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# A culturally sensitive support group for Chinese families : redesigning the Bright Beginnings curriculum

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A Culturally Sensitive Support Group for Chinese Families:

Redesigning the Bright Beginnings Curriculum

By

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Infant and Family Development and Early Intervention

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## **Abstract**

A Culturally Sensitive Support Group for Chinese Families:

Redesigning the Bright Beginnings Curriculum

Jenny Wong

The purpose of my thesis is to explore the goodness-of-fit between the Bright Beginnings Curriculum and people who identify with the Chinese culture. Two main components of the research are: the curriculum description of Bright Beginnings and the proposed suggestions for making the Bright Beginnings Curriculum more culturally sensitive to the Chinese population. The aspects examined in regard to the curriculum are Chinese history, language, values, parent-child relationship, parenting beliefs, childrearing practices, socialization goals, perspectives on disabilities, and communication styles. By identifying such important cultural issues, early childhood professionals can better meet the needs of the population they are serving.

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## Proposal

In September of 2013, I began my special needs/early intervention fieldwork in an Early Head Start program at The University Settlement Society of New York. During my time there, I served as a co-facilitator for a weekly parent-child socialization group. This parent-child socialization group is a component of a community-based prevention program for at-risk and under-resourced families in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. We adopted two curriculums from The Center for the Developing Child and Family at The Ackerman Institute: *Bright Beginnings* by Martha Edwards and *Personal Best* by Judith Grossman. I will focus on my yearlong experience with the *Bright Beginnings* curriculum and how future early intervention and early care professionals might rethink the curriculum to include culturally sensitive practices to better support Chinese families.

The *Bright Beginnings* curriculum is a theoretically based intervention for families making the transition to parenthood- consisting of group discussions and parent-child activities. It is developed to help parents promote their children's social and emotional development and school readiness. The parent-child group component consists of five six-session cycles of groups that parents attend with their child from two months old to 30 months old. The sessions are carefully structured around a theme (e.g., Learning about the world; Learning to communicate; Playing is learning; Guiding children's behavior; Goals for our children). The sessions include in-depth discussion about the theme and application of these ideas to parent-child interactive activities (Edwards, 2014).

My parent-child socialization group consisted of nine families: one Black family, one Mexican family, and seven Chinese families. At the beginning of our sessions together, there was very little conversation and discussion going on. My supervisor and co-facilitator felt

that parents were testing out the waters and learning to feel present and comfortable in front of other parents and early care professionals. I agreed- it was a new experience for all the attending parents, most of whom were mothers. Many feelings and memories could have surfaced during that time to affect, what seemed to us, their distance and lack of communication. However, as more sessions approached and passed, it became apparent to me that the Chinese families were not sharing their experiences as readily and willingly as the non-Chinese families. Some maintained eye contact and focus solely on their infant, some scanned the classroom space, some just listened to the facilitators translate what the non-Chinese families had shared. I began to feel confused and unhelpful from the lack of responsiveness. Soon, I became frustrated and found it challenging to attend these weekly parent-child socialization meetings.

While talking to my advisor about my challenges with the parent-child group sessions, I realized the focus of my frustrations were on the parents in the group. We talked about taking some steps back to rethink why this was. The Chinese parents have not contributed ideas that would frustrate me, but their lack of involvement in the curriculum did. The curriculum had so much to offer—what did it not meet for these parents? This understanding shifted my attention to the Bright Beginnings curriculum. I began to think about the relevance of the Bright Beginnings curriculum to parents and infants, the requirements of parents' time and participation outside of the socialization sessions, and most importantly, I thought about the cultural appropriateness of the curriculum to these Chinese families. For a while, I overlooked the fact that these families don't necessarily identify with the Western culture, customs, and beliefs in parenting and childrearing.

But even having identified what the challenge was, I still had difficulties figuring out how to support these families in a culturally sensitive way. For a year, I struggled to find strategies and modifications to best support Chinese families using the Bright Beginnings curriculum. Now that I've learned more about working with families of diverse cultures by actively listening, providing space for communication, trying to understand a parents' reasoning for certain behaviors, etc., I am able to delve into the Bright Beginnings curriculum with clearer thoughts. However, this is not to say that my suggestions should be permanently implemented into the curriculum. In my project, I will include reflective thoughts and analyses on snippets of the curriculum, as well as Chinese historical content to help paint a clearer picture of my observations and thoughts. I will also provide new insight and suggestions on creating a more culturally inclusive curriculum for Chinese families.

## Literature Review

**Banks, R., Milagros Santos, R., & Roff, V. (n.d.). Discovering Family Concerns, Priorities, And Resources: Sensitive Family Information Gathering. YOUNG EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN, 11-19.**

Banks, Milagros Santos, and Roff discuss the sensitivity in family information gathering. Educators and service providers come into meetings with similarities as well as differences in beliefs, values, and practices concerning child rearing/care. They emphasize viewing family information gathering as an ongoing process through which the early intervention provider continuously refines his or her understanding of the family's resources, priorities, and concerns, both in relation to their child as well as potentially to broader family issues, rather than as a discrete activity. Every one is a member of a culture or multiple cultures. For this reason, each person involved in the EI program- the family member, EI provider, the child view the world through culturally tinted lenses that influence their social interactions, behaviors, beliefs, and values (Banks, Milagros Santos, and Roff, n.d.). It is important during information gathering that in order to strive for cultural competency, EI providers have an established a healthy, understanding relationship with the family, consider the complexity of culture and language, understand how everyone has been shaped by their own experiences, and accepting the differences between the backgrounds of the themselves and family members.

**Carlson, V.J., & Harwood, R.L. (1999). Understanding and negotiating cultural differences concerning early developmental competence: *The six raisin solution*. Bulletin of ZERO TO THREE National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families, 20(3), 19- 24.**

Carlson and Harwood (1999) discuss a staff development model that is designed to help early child care professionals learn to build more collaborative and effective cross-



cultural relationships. They emphasize that understanding why parents and families value particular parenting practices enables practitioners to discuss and negotiate any changes that might further their children's developmental competence respectfully, from within the parents' perspective. Also, thinking about culture as shared knowledge is a way to bridge the differences in our interpretation of our experiences and knowledge. This requires two complementary and ongoing processes: self-awareness of one's own cultural assumptions, values, and beliefs; and willingness to explore the cultural knowledge of others in the full context of their personal and shared histories, assumptions, goals, beliefs, and practices (Carlson and Harwood, 1999). It is important to learn about a culture's long-term socialization goals for children; for example, "What qualities would you like your child to possess when s/he is an adult?" This information will allow us to learn about the personal and community values that a family holds. Becoming aware of the family's social networks (i.e. play groups, socialization groups) and the support they provide for the family's socialization goals is pertinent to understanding the family's behavior /willingness to participate in these groups and discovering effective and collaborative ways to help their children grow in the context of their family's culture and values.

**Chao, R., & Tseng, V. (2002). "Parenting of Asians." In *Handbook of parenting*, edited by M. Bornstein, 2nd ed. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.**

Chao and Tseng (2002), provide historical considerations influencing Asian parenting. Though they provide a general overview of parenting in various Asian countries, Chao and Tseng also elaborate on specific East Asian countries' (i.e., China and Hong Kong) sociocultural roots of interdependence, role in relationships and reciprocity (i.e., parental authority, respect, and care, children's obligation to parents and families, gender and socioeconomic differences), as well as perspectives on parental control and parental

aspirations, attitudes, expectations, and involvement in children's education. Parental control in China has been described as "guan", which, when translated, means "to govern". The word "guan" can also have a positive connotation for Chinese people, as it can also mean "to care for" or "to love". The meaning of parental care and their behaviors might be misinterpreted in America as shaming, but this approach, for Chinese parents, is synonymous with a care and concern as well as firm control and governance of the child.

**Lee, W. P. (2007). *The eighth promise: An American son's tribute to his Toisanese mother*. Emmaus, PA: Rodale.**

William Poy Lee dedicates this book to his Toisanese mother. In this book, where the chapters alternate between mother and son, stories of maternal-infant reflective processes, child rearing, family values and beliefs, give insight into this family's Chinese culture in a small village near Guangzhou, China. William's mom also writes about her immigration to San Francisco, describing her challenging transition as well as her aspirations for her sons and hopes for her extended family in Toisan. As William's mother's chapters progress in the book, it becomes evident how deeply she reflects on her maternal role and care for William and his brothers--consistently referencing Chinese history and neighborhood village traditions as a source of influence in her life and childrearing practices (i.e., certain foods to eat pre- and post-natal to help both mother and child). William also reflects on his childhood experiences as a first generation Chinese American with an immigrant Chinese mother. Though not as in depth has his reflection of his relationship with his mother, William also delves into his relationship with his father and how that might look differently than other father-son relationships.

**Martha E. Edwards, PhD. (2014, May 24). Retrieved December 17, 2014, from**

<http://www.ackerman.org/martha-edwards-phd/>

Martha Edwards is the curriculum developer of Bright Beginnings. It is a theoretically based intervention for families making the transition to parenthood, consisting of group discussions and parent-child activities. There are also take-home activities for parents to fill out and engage in with their children. This curriculum is designed to help parents promote their children's social and emotional development and school readiness through multiple components: a prenatal component, parent-child group component, home visiting component, father's component, and sibling component. The focus of the parent-child group component consists of five six-session cycles of groups that parents attend with their child from two months to 30 months. The in-depth discussions are centered on a theme (i.e., learning to communicate, sensory play), and parents are encouraged to engage in provided interactive activities with their children during the sessions.

**Md-Yunus, ShamAh, "Rice, rice, rice in the bin: Addressing culturally appropriate practice in early childhood classroom" (2009). *Faculty Research and Creative Activity*. Paper 36.**

Md-Yunus addresses a controversial issue in many early childhood classrooms' sensory materials: rice. Using her classroom observations of a Chinese student responding to the integration of rice in their sensory activities, Md-Yunus reflects on the cultural appropriateness and ethical practice of using rice as a play material. Though rice provides a great sensory experience for children, understanding the cultural context of rice is a significant consideration in cultivating a culturally competent classroom. Md-Yunus addresses the importance of rice in Asian cultures and how playing with it can be insulting and offensive.

**Tan, A. L. (2004). *Chinese American children & families: A guide for educators & service providers*. Olney, MD: Association for Childhood Education International.**

Tan goes in depth about the three main Chinese religious beliefs that have influenced Chinese American children and families: Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. Confucian teachings and prescription for a stable society focus on human relationships. Taoism emphasizes the need to transcend artificial human culture and maintain harmony with nature through the cultivation of inner strength and practicing of meditation. Zen Buddhism in China sheds light on the roots of human suffering and offer solutions to realize the awakening; it teaches its followers to be humanistic, fatalistic, nonviolent, pessimistic, and anti-materialistic (Tan, 2004). Though all three have their own beliefs and values, most Chinese families integrate aspects from the three systems into their lives. Tan provides detailed descriptions of common Chinese communication styles as well as day-to-day values and practices in regards to relationships, academics, child rearing, health, mental health, and disabilities. The background information is helpful for educators and service providers to consider as they work with a Chinese population, however, it is important to keep in mind that this information cannot be interpreted as true for all Chinese or Chinese-Americans, as there are intra-group variations. This background information serves as an aid in enhancing understanding of the cultural characteristics that may contribute to a Chinese child's or family's mindset and/or behavior (Tan, 2004).

**Taylor, A. (2014, January 30). Why Chinese Families Don't Say 'I Love You'.**  
Retrieved December 17, 2014, from <http://www.businessinsider.com.au/i-love-you-in-china-2014-1>

Taylor's article shortly explores why Chinese families don't say, "I love you". The data explored were two videos showing Chinese children telling their parents "I love you". The responses were mixed: "Are you drunk?", "I am going to a meeting, so cut the crap", "I am so happy you called to say that, it is the happiest thing that happened to me in 2014". A sociologist from Peking University mentioned that many Chinese parents are not good at expressing positive emotions." Others believe it is due to the upbringing of Confucian teachings, which emphasizes educating children with negative language.

**Lee, E. (1996). "Asian American Families: An Overview." In *Ethnicity and Family Therapy*, edited by Monica McGoldrick, Joe Giordano, and John K. Pearce, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Guilford Press.**

In this excerpt, Lee (1996) discusses how in the Chinese culture, the family, rather than the individual, is the major unit of society. She provides an overall description of Chinese Americans – demography, language, migration history, and family structure, clinical considerations, and culturally relevant assessment models/tools. Immigration came in different waves with different types of family systems. The first wave of immigration (1850-1919) is called the Pioneer Family, the second wave (1920-1942): The Small Business Family, the third wave (1943-1964): The Reunited Family, the fourth wave (1965-1977): the Chinatown and Dual Worker Family, and the fifth wave (1978-Present): The New Immigrant, Refugee, and Astronaut Family. For the most recent wave of immigration, many Chinese sought to come to America to seek higher education for their children. This allows us to see the cultural importance of education and academia for Chinese people. Lee also describes how Chinese people perceive the mental health professional role; many mental health disciplines are not widely recognized in many Asian countries, so the roles of these professionals are not as clearly understood as the role of a physician who prescribes

medication. It would be important to explore the family's exposure to mental health professions in the past as well as their experiences with them and to clarify the service provider's role and relationship to the family.

## **Curriculum Description**

The Bright Beginnings Curriculum developed by Martha Edwards, the Founder and Director of the Ackerman Institute's Center for the Developing Child and Family, is a longitudinal prevention program for infants, toddlers, and their families. Dr. Edwards' aim for this curriculum is to promote infant mental health, school readiness, and the ongoing relational development of children and parents.

The Bright Beginnings Curriculum is one section of Dr. Edwards' Bright Beginnings Parent-Child Program, which also includes a prenatal component, a video review component, and a home visiting component. The prenatal component, consisting of six-sessions, is focused on supporting soon-to-be-mothers in developing a bond with their unborn child(ren) as well as receiving and providing support to other women in the same stage of life. In the video review component, parents and their child(ren) are videotaped for ten minutes doing a variety of activities (i.e., reading books, blowing bubbles, playing with toys) together (Edwards, 2014). The last part of Dr. Edwards' Bright Beginnings Parent-Child Program is the home-visiting component. During these visits, a family's assigned facilitator helps to individualize the program for each family and to reinforce the curriculum's objectives in the child's natural setting.

My focus is on the Parent-Child Socialization component, in which the Bright Beginnings Curriculum was implemented in a group setting with families of various cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The Parent-Child group component consists of five six-session cycles of groups that parents attend with their child from two months to thirty-six months. The sessions, each lasting an hour and a half long, are carefully structured around a theme (i.e., learning about the world, learning to communicate, playing is learning, sensory

regulation, etc.) and include in-depth discussions on the theme as well as the application of these ideas to parent-child interactive activities. The Bright Beginnings Curriculum used during this Parent-Child group is separated into three years of curriculum. Year One is for infants two months or older, Year Two for toddlers (13-24 months), and Year Three for older toddlers (25-36 months). From my experience, once a child is of age for the next year's curriculum, he or she is transferred out of his/her current classroom and into the subsequent curriculum's socialization group. For example, if a child in the Year One socialization group is turning 13 months, he or she will soon be transferred to the Year Two socialization group.

Within the Bright Beginnings Curriculum, my focus is on the Year One curriculum I had co-facilitated for caregivers and their infants. The format in which the curriculum is to be facilitated is direct, structured, and mildly prescriptive: free play followed by an opening/welcoming song, checking in, checking back, and continuing on with the session's discussion matter. The idea of free play at the beginning of the session is not only to observe parents' interactions with their infants, but as a time for an infant to get situated to the environment, so she is less demanding of a parent's attention during discussion time with other parents (Edwards, 2011, Year 1, Session 1). The opening/welcoming song is to encourage the development of a community—everyone can join in to sing and learn each parent's and each child's names. Because every individual comes into new situations with various feelings, it is important to briefly check in on how parents are feeling/doing before engaging in the proposed subject for the session. After the first session, facilitators are to check back with parents about the ideas shared during the previous session. Sometimes these ideas seamlessly transition to the next session's topic (i.e., Session 3: The Give and Take of Communication -- Part I; Session 4: The Give and Take of Communication -- Part II); other



times, the topics are not so continuous (i.e., Session 5: Playing is Learning -- Part I, Session 8: Playing is Learning -- Part II).

Often after discussions, the group sings songs, blows bubbles, listens to lullabies, and reads books before doing a sticker chart (for attendance purposes) and closing with a Goodbye song. Parents are encouraged to contribute their ideas and thoughts to the socialization group even after a themed discussion— whether they are songs from their culture, books from their childhood upbringing, etc. At the end of each Parent-Child socialization group session, facilitators distribute a Parent Guidebook activity sheet. The Parent Guidebook, translated in other languages (i.e., Chinese and Spanish), is used as an at-home supplement of the Bright Beginnings curriculum to deepen participants' understanding of the Bright Beginnings ideas and practices. It can also be utilized as a resource to help parents decide what works for their children and families. This written activity requires participants to be literate in the language the activity worksheet is provided in. It also demands parents to set aside time throughout the week to reflect on their parenting experiences. My experience and thoughts on the participants' engagement/participation in these home-activities will be provided in the subsequent section: Proposed Changes.

There are twelve themes discussed in Bright Beginning's Year One Curriculum-- they are as described in the following section—some of which I will delve further into than others:

Session 1: Getting to Know One Another. The content in this session involves asking questions such as, "How did you name your baby?" and "What songs do you sing at home?", a letter written from a child's perspective to her parent, and a discussion on the parents' goals for participating in the Bright Beginnings Parent-Child Program. Facilitators also provide an

overview of Bright Beginnings' Parent-Child Socialization group, listed as such: 1. Bright Beginnings is a program for young children and their caregivers- parents, grandparents, or other family members, 2. The idea is to come together, share information and experiences, learn together, and support one another, 3. Parenting is one of the hardest and most important jobs there is. We are all here to help each child grow and develop as fully as possible. In these first few years, children's brains grow more than at any other times in their lives, and 4. Helping your children learn and grow now will prepare them to be successful in school and beyond (Edwards, 2011). Using this information, parents are to reflect on and discuss what they want to get out of participating in the Bright Beginnings' Parent-Child Socialization group. During this time, as the facilitators are cultivating a warm and welcoming atmosphere for the socialization group, it would also be important for them to acknowledge their own roles in the program—what it means to be a mental health specialist, what their relationship is to the parents, confidentiality guidelines they follow, etc. This will be further examined in the Proposed Changes section of my paper.

In the "Letter from Your Child", which has also been translated to Mandarin Chinese, an infant addresses the letter to her parent, stating from her perspective, what an infant might be going through, what might help support her understanding of her world, as well as providing meaning to her social and emotional engagements/interactions. It is also, seemingly, a source of parent-empowerment, as the infant acknowledges her parent's effort in cultivating a loving and responsive environment for her. The infant signs off on the message with the letter closing, "Love". For Edwards (2011), this letter serves two purposes: first, by speaking for the children and giving voice to their possible perspectives, it helps caregivers imagine their children as thinking and feeling individuals who have desires and

intentions separation from their parents. The capacity to do so is a skill called parental reflective functioning (Fonagy, 1995). Secondly, the content of the letter previews some of the developmental tasks that children of this age typically endure. Having this knowledge can aid parents in matching their parenting strategies and goals to their children's capacities. This letter affectionately acts as an anticipatory guidance for what is to come. From my observations of the discussion of this letter, Chinese-speaking parents lightly chuckled and verbalized how silly it was for an infant to write. This issue will also be further examined in the next section of my paper.

Session 2: Learning About the World. In this session, facilitators discuss the seven senses: hearing, touching, tasting, seeing, smelling, proprioception (position), and vestibular system (motion). The main idea is to help parents become aware of the way children use their senses to explore their world, so that parents can see what interests them. Using this gathered information, parents can learn to support their children's interests and/or find ways to soothe them when upset. Some activities provided are: waving fingers, singing, massaging baby with firm touches, tasting solid foods, gently lifting baby up and down, and putting baby on tummy time.

Session 3: The Give and Take of Communication (Part I). This session emphasizes the importance of the parent-child relationship and the importance of talking to children. Facilitators and parents discuss how babies communicate and how parents can "read" their babies' communication and respond in accordance with their child's vocalizations. Different cultures have different socialization goals as well as different significances for a parent-child relationship. Prior to discussing the importance of the parent-child relationship as it is the

foundation of the child's growth and development, it would be beneficial to ask parents what being a parent to their child means to them or their culture.

Session 4: The Give and Take of Communication (Part II). In this session, facilitators and parents continue the discussion of communication. However, in this session, the focus is on crying—why a child might be crying, what the parents' reactions are when their children cry, and how parents can soothe their distressed infants. Some reasons offered are: loneliness, boredom, pain, fear, hunger, tiredness, temperature changes, overstimulation, and colic.

Session 5: Playing is Learning (Part I). In this session, the discussion revolves around the idea of play—what play means, how children play, and the activities and games parents and children can participate in together. This session runs a little differently than previous ones, as parents are encouraged to share and demonstrate their play activities with their children.

Session 6: The “I can do it!” Feeling. This session centers on the feelings of confidence and competency – in both parenthood and infancy. There are two components of the “I can do it!” feeling: 1. What the baby is doing, and 2. Sharing the good feelings that come with being able to do something with significant adults in his/her life. While the first is the most important, the second is reinforcing and motivating (Edwards, 2011). This session allows parents to express their feelings on child-competency—whether they feel it is an important trait, or whether it is worrisome, as the child may become too self-centered.

Session 7: Goals for Our Children. In this session, parents identify the characteristics they want their children to develop to be successful. Facilitators help parents view these as their parenting goals. The purpose of this session is to link together the goals parents have mentioned with practices and activities offered by Bright Beginnings from the previous six

sessions. As this is a socialization group, it would be important for facilitators to encourage parents to not only think about what it means to be successful, but also what they believe their children's role in society is, and what their relationship to specific people are. This will also be examined more in depth in the next section of my paper.

Session 8: Playing is Learning (Part II). This session is a continuation of Session 5 on the idea of play as a learning experience. Facilitators help parents explore the idea of following the child's lead in play and understanding the WAIT steps: Wait and watch, Attune to the child's feelings and acknowledge actions, Interact and enjoy, and Teach something new. Facilitators also offer ways to build toys using recycled scraps (i.e., egg cartons, cereal boxes, newspaper, etc.) from home. Parents will think about what their children play with and how to engage in play with them to make the most out of their experiences (Edwards, 2011).

Session 9: Learning to Talk. This session is focused on responding to a child's communication efforts. Facilitators help parents discover ways to help their child(ren) learn language, whether with gestures or vocalizations (i.e., babbles). Mentioned in the Bright Beginnings Curriculum are four strategies that parents can use to help children learn to talk: 1. Notice what the child is paying attention to and label those objects/properties of the objects, 2. Notice the child's attempts to communicate. Responding helps strengthen her understanding of talking and motivation to talk to you, 3. Talk about what you are doing together or what is going to happen next, and 4. Explore a book together. Although not explicitly stated in the curriculum, facilitators should offer insight into dual language development. As the socialization group sessions are usually held in English, it is important to let parents know that it is okay to speak their home/primary language to their children and

to acknowledge that their home language is also an important contribution to their children's language development.

Session 10: Routines. In this session, facilitators discuss the importance of routines and how they might be helpful to a child as well as the overall flow of a child and family's day. Facilitators help parents begin to think about individual routines they already have for their child and family and other ways, if necessary, to include routines that gently guide/transition their children into new or unfamiliar situations.

Session 11: Guidance. In this session, facilitators present guidance methods of: using routines, showing, acknowledging good behavior, and redirecting behavior. Parents will discuss what is acceptable and unacceptable for their children to do and think about how to guide/respond to these behaviors accordingly.

Session 12: Putting it Together. In the last session, parents are presented with satisfaction questionnaires. In this survey, they are asked to rate their experience from 1 (not much at all) to 5 (very much). They are also asked to write down the things they like/did not like about the Bright Beginnings curriculum, as well as any improvements they would like to see. They are also encouraged to role-play teaching the Bright Beginnings ideas to another person. The purpose of this activity is to give parents another experience to deepen their understanding of parenting practices—it also allows them to relay the learned ideas to other important caregivers of their children. Lastly, parents will receive another "Letter from Your Child". This letter is similar to the very first one parents received at the initial Bright Beginnings parent-child socialization session. The child reflects what they may be thinking, feeling, and doing as a seven- to ten-month-old. Parents are encouraged to think about the relevance of the letter to their child's current development and whether or not it sounds like

something their child would say-- if they were articulate. To end the socialization group session, facilitators encourage parents to review the past twelve sessions' activities and practices and attempt to integrate them into their daily agenda. I will delve further into several aspects of this session in the Proposed Changes section of my paper as well.

### **Proposed Changes**

In this segment of my project, I will provide historical information as well as research-based evidence, in regards to childrearing practices and socialization goals for Chinese families, to support my suggestions for changes in the Bright Beginnings Curriculum. It is important to note that my suggestions, though carefully examined, are not expected to be implemented into the curriculum. It is also important to note that while there are proposed fundamental differences between cultural groups, variations within cultural groups (i.e. socioeconomic class, religion, acculturation status, agreeability with culture, etc.) exist as well and may contribute to the differences in parenting ethnotheories (cultural beliefs), parenting behaviors, and the overall development of the parent-child relationship. The following are reflective thoughts, analyses, as well as contextual information to help early childhood care professionals and service providers, myself included, to think and/or rethink about their work with infants, toddlers, and families whom, in any degree, identify with the Chinese culture.

I believe the Bright Beginnings Curriculum has much to offer. As I recollect, many suggestions offered in the curriculum have researched-based evidence cited in footnotes to support them. The Bright Beginnings Curriculum seems mindful of the importance of the caregiver-child relationship, as well as its importance in contributing to the development of the child's future competency in society. However, the perception of the mentioned practices in the Bright Beginnings Curriculum may be misaligned to the actual population's (in this case, Chinese immigrant caregivers') perception of childrearing and socialization practices and parenting behaviors and ethnotheories. This is an important topic to delve into—parenting and family socialization within a Chinese cultural context-- as it can provide early



childhood professionals and service providers insight into the responsiveness and relevance of a certain practice/behavior as well as the perceptions of those involved (caregiver and child) and how those perceptions might affect the caregiver-child relationship or other aspects of the child's development (i.e., more aggressive, more respectful, etc).

I will begin by dissecting certain aspects of the Bright Beginnings Sessions, followed by additional pertinent ideas, that have raised thoughts, questions, or concerns for myself as well as for those I have communicated with throughout the duration of this project.

Session 1: Getting to know one another. In this session, facilitators, parents, and infants get to learn about one another through introductions and developing group guidelines together. As it is the first session together with potentially all enrolled caregivers and infants, it would be important for the facilitator to clearly explain the curriculum and its goals and expectations. Having observed that the Chinese parents in my socialization group only occasionally participated in our discussions (some stayed quiet throughout the discussion while others offered one or two comments), I was intrigued to examine why that was. One perspective I hold is that these Chinese parents may not have had a clear understanding of who these particular infant mental health professionals are, what their role entails, as well as the infant mental health professionals relationship to themselves. Similarly, according to the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2008), some Chinese parents may be apprehensive about Western care because of a lack of understanding of the health care system. Having this information can help facilitators organize their first session with the parents in a way that offers a clear description of the Bright Beginnings goals and expectations, the curriculum facilitator's role as an infant mental health professional and their

relationship to the parent, expectations of the parents, etc., so that the parents can feel they are entering something that is not completely foreign and uncomfortable.

During our first and subsequent sessions, we sang Chinese songs the facilitator knew for the “Singing” portion of our curriculum. In thinking about modifying this aspect of the curriculum to become more inclusive and relevant to Chinese parents, I think it would be important to collaborate with parents by asking them the songs they are familiar with, or the songs that they like to sing at home. Facilitators can make note of the song and print lyrics for all to sing along to in the subsequent sessions. Of course, it is important to be mindful of the facilitator’s availability to ensure these needs; discretion is dependent on the both parents’ needs as well as the facilitators’ accessibility to meet these needs.

Also presented in this first session is a letter written from an infant’s perspective given to the parents. Though I fully understand the importance for parents to build high reflective functioning skills, which refers to a caregiver’s capacity to hold their child’s mental states in mind and the ability to distinguish inner from outer reality (Fonagy, 2005), thinking about the role of a caregiver is in accordance with their respective cultures, as well as the relationship between them and their infants, is just as significant in providing a meaningful and culturally responsive socialization group experience. In this letter, the child talks about his/her development, what he/she has done/is doing/will be doing, how he/she is feeling during those times, what the parent should think of it, etc. First, it is interesting to think about how this letter might affect Chinese parents who identify with Confucian philosophies and teachings. Confucian philosophies emphasized filial piety (obedience, good conduct and dedication to one’s parents, elders, and ancestors) and respecting parents (Bornstein, 2002). Though this child to parent letter might be an interesting and uplifting method of helping a parent

understand his/her child's development, achievements and struggles, it might not serve the same message in a Chinese culture. An infant/toddler's role in a Chinese culture usually is to listen to his elders, because they know what is best for the child. In thinking about the parent-child dynamic in regards to the structure of the letter provided in the Bright Beginnings curriculum, some Chinese parents might perceive the letter as disobedience, since the power dynamic has reversed. Instead of a parent writing to the child, the child is writing to a parent--an older person, who in the Chinese culture, is to be respected and listened to. I think it would be culturally sensitive practice to think about what this letter means to Chinese families in the context of their cultural beliefs and values within their families. I think it might elicit a less intrusive and "disobedient" response from Chinese parents if a letter from a parent to a child was introduced first, followed by a response letter from the child to the parent. This might convey the idea that the parent/adult/elder is leading the way and thus being respected by someone younger.

In addition, the child signs off the letter with "Love, (child's name)". The word and the idea "love" in the English language can indicate a romantic relationship, closeness and strong positive feelings for a sibling/parent/child, or a strong passion for something. In Chinese, the word "love" is rarely expressed. This is due to the upbringing of Confucian teachings, which emphasizes educating children with negative language (Taylor, 2014). This is not to say Chinese families do not express love. Many parents in this culture do so in a different way: mothers emphasize the importance of love by fostering a close, enduring parent-child relationship (based on filial piety and respect) and by providing a secure and warm environment within the home" (Bornstein, 2012). It might be interesting for future early childhood service providers to ask parents questions regarding this topic-- specific questions

about parents' beliefs, in proactive efforts to gain understanding of each parent's views, goals, and expectations, and to share their own perspectives respectfully.

During my experience observing and co-facilitating the Bright Beginnings curriculum, I realized the challenges we faced collectively when trying to convey an idea from English to China's main spoken language, Mandarin. This is another aspect of the letter that warrants assessment-- the accuracy of the content translated from English to Chinese. Having read the Chinese version of "Letter from Child" with people who spoke Cantonese and Mandarin, I came to an understanding that the text was incongruent with the message written in English. Having read about studies taken place in different countries whose primary language is not English, I took interest in the way questionnaires/surveys were organized for the interviewee's participation/engagement. There was a particular method I found that might be of value to the Bright Beginnings Curriculum: back translation. Back-translation is when a text is translated from one language to another, and a separate reader translates it back to the original language without reference to the original text. The text is then reviewed for congruency. This method helps to evaluate equivalence of meaning between the source and target texts (McGowan, 2014). I believe using this method would create a more cohesive experience for families who are taking worksheets/letters in Chinese to read at home.

Lastly, in regards to language and translation, it would be helpful to have various versions of written Chinese text. For example, simplified and traditionally written Chinese characters. Until the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Chinese used traditional, complex characters and the Wade-Giles romanization in their writing system. In the Communist Party's efforts to increase literacy and to make it more convenient

for the central government to communicate with everyone, a new system of writing developed, replacing many traditional characters that evolved from their pictorial roots with simplified characters of reduced strokes (Keyser, 2009). With this new simplification process (by warping the shapes of characters), those who have learned the traditional characters may face confusion and challenges in understanding the meaning of simplified Chinese text (Meng, 2009). Interestingly, not all written characters in Chinese exist in the spoken Chinese dialects. Cantonese is a dialect common to Guangdong and Hong Kong—it is also the primary dialect of some parents in my socialization group. When spoken Cantonese is written (also comprised of made-up characters), it is more colloquial than spoken Mandarin, even though both rely on Chinese characters. Though this is so, most Chinese-literate readers use the more formal text to communicate on paper. I have translated the “Letter from Child” in two versions for clarity: Simplified Chinese and Traditional Chinese. Having this resource available can help relieve some parents’ hesitancy to the provided at-home worksheets/letters.

In Session 2, the focus is for parents to explore different sensory (hearing, seeing, tasting, smelling, feeling, position, and motion) experiences with their children. During this session, we talked about different things infants are learning when they touch, taste, hear, or feel something. We also suggested that these experiences don’t always require monetary expense, and can be explored through recycled materials found at home. It is a very thoughtful suggestion—much aligned with this specific population’s resources and accessibility to resources. I remember my co-facilitator suggesting parents to allow their children to play with rice, since rice, a staple food in Chinese culture, would readily be available. At the time, I had not thought about this assumption my co-facilitator had placed

about Chinese families—that not all Chinese families eat rice during their meals. More importantly, however, I also had not spoken out about the cultural and ethical issues in regards to “exploring with food”. In Chinese families, especially families from the southeast part of China, where rice composes a large part of their daily diet and agricultural field, it is disrespectful and insulting to use it other than in meals or rituals. Essentially, it is not respecting your family and their efforts in creating a healthy family. From my childhood experience, I learned that rice was never to be wasted or left behind in one’s bowl. It was a sign of disrespect for my parents and our ancestors, who have spent most waking hours working in the rice field to make ends meet, to provide for the family. Rice is considered a precious commodity, despite its affordability in grocery stores in the United States. In a memoir by a Toisan Chinese-American man and his mother, it was mentioned, “On the Eighth Day (of Chinese New Year), the creation of rice is remembered and thanks given” (Lee, 2007). Also, food is an important resource for survival, especially for families who are under-resourced. To suggest it as “junk” shows a lack of understanding for a culture’s history and efforts, as well as a lack of compassion for an individual family’s struggles.

In Session 4, facilitators and parents continue to discuss the give and take of communication with a particular emphasis on crying. The Bright Beginnings Curriculum offers many reasons as to why a child might be crying: loneliness, boredom, pain, fear, hunger, overstimulation, colic, etc. They also have a list of actions to take when a child is crying for a certain reason (i.e., Reason for crying: Hungry. Responses: Nurse or give bottle). The discussion encourages parents to think about what their thoughts are when their babies cry. It would be important to help parents think about their own experiences as young children crying. How did their parents respond? What is their individual/culture’s perception

of crying? Not every culture/individual will respond similarly to crying. Having worked with Chinese families in other environments and arrangements, I usually hear parents responding to their infants' cries with "mei shi/沒事" (Mandarin) or "mo see/無事" (Cantonese). This translates to, "It's nothing" or "It's no big issue." Growing up with immigrant parents from Toisan village near Guangdong, China, I was taught that crying is primarily related to grief. Crying in my family signified a death in the family, and it was only acceptable to do so then. It was serious matter—so crying was rarely allowed. Some members of Chinese culture do not necessarily believe in/agree to this, and others may unquestionably accept the same outlook on crying. Nonetheless, it would be important to have this conversation with parents in order to best support their needs and parent-child relationship sensitively.

In Session 5, play is described as a learning opportunity. The group discusses what play means, how children play, and the activities and games parents and children can participate in together. What isn't discussed is playing with children who are developmentally different (i.e. hearing loss, low tone, sensory dysregulation, etc). In the Bright Beginnings curriculum, there is not a section that attributes to differentiated learning experiences for children with developmental variations. A valuable question to think about is: How does the Bright Beginnings curriculum support families whose infants and/or parents have been through a traumatic birth experience, have health issues or developmental variations? Many resources have stated that, historically, Chinese children and adults with disabilities were referred to with discriminatory terms such as "can fei" (the handicapped and useless) and faced a great deal of marginalization in society (Feuerberg, 2013; Disabled World, 2010). It is important to create an environment and experience for infants and their caregivers with developmental variations that do not, in any way, duplicate similar ostracism.

Some questions to think about are: How can I support a child with...? What games and activities would help this specific child engage in, for example, reciprocal exchanges, eye contact, or movement of a certain muscle? It is essential to integrate these developmental differences into their curriculum to make it a fully inclusive support group for both parents and infants.

Session 7 encompasses a significant aspect of the parent-child relationship. It is titled: Goals for Our Children. In the short amount of time allocated for this extensive subject, parents are to identify the characteristics they want their children to develop to be successful and facilitators are to help parents view these as their parenting goals while integrating the practices and activities offered by the Bright Beginnings curriculum. As circumstances can bring various cultures into one socialization group, there may be some differences in parents' overall goals for their children. For example, due to the influence of Confucius teachings, many members of Chinese culture value the harmony of social and interpersonal relationships through proper relations. This means that a caregiver-child relationship would be maintained through a child's act of filial piety, which encompasses behaviors such as, obedience, courtesy, respect, and care toward his elders (Tan, 2004). Because each family may identify to varying degrees of Chinese culture, it would be important for facilitators to acknowledge that socialization is an ongoing process of social interaction through which children become functional members of a society. Goals of socialization and parenting practices used to accomplish these goals vary across and within cultural groups, and parents and other caregivers play a particularly influential role in the socialization process (Raj and Raval, 2012), so it would be important to discuss each family's personal identification of socialization goals for their children. It would be interesting for parents to think about, if they



are able to recall, socialization goals their parents set for them, whether they were similar to or different from their own, and why these socialization attributes to their child were so important.

Session 8 is a continuation of Session 5 on the idea of play as a learning experience. For this section, I was wondering about the discontinuity in succession from the first discussion of play. I was also wondering about the application of the WAIT steps: Wait and watch, Attune to the child's feelings and acknowledge actions, Interact and enjoy, and Teach something new. Is this meaningful to families who are constantly busy, have to care for more than one child, or have challenges emotionally connecting to their child? How do Chinese families play/interact with their children? Culturally, many members of Chinese culture value the interdependence model (preference of body contact, body stimulation, and responsiveness to negative infant signals) or autonomy-related model (face-to-face contact and object play as well as body contact and body stimulation) more so than the independence model of parenting (preference of face-to-face contact, object play and responsiveness to positive infant signals (Keller et al., 2006). Hold this with Chinese families and their identification with these socialization preferences in mind, I wonder how the Bright Beginnings curriculum might use play in other ways to engage infants and their children. Perhaps-- sitting with their child on their laps in front of a mirror to sing a song/do finger play would adhere better to their cultural values.

In Session 9, the group focuses on responding to a child's communication efforts. While the curriculum helps parents discover ways to help their children learn language, it does not offer insight into dual language development. As the socialization group sessions are usually held in English, it is important to let parents know that it is okay to speak their

home/primary language to their children and to acknowledge that their home language is also an important contribution to their child's language development.

In Session 11, facilitators present guidance methods of using routines, showing and acknowledging good behavior, and redirecting behavior. It is important to note that there is a cultural mismatch in the way behaviors are handled between the Bright Beginnings Curriculum and Chinese culture. During this discussion, facilitators started by emphasizing that acknowledging children's positive behavior encourages and reinforces positive behavior, and that withdrawing attention from negative behavior suspends the behavior from occurring again. When thinking about Chinese cultural beliefs in parenting and discipline, this idea seems contrasting to the familiar Confucian upbringing that "shame is both a method of helping children learn moral precepts and a virtue to be developed. Shame has been seen as a virtue since the time of Confucius in China. Parents reported that the immediate concrete experience helped the children understand how the rules work and to remember and to follow the lesson. Parents felt that it was necessary to make their children feel shameful when they had transgressed, but only to teach them to know right from wrong... Shame was used to teach the children how to be a part of society, to include them and protect them from being set apart by being condemned by people outside the family or by society in general" (Rogoff, 2003). The idea behind this negative language and attending to negative/undesirable behavior and experiences is really for the parent to have an active role in disciplining the child from moment to moment. It's a scary idea to understand and to accept, even when this is something I have gone through as a child living with Chinese immigrants. I still am not sure how to approach this cultural difference or how to find a middle ground for working with this specific difference. However, I think it's important to be aware of this historical and cultural

influence and how that might have influence Chinese parents' interactions with their children.

In the last session of the Bright Beginnings curriculum, Session 12, parents are asked to fill out a satisfaction questionnaire. It would be important to have these questionnaires translated to the individual's literate language (i.e., simplified/traditional Chinese).

Allocating enough time for parents to reflect and briefly write their comments on the survey is also important. For the rating scale, it seems that a more detailed and definite or quantitative description of what the scale represents would be helpful for parents – “not much at all” and “very much” is a subjective method, thus responses can vary amongst the group.

There are other aspects of the Bright Beginnings Curriculum and Chinese culture that I would like to address:

Having had experience with the yearlong curriculum, I came to realize that the curriculum handouts given to facilitators are presented in a very prescriptive way – an almost inflexible schedule, as the sessions are only one-and-a-half-hours long. It would be beneficial to allow time for parents to fully discuss their thoughts and feelings on the proposed topic by extending the discussion to the following week's get-together. I had not thought about this possibility prior to meeting with a Program Coordinator at an Early Head Start in Flushing, Queens, New York. The Program Coordinator had stated that in their implementation of the Bright Beginnings Curriculum, parents and infants only meet once every other week and integrate a different curriculum intermittently, thus not fully completing the twelve sessions of the Bright Beginnings Curriculum. From that conversation, it seems that although the curriculum has a strict agenda, it seems that a center can also choose to implement the curriculum in ways that deem fitting for the center. Perhaps allowing the previous week's

discussion to continue in the next session would be beneficial for parents to fully reflect on their parenting ethnotheories, behaviors, and interactions with their infants.

Something I had noticed in the Year Two (Toddler) Curriculum was that a Chinese mother stopped attending sessions for about a month. She had just given birth and in accordance with traditional Chinese postpartum practice, this mother stayed home for 30 days. The reasons for doing so come from the belief that after childbirth, it is important for mothers to restore the imbalance of yin and yang elements in their bodies. If the yin and yang in your body are out of balance, a body will be prone to later illnesses (Lim, 2011). Understanding that this could be part of a mother's experience in the Year 1 (Infant) Curriculum, how could facilitators think about supporting the mother during this time? The missing sessions- of course, are important to think about, but as is the importance of this ritual for families who partake in it. With this in mind, facilitators and program directors can begin to think about ways to best support the mother, infant, and family.

Lastly, in my interview with a program coordinator at an Early Head Start in Queens, I learned about the similar and different challenges we both faced in our respective socialization group experiences. While I felt the Chinese parents did not participate in the socialization group I observed and co-facilitated, this program coordinator's experience was different—most parents (of Hispanic background) were eager to communicate their thoughts and experiences. The challenge their center faced was figuring out how to allow every parent to communicate and reflect upon their thoughts, rather than having one dominate the discussion. A challenge we both faced was in the inconsistency in interactions between the caseworker (home visitor), curriculum facilitator, and caregiver. Ideally, the home visitor would be the same person to facilitate the curriculum. However, due to limitations and

circumstances, there are inconsistencies in utilizing the Bright Beginnings at-home activities individually and with a home-visitor.

Reassessing the Bright Beginnings Curriculum-Year 1 is challenging, as there are about twelve concentrated lesson-plans to think and rethink about. However, I think being able to examine various issues that had affected the interactions and communicativeness for Chinese parents during our parent-child socialization groups, and being able to connect those experiences within a cultural context served to be an invaluable lesson for me. One of the biggest takeaways from reflecting on these experiences with the Bright Beginnings Curriculum was thinking about utilizing used knowledge of group characteristics and history, in this case the Chinese, to make program experiences for parents of different cultures more comfortable, engaging, and respected. As I've learned that there are individual families who identify with the same culture might have individual differences, it's important to ask specific questions regarding a sensitive topic so that we, as early childhood service providers, do not fall into indiscretion by generalizing and stereotyping. To close, I felt Banks, Santos, and Roff (n.d) stated something very powerful and resonating- something that I truly gained from my reflections of working with Chinese families using the Bright Beginnings curriculum: "Everyone is a member of a culture or cultures. Each family member, each EI provider, and each child views the world through culturally tinted lenses that influence their social interactions, behaviors, beliefs and values. The norms and values by which families live affect their willingness to provide information to EI providers as well as their willingness to involve themselves in the overall family information gathering process".

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## Appendix

### Original Text from Curriculum (English)

#### Letter from Child

Dear Mommy and other Loving Family Members,

I am finally getting the hang of being a little person. It has taken me a few months to do this. It's hard sometimes to make sense of everything. It helps if we have a routine for eating, sleeping, and playing – then I can relax and know a little what will happen throughout the day. I can't do too much for myself yet. So I need you a lot right now. If you respond to me right away, I promise I won't get spoiled. It will let me know that I can trust you and that you will be there for me when I most need it.

In my own small way, I am also beginning to realize that I can make things happen! I can reach out and grab something. I may be able to put it into my mouth, transfer it to my other hand, or put two objects together. What a wonderful feeling to be able to do things! I would like to feel this feeling more and more.

But I feel most wonderful when I am with you. I love when we look into each other's eyes, smile, make faces, and pretend that we're talking to each other. Sometimes it's so wonderful that I can only take so much before I have to look away and calm myself down before we can start "talking" again. Please be patient with me and know that I am not rejecting you, I just need to rest sometimes.

You are my world. I feel your feelings and I am beginning to imitate them. I am learning about my own feelings that way. You are my teacher. Thank you for loving me and helping me to learn about the world.

Love,  
Your child



Translated Version (Chinese in Traditional/Complex Characters)

寫給親愛的爸媽的信

親愛的媽媽和家人：

經過了幾個月的時間，我終於適應做一個小寶寶。因為我現在還小，我對很多事情還是不太懂。但是如果你能幫助我建立規律作息的時間表：吃，玩，睡的模式那我就知道日後需要做什麼。

如果你及時即可回應，我保證我不會因為這樣而被寵壞。這樣我就能相信我能信任你，因為在我最需要你的時候，你會在我身邊。

慢慢地我懂事了，我可以有所作為的。我可以伸手去拿東西。我可以把它放在嘴裡，把它放到另外一隻手裡，或把兩個東西放在一起。能做一些事情是多麼好的感覺啊！我很想可以越來越多有哩種的感覺！

但是我還最喜歡跟你一起的時間。我很喜歡你看著我的眼睛，我看著你的眼睛、一起微笑、一起做鬼臉，假裝我們在說話。有時候這種感覺實在是太刺激了，好到讓我有點受不了，只好展示看旁邊，讓自己靜下來，然後再接著跟你“聊天”／玩。請你耐心一些和明白我並沒有激你發癩，我有時淨繫要休息一下。

你是我的全世界。我感受得到的感覺，我也開始模仿你的感受了。我透過了這種方式開始學習我自己的感覺。你是我的老師。謝謝你對我的愛護、帶我見識到這個世界。

孩兒

(Date)

Translated Version (Chinese in Simplified Characters)

写给亲爱的爸妈的信

亲爱的妈妈和家人：

经过了几个月的时间，我终于适应做一个小宝宝。因为我现在还小，我对很多事情还是不太懂。但是如果你能帮助我建立规律作息的时间表：吃，玩，睡的模式那我就知道日后需要做什么。

如果你及时即可回应，我保证我不会因为这样而被宠坏。这样我就能相信我能信任你，因为在我最需要你的时候，你会在我身边。

慢慢地我懂事了，我可以有所作为的。我可以伸手去拿东西。我可以把它放在嘴里，把它放到另外一只手里，或把两个东西放在一起。能做一些事情是多么好的感觉啊！我很想可以越来越多有哩种的感觉！

但是我还最喜欢跟你一起的时间。我很喜欢你看着我的眼睛，我看着你的眼睛、一起微笑、一起做鬼脸，假装我们在说话。有时候这种感觉实在是太刺激了，好到让我有点受不了，只好展示看旁边，让自己静下来，然后再接着跟你“聊天”/玩。请你耐心一些和明白我并没有激你发飙，我有时净系要休息一下。

你是我的全世界。我感受得到的感觉，我也开始模仿你的感受了。我透过了这种方式开始学习我自己的感觉。你是我的老师。谢谢你对我的爱护、带我见识到这个世界。

孩儿  
(Date)