safe wherever they are.

Now I have 14 children at the school, some whose families speak Chinese at home and others who just want their children to learn Chinese, even though it is not their cultural or language heritage. Children have a kind of superpowered brain that absorbs knowledge and new languages easily. On my teaching team, some speak only Chinese to the children and others speak only English. After just a few months, most children can understand either one. We also have part-time teachers for enrichment classes like dance, music, soccer, and tennis. All of the teachers here have their master's degrees in early childhood education and two of us have Montessori certification.

The classroom environment is designed so that children can help themselves or know how to ask for help politely. We can focus on forming

community and giving kids the skills to interact and cooperate with others in the classroom. We build up their concentration, confidence, self-discipline, sense of order, and ability to care for the environment. We plant peaceful seeds in those children. They understand that we respect them and even if we are from different countries or different cultural backgrounds, we can work together peacefully to make the world better. Parents really like to see their children become so independent and creative, so my program is always full even though all of my families pay privately.

I've enjoyed talking to other providers on the Home Grown Policy Insight Panel. Over the past few years as the owner of my own business, I have also felt myself grow up. I've grown leadership skills, communication skills, and business skills. We child care providers all have the same passion to dedicate to this field and we work together to be part of the policymaking process. This is an important way to build community among providers and to help young children and families.