

Episode 5: Bringing HOPE to Spanish-Speaking Communities: Featuring Dr. Javiera Brierley Vera and Flavia Maccio

Podcast transcript

“The [Four] Building Blocks [of HOPE] are the same in any language... But, what we really need to do is to listen very carefully of what that family, what that organization, or that government think should be put into each Building Block. -Javiera Brierley Vera, MD

Robert Sege: Welcome to the HOPEful Conversations about Child Development podcast series. I'm Bob Sege, a pediatrician and director of the HOPE National Resource Center at Tufts Medicine.

Baraka Floyd: And I'm Baraka Floyd, a community pediatrician at Stanford and HOPE Facilitator and Champion. The Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences, or HOPE Framework, emphasizes the Building Blocks that children need to thrive: relationships, environments, engagement and emotional growth. In this podcast, we interview leaders in child health and development in order to learn more about how to support families in creating positive childhood experiences for their children. You can learn more about HOPE by visiting our website, positiveexperience.org. Buenos Dias. Today, we're taking HOPE on a cross-cultural trip. On today's episode, we have a great conversation with two guests who lead our growing network of HOPE in Espanol. They build locally sourced, culturally responsive resources to spread HOPE in ways that are natural to each region, country, or county where Spanish-speaking individuals reside. Dr. Javiera Brierley Vera is a family medicine physician and faculty member at Pontificia Universidad Cattolica de Chile. Her practice focuses on children and adolescents where she collaborates with HOPE National Resource Center to cultivate not just linguistically, but culturally aligned materials to bring resilience and thriving into clinical spaces, communities and beyond. We met her just a couple of years ago when Javiera sold her car to come to Boston and learn about HOPE. Flavia Maccio is a HOPE Champion, someone trained to implement the Building Blocks children need to thrive at a systems level. Flavia is an early childhood specialist working in Oakland County, Michigan. Flavia has led an implementation of HOPE in the early childhood setting, which has helped to improve staff recruitment and retention. She has not only used her skills to change workplace culture, but to infuse early childhood education, a sector in her local area, with culturally aligned content for families, children, and communities.

Sege: Welcome, Flavia. Welcome, Javiera. And, my first question is for Javiera. Javiera, you're a family physician, and you teach medical students and residents. Tell us the story of how you got started with HOPE.

Javiera Brierley Vera: So excited to be here, Bob. Of course. I was a family medicine resident in Pontificia Cartolico University de Chile. I was in my psychiatry rotation and, my teacher there, Carmel Lagos, was telling us about ACEs and everything that happened with adverse childhood experiences and all the outcomes that came after that. And, I was like, what do we do now with that? Like, how can we improve lives of families and how we can serve them better? And looking in Google, at the existing evidence at that time, I came across the HOPE framework, and then I started to learn about positive childhood experiences and how they change outcomes even when adversity was happening. It's crazy,



Bob, because I took the online course, and things changed for me. Like, I resonated deeply with everything that was being told. I made a crazy choice. I decided I needed to see firsthand what you were doing and I sold my car and went to Boston and took an elective with you guys at the HOPE National Research Center. Then, you gave me the opportunity to work with you in person. And then, three years later, I'm still working together with you and the team towards promoting access to positive childhood experiences. But now from Chile.

Sege: Javier, what a pleasure. I still remember when you showed up at my office, and I had no idea what to make of you. But clearly, you've taken HOPE to such wonderful places, and I'm so delighted that you and Flavia are here with us today.

Brierley Vera: Thank you. Pleasure of mine.

Floyd: Flavia, you lead an early childhood program in southeast Michigan. Can you tell us the story of how you got started with HOPE?

Flavia Maccio: Yeah. So, hello. Thank you for having us. From the early childhood perspective, we're always looking for ways to support professionals that work with families and young children. We are always trying to support teachers, childcare providers, home visitors, anybody that work with that age range from birth to five. Veronica Pechumer, our team leader, heard about HOPE and she got trained. And then, as a team, we just jumped right in because we found it to be exactly what professionals needed to support families. And, we think this is such an important time for families to be supported from a strength-based perspective.

Floyd: And, when you say exactly what professionals need, can you tell me a little bit more about that?

Maccio: I think that early childhood is such an interesting field because there are a lot of professionals that are trained to support families when they're in preschool and then elementary school and beyond. But, it's hard for families of young children, especially when they are with the first child, to find professionals that can help them in this parenting journey. And as, as we know, early childhood professionals are not as well fed as they should and the trainings tend to be a little bit limited. Every time there is something for them, we are looking for research, research-based, and good resources too, to share with them. We knew about, like Javiera mentioned, we knew about ACEs, but we founded that there was a missing piece for professionals to support families. So we felt that HOPE was answering that question, because, like Javier mentioned, no matter how many adverse experiences parents and children experience, there's always HOPE for them, because they can build those positive experiences that can mitigate trauma.

Floyd: You found that the early childhood professionals, they really could identify problems and were well-versed in that from the trainings that they had. But, what HOPE did was really allowed them to kind of see the other side.

Maccio: Yeah, exactly. That's exactly how you said it. Because we're always looking to supply what's missing. We lack that part of looking at what is strong in families, especially when it comes to a family that has a lot of trauma. We tend to only see the trauma because that's what we want to address and how we want to support them. But, as we say, the trauma is not the whole story. And, the strengths of

the family is also what can determine how that family is going to overcome and provide a better future for the children.

Sege: Flavia and Javier, you guys are both here and you've been very much involved in creating materials for people whose heart, language and culture is in Spanish. I just wanted to ask you if you could tell us and tell our audience how the Building Blocks of HOPE resonate with the culture of Spanish-speaking families.

Brierley Vera: The [Building] Blocks are the same in any language, Bob. In Spanish, in any language, is the same word, is the same concept. But, we, what we really need to do is to listen very carefully of what that family, what does that organization, or that government think that should be put into each Building Block. It makes sense for them. We really need to be very mindful of what are they saying, how are they saying it, what examples are they giving to me. Then, I can help them and accompany them on that journey of promoting positive childhood experiences in each of those Building Blocks systematically help them, thrive into each one of those areas. Because, that's where the framework does. It guides us to systematically approach to each [Building] Block so we have access to positive experiences in all those areas that make our families thrive.

Sege: Thanks so much. And Flavia, I believe you're originally from Argentina and Javier, you're obviously in Chile. For those of us who are not from a Spanish-speaking culture, are there differences between the different Spanish speaking communities and nationalities? Because I know there are around 500 million people in the world whose first language is Spanish. Since you're from different countries, can you talk a little bit about how this all works?

Maccio: Yes, that is exactly true. I mean, like you mentioned, there's like a lot of Spanish speakers. Javiera and I are, like, from our respective countries. We are, we're neighbors, and we are soccer rivals too. But, there are 21 Spanish-speaking countries in the world, and they are all represented here in the [United] States. We all speak Spanish and, like it happens with any other language, there are other accents, there are different expressions that are more typical of one country than another. What I would say the Spanish-speaking community shares is a very strong understanding of relationships. And, as Javiera was mentioning, the Building Blocks are just based on human nature. Right. We all know about relationships, we all know about engagement, environment, and what it feels to help our children and ourselves grow emotionally. I think that it's universal. The message of HOPE is universal. And, especially families, Spanish-speaking families understand the concept of relationships and how important they are to provide positive experiences, not just for children, but for adults. Because typically the family is not just mom, dad and children. It's also grandma and grandpa and uncles and cousins and second cousins. Because, sometimes we have a big family living under the same roof. Sometimes, it's just the typical family. But, the connections, the shared experiences with the families is a little bit more intense in Spanish-speaking families. I think it's, it's important to know that it resonates. I was having trainings with Spanish-speakers and there is no translation needed. The Building Blocks of HOPE are perfectly understandable in any culture, and especially in the Spanish-speaking culture too.

Floyd: Flavia. What I'm hearing is that while there's not translation needed, what's beautiful is that particularly for the relationship Building Block for families, it's expansive. In Spanish culture, where it may not be so expansive in American culture. And, just thinking about how important it is for us when we're thinking about these Building Blocks, to really listen to our families and really listen for, when they're talking about their relationships, who those relationships are with and what those relationships mean. Because, when we think about someone's environment and who's in that environment, we might

think, oh, you live with so many people, that must be so uncomfortable. But, if they have strong relationships with all of the people in that environment, actually that might be wonderful for that child. You know, just really thinking and listening to our families, around what those relationships are and what they mean is just so important.

Maccio: Yeah. And again, the Blocks are 4. But, I feel that starting with relationships is what has really caused that resonating. And, when talking with Spanish-speaking families, because they move that relationship into everything, right into the engagement that they have with their community because they got to that specific organization or that opportunity through their relationships, the environment in which they move. Because that environment depends on the people that are around them and how much they trust them. And, trust is built in relationships and the same, of course, for emotional growth. I think that is why we can see Javiera, from her role in supporting countries and people from different countries, that are getting to know HOPE and myself from inside the States and working with Spanish families that came to the States, that we can get that really immediate buy in, with Spanish-speaking families.

Brierley Vera: I would just want to add, Flavia, that is crucial that we engage everyone involved and it's not that hard to make the content of HOPE resonate culturally everywhere. I think we just need to have the conversation. Because, if we have the conversation, then we know their words, we know their examples. And then, for example, if an organization wants to implement HOPE in Espanol because they speak Spanish in their organization, then it's just taking steps on their own learning process of the HOPE framework, put their own words into that and spread the message. I feel that the work we've done in HOPE en Espanol about translating materials, it's about that. It's about talking with each other, what makes sense for ourselves, even when we speak the same Spanish but in a different country. Maybe, we just need to do some tweaks here about the words, but the content is the same. We need to have the conversations and to see what makes sense for us in order to spread HOPE in our own example.

Sege: This is just terrific. And Javier and Flavia, I both hear you're saying how important family relationships and other relationships are. And Javiera, I know you've also been involved in a bunch of organizations and I think maybe if you can spend just a minute telling us about one of them, America Solidaria.

Brierley Vera: Yes, of course. It's a great example, Bob. America Solidaria Chile learned about the HOPE Framework around three years ago. And then, they took the trainings, the Train the Facilitator trainings, and then started spreading the HOPE framework in their organization. What happened there is that the whole framework started to be available source, at the beginning was like, oh, this is very interesting. And, little by little, it started to become a central pillar of the organization and about their strategy. They started to incorporate the whole framework into each of their programs. They thought on the programs they have with adolescents and with children, and they started to think, really put thought into thinking what they would do, for example, in the relationship Block or in the environment Block, and then how to promote that in each of their projects, such as, for example, Accionadores or Design for Change. So, they adapted it to the local Chilean reality and they promote that with also the volunteers that work with them. They've done an amazing work of bringing HOPE into their local organization and spread it very widely into their programs, into their way of how they talk about positive childhood experiences. They have like a common, language now in which they promote positive childhood experiences. From this paradigm, the paradigm of strength, the paradigm of seeing what things work.



Sege: That's really wonderful. Can you just tell the audience a few of the countries where America Solidaria works?

Brierley Vera: Yeah. So, America Solidario works widely in Latin America. America in Chile, in Uruguay, in Mexico. And also we've had experiences with other organizations here in Chile that are taking the whole framework, such as Universidad Catolica de Chile. And, also there's a lot of work being done with the EASTIE Coalition in Boston. And also, for example, in Maryland, Washington State, and San Diego State University. We have so many Spanish speakers bringing positive childhood experiences all over.

Sege: That's wonderful. And Baraka, I think you had a question you wanted to ask before we wrap up.

Floyd: Yeah. How does HOPE reinforce the Spanish-speaking community's storytelling about their ancestors and traditions? I think in polarizing times like these, it's really important for providers to honor these traditions, even when their backgrounds are different.

Brierley Vera: Yes. What I would say, Baraka, is that in order to honor their traditions is kind of like this thing we were saying before. We need to listen very carefully. We need to ask the important questions. Say, asking like, what matters? What's most important to you? What is going well with you? Or, maybe I'm a provider. One of my favorite questions is like, what would you like to improve? Or, what would you like to happen here? Then, we can team up with the families or with the organizations and accompanying them so they can honor their beliefs and their traditions and their needs and their aspirations. Having that conversation, I think is crucial. Yeah.

Floyd: And, I think having that conversation allows you to really kind of fit things in those Building Blocks. Right. Because a lot of times what comes up is it's like certain types of relationships that they want to improve or certain types of activities that kids want to participate in. And a lot of times those activities might be cultural activities or places that they want to engage that might help connect them to their culture or their ancestors. Flavia, what about in the early childhood system?

Maccio: In the early childhood, we have a framework that articulates so well with HOPE. It's called Help Me Grow. And it's a system by which there's a centralized access and families can call to the affiliate in their county or in their state and they can get connected with early childhood resources. Sometimes, they may be looking for preschoolers, sometimes they might be looking for reassurance about their child development so they can do a developmental assessment, to see if they are on track or they need more support from early intervention or home visiting or other kinds of works. We have that connection with families in the way that they can call us to see how can we support them. Sometimes, they call and they find out that there's other things. And in that, we have a lot of callers from the Spanish-speaking community. Sometimes they call with a little bit of fear because they don't know what that entails, the share of information or what is confidential. So, we really put their concerns at rest saying that we just use their information to find the resources that they need, not for anything else. And, we always say that our work moves to that speed of trust with families having those conversations, listening to them, understanding that preschool does not look the same for all families or they don't have the same idea of preschool because they come from another country where preschool look, look very differently. That, that is always what we pay attention to. And, like Javiera said, we're listening, asking the right questions, and just moving at the rhythm that their trust establishes.



Floyd: Flavia, you made two really important points there. One, moving at the speed of trust, and the second, that preschool looks different for everyone. And, I just want to highlight that, you know, with HOPE, we talk about the fact that families define what's positive. That aligns with the idea that preschool looks different for everyone. Positive childhood experiences look different for everyone. I think moving at the speed of trust also aligns with that as well. Thank you so much, both of you, for this wonderful conversation today. We look forward to seeing you back next week.

Maccio: Thank you.

Brierley Vera: Thank you.

Sege: The HOPEful Conversations about Child Development podcast was produced by Kris Markman and Patricia Reyes at the Tufts Clinical and Translational Science Institute. Funding for this podcast was provided by the Freedom Together Foundation. For more information, a transcript and resources related to today's HOPEful conversation, please visit us at positiveexperience.org or follow us on LinkedIn.