Background

The future for today's students is complex and rapidly changing as the advancement of technology is connecting people and systems around the globe in new and unforeseen ways. As automation rolls out and routine task-oriented jobs are disappearing, the skills that are needed for success have been altered in significant ways. There is an increasing awareness that schools must shift to meet the needs of today's students and equip them with the academic and social skills that are critical for success in work, life, and citizenship.

Colegio Marymount, a Catholic, independent learning community for young women located in Medellin Colombia, realized the need to transform their school to prepare their students for this complex world. The school was founded in the 1950s and for many years employed a traditional model of teaching, one where the teacher was the disseminator of knowledge and students were passive recipients. In 2018, the school underwent an accreditation review and received compelling feedback that it needed to shift instruction to be more 21st century focused and forward-thinking. This put the leadership on a journey to investigate and implement a school redesign, and to provide critical professional learning to its educators. The leadership decided to pull in outside expertise to support them in this transformation process.

LINC supports School Transformation, Implementing a Student-Centered Approach

The school connected with LINC's Latin America team and was impressed by LINC's research-based approach and expertise. LINC's work is built around the Model of Generative Change, the product of over 15 years of research from Stanford University's Dr. Arnetha Ball. Her process is one through which teachers and students develop voice, generativity, and efficacy in their thinking and practice. As an approach to professional learning, the model recognizes teachers as agents, not objects, of classroom transformation. LINC's school transformation work is grounded in effectively engaging and preparing teachers and leaders for the dramatic shifts happening in the world that impact student readiness for life. We have learned that this work in innovative learning is not about tools or models or even technology. It’s about shifting mindset and culture, empowering educators to facilitate innovation by re-imagining learning.

Together, the school’s leadership team and LINC began planning a rollout of teacher professional development that would push the school into a more student-centered approach where students would have independence, choice, and voice in their learning. The leadership team established a plan using LINC's Generativity Roadmap and supporting rubrics which provided a clear pathway from traditional...
After summer workshops, school leadership assigned the entire teaching team teaching to innovative, student-centered classrooms. Using the Generativity Roadmap, the team co-designed a sustainable transformation strategy for Marymount Medellin to successfully move the school toward generativity in four quadrants: culture, teacher capacity, learning environment, and technology. LINC employed consultation, in-person workshops, coaching, and the use of LINCspring, LINC’s easy-to-use, online coaching and professional learning platform.

The school’s leadership team set a goal of empowering a culture of continuous growth among teachers arising from self-directed professional learning experiences to transform the school into a benchmark for educational innovation. Catalina Caicedo, Marymount’s high school principal, describes the process: “From the very beginning, we worked together with the LINC team, deciding on the best ways to get our people involved and centered. It was like constructing something together step-by-step, by looking at the diagnosis of needs at each moment. It was a highly motivating process. We used the research approach, followed by trying new ideas in our classrooms to see if they work, each time working to make it better and learning all the time.”

As initial areas of focus, the transformation team selected project-based learning as a key instructional model and also targeted an increase in the understanding and integration of formative assessment, all with the hope of creating a more student-centered learning experience. The whole approach to instruction shifted. As Julia Velez, a transitional kindergarten teacher explains, “Everything has changed. Before all of our content was separated, now we integrate as much as we can. I like to use the analogy of a tree. Before we looked at the parts separately, like studying the leaf, without the trunk. Now we study the tree as a whole to more deeply understand content and interconnections. This is much more fulfilling (and challenging) to us as teachers as it opens broader horizons for students and teachers.”

Leveraging LINCspring to Shift Teacher Practice and Increase Student Engagement and Agency

In the summer of 2019, the LINC team provided the teaching team at Marymount Medellin with in-person workshops. As Jeremy Montes, 4th grade teacher noted, “While we had regular professional development before, LINC’s delivery was much more impactful because, rather than employing a stand and deliver approach, LINC engaged us in a personalized blended learning station rotation experience focused on improving teaching practices and enabling us to experience the type of learning environment we should be offering to our students. It was the first time we were actually shown the way we should be teaching.”

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to complete the project-based learning cycles in LINCspring. Each cycle within LINCspring follows the Reflect, Tinker, Grow model, which encourages teachers to try new strategies, reflect on how they went, and tinker with them to improve. The entire school community engaged in this critical growth opportunity and worked collaboratively to plan engaging, student-centered projects. The LINCspring cycles were instrumental in supporting teachers in employing these new project-based learning instructional models. Teachers were able to receive online coaching through the virtual platform and felt their questions were always answered quickly and well, in particular by their LINC Transformation Agent Maribel Vazquez. Velez commented, “Maribel is always there for us. The coaching has been wonderful. Maribel will help with everything we need to support students.”

After the school-wide engagement on project-based learning and formative assessment cycles, teachers have been able to complete cycles in a personalized way. They meet with their supervisors and receive input from their LINC coaches to determine areas of growth and then select LINCspring cycles they plan to complete. This personalized approach is well-liked by the teachers and has resulted in over 1000 hours of completed professional learning on LINCspring. Velez exclaimed, “I really enjoy it [LINCspring] and it pushes you to become a better teacher every day and to explore different tools and how to incorporate them into your class.” Alejandra Jaramillo, a middle school English teacher added, “It is very important for teachers to have a say in what they want to learn and LINCspring offers this approach.”

Caicedo added, “Once teachers transformed into pedagogical problem solvers, they could use strategies for what they were actually facing in their classroom. Once they made that mindset switch, they could start determining what they needed to learn and engage with cycles on those topics. Our teachers are really using LINCspring and having fun with it!”

**Impact on Students**

While initially it was a big change for students to take on new responsibilities in the classroom by doing more of the learning on their own with more autonomy, they quickly began to thrive. According to Montes, “Students really learned to become problem solvers in the classroom and to work effectively in teams, key skills for today’s global economy.”

Even in a preschool environment, students loved the independence. Velez said,
“We started using playlists with the girls and it was a big success. Students could not get enough of them. They loved the flexibility in choice and engaging in independent learning, following the 21st century learning protocols.”

Teachers had to think about their roles differently. As Jaramillo explains, “We are not the main character in the classroom. We need to help our students get into their own process of learning, guided by us.” Yeisson Acevedo, the high school physics teacher mentioned how, by using new strategies such as exit tickets and Padlets, he got the students to ask deeper questions and could more easily track student mastery. These strategies opened the students to an increased interest in science and math and shifted their mindsets about their skills in these important areas.

The LINCspring cycles on formative assessment were also instrumental in fostering big shifts. By using rubrics for formative assessment, teachers were regularly demonstrating to students what was expected for them in their work and allowed students to take more ownership over their learning. As Jaramillo said, “What is most helpful is using more rubrics so students understand how they will be evaluated from the beginning. I know where my students are at each point, and I can vary my strategies to help them achieve what they need individually.”

Overall, the work with LINC has allowed students to be more independent, autonomous, and have different possibilities for how to work. “It gives my students the option to be who they are and not who I want them to be,” expressed Jaramillo.

Conclusion

Teachers and school leaders believe that LINC was exactly what the school needed to take them in the right direction, to change the culture of the school toward a student-centered, innovative approach. Even those teachers who were initially reluctant to change are now trying new strategies, and leaders and teachers agree that the continuous support from LINC has been key for the process of transforming into an innovative, student-centered school.