Luker Foundation

Sharon Ravitch

Gul Rukh Rahman

Reima Shakeir

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Abstract
This case study focuses on the impact the Luker Foundation has made in the fields of education and entrepreneurship in Colombia. The case illustrates Luker's successes in strategically engaging local stakeholder groups as a collaborative approach to development. This case study is based on textual analysis of online documents, artifacts, and social media sites along with in-depth interviews and focus groups with key members of the Luker Foundation. The primary purpose of this case study is to generate in-depth understanding of the Luker Foundation and its full operating context in terms of key programs, policies, and organizational strategies to generate grounded knowledge that can inform mission, policy and program development, and professional practice, as well as civil and community action. The Luker Foundation currently focuses its work in two main areas: education and entrepreneurship, while continuing to support the social improvement work it has provided since 1994 to multiple institutions in Manizales through dedicated projects. The goal is to make Manizales an example of a sustainable and inclusive society. Once the Foundation moved away from charity to more strategic and structural issues in education, they could not find NGOs in the city with the necessary skills for implementation without Foundation support. Thus, without strong organizations to work through, the members of the Luker Foundation decided to lead the change they wanted to see by taking on an active and central role in delivering a new pedagogical model within the public schools of Manizales.

Keywords
Luker Foundation

A Collaborative Approach to Development, Columbia

An educated and entrepreneurial person is able to develop
him or herself and to bring development to his or her
community. (Marcela Restrepo, 2020)

Case Study Methodology

This case study focuses on the impact that the Luker Foundation has had on the field of education and entrepreneurship in Colombia. The research illustrates the successes of strategically engaging local stakeholder groups as a collaborative approach to development. This case study is based on textual analysis of online documents, artifacts, and social media sites along with in-depth interviews and focus groups with key members of the family philanthropy. This case study is an in-depth exploration of in-situ phenomena from multiple contextualized perspectives. These perspectives speak to the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, program, or system in a ‘real life’ context. The primary purpose of this research is to generate in-depth understanding of the Luker Foundation and its full operating context in terms of key programs, policies, and organizational strategies. A 360 degree understanding of the Foundation will generate grounded knowledge that can inform mission, policy, and program development, professional practice, and civil or community action.

In this exploration we use a triangulated case study research design for maximum validity and reliability. While some organizational cases relay just one data source (usually the interview method), it is vital to obtain differentiated data by engaging several data collection and analysis methods. Strategically collecting and analyzing multiple data sources enables the validity measure
of triangulation, where different data sources converge to corroborate and validate the findings that emerge from another data source, generating insights within the data set that otherwise might be missed (Ravitch & Carl, 2020).

The theoretical and methodological framework that informed how the researchers approached this case study is drawn from theories of decolonizing methodology, critical rhetoric, intersectional post-colonial theory, and affective economies (Ahmed, 2004). The social identities of two of the authors, Dr. Reima Shakeir and Gul Rukh Rahman, whose backgrounds are rooted in the global south, informs this research. Gul Rukh Rahman spent the past several years building the ERIFIP platform at the Edmond de Rothschild Foundations. ERFIP’s mission is to reassess the context of global development and more actively engage private philanthropy and family business across Frontier Economies and the Global South. The platform is rooted in the notion that development through innovation, cross-sector collaboration and private-public partnership should not begin and end in the offices of international development agencies. Rather, it requires building closer financial and technical cooperation with local philanthropy, well positioned to advise on and implement sustainable solutions (Ladak, 2014). The cases are supervised by international methodological expert, Dr. Sharon Ravitch whose professional work has for many years been anchored in regions such as India, Nicaragua, and Haiti. Dr. Ravitch’s work emphasizes intersectional allyship and a lifelong process of building relationships based on trust, consistency, and accountability with marginalized individuals and/or groups of people (Ravitch & Carl, 2019).

In critical case study design, a tradition that situates case studies to effect social transformation, the primary goal is to examine audio/visual texts as concrete philanthropic activity

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1ERFIP (Empower Families for Innovative Philanthropy) is a unique platform for Frontier Philanthropists and business people. It gathers principals, professionals and practitioners in an intimate and thoughtfully structured environment to build and share knowledge to address some of the most pressing social and economic challenges of our time.
and practice that is anchored in its own specificity (religious, cultural, values-based) and not as adjacent objects to the milieu of Western development initiatives in which they exist. These cases are narratives of private families who leverage their intimate contextual knowledge of ground realities to address social challenges and implement sustainable solutions. In addition, we draw on interdisciplinary and cross-contextual theoretical and methodological tools because of the material-discursive intersections of this project.

It is in fact an ultimate push-back against mainstream case study methods that only allow for tokenized inclusion of global south philanthropic research. Perhaps it is symptomatic of how philanthropy research itself is institutionally moving towards a focus on binary/ neocolonial frameworks that is missing critical interrogations of how power reproduced hierarchies of race, class, caste, ethnicity, geography, and so on. Thus, the decolonized intersectional framework is a counter-hegemonic strategy against the imposition of structures and methods that adopt frameworks and design logics developed through neocolonial hierarchies that have not been adequately unpacked or examined in honest relation to global south everyday contexts.

This research utilizes a phenomenological case study approach. The primary purpose of phenomenological case studies is to illuminate the specific phenomenon in context, to identify phenomena precisely through and within how they are perceived by the actors in a situation or setting, in this case a family philanthropy (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). This requires a specific approach to data gathering and analysis wherein gathering ‘deep’ information and layered perceptions through inductive, qualitative methods such as interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation is the focus. It then requires specific phenomenological data analysis that retains a fidelity to the emic, or spoken, terminology of the focal participants.
Phenomenology is concerned with the study of experience from the inner perspective of the individual, ‘bracketing’ taken-for-granted assumptions and usual or normative ways of perceiving\(^2\). Humanist and feminist researchers refute the possibility of starting without preconceptions or bias, and emphasize the value of illustrating how interpretations and meanings have been placed on findings, as well as making the researcher visible in the ‘frame’ of the research as an interested and subjective actor rather than a detached and impartial observer (e.g., see Plummer 1983; Stanley & Wise 1993). Thus, narrative inquiry is invoked to address these validity issues. This case study emphasizes,

The researcher who engages in narrative inquiry is interested in determining the meaning of a particular experience or event for the one who had it, and tells about it in a story...to further particularize the narrative and to enhance perspective, the narrator not only "tells” the story from a point of view but also situates it in a particular social, cultural, or political context. (Kramp, 2004, p. 108)

Additionally, a narrative approach to case study research enables researchers to critically explore the embedded stories of the philanthropists’ visions, their giving strategies, and their specific philanthropic experiences within the country contexts and milieux in which they developed and in which they have operated and currently operate. In particular, the research explores the socio-political and cultural specificities that pertain to their giving practices. This is vital since these family philanthropies emerge from local need and resource, and the mediating variables and realities of each context are an important part of a philanthropy’s journey story as well as their implementation plans and responsive organizational developments over time.

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\(^2\) [https://www.rgs.org/NR/rdonlyres/F50603E0-41AF-4B15-9C84-BA7E4DE8CB4F/0/Seaweedphenomenologyresearch.pdf](https://www.rgs.org/NR/rdonlyres/F50603E0-41AF-4B15-9C84-BA7E4DE8CB4F/0/Seaweedphenomenologyresearch.pdf)
Introduction and Contextualization

Colombia – Geography, Demographics, and Resources

Found in the northwestern region of South America, Colombia, measuring 1,138,910 square kilometers, is the fourth largest country in the continent (Hudson, 2010). This is almost the same size as UK, France, and Germany combined. Around 1,000,000 square kilometers is land and around 100,000 square kilometers is water. It is surrounded by bodies of water and other neighboring countries; The Caribbean Sea to the north, the North Pacific Ocean and Isthmus of Panama to the west, Ecuador and Peru to the south, and Venezuela and Brazil to the east. It is subdivided into major geographic regions: the Caribbean Lowlands, the Pacific Lowlands, the Andean Region, the grassland plains known as Llanos, and the Amazon Region. Being part of the Ring of Fire and located where three tectonic plates meet, Colombia experiences frequent seismic activity. Also, due to its nearness to the equator and variations in elevation, the country has a wide range of temperatures in its regions. In the hotter areas, the temperature ranges from 24 degrees Celsius to 27 degrees Celsius but can go as low as 18 degrees or as high as 38 degrees. In the very high mountain regions, the temperature can go as low as -17 degrees Celsius.

Colombia is reported to have an estimated 48 million people in 2019, and it is the third-most populous country in Latin America, after Brazil and Mexico (DANE, 2020). The Colombian population is concentrated in the Andean Highlands and along the Caribbean Coast, and population densities are generally higher in the Andean region. The nine Eastern Lowland Departments, comprising about 54% of Colombia's geographical area, constitute less than 6% of the population. Colombia has traditionally been a rural society, with movement to urban areas being very heavy in the mid-20th Century. Notably, Colombia is now one of the most urbanized countries in Latin America. For example, the population of Bogotá, the capital of Colombia, alone
has increased from just over 300,000 in 1938 to approximately 8 million in 2019 (Banco de la República, n.d.). The geographical diversity of Colombia comes with its wealth of natural resources. The country is abundant in coal, copper, emeralds, gold, hydropower, iron ore, natural gas, natural nickel, petroleum, platinum, and silver (Hudson, 2010).

Around 79% of the population are Roman Catholic, 14% are protestant, 2% belong to other religions, and 5% are unspecified. In terms of age structure, 23.27% of the population are 0 to 14 years old, 16.38% are 15 to 24 years old, 42.04% are 25 to 54 years old, 9.93% are 55 to 64 years old, and 8.39% are 65 years old and above. The median age is 31.2 years old (30.2 years for males and 32.2 years for females). The life expectancy at birth for the entire population is 76.6 years, 73.5 years for males, and 80 years for females. 81.4% live in urban areas with an urbanization rate of 1.22% per year (average change in population per year). Around 8’000.000 million live in Bogota, 4 million in Medellin, 2.782 million in Cali, 2.273 million in Barranquilla, 1.331 million in Bucaramanga, and 1.063 million in Cartagena. The education expenditure of Colombia is 4.5% of the GDP in 2017. The 2018 literacy rate, defined as percent of population age 15 and over that can read and write, is 95.1% (The World Factbook: Colombia, 2020). Spanish is the main language spoken in Colombia. Two Creole languages -- Palenquero and Vlax Romani -- are also spoken. Palenquero is a Spanish-based Creole language and the only Spanish-based language spoken in Latin America (Misachi, 2017)

The contemporary economy of Colombia that is based on, oil coffee and other agricultural exports, emerged after its independence in 1819, when entrepreneurs were able to capitalize on world markets other than Spain (Hudson, 2010). Towards the late nineteenth century, the exportation of tobacco and coffee increased, which led to population expansion, especially in the cities. Throughout this time, agriculture and commerce progressed slowly but steadily. The coffee
industry boomed after the War of the Thousand Days (1899 to 1902), a civil war between Liberals and Conservatives. This economic shock triggered the rapid development in infrastructure and transportation. By the mid-1920s, coffee comprised 75% of Colombia’s export. To date, coffee is one of the country’s biggest export, together with cattle, bananas, flowers, sugar, and palm oil. In 2019, oil, coal, gold and other minerals represent 22.5 US billion, 56.9% of total exports, while coffee exports are 2.7Us billion, representing 6.9% of total exports.³

**Coca Trade in Colombia**

Oil and Coffee are not the only top exports (not updated, oil is top export product) of Colombia. Together with the aforementioned exports, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, in their 2019 World Drug Report, identifies Colombia as one of the top producers of coca (World Drug Report, 2019). In 2017, about 70% of coca bush cultivation was located in Colombia, 20% in Peru, and 10% in the Plurinational State of Bolivia. The cocaine industry in Colombia started in the 1980s when marijuana dealers transitioned to cocaine because it was easier to transport and its financial value is higher (Fisher & Meitus, 2017). Two of the most prominent groups participating in this is the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) and Ejercito de Liberación Nacional (ELN).

FARC, first formed in 1964, initially went against the drug trafficking trade. But as coca farming became more prevalent among their constituency, they became active in participating in the illicit drug trade. While FARC was more involved in the rural areas, ELN has a more urban constituency. Also formed in the 1960s, ELN’s first members were radical Catholic priests, students, and left-wing individuals. Just like FARC, ELN initially went against the drug trafficking trade, but eventually also succumbed to economic benefits (Fisher & Meitus, 2017). The high

³ Source: OEC.world/es
economic returns of participating in the drug trade meant that the two groups effectively financed terror attacks, assassinations and kidnappings. They have been identified as among the strongest and most violent leftist groups in Latin America. In 2016, FARC and the Colombian government signed a peace agreement.

Colombia’s internal armed conflict as well as violence generated by the drug-trafficking industry has caused massive displacement of rural populations. Large numbers fled to major urban areas. This explains the high percentage of the population living in urban areas. The Colombian government has pursued multiple efforts to curb the perpetration of violence by the militant groups through attempts of eradicating coca plants. Through aerial eradication, the government would fly planes over areas of coca cultivation and drop glyphosate, a type of poison that can kill plants (Fisher & Meitus, 2017). However, public health experts say that exposure to glyphosate has negative impacts on health, especially on those who live in rural areas where the coca plantations are. Another critique of aerial coca eradication is the inadvertent effect on people who depend on coca as a source of income. Coca farmers who lose their livelihood to the eradication efforts may end up joining the guerilla groups, which in turn may exacerbate the violence.

Due to the complexity of aerial eradication of coca via glyphosate, other alternatives to coca eradication were explored. In 2019, Juliana Suárez of the Latin American Post wrote an article about how Colombian coca farmers reinvent themselves and move to planting cacao. The article of Suárez focuses on the life story of Juan Antonio Urbano, a native of western Boyacá, a town northeast of Colombia’s capital Bogotá. Urbano is one of the leaders in the plans of replacing coca with cacao in his region. With the help of the United Nations, farmers voluntarily started eradicating coca. It took three years to completely eradicate coca from the region where Urbano
lived. Now, the farmers are helping other farmers throughout the country in eradicating coca by planting cacao (Suarez, 2019).

USAID and other international agencies have long supported the production of cacao as an alternative to coca (Abbott et al., 2018). Cacao initiatives included giving farmers free cacao trees, providing technical assistance to prepare farmers to grow new crops, conducting research to determine areas where cacao production is feasible, and training on production methods and post-harvest practices. These efforts yielded an increase in area harvest of cacao in 2014 to 2015 of 70,000 hectares. The expansion in area harvest of cacao increased production from about 39,000 metric tons in both 2004 and 2010 to 54,700 metric tons in 2015 (Abbott et al., 2018). These development projects paved the way to the establishment of new producer organizations and the strengthening of existing producer organizations.

Within this milieu of thwarted and uneven development, lost opportunity and collective trauma, Casa Luker emerged as a beacon of hope and possibility for Colombian economic renewal. Casa Luker reflects a Columbian family’s vision of utilizing and building on a key crop in their country. They approached it by engaging local authorities and collaborating with the communities to build an ecosystem that could bring peace, stability, and prosperity to Colombia.

Casa Luker, a family business founded in 1906, is one of Colombia’s most successful private enterprises. It is one of the key players in Colombian cocoa production and its by-product export business. Casa Luker has a presence in 41 countries including Venezuela, Chile, Ecuador, Russia, Panama, and Belgium. The International Cocoa Organization (ICCO) recognizes Casa Luker as an exporter of 100% Fino de Aroma cocoa, which is regarded as high quality in international markets (Osorio, 2017). A large-sized company with over 700 employees, Casa Luker purchases 38% of the total cacao produced in Colombia.
Casa Luker’s Societal Contributions: The Luker Foundation

This case study begins with the story of Casa Luker and its development as a premiere Colombian business. The research focuses on the Luker Foundation (in Spanish, Fundación Luker), which is the philanthropic arm of Casa Luker. Founded by the Restrepo family in 1994, the Luker Foundation mission is to address issues of education, entrepreneurship, and business development in the Country.

The Restrepo family created the Luker Foundation in their hometown of Manizales in 1994, a city in central Colombia which is their hometown. Despite its difficult topography, the area has fertile lands and is known as the heart of Colombian coffee plantations. According to the World Bank (2010), Manizales is ranked as the best and easiest place to do business in Colombia. It is also known for its higher educational institutions including: Universidad de Caldas, Universidad Autónoma de Manizales, Universidad de Manizales, Universidad Nacional, and Universidad Católica de Manizales. As one funding report states,

The main objective of the Luker Foundation, created in the city of Manizales, is to improve the quality of life for the city’s citizens through two main areas: education and entrepreneurship. The Luker Foundation focuses on promoting youth programs that involve these two areas through the multiple programs it implements. The goal is to make Manizales an example of a sustainable and inclusive society.

On the Luker Foundation website they eloquently describe the motivations behind their work,

Why we do it? Because we are convinced that an educated and enterprising person transforms and generates development. For this reason, Fundación Luker has focused its work for more than 20 years, on helping people and communities to develop their potential and to learn to be what they are capable of being. In these two decades, clear results and alliances have been achieved, the legacy of the family values that gave rise to the

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4 [https://www.4icu.org/co/a-z/](https://www.4icu.org/co/a-z/)
5 [https://sdgfunders.org/reports/spotlight-on-luker-foundation/](https://sdgfunders.org/reports/spotlight-on-luker-foundation/).
Foundation has been maintained, and work models have been created around education. (Luker Foundation website, 2020)

Mission, Vision and Values

The Luker Foundation’s Mission is to generate economic and social development:

- by working through national and / or international alliances
- with innovative projects of high impact in education and entrepreneurship, that empower individuals, institutions and communities.

The Luker Foundation Vision Statement

Fundación Luker has the capacity and knowledge to transform communities, and is recognized for its significant achievements in education and entrepreneurship.

The Luker Foundation Values Statement: Fundación Luker is:

**Ethical**

- Honest in its relationships with others and with itself.
- Coherent in the fulfillment of its principles; acts according to what it says.
- Transparent in its actions and its report to stakeholders.

**Responsible**

- In searching excellence
- In the austere management of its resources
- In assessing its results and impacts

**Respectful**

- Of the differences and the necessary plurality in a free and democratic society.
- Of the dignity and rights of our beneficiaries, allies and collaborators.
- Of the institutionality, normativity and law.

Marcela Restrepo-Mejia, vice president of the Luker Foundation’s Board of Directors shared in an interview that the Restrepo family “has always had very strong values and ethos of giving back to the communities in which they operate. We have always been incredibly blessed as different generations of our family have been successful in business.” Restrepo continued,
The family business that had been created in 1906, is being run and built by the 4th and 5th generations. We started with hot chocolate and today the business deals in derivates of cacao, food, beverages and other areas. As the business grew, so did our family’s focus and commitment to continue supporting our local community. In the past, the family had always been helping out people on a case-by-case basis without any particular focus or any structure. (Restrepo, Interview, 2020)

In 1994, the family decided to focus and converge their philanthropy efforts and developed a structure in which they could focus and delimit their giving practices. The family wanted to do something that would be both transformative and impactful for their home town of Manizales. With a spirit of service, contribution, and a dream of sustainable development for Manizales, Colombia, this is how born.

In its early days, the Foundation experimented with a broad range of interventions in education, elder care, organizing soccer leagues, and nutrition programs. “They tried everything,” says Pablo Jaramillo, the General Manager of the Luker Foundation. “In the end, they realized that the most powerful tool to change the world is education. Until 2006, education was their sole focus. Today, the Luker Foundation has vast experience implementing school development programs in both urban and rural areas with improved student performance and attendance rates.”

After years of being involved with various fields of development, the Luker Foundation currently focuses its work in two main areas: Education and Entrepreneurship. In addition, it continues to support the social improvement work it has provided since 1994 to several institutions in the city through Special Projects. The goal is to make Manizales an example of a sustainable and inclusive society.

**Education as a Pathway to Peace**

A central belief and guiding principle of the Luker Foundation is that concentrating focused strategic efforts and engaging in a disciplined line of philanthropy, such as education, is key to make sustainable impact in Manizales. Marcela Restrepo shared, “After a lot of soul searching and
experimentation, we decided to focus on improving education. Education is a long-term investment, but there is no other way to change mindsets, shift attitudes, and build a cohesive society without a robust education system” (Restrepo, 2020). This vision drove the ensuing several years, as the Foundation continued and fortified its focus on education.

There was collective desire from family members to do something meaningful, impactful, and powerful with a diffusion effect of impact in and for Manizales. Importantly, 50% of the Board of Directors is comprised of family members. The Foundation was clear, with unanimous resolve that it would not simply help people on an immediate-need basis. It would rather honor the family’s shared vision and concentrate it’s efforts to create the conditions in which the people of Manizales are able to co-create sustainable conditions to improve their lives now and in the long-term, inter-generationally and with durability.

The Luker Foundation reflects the important understanding that “if true change is to happen, it has to be through interventions in the education system. There is no other option,” avers Marcela Restrepo (Restrepo, 2020).

When we started, we were a funding organization. However, as we moved into this field we realized that there were very few organizations in the city that had the capacity to deliver quality education programming. We had to move from being a funder to an operational entity. It is easy to be a funding organization when you are charity oriented, when groups have specific, to-the-point needs. But once we moved away from the more specific charity issues to the more strategic and structural issues in education, it’s not easy to just stay behind the desk. We didn’t find strong enough NGOs in the city to do implementation without us getting involved. (Restrepo, Interview, 2020)

Thus, without strong organizations to work through, the Luker Foundation decided to lead the change they wanted to see by taking on an active role in the implementation of a new pedagogical model, within the public schools of Manizales. “More active” meaning they took care of furnishing the classrooms, provided the materials and student guides, led the teachers training in the new model, etc. But always with the approval and co-funding of the municipality (local
government). The Foundation made the courageous decision to develop an operational ecosystem for sustainable development in their country. “We had faced several challenges. For example, when the Foundation wanted to implement the Active Urban School initiative, one of the greatest problems faced was the lack of will and flexibility of the teachers to change and adapt to the new methodology, especially teachers from older generations.” Marcela Restrepo stated.

**Education in Colombia**

Colombia’s system of education has four main stages excluding post-secondary non-tertiary education and adult education, according to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2016). The first stage is early childhood education and care (ECEC). It includes services for children from birth to six years old. The second stage is basic education, which includes grades 1 to 9. Basic education starts from primary education (primaria) then proceeds to lower secondary education (secundaria). The third stage is upper secondary education (media). Upper secondary education includes grade 10 and 11. The last stage is tertiary education. Tertiary education varies depending on the provider and program.

Education policies have positively impacted the education participation in Colombia between 2000 and 2013 (UNESCO-UIS, 2015). Enrollment in pre-primary education increased from 36% to 45% due to provision of free public schooling and investing in major infrastructure projects and education resources. Net enrolment rates also increased from 59% to 70% in lower secondary and from 30% to 41% in the upper secondary level (UNESCO-UIS, 2015). Another huge growth is in tertiary education, with the gross enrollment rate increasing from 24% to 48%.

While the education system had made great strides in increasing education access, the country still does not fare well compared to other OECD countries. Amidst policy changes, the country’s early childhood education system faces low enrolment from children aged 3 to 5, low
expenditure levels, and the highest student teacher ratio among OECD countries. The OECD recommends that there should be an increase in educational investment to further improve access and quality of education, especially in early childhood education and care (OECD, 2019).

The Luker Foundation largely operates through a strategic partnership development framework through which it collaborates with local stakeholder entities such as universities, research centers, municipal programs and groups, and other local foundations to build sustainable partnerships. This strategic partnership framework also includes several government authorities at the departmental and national levels. As Restrepo states, “The Luker Foundation Board, which has 50% family representation and another 50% external experts is of the opinion that the Foundation must try to work in partnerships to deliver sustainable and long-lasting changes” (Restrepo, 2020). This approach to sustainability is key to the Foundation’s transformational success.

Today, the Luker Foundation has three main education programs that are each designed to solve key problems. In the Escuela Activa Urbana (Active Urban School) program, the Luker Foundation partners with schools that will implement effective teaching pedagogies to encourage active participation and collaboration for socioemotional development. Second, the Aprende (Learn) program focuses on identifying, implementing, and evaluating educational programs for elementary school-aged children who are struggling academically, particularly in reading and mathematics. The Aprende (Learn) program includes teacher professional development and support, designing and provision of educational materials, academic tutoring, and parent seminars for improving children’s learning at home.

The La Universidad en Tu Colegio (The University in Your School) helps high school students who want to attend university but lack the financial resources to be able to apply and attend to prepare for university. This involves attending full morning and afternoon sessions,
effectively doubling school time. Finally, the Manizales Campus Universitario (Manizales University Campus) is a program that systematizes the development of Manizales as an attractive city for university students. This program is carried out in collaboration with several organizations and universities in Manizales.

“We had to face a number of challenges as we started this journey,” says Restrepo. Public education in Colombia was based on traditional systems of learning in which teachers were expected to lecture the vast majority of the time while students were expected to learn by passively listening and taking notes. In this model, which Paulo Freire (1970) refers to as the banking model of education, wherein students are seen as empty vessels and passive learners and teachers are positioned as enforcers of order and distillers of rote information. This, among other problems, meant that every student had to learn the same material at the same pace. This led to very uneven levels of learning and a system of education that was lagging far behind international averages. As Marcela Restrepo, a member of the board, shared: “In the traditional Colombian classroom, where one teacher taught the same lesson to 30 kids, perhaps 10 will learn 100%, another 10 will learn 75% percent, and 10 will learn 25% of the material.” This passive model of learning was a significant educational and intergenerational social issue along with dearth of resources for teaching and learning.

Through engaging in resource and needs assessments in a range of communities and households, the Restrepo family observed that when students struggled in school, many times their families were unable to help them because parents themselves had not gone far in their own education. The Luker Foundation also found that many of the lessons were outdated and that the students struggled to engage or see the relevance of these lessons or educational process to their lives or their futures.
As a result, many students from under-resourced families would drop out of school because they fell behind and could not catch up. Compounding the problem was the fact that these students often needed to work or care for their houses and siblings and could not focus on studies. Many students did not find school interesting or important; they could not see the value of staying in school when they could find quick jobs that would bring much-needed additional income to their families. It was a conundrum that needed intervention because the pressure was too immediate for long-term planning. Structural change was needed.

To start off, the Foundation decided to undertake extensive community-based and global research, visiting schools in other parts of the world to learn from the best and most successful systems, approaches, and strategies. “We had no desire to reinvent the wheel,” says Pablo Jaramillo. “We knew that many successful schools already existed in other parts of the world and we wanted to better understand different pedagogies and what got students motivated and engaged”. The Luker Foundation staff also met with international organizations like the OECD to learn how large NGOs addressed education issues. Escuela Activa Urbana (Active Urban School), launched in 2002, was the result of this work.

**Escuela Activa Urbana**

The Escuela Activa Urbana model changes the way students learn within the classroom. This model is based on the internationally well recognized model called Escuela Nueva, which was created and developed in Colombia for rural schools. In this model, teachers become guides and mentors rather than enforcers or distillers of rote information. The learning is more cooperative, and as such students sit in small learning groups of 3-4 and work together to complete specialized learning guides. As students work in groups, they help each other when individual members struggle. Instead of lecturing, the teacher circulates around the room spending time
individually where groups are struggling. This leads to increased and deepened classroom engagement for teachers and students and elevates the quality of education through increased engagement and the building of a sense of belonging.

The model works such that each small student group progresses at a different pace so that students can learn at their own pace, that is, individualized differentiated instruction. Indeed, some student groups can finish an entire academic year in only 8 months and then move to next grade earlier than a traditional annual progression model will allow. Groups that are struggling can take extra time, and not move to the next grade until they are truly ready. This model allows for educational mobility on a more individual basis. It is vital for student advancement in these underserved contexts.

The success is measured using the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) indicators developed by the OECD, the Early Grade Reading and Math Assessments (EGRA/EGMA), SABER tests of grades 3, 5 and 9, and the Synthetic Quality Index Education (ISCE). These tools also allow the programs to identify students who are struggling early and provide them additional tutoring and support through an add-on program called Aprende (Learn). Annual reports (that are publicly available) do not disclose data on student gains, which is a research limitation of this study.

**The Aprende Program**

The Aprende Program designs, implements, and evaluates educational innovations aimed at strengthening the basic competencies of students at official educational institutions of Manizales. In addition, it provides knowledge to the region on the effectiveness of academic reinforcement programs for reading and math teachers. A team of 17 persons provides guidance in remediation tutoring. Five educational innovation pilot programs have been implemented at official schools in
order to determine the best strategies aimed at impacting the development of language and math competencies, in alliance with the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) and Harvard University. The program Highlights:

- More than 16,000 children have participated in the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) and Early Grade Math Assessment (EGMA). The EGRA and EGMA are used to evaluate the interventions within the Aprende (Learn) Program.
- The program has recently been evaluated by the IADB with excellent results particularly in reading skills – one of the highest impacts on any educational program evaluated in the last 5 years by the IADB- For this reason, the bank (IADB) is now recommending this program to several Latin American countries for its adoption and implementation.
- In 2020, the program is being implemented in all 52 public schools of Manizales, benefiting an estimated 17,000 students.

**La Universidad en Tu Colegio (The University in Your School)**

In addition, the Luker Foundation has developed a program to help economically disadvantaged students in Manizales continue their education at the university level. Many students from under-served families have historically struggled to earn a seat at a reputable university, which is mandatory in order to qualify jobs that earn a sustainable livelihood.

Attending university in Colombia is often prohibitively expensive and many deserving and bright students cannot afford tuition and other related costs of attending university such as transportation, food, books. In many homes, 50% or more of a family’s income is spent on sending a single child to university. Many families who struggle financially expect their children to find jobs right after high school to contribute to household income instead of pursuing higher studies. Additionally, universities in Colombia are competitive and can be difficult to get into. Free or
sponsored slots are based on a student’s performance on a standardized national test. Thus, students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds must compete not only with each other, but also with those who have had better educational opportunities and resources including the ones who went to private schools that prepare them for university exams and application processes.

To address these problems, the Luker Foundation launched the La Universidad en Tu Colegio (The University in Your School) program. This program helps schools implement university-level technical programs during the last two years of high school. There are currently 16 technical degrees offerings, including programs on website design, backend web services, industrial controls, pre-school teaching, tourism, as well as hygiene and occupational safety.

Students attend their regular high school classes during the morning hours and then attend their university courses in the afternoon at the same school. The program is open to any student attending public high school in Manizales. The program’s tuition fees are waived for any student who completes the program. By having the university come to the students, both the issues of being accepted to university and issues of affordability and travel burden are alleviated. Each year, 1500 students enroll in the program, which represents 80% of those in tenth grade across 23 participating schools out of 52 public schools in Manizales.

“The program is free for students, since the cost is assumed 100% by the alliance, who pays a discounted price to the universities. If a student decides to continue another year in the training process, they are awarded the title of Technologist. In 2019, we have 1357 students in technical programs corresponding to 43% of the students enrolled in 10th grade in the 52 official schools of the city of Manizales.” Restrepo shared in an interview about the strategy of the
Program. This project has been implemented for 4 years, with important results such as an increase in higher education absorption from 33% to 84% in beneficiary schools.6

Even with its impressive and measurable success at moving the dial on education in Manizales, the Luker Foundation is quick to describe all the work they still have to do. Here again, the mantra to “constantly search for focus” has played a large role in their ability to make a disciplined impact in the country. Marcela Restrepo emphasizes,

We have pursued focus in our quest for impact. As I said before, the foundation initially addressed all sorts of issues and populations (health, culture, education, recreation, the young, the elder, etc). Progressively, we narrowed down the areas of intervention and privileged doing more in fewer areas. To date, we have a clear focus in education and entrepreneurship. (Restrepo, Interview, 2020)

Given that the Foundation needed to create and grow bespoke programs, its initial success required working intensely to convince teachers, schools, the local government, and other stakeholders to try out this new model. “We had to go school by school, director by director, to convince them,” stated Marcela, “we had to be by their side on a daily basis, helping with problems. Change came, amongst other things, by having someone from outside interested and accompanying them. Education is a lonely journey for school directors and teachers, and having someone listening and interested and willing to support them, that was a very big carrot.”

Thus, the Foundation’s success came at a price: “At some point we realized we were taking up much responsibility for the day-to-day operations and functionin. We were carrying too much of the responsibility. If someone over-functions, someone under-functions.” At this stage, keeping a focus on education meant finding ways to delegate day-to-day operations to partners with similar values and ethics. Given some of these challenges, Marcela Restrepo was convinced that they must change their approach by sharing it with a larger group of actors.

6 https://fundacionluker.org.co/portfolio/universidad-en-tu-colegio/
However, doing this without losing all you have built can be extremely difficult, as Pablo warns “A successful school can turn its good results to bad results in just 3 months if you change a good principal to a poorly motivated principal. So, this cannot be something you work on and then count on it staying that way after you leave. You also have to be willing to be there, to stay the course, to support them in case they need.” This is the kind of commitment that the Luker Foundation has made to Colombian development through concentrating its efforts on education in Manizales.

The family recognizes that education is the key to lasting peace and prosperity. The nearly five-decade long armed conflict has had a negative and defining impact on social and economic development in Colombia. Colombia’s transition towards peace and higher levels of development depends on many factors, including its ability to build a strong and inclusive education system and closing gaps between urban and rural areas, creating livelihood and educational opportunities so that families and communities can be financially autonomous.

“We have succeeded in transforming the educational model for a large part of the population, from childhood to university life; this is definitely causing a huge revolution in the city of Manizales.” Darío Gómez Jaramillo, Luker Foundation Board Member.

Entrepreneurship as a Pathway to Prosperity

In 2006, the Luker Foundation formalized a commitment to extend their contribution to their community beyond education. Around the same time, Colombia in general, and Manizales in particular, was hit by the collapse of the coffee prices in the international market. Spurred on by a large legacy donation from Ines Restrepo, an aunt, the Foundation decided that they needed to help in the City’s economic recovery. As Marcela states, “Education is a long-term investment. We needed to also do something that had an impact in a shorter term.” After a period of strategic
thinking and planning, the Foundation decided to launch a major entrepreneurship initiative in Manizales.

While public education can take decades, or even generations, to fully realize its full impact, entrepreneurship training has the potential to get new businesses started and existing businesses developing towards sustainability. The Foundation’s Board of Directors believed that their city “had historically been more entrepreneurial but that over time, after being reliant on the coffee industry for so many years, it became more passive”. When the coffee industry went into a big crisis in 2005, people seemed to be lacking in entrepreneurial skills and mindset.” Restrepo stated.

Rather than being the only foundation pushing for entrepreneurial training, the Luker Foundation recruited allies and partners to help build the project together, as a collective. They approached Babson College in the United States, ranked then as the #1 college in both undergraduate and graduate training in entrepreneurship by U.S. News and World Report for more than 20 consecutive times. Babson College was also interested in partnering with the Luker Foundation. Together, they convened all forces in the city. Once the Chamber of Commerce of Manizales, the Municipality of Manizales, 2 national banks, the local newspaper and other institutions interested in the economic welfare of the city, and 5 universities joined the effort⁷, the Manizales Más Program was created, as a new alliance to develop and improve the entrepreneurial ecosystem of Manizales.

Manizales Más

Manizales Más is a public - private, and academic alliance for the integral development of the entrepreneurial ecosystem of Manizales and the region. It creates the necessary conditions for

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⁷ SUMA is a local consortium of 5 national, private, and local universities that share students, faculty, and other resources. The partners in SUMA include the University of Caldas, The Autonomous University of Manizales, the Catholic University, the National University of Columbia and the University of Manizales. The collective student population is about 25,000 students.
the growth of existing companies through training and utilization of various programs to strengthen them in becoming high-potential companies (Fundación Luker, 2017).

In this program, the Luker Foundation, Babson College, and the city of Manizales identified regional businesses that had several readiness criteria for growth and development. These businesses were invited to participate in their “Program for Businesses with High Potential.” This program includes six areas of entrepreneurial training to help these businesses grow strategically and maximize their sales and operations. The program also offers entrepreneurial mentorship for these organizations and the range of individuals within them.

Manizales Más also helped the 5 universities involved to create an entrepreneurship minor with any other degree the universities offered. Professors of these universities were themselves trained on cutting-edge entrepreneurship teaching methods and strategies. The universities’ administrations, working with Luker and Babson, ensured the entrepreneurship minor was accepted by the other departments within the schools. This is an impressive accomplishment that shows the fruits of strategic partnership and collaboration.

The Manizales Más program has four areas of focus:

**High Potential Companies**

This program works with companies identified as high potential. It helps to increase sales and profits by enabling the entrepreneurs to grow faster through developing new capabilities, knowledge, mentoring, and relationships.

**Entrepreneurial Mentoring Program**

This program invites individuals from the business or corporate sphere with proven track record of success to establish long-term relationships with growing entrepreneurs. This is aimed
at successful business leaders to share their experiences and knowledge with upcoming entrepreneurs in order to learn how to manage risk and address growth challenges.

**Affiliates and High Potential Professors**

These programs work to develop the substantive knowledge and skills of professors in the allied universities of Manizales Más to prepare and support them in their task of teaching entrepreneurship. This helps to strengthen the human capital and entrepreneurial culture components of the Manizales ecosystem.

**Adventure Más**

This program offers an experience of intensive acceleration intended for companies in their early stages. Throughout a six-week intensive program, entrepreneurs identify and engage the main growth challenges with training, mentoring, and the support of specialized advice from experts.

**Highlights of Manizales Más**

- 51.5% average growth of High Potential Companies in 2017
- 209 new jobs created by High Potential Companies in 2017
- 503 entrepreneurs in the Startup Más program in 2017
- 428 students in the Route to Entrepreneurship
- 19 High Potential Professors
- Over $46 million in sales from High Potential Companies in 2017
- High Potential Cocoa Growers Program (within the project with Casa Luker) to seek new business opportunities for two associations in Tumaco
Two new projects resulted from this intervention, seeking to generate an additional income and well-being for the community, in addition to new competencies for the leaders of the Comcacaot SAS and Chocolates Tumaco Associations.

In alliance with the Chamber of Commerce of Manizales, Caldas, 12 entrepreneurs who built an entrepreneurial community were trained in sales and pitching.

A Diploma in Teaching Entrepreneurship took place to strengthen the entrepreneurship pedagogy of 15 local university professors.

**Media and Visibility**

Finally, the Luker Foundation and its allies enlisted the help of local media to help change the local discourse and culture regarding entrepreneurship. Traditionally, Colombian culture—particularly, that of people from Manizales—has emphasized keeping a low profile regarding one’s successes. Celebrating success is often conflated with arrogance, bragging, or flaunting one’s wealth or skill, which is frowned upon. Thus, a cultural shift needed to take place that could create a space for a shift in this perception so that there could be network development and knowledge-sharing as well as dissemination of accomplishments and lessons learned.

Celebrating success as well as talking about challenges was important to counter pessimism and fear of risk around entrepreneurial success. The Luker Foundation and its partners started working with local media to engage local entrepreneurs to tell their stories of success and their growth strategies. As Marcela mentioned, “You have to get to talk about successes. That [businesses] are making it and growing and becoming successful. That is as contagious as much as pessimism” (Restrepo, 2020).

After a couple of years, the Foundation observed that people’s perceptions were changing. People began to recognize that they had the ability to put forth small projects and get training on
how to lead them. Indeed, the Manizales region saw a 100% increase in total entrepreneurial activity (as measured by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor). Today, the Luker Foundation counts over 100 high-potential ventures and 1500 new jobs created through the entrepreneurship initiatives it organizes. Existing firms in Manizales saw a 55% increase in sales growth within one year of participation in the program. Best of all, the day-to-day operations and budget of Manizales Plus continue to be shared by all partners of the alliance.

**Conclusion: Blueprints from the Field**

The tremendous success of Luker’s entrepreneurship projects, including the success of bringing together local stakeholder groups, has been slightly bittersweet for the Luker Foundation. Within the education sector, the Foundation shows its allies and other stakeholders a blueprint for the work they still need to and can do. However, the collective ownership has not been as successful as that of in the entrepreneurship sector.

As Marcela Restrepo shared, “We do need to get many more actors actively involve. We are good at bringing people together. Now, the city has to take ownership of educational projects like it did in entrepreneurship.” Her advice for foundations working with partners includes “Advise them, don't get left doing things on your own. It takes a lot of work to work with allies. If you want to go quickly, go on your own, if you want to go far, go with allies. Don't work on your own, don't take it up on your own.”

One of the key insights that has emerged from conversations and research on the Luker Foundation is their strategic, unwavering, ethical, action-oriented focus on building robust and sustainable partnerships. The Luker Foundation works closely with local, national, and international institutions as a primary strategy for the sustainable growth and development of their

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8 https://www.babson.edu/about/news-events/babson-announcements/babson-entrepreneurship-ecosystem-project-in-colombia/
projects. In addition, the Foundation pays special attention to local community stakeholder buy-in, participation, and engagement as it plays a key role in development and success of the Foundation’s projects and interventions.

The Luker Foundation believes that philanthropy without business support and acumen will not successfully address long-term, large-scale societal issues. The success of the Luker Foundation can in part be attributed to the fact that the family has deep roots in Manizales and thus had long-term relationships and enjoyed trust and credibility within the community. This is a reflection on the idea of parachute philanthropy where well-meaning individuals, or organizations want to do good in areas where they have no limited credibility, limited understanding of issues and lack of a holistic view on attitudes and cultural sensitivities. A few reasons why many interventions fail and resources get wasted. Luker’s work is a blueprint of how to do stakeholder relevant philanthropy.

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