

Implementing Positive Behavior Support With Chinese American Families:

Enhancing Cultural Competence



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Abstract: In positive behavior support (PBS) practices, one critical issue involves helping professionals understand and respect the values of families from culturally diverse backgrounds. This article summarizes embedded cultural values of PBS represented in four key features of the PBS process: collaborative partnerships, functional assessment, contextual fit, and meaningful lifestyle outcomes. With acknowledgment of acculturation, the contrast between Chinese cultural values and embedded PBS values is illustrated in the context of implementing PBS for Chinese American families.

Meng is an energetic and intelligent 14-year-old middle school girl. She moved to the United States from China with her family 3 years ago. Meng has attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and occasionally displays problem behaviors, such as sleeping during class and tearing up papers or books. Recently, Meng's teachers have been increasingly concerned that her frequent problem behavior in class impedes her learning progress. After the school counselor talked to her several times, Meng admitted reluctantly that "things" at home cause difficulty for her at school. The school psychologist asked Meng's family to meet with the school's positive behavior support (PBS) team to establish an understanding of Meng's needs and to develop a PBS plan for the school and Meng's home. The family hesitated but agreed to attend. However, when the meeting began, several problems emerged when the family and school personnel revealed different perspectives on understanding and implementing PBS that were rooted in cultural values and beliefs (see Note).

Professionals often work with families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds when dealing with their children's problem behavior. Culture and context profoundly influence behavior (Chen, Downing, & Peckham-Hardin, 2002; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Lynch & Hanson, 2004). Certain situations and specific cultural values and beliefs determine whether a particular behavior is viewed as appropriate or problematic. Some behaviors that most professionals from the mainstream culture consider un-

conventional or problematic may not be unacceptable or troublesome to families of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and vice versa.

PBS is a broad range of systematic, individualized strategies that not only prevent and remediate problem behavior but also achieve important social and learning outcomes (Carr et al., 2002; Horner, 2000). There has been increased use of PBS not just in schools but also in homes and communities (Barry & Singer, 2001; Lucyshyn, Dunlap, & Albin, 2002; Markey, Markey, Quant, Santelli, & Turnbull, 2002).

When using PBS strategies, professionals should recognize that some families have different values and beliefs, child-rearing practices, and behavioral expectations that are inherent in their cultures (Chen, Downing, & Peckham-Hardin, 2002; Lucyshyn, Dunlap, & Albin, 2002). Informed understanding of families from various cultural backgrounds is vital to the success of any intervention, including PBS (Lee, 1996; Lynch & Hanson, 2004).

Moreover, as Lynch and Hanson (2004) noted, professionals who want to work effectively with diverse families need to improve their cross-cultural competence. *Cross-cultural competence* has been defined as "The ability to think, feel, and act in ways that acknowledge, respect, and build upon ethnic, socio-cultural, and linguistic diversity" (Lynch & Hanson, 1993, p. 50). Developing cross-cultural competence consists of three key elements: understanding one's own culture and heritage, learning culture-specific information about families from other

cultures, and applying knowledge and skills to work effectively with families (Lynch & Hanson, 2004). Professionals who want to ensure culturally responsive PBS practices for families from diverse backgrounds must incorporate these elements into their practices.

Remarkably, today's U.S. society is becoming more and more heterogeneous. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2000a), the populations of races other than White or Black have grown dramatically between 1970 and 2000. Asians and Latinos are the two fastest growing racial groups in the United States over recent decades (Hobbs & Stoops, 2002). In particular, Chinese Americans, as the largest Asian subgroup in the United States, have had a significant population growth: by 48%, to a total of nearly 2.5 million in 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000b). Given such dramatically changing demographics, it is imperative for professionals who work with children and families from culturally diverse backgrounds to enhance cultural competence to undertake culturally appropriate PBS practices. To illustrate the important issues of understanding the cultural values embedded in the PBS (i.e., mainstream cultural values) and the specific cultural values of families who have culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, we chose Chinese Americans, one of the fastest growing minority groups in the United States, as the specific focus of this article. The purposes of this article are (a) to synthesize the embedded cultural values of PBS that can enhance professionals' understanding of the essence of PBS, (b) to illustrate Chinese American families' perspectives on PBS in terms of traditional Chinese cultural values and the variation of those cultural values with regard to acculturation, (c) to address the importance of understanding contrasting values of PBS and its applications in the process of implementing PBS in Chinese American families, and (d) to provide recommendations for professionals who work with families of diverse backgrounds in implementing culturally responsive PBS practices.

Understanding Embedded Cultural Values of PBS

Kalyanpur and Harry (1999) pointed out that the values that underpin the value base of special education in the United States are the U.S. mainstream values, which Spindler and Spindler (1990) noted as "equity, individualism, personal choice, and hard work" (p. 8). As a widely used approach in special education practices, PBS is guided by theories and research derived from special education and psychology and tends to reflect mainstream values (Chen, Downing, & Peckham-Hardin, 2002).

In addition, Althen (1988) identified the American values and assumptions as follows:

1. individualism and privacy;
2. equality;
3. informalities;
4. the future, change, and progress;
5. goodness of humanity;
6. time;
7. achievement, action, work, and materialism; and
8. directness and assertiveness.

It is noted that most U.S. mainstream cultural values are embedded in PBS, and the core principles and key attributes of PBS strongly reflect these cultural values.

There is consensus on the core principles and key features of PBS in the literature (Carr et al., 1999; Carr et al., 2002; Horner, 2000; Lucyshyn, Dunlap, & Albin, 2002). Lucyshyn et al. identified a comprehensive set of key features of PBS with families, including collaborative partnerships, family-centered principles, meaningful lifestyle outcomes, functional assessment, multicomponent PBS plans, contextual fit, activity setting as unit of analysis, implementation support, continuous evaluation, and support with humility. We focus on the following four PBS key features as exemplars of the embedded cultural values of PBS: collaborative partnerships, functional assessment, contextual fit, and meaningful lifestyle outcomes (see Table 1).

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

An emphasis on families working in partnership with professionals is a core PBS value (Lucyshyn et al., 2002; Turnbull et al., 2002). Building collaborative partnerships refers to establishing a truly respectful, trusting, and reciprocal relationship between professionals and families in carrying out function assessment, designing behavior support plans, and sharing responsibility for PBS implementation. Research has documented that a family-professional partnership is an important component that influences the effectiveness of PBS practices (Hieneman & Dunlap, 2000; Lucyshyn, Albin, & Nixon, 1997; Vaughn, Dunlap, Fox, Clarke, & Bucy, 1997). American mainstream values, such as equality, informality in communication, change, future progress, achievement, directness, and assertiveness are frequently embedded in family-professional partnerships related to designing and implementing PBS.

FUNCTIONAL ASSESSMENT

At the heart of the PBS process is a functional behavioral assessment that identifies the specific relationship between behaviors and circumstances that trigger problem behavior (Horner & Carr, 1997; O'Neill et al., 1997; Reid, 2000; Sugai, Lewis-Palmer, & Hagan-Burke, 1999-2000). The

Table 1. PBS Tenets: Embedded PBS Values Versus Traditional Chinese Cultural Values

| Embedded PBS values (Anglo European) | Traditional Chinese cultural values |
|--|--|
| | Collaborative partnership |
| Equality (equal partnership) Informality in communication Directness and assertiveness | Filial piety (deferential to authority) Maintenance of harmony (avoid conflict in communication) Family privacy (indirectness) |
| | Functional assessment |
| Scientific rationale in viewing disability/problem behavior Individualism (person-centered) Change and progress for the future Action and achievement (usefulness of intervention) | Spiritual rationale in viewing disability (fatalism & religious belief) Promotion of family unit (family-focused) No need for change (focus on past) Suspicion of the usefulness of intervention |
| | Contextual fit |
| Equality (focus on everyone in the environment for the problem) Change and progress (focus on ecological change and progress) Action and achievement (democratic discipline) | Promotion of family unit (focus on child's problem) No need to accommodate child Authoritarian discipline |
| | Meaningful lifestyle outcomes |
| Individualism (person-centered planning and support systems for better life outcome) Change and progress for the future (focus on long-term life outcome) Work and achievement (work hard to attain material benefits & leisure) | Promotion of family unit (child's career success as family's pride) Maintenance of harmony (family goal outweighs personal goal) Emphasis on education (career success requires sacrificing leisure) |

Note. PBS = positive behavioral support.

functional assessment process can disclose information about overall behavior patterns, the conditions that predict occurrences of behavior, and possible reasons for the behavior. Functional assessment is carried out via indirect or direct observation and interview. Results of functional assessment then become the foundation for determining hypotheses to guide individualized behavioral support.

Research has found that problem behavior typically serves a purpose or function: (a) escaping or avoiding non-preferred or aversive demands and tasks, (b) gaining attention, (c) gaining access to a preferred thing, and (d) getting self-stimulation reinforcement (O'Neill et al., 1997; Repp & Horner, 1999). In addition, studies have shown that the function of problem behavior can be understood in a broader sense: problem behavior is a problem of learning (Taylor & Carr, 1992), and problem behavior serves a communicative function (Carr, 1994). Therefore, one important strategy for the behavior support plan is to teach new behaviors and skills, thus making problem behavior irrelevant. Another key strategy is to identify effective ways for individuals with problem behavior to communicate their wants and needs. These features of functional assessment reflect mainstream cultural values in many respects, especially with regard to individualism (e.g., focus on personal choice and needs), change and progress for the future (e.g., control problem behavior and reinforce desirable behavior), time (e.g., efficiency of behavior remediation and

future-oriented prevention), and action and achievement (e.g., remediation of problem behavior is doable and achievable).

CONTEXTUAL FIT

Contextual fit is regarded as the key to ensuring effectiveness of PBS practices in terms of ecological validity (Albin, Lucyshyn, Horner, & Flannery, 1996; Carr, 1997). For conceptual fit to be acceptable, feasible, and sustainable, behavior support plans must be congruent with the individual with problem behavior, all of the people who have implementation roles, and the environmental variables (Albin, Lucyshyn, Horner, & Flannery, 1996; Lucyshyn, Dunlap, & Albin, 2002). This concept of contextual fit acknowledges the necessity of focusing on a problem's context rather than on problem behavior or the individual with the problem behavior. Furthermore, contextual fit requires establishment of responsive environments to facilitate changes in all the behaviors of all relevant persons. So, the focus of PBS assessment and intervention shifts from being directed solely toward the individual's problem behavior to many variables in the environment, including the roles and interactions of families and professionals. Research has demonstrated that PBS is more effective (a) when the environment is reorganized in contrast to when it is not reorganized, and

(b) when significant people in the environment (e.g., educators or family members) change their behaviors rather than when change is expected only from the individual with the problem behavior (Carr et al., 1999).

In addition, contextual fit calls for understanding the cultural and ethnic diversity of families and for intervention to be culturally sensitive and appropriate (Lucyshyn et al., 2002). The beliefs and rationale of emphasizing contextual fit reflect some key U.S. cultural values, such as equality (e.g., focus on the environment instead of on individuals in the matter of problem behavior; responsiveness of PBS implementation to families from diverse backgrounds), change and progress (e.g., focus on ecological change and progress), time (e.g., management and efficiency of future-oriented prevention and intervention), and action and achievement (e.g., action leading to ecological change results in broader achievement).

MEANINGFUL LIFESTYLE OUTCOMES

A fourth central feature of PBS relates to the goal of creating a richer, more meaningful lifestyle for individuals with problem behavior (Carr et al., 2002; Koegel, Koegel, & Dunlap, 1996; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1999). Achieving meaningful lifestyle outcomes refers to improvements in family and peer relationships; home and community activity patterns; and choice (e.g., self-determination) related to preferences and resources of individuals with problem behavior, their family members, and other important people in their social networks (Lucyshyn, Dunlap, & Albin, 2002). The focus on meaningful lifestyle outcomes is not limited to the individual with problem behavior but also takes into account quality of family life, because the problem behavior affects the individual with problem behavior and his or her family (Fox, Vaughn, Dunlap, & Bucy, 1997; Poston et al., 2003). In addition, person-centered planning is strongly suggested as a PBS planning process that promotes meaningful lifestyle outcomes (Harrower, Fox, Dunlap, & Kincaid, 1999; Holburn & Vietze, 2002). The rationale of promoting richer lifestyle outcomes through PBS reflects key U.S. cultural values, including individualism (e.g., person-centered planning and individualized support systems for better life outcome), change and progress for the future (e.g., focus on the long-term life outcome), and work and achievement (e.g., get a job, work hard, and attain material benefits).

Overall, the ideas and rationale associated with the four key features of PBS reflect mainstream U.S. cultural values. Professionals should realize that the principles of defining problem behavior and associated interventions are culturally based (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999). Professionals also need to be aware of those embedded cultural values of PBS. Furthermore, they must realize that the culturally-based rationale of PBS may be understood differently by families from other cultures.

Chinese American Cultural Values and Perspectives on PBS

As described previously in Meng's case, professionals likely will face difficulties when they begin implementing PBS for children of families from culturally diverse backgrounds. They will discover they need specific information about families from other cultures and reflection on their own PBS-embedded cultural values and those of families from diverse backgrounds. Professionals working with Chinese American families need to understand general Chinese cultural values and the perspectives of Chinese American families concerning PBS (see Table 1).

UNDERSTANDING TRADITIONAL CHINESE CULTURAL VALUES

There is tremendous variation among people of different Asian American groups regarding cultural values and beliefs (Chan & Lee, 2004). Generalizing a set of typical cultural values for Chinese American families is a complex and difficult task, given variation among Chinese American families in terms of the dynamic nature of the acculturation process. However, the literature has noted shared traditional cultural values that reflect Chinese culture (Chan & Lee, 2004; Lee, 1997). This section describes three traditional Chinese cultural values and analyzes the perception of disability and discipline in terms of these values and beliefs.

Although various Chinese cultural values and beliefs have been summarized in the literature (Chan & Lee, 2004; D. Y. E. Ho, 1987; Lee, 1997), researchers agree on the traditional Chinese cultural values. Chan and Lee (2004) noted that these traditional cultural values are rooted in the doctrines and philosophies of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism.

Promotion of Family Unit

Promoting the family unit rather than individual interests is a significant traditional Chinese value (Chan & Lee, 2004; Lee, 1997). According to Confucian principles, family is the fundamental unit or backbone of a society. The family is also the central focus of an individual's life and generates loyalty, mutual obligation, cooperation, interdependence, and reciprocity. Each individual typically views him- or herself as integral to family oneness and strives consistently to promote the family's welfare, harmony, and reputation (Chan & Lee, 2004). Family-oriented cultural values are manifested in filial piety and family hierarchical structure.

Filial piety has been defined as a simultaneous "mental state and a behavioral code" (Jordan, 1998, p. 271). Underlying components of filial piety include reverence for elders, ancestors, and the past; unquestioning obedience or subordination to parents; and concern for parents' needs

and the desire to please and comfort them (Chan & Lee, 2004). It is believed that children owe their parents and must remain loyal to the parents and the family.

Consistent with the value of filial piety, Chinese families in general embrace a hierarchical, cohesive, patriarchal, and vertical structure characterized by well-defined, highly interdependent roles of family members (Chan, 1986; Chan & Lee, 2004). Traditional Chinese American families are patriarchal because the most powerful person is usually the oldest male (e.g., grandfather or father), and the subsequent authority figure after the oldest male is the oldest female (e.g., grandmother or mother) and then the oldest child (male superseding female; Asian American Heritage, 1995; Lee, 1996). These cultural values are evident in Meng's family:

Meng's grandmother usually has the final say on many important family issues, but her father and mother are also authority figures who make decisions. Meng's grandmother and parents expect Meng to always show respect and obedience to them. The family sets the rule that Meng should be in awe of her grandmother and parents and obey them, even if she disagrees. Meng has a behavior concern at night. She frequently wets the bed, which leads to a cycle of tearing off her clothes and crying for hours. This interrupts Meng's school day dramatically because she is tired and upset due to the previous night's problem. However, Meng's grandmother and parents are very uncomfortable discussing this with teachers and school staff at formal meetings because they believe the issue should be addressed privately within the family to avoid shame.

Maintenance of Harmony

Maintaining harmony is another traditional Chinese cultural value (Chan & Lee, 2004; Lee, 1996). Overall harmony is maintained through an individual's efforts to achieve intrapsychic harmony, interpersonal harmony, and harmony with nature and time (Chan & Lee, 2004). To promote family and social harmony, individuals should avoid direct confrontation, conform to rules of propriety, and recognize and respect (i.e., "give face to") others. Such a middle path virtue is in accordance with Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist teachings. Cultural behaviors based on these guiding principles that show politeness, tact, and gentleness in interpersonal interactions are highly regarded (Sileo & Prater, 1998). For example, it is common to see Chinese Americans nod their heads habitually when someone is speaking. Nodding is a gesture of acknowledgment and shows general respect. However, nodding does not necessarily indicate agreement with what is being said. The person who nods may have a dissenting point of view. Moreover, to maintain harmony, he or she is not likely to voice an opinion in public. We look to Meng's family to further understand this issue:

In one of Meng's PBS planning meetings, she was invited to attend the meeting along with her parents, the general

education teacher, the counselor, the special education teacher, and the vice-principal. As the meeting facilitator, the school counselor asked Meng to speak first because she thought it would be nice to start with Meng sharing her hopes and dreams for her high school years and after graduation. Meng was very hesitant to speak. She kept looking at her parents and spoke very briefly about her family's goal for her. Meng's parents were silent during the entire meeting. They declined to speak, only nodding their heads and smiling when the counselor asked their opinions. The school counselor later learned from Meng that Meng's parents were upset and offended because the counselor asked Meng to speak first. Meng also mentioned that although her parents felt humiliated, they chose not to speak or react because they wanted to avoid conflict during the meeting.

Emphasis on Education

In Chinese culture, high reverence and social status are conferred on teachers and scholars because they represent the predominant value of education (Chan & Lee, 2004; Leung, 1988). In accordance with Confucian teachings, "Children are ingrained with a lifelong respect for knowledge, wisdom, intelligence, and love of learning" (Chan & Lee, 2004, p. 253). Many Chinese American families uphold this cultural value (Leung, 1988; Min, 1995). Parents believe their primary responsibility is to ensure their children are successful in education. In turn, children are told they should be fully obligated to family through academic achievement. Moreover, academic achievement is regarded as the greatest tribute children can bestow on their parents and family (Chan & Lee, 2004; Leung, 1988). This is evident again in Meng's family:

Meng's parents hope she will enter a prestigious medical school to be trained as a doctor. The family believes that Meng's academic and career success will promote the family welfare and be a source of shared pride among its members. Meng's parents rigidly control her after-school time. They know Meng likes playing piano and volleyball and do not oppose her playing so long as she finishes all her homework and family-assigned extras. But they often require Meng to reserve most of her time for studying. They also realize, however, that Meng will compete for college entrance with other students who also have excellent grades. Therefore, piano and volleyball could help her compete in college admissions.

Negative Perception of Causation of Disability

Some Chinese American families have traditional beliefs about the cause of a disability. They believe their child's disability may be attributed to the mother's failure to follow familial or traditional habits and health-care practices during pregnancy, divine punishment for sins or wrongdoings committed by the parents or their ancestors, or

spirit aspects involving demons, ghosts, or evil spirits (Chan & Lee, 2004; Yalung, 1992). In addition, some Chinese Americans still believe in karma, the concept that the present life is predetermined by good or bad deeds committed in one's previous life. They believe that disability happens to their child due to karma. Meng's family is an example:

Meng's family has great respect for the past and Buddhist beliefs because her grandmother is a faithful follower. Meng's grandmother believes that Meng's nighttime problems may result from something wrong she did in her previous life. Grandmother also believes that helping Meng pursue the middle path and maintain harmony in this life may help alleviate or overcome her problems.

Discipline Through Punishment

Chinese American parents believe that teaching their children to embrace the values and principles of filial piety and harmony is their primary duty (Lee, 1996). Chinese parents control their children persistently by modeling appropriate behaviors and appealing to their sense of duty and obligation. Parents sometimes punish their children's misbehavior by arousing their fear of personal taunt and family shame (Lee, 1997; Uba, 1994). Primary forms of discipline used by Chinese parents are name-calling, teasing, and verbal reprimands (e.g., scolding). Physical punishment is usually considered acceptable (C. K. Ho, 1990). Children are reminded through these forms of discipline that their misbehaviors result not only in their "loss of face" but also disgrace and embarrassment for their family. Some of these discipline practices are evident in Meng's family:

Meng's parents control her after-school time strictly. They supervise Meng's completion of school assignments and extra homework that her tutor assigns. They check Meng's grades and teacher reports frequently. They punish Meng with a double amount of homework if her grades are not satisfactory. Meng feels frustrated in trying to satisfy all of her parents' requirements. She occasionally complains that she has too much homework in comparison with her classmates, who have more leisure time. Meng's father gives her a "cold face" (a stern, reprimanding look) and punishes her by not allowing her to eat dinner with him. Furthermore, Meng's father believes that if he does not spank Meng, she will not grow up to be a good person. Therefore, Meng is spanked when she complains or defies her parents.

Through the example of Meng's family, we have introduced the traditional Chinese cultural values that some Chinese American families hold. However, not all Chinese American families hold these cultural values because there is tremendous variation in Chinese American families' cultural values in terms of the impact of the acculturation process (Chan & Lee, 2004; Chen et al., 2002).

VARIATION IN CHINESE AMERICAN FAMILIES' CULTURAL VALUES

Chinese American families are, to some extent, involved in assimilation (i.e., the process of being Americanized) and acculturation when they are increasingly exposed to U.S. societal norms and mainstream values. As noted by Lee (1996), "There is no one 'typical' Chinese American family" (p. 254). There are many individual family differences; thus, Chinese American families may vary in the cultural values they hold. These families represent a wide range of cultural values—from very traditional to very "Americanized" in terms of acculturation (Lee, 1996).

Leung (1988, cited in Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999) noted that acculturation consists of the following four stages: traditionalism, marginality, biculturalism, and overacculturation. In addressing the issue of cultural conflict in acculturation, Kitano and Maki (1996, cited in Sue & Sue, 1999) pointed out that Asian Americans generally resolve conflicts in one of four ways regarding assimilation and ethnic identity (i.e., retention of custom, values of culture of origin): Type A—high in assimilation, low in ethnic identity; Type B—high in assimilation, high in ethnic identity; Type C—high in ethnic identity, low in assimilation; and Type D—low in assimilation, low in ethnic identity. Type A individuals are entirely Westernized and may hold mainstream values rather than the values of their culture of origin. Type B individuals are bicultural and feel comfortable with embracing the values of either cultural group. Type C individuals are more likely to adhere to the traditional values of their culture of origin, although they are somewhat acculturated. Type D individuals usually feel alienated from both cultures and are in a transitional stage of seeking an identity (Sue & Sue, 1999).

Kitano and Maki's (1996) framework is useful for analyzing the variation in Chinese American families' cultural values. Meng's family members belong to the Type C group because the family still holds all the traditional Chinese cultural values. However, it is important to know there are Chinese American families (e.g., Type A and Type B) who hold cultural values different from those of Meng's family.

In addition, Lynch and Hanson (2004) noted that cultural or ethnic identification is not the sole determinant of one's values, beliefs, and behaviors but is instrumental. Making assumptions about a person's behavior based on a cultural label or stereotypical cultural trait usually leads to inaccurate and inappropriate generalizations. Professionals thus must learn culture-specific information about families from diverse backgrounds while not stereotyping their values.

CONTRAST CULTURAL VALUES IN UNDERSTANDING PBS

When professionals from the mainstream culture work with families of diverse backgrounds, their awareness and

understanding of cultural differences can dramatically influence the way the PBS process is carried out (Chen, Downing, & Peckham-Hardin, 2002). Professionals must realize that contrasting their cultural values and those of the families they serve affects understanding of PBS. We address these contrasting cultural values in the context of PBS, especially those associated with the previously described four key features of PBS: collaborative partnerships, functional assessment, contextual fit, and meaningful lifestyle outcomes.

Collaborative Partnerships

Strengthening collaborative partnerships between professionals and families throughout the PBS process has been increasingly emphasized in the literature (Hieneman & Dunlap, 2000; Turnbull et al., 2002; Vaughn et al., 1997). It is believed that collaborative partnerships are achieved when professionals and families perceive and treat each other as active, equal partners (Turnbull & Turnbull, 2001); however, establishing these partnerships can become a complicated goal that is difficult to achieve.

Research has shown that traditional Asian American families typically depend on professionals' opinions to develop and implement programs for their children's behavioral concerns (Sileo & Prater, 1998). Chinese American families usually do not seek information related to their children's disabilities (Smith & Ryan, 1987). This can be explained by the Chinese values of families as deferential to authority (e.g., educational agency), due to filial piety, and the expectation that experts (e.g., professionals) should provide solutions. In addition, maintaining harmony and peace with others has deep spiritual and historical significance to many Chinese American families (Chan & Lee, 2004). Therefore, the PBS team should not expect a Chinese American family to share ideas that differ from or contradict those of professionals. This proved true in the case of Meng's family:

Meng's family was passive in response to the school's request that they attend PBS team meetings to discuss Meng's problem behavior. The family declined to hold the meeting in their house and showed little interest in attending the meeting at school. The family was reticent during the meeting because they were afraid their opinions could cause disharmony or even conflict. In addition, they were reluctant to share information about Meng and other family members when asked to do so. They were uncomfortable discussing Meng's bedwetting issue in front of strangers because they considered this private information. They were especially concerned that disclosure of Meng's problem would disgrace the whole family. As for Meng's behavioral issues at school, her parents saw no need to seek the opinions of school staff members because they considered the staff to be experts.

Functional Assessment

The key purpose of functional assessment is to understand the nature of problem behavior by identifying the relationship between the behavior and relevant circumstances (Horner & Carr, 1997; O'Neill et al., 1997). For professionals in the mainstream culture who believe in principles and practices based on science, there is no doubt that problem behavior must serve some functions, so interventions should address remediation of problem behavior. However, some Chinese American families may disagree that PBS is necessary and question its application to their child's behavior issues.

Traditional Chinese American families may believe that disability results from a misdeed the child committed in a previous life or from God's punishment (Chan & Lee, 2004). These beliefs create guilt and fatalism and make families suspicious of interventions. Some families conclude that seeking services for their child is pointless (Chen, Downing, & Peckham-Hardin, 2002). Moreover, beliefs about the cause of the child's problem behaviors influence family expectations about their child's behaviors, their goals for their child, and their involvement in PBS. Let us look at Meng's case to further understand this issue:

Meng's family (particularly her grandmother) believed that Meng's bedwetting stemmed from the influence of bad spirits. They believed Meng was being punished in this life for misdeeds she committed in a previous life. The family used a sacred prayer and a special ritual of ancestor worship to treat Meng's problem. They did not seem to understand why the school wanted to engage Meng and her family in the PBS process. In their hearts, they did not think Meng's nighttime behavioral issue was a serious problem to be addressed by so-called intervention strategies.

Contextual Fit

PBS focuses on ecological validity, which attends to (a) how interventions are relevant as a natural part of a child's and his or her family's routine life and (b) how changes in children's problem behavior and family context become sustainable (Albin et al., 1996; Carr et al., 2002). Professionals believe they must help change the family context to address the child's problem behavior. In other words, professionals focus on problem contexts rather than on the child per se. Professionals also believe that family involvement in PBS implementation is crucial to effective interventions.

Professionals and Chinese American families may appear to have common beliefs about the importance of the family unit, but such agreement may not always occur. From a professional's viewpoint, all of the people in the family context (including parents) need to change their behaviors to accommodate their child's needs. In Chinese American families with a hierarchical structure, parents

tend not to accept the idea that they need to accommodate their child. They believe that the child is the only one whose behavior must change to meet family requirements and maintain family harmony. They also think that discipline is the right path to reach those goals. Chinese American families select different behaviors to encourage and discourage in their children. Their ways of disciplining their children sometimes differ from those of the mainstream culture (Chan & Lee, 2004; Lee, 1996, 1997). For example, physical punishment or other types of punishments commonly used in Chinese American families may be considered abusive by professionals in the mainstream culture. In addition, the ways in which Chinese American families discipline their children can dramatically influence their involvement in planning and implementing PBS and the effectiveness of interventions. Meng's family illustrates this issue:

Meng's parents had difficulty understanding the PBS team's idea that everyone in the family should make changes to accommodate Meng's needs, if necessary. The family also did not seem to accept the idea that they should play a role in planning and implementing PBS in relation to Meng's behavior at home and in school. Meng's parents were unhappy with PBS team members who asked them to describe their discipline practices toward Meng. The parents knew they had restrictive control of Meng's after-school time and used punishment in a variety of ways. But they thought their discipline was appropriate and efficient in regulating Meng in order to achieve family goals.

Meaningful Lifestyle Outcomes

An important PBS goal in addition to the remediation of problem behavior is to help children with problem behavior achieve richer and more meaningful lifestyle outcomes (Carr et al., 2002). Remediation of children's problem behavior is not believed to be sufficient, and the ultimate goal of PBS is to help children with problem behavior live a better life. Although the PBS process acknowledges the influence of family context, many essential PBS features reflect its grounding in a person-centered philosophy (Koegel, Koegel, & Dunlap, 1996). For instance, person-centered planning is commonly used in the PBS process to help design the support plan for achieving children's meaningful lifestyle outcomes (Kincaid, 1996). As noted, the voices of children with problem behavior should be heard in this approach. They should be asked to share their hopes, desires, and dreams for the future.

However, embedded PBS values of individualism and equality may contradict traditional Chinese American cultural values of promoting the family unit and maintaining harmony. Some Chinese American families consider it inappropriate or offensive to ask a child to speak without the

parents speaking first (Lee, 1996). In Chinese American families with a hierarchical structure, grandparents or parents speak on behalf of their children. They believe that cohesion and preservation of the family unit, rather than an individual member's goals and desires, should be prioritized. They want to make sure that family goals override individual goals if there are differences. In addition, families may define meaningful lifestyle outcomes differently, depending on their own values and beliefs (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999). The definition of "typical" U.S. mainstream quality of life may differ from the perception of Chinese American families. Let us look to Meng's family as an example:

When Meng's family started participating in development of the PBS plan with the PBS team, the issue of how to define more meaningful lifestyle outcomes for Meng emerged. The special education teacher saw friendship development as very important to Meng's future and thought that Meng should spend more after-school time with her peers (e.g., socializing at a youth club, participating in group study, playing sports). Most team members believed that Meng would be much happier if she were able to have some control over her after-school time. Meng's family did not disagree that developing friendships is important. They insisted, however, that Meng was obligated to use her after-school time for her family commitment. Her personal desires should be subordinated to the family goal. Meng's family hopes she will enter a prestigious medical school and then become a doctor. They believe that a prestigious career for Meng will not only glorify the family but also would be the utmost achievement in her life. Therefore, the sacrifice of Meng's leisure and personal enjoyment is the necessary price paid for future career success.

It is important for professionals working with Chinese American families to realize there are contrasting cultural values related to PBS. However, we caution against overgeneralization about what we have just described.

Implementing Culturally Responsive PBS

As addressed by Lynch and Hanson (2004), the most important step in cross-cultural competence development is for professionals to apply knowledge and skills in the process of working with families after the professionals have reinforced self-awareness of their own cultural values and obtained knowledge about other cultures. Such a step is critical for professionals who want to work effectively with culturally diverse families in PBS. Using Meng's family as an example, we address the complex interaction of different cultural perspectives between professionals and Meng's family in relation to the four key PBS features: col-

laborative partnerships between families and professionals, functional assessment, contextual fit, and meaningful lifestyle outcomes.

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

The school's PBS team had difficulty collaborating with Meng's family through formal meetings that involved the PBS process. The PBS team realized that asking Meng's parents questions and soliciting discussion at meetings was inappropriate for obtaining information about the family's concerns about Meng's behavior and its contextual influences. Interactions at the meetings were limited, and the PBS team realized that Meng's family resisted collaboration. Lack of trust between the family and the team was evident. After brainstorming, the PBS team decided to try informal contacts (e.g., phone calls, home visits) instead of formal planning meetings. The PBS team asked a Chinese American music teacher in Meng's school to be facilitator for the PBS team. The teacher not only facilitated learning and discussions about Chinese cultural values within the team but also made phone calls to Meng's family. The PBS team also asked for help from a Chinese American professor in the community who is a good and respected friend of Meng's family. The professor accompanied the PBS team to Meng's home for visits. Through the phone calls and home visits, the PBS team built a rapport with Meng's family and started learning about their preferences, ways of sharing information, and opinions.

After analyzing cultural differences, the PBS team adjusted their communication style to accommodate Meng's family. The team found that trust was established gradually, along with their increasing understanding of and effective communication with the family. Furthermore, the team did not emphasize that Meng's family needed to be in an equal partner role, given their specific cultural values and beliefs. With these accommodations, the team realized they had earned more collaboration from Meng's family. In addition, with the Chinese American professor's facilitation, the team tried to discuss options for conducting the PBS process for Meng at home and in school with the family. When the family began accepting PBS, the team moved on, calling for more family involvement by explaining the family's unique and essential role in the PBS process.

The important message the team learned through such a culturally reciprocal building process was that time and respect are essential in establishing mutual trust and collaborative relationships between people of two distinct cultures. Over time, the family became more familiar with and open to the team so that the team could begin to learn more about the family and Meng. By showing respect to the family, the team could begin developing a trusting relationship with family members, and the family members became willing to share some of their information.

FUNCTIONAL ASSESSMENT

The PBS team encountered significant reluctance from Meng's family regarding the appropriateness of a formal functional assessment of Meng. Not only did the family have very different perspectives as to the cause of Meng's nighttime problem behavior, they also disagreed that functional assessment was necessary and appropriate. Moreover, the team found it especially difficult to use formal interviews and direct observations to get personal information from family members. The team brainstormed about possible solutions and decided to focus on helping the family understand the scientific view of problem behavior as the basis for determining the necessity of using PBS to address Meng's problem behavior.

The team asked the Chinese American professor to facilitate their conversations about PBS with Meng's family. The professor suggested the team consider not negating the family's belief in spiritual treatment for Meng's problem. She also suggested that the team focus on their concern for Meng's learning issues resulting from her classroom problem behavior. The professor knew Meng's family cared very much about Meng's education, especially about her academic performance.

Interestingly, Meng's family jumped on board quickly when the team sought to focus their conversations on Meng's learning issues. Meng's parents told team members that they were concerned about Meng's regression in her grades and of their hope that the team could help find the solution. With the professor's suggestion, Meng's parents allowed Meng to participate in conversations and share her experiences about her classroom problem behavior. To her parents' surprise, Meng, whom her parents called a "lazy girl," told everybody she could not help falling asleep in class if she had experienced difficulty the night before. Team members realized that lack of sleep, which was the consequence of Meng's nighttime problem, was likely the primary cause (i.e., setting event/antecedent) of Meng's classroom problem behavior, and they sought agreement from Meng's grandmother and parents about their assessment. The family recognized that Meng's nighttime problem was related to her classroom problem behavior and agreed that solving Meng's nighttime problem was very important. To understand the cause of Meng's nighttime problem, one team member, together with the music teacher, conducted informal interviews with Meng and her parents during a home visit, given Meng's family's concerns about disclosing family information. Again, Meng's parents allowed her to speak of her experiences. Meng said she usually wet the bed during nightmares. When she woke up and realized what happened, Meng always felt shameful, then cried and tore her clothes or other nearby objects. Meng also mentioned that she used to have nightmares when she was feeling stressed about her extra home as-

signments and frustrated that she could not satisfy her parents, although she studied “all the time.”

The team listened to Meng’s grandmother and parents about their views on Meng’s nighttime problem. Although the team disagreed with them, the team did not try to negate Meng’s family’s current practice of spiritual treatment. The team decided to incorporate Meng’s night prayer into the PBS plan. However, they kept urging the family to consider incorporating PBS within their current practice. The family agreed to discuss PBS strategies that could be applicable to Meng at home. The team strongly recommended the family allow Meng to have time to relax prior to going to bed (e.g., listening to music, watching TV, doing some physical exercise). They also suggested that Meng’s parents take Meng to a physician for a kidney examination. Furthermore, they also recommended that the grandmother give Meng a Chinese herbal soup (i.e., a nutritional soup made by Meng’s grandmother) early in the evening rather than just before bedtime. A clean sheet and pajamas should be put on a chair next to Meng’s bed so Meng could change the sheet and pajamas quickly and go back to sleep if she wet the bed.

The team learned another important lesson about conducting functional assessment with Meng’s family. The key message is that achieving the goal of a culturally responsive PBS intervention in Chinese American families such as Meng’s may require PBS professionals to incorporate a nonscientific interpretation of the causes of problem behavior along with traditional, culturally appropriate interventions linked to this interpretation. Doing so can help build trust and a spirit of reciprocity with the family. This may contribute to the family’s understanding of and support for new ideas about how to help their child at home and in school.

CONTEXTUAL FIT

In studying Meng’s parents’ discipline practices, the team became concerned about how discipline could affect PBS implementation. Despite opposing the punishment practices of Meng’s parents, the team did not directly criticize her parents or make judgments about their practices. The team had several conversations with Meng’s grandmother and parents to express their concern about punishment. The team also discussed how punishment could lead to negative consequences for the family. They did not ask the family to give up all of their current discipline practices, but the team shared information with Meng’s family about alternative discipline strategies. They persuaded the family to stop using a dinner time-out for Meng because of its effect on Meng’s nighttime problem when she had to eat a later dinner closer to bedtime. They also recommended Meng’s parents not use extra homework as punishment, because it often resulted in Meng not getting sufficient

sleep. Meng’s parents considered the team’s suggestions seriously and expressed interest in knowing how team members disciplined their own children.

The key message is that Chinese American families may practice traditional discipline options that seem unacceptable to professionals from the mainstream culture. Professionals need to be aware of such differences and avoid making an easy judgment. Professionals and families should discuss the ways family members can be comfortable using discipline. By doing so, professionals can build trust and reciprocal relationships with families for effective PBS implementation.

MEANINGFUL LIFESTYLE OUTCOMES

The PBS team realized that the family had a view of meaningful lifestyle outcomes for Meng that differed from theirs. The team understood that Meng’s family had exceedingly high expectations for Meng to be successful in education. They also realized that Meng’s family had a distinctive view of the importance of Meng’s personal life enjoyment. The team avoided arguing with Meng’s family about their point that Meng must sacrifice personal enjoyment to achieve the family’s goal. Team members decided to address this issue in a different manner. They discussed with Meng’s family the possibility of making a better balance of Meng’s after-school time arrangement. They reminded Meng’s parents of Meng’s stress and frustration related to the pressure of their high expectations for homework and how this may have been related to Meng’s nighttime problem. The team made it clear they supported Meng in achieving her family’s goal. But the team also made a point well taken by Meng’s family: Meng could have a *richer, more pleasant* life as she pursues her family’s goal. Meng’s family and the team discussed their suggestions concerning the arrangement of Meng’s after-school time. They agreed to let Meng attend a study group at her classmates’ homes and sing in a community children’s choir.

The key message is that professionals should acknowledge that Chinese American families have different views of meaningful lifestyle outcomes in terms of their cultural values and beliefs. Professionals should respect Chinese American family values and beliefs regarding prioritizing family rather than individual goals. Professionals also should take into account family expectations and priorities for their children by incorporating expectations and goals the family considers important into the PBS plan to help enhance family quality of life.

SUMMARY

Working with Chinese American families to carry out effective PBS is challenging. Knowing only PBS concepts,

procedures, and techniques is insufficient for professionals trying to carry out culturally responsive PBS. To ensure culturally responsive PBS practices, professionals need a clear understanding of the embedded cultural values of PBS. They also need cultural-specific knowledge about families from diverse backgrounds and must acknowledge variation in cultural values among families. Beyond that, professionals need to be motivated to engage in a continuous process to apply their knowledge and skills and simultaneously involve themselves in new learning (Lynch & Hanson, 2004). Meng's case demonstrates that integrating

these important steps and strategies into the PBS process has improved Meng's problem behavior and enhanced her and her family's quality of life.

Meng has significantly overcome her problem behaviors at school and home. Although she occasionally wets the bed, Meng no longer has subsequent problem behavior because she follows specific steps that help her go back to sleep quickly. In school, Meng is now performing well without reoccurrence of the problem behavior. Her grades are rising, and Meng's family is very happy with her progress. In addition, Meng spends more after-school time in different activities. She went to the study group and made more friends. She became a leader in the community children's choir. Her family was very proud of her when she sang a solo at a community performance.

Stage 1: Prior to beginning the PBS process

- Be reflective about your own cultural values and beliefs
- Understand the embedded cultural values of PBS
- Learn the roles of family members and the family structure
- Understand families' tendency to not dispute or actively disagree
- Learn the family's expectations for the child's behavior and learning goals
- Understand family members' suspicion of intervention in terms of their perception of disability
- Learn the family's discipline practices
- Understand the family's reluctance to share personal and family information
- Learn the family's nonverbal communication style

Stage 2: When conducting functional assessment and developing PBS plans

- Take time to build trust and rapport with the family
- Use a mediator (e.g., family friends) to help build up trusting relationships
- Understand the family's different perspectives on PBS
- Be aware of the family's slow and passive involvement in the process
- Do not make quick judgments on the family's perspectives of PBS
- Try to identify existing or potential natural supports and resources
- Try to identify potential sources of possible conflict
- Be honest about misunderstandings or disagreements with the family
- Be confident in showing your expertise in problem solving
- Understand that a family takes time to make decisions

Stage 3: When implementing and sustaining PBS interventions

- Develop broader supports for the whole family rather than just for the individual with the problem behavior
- Listen to the family's opinion of what is or is not working and what is helpful
- Respond to family's questions about progress and problems
- Make sure that you and the family have the same goals
- Understand that development of cultural reciprocity requires time and persistence

Future Recommendations

PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

Useful strategies and tips exist to help guide professionals' PBS practices when working with families from culturally diverse backgrounds. Researchers have recommended various strategies to be employed in the PBS process (Chen et al., 2002; Griggs & Turnbull, 2001; Santarelli, Koegel, Casas, & Koegel, 2001; Sheridan, 2000). Some of these strategies have proven effective in PBS practices for Chinese American families. Figure 1 summarizes tips for professionals who want to provide culturally responsive PBS. Among those strategies and tips, key points are as follows: (a) understand your own cultural values and beliefs and the embedded cultural values of PBS, (b) understand families' perspectives on PBS in terms of their cultural values within the context of their daily family routines and activities, and (c) build trusting, respectful partnerships with families throughout the PBS process. Although the tips are synthesized in a generic way, professionals should acknowledge a caveat with respect to the limitation of the generalizability and applicability of these tips.

RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

It is our belief that the field should acknowledge the significance of and expect increasing endeavors in studying cultural competence and PBS interventions with culturally diverse families in the future. Considering that the literature lacks both conceptual discussion and sufficient empirical studies with respect to "cultural fit" PBS practices, we envision an array of topics and issues that deserve further inquiry. First, along the same line as in this study, future research should expand the focus on the following:

- conducting qualitative inquiry with PBS researchers to delineate the values embedded in PBS for the purpose of providing more precise

Figure 1. Tips for professionals who work with culturally diverse families in the PBS process.

and comprehensive analysis than we have been able to do in this article;

- conducting qualitative inquiry with Chinese American families who represent the full range of acculturation to more fully understand their cultural values related to PBS and other educational interventions;
- conducting qualitative inquiry with families from other ethnic groups within Asian cultures, as well as with families from other racial groups, related to their agreement/disagreement with PBS values and the identification of their core cultural values.

Second, quantitative inquiry should also be conducted to further analyze the embedded PBS values as well as to examine and evaluate the effectiveness of culturally responsive PBS practices with families from different racial/ethnic groups. In this regard, the future studies can aim to

- develop a survey on the basis of qualitative data analyses to administer to a larger number of researchers, practitioners, and families concerning their agreement and disagreement with the embedded PBS values;
- develop procedures for incorporating this survey into the functional assessment process to identify the extent to which each family (and other members of the PBS team) adhere to and differ in their beliefs regarding embedded PBS values;
- conduct multiple single-subject-design case studies to examine the effectiveness of culturally responsive PBS practices with families from different racial/ethnic groups.

Last, but not least, some practical issues in the process of implementing culturally appropriate PBS need to be examined. For instance, it will be interesting to compare and contrast the use of different negotiation/problem-solving models within team decision-making settings that can be used to reach consensus when there are differences and even clashes in cultural values among team members, especially differences between professionals and families.

Gallimore (1999) pointed out that it is a permanent journey for professionals to discover where they have to make persistent efforts to seek a more sophisticated and sensitive understanding of the role of culture in their personal and professional lives and in the lives of those they serve. Furthermore, the question of how development of professionals' cross-cultural competence can be integrated into PBS practices for diverse families to result in "cultural-fit PBS" is not yet fully answered and deserves further exploration. The journey of discovery is arduous and requires professionals' commitment to inquiry, application, and reflection.

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NOTE

Rather than being a case study of a single individual, the vignettes about Meng and her family are an amalgamation of PBS implementation with several different individuals. Our intent is to be as fully illustrative as possible of the major cultural considerations.

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