

Yidan Prize
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Voices for change:

Stories from teachers across the world



“It is the teacher in the classroom who determines the quality of education and the future of children.”

Professor Yongxin Zhu
2022 Yidan Prize for Education Development Laureate

Teaching matters

“Through teaching, the lives of children change for the better,” says Elizabeth, a secondary school teacher in Zambia.

There’s a reason you remember your best teachers all your life. According to the United Nations, they are the “single most influential variable” in a child’s education and their learning outcomes.

From India to Zimbabwe, from Changzhou City to the Bronx and beyond, educators make a difference in countless ways. Whether supporting the most marginalized students or shaping policymaking at the highest levels, all share common characteristics: a love of learning, and a passion for making it accessible.

At the Yidan Prize Foundation, we celebrate the dedication, enthusiasm, and endless creativity of teachers. This booklet focuses on those stories and the people behind them, highlighting contributions from our laureates and partners around the world.

Here are some of their voices.

Helping Zambian students reach their full potential



Elizabeth knows that each of her students is unique. “Every child has different circumstances and therefore needs different solutions,” she says. As a newly qualified teacher, she hopes she will have “ears to listen, patience, and the wisdom” to help.

Elizabeth’s focus was on learners from the start. She began by volunteering as a CAMFED Learner Guide at her local secondary school, then as an Agriculture Guide before becoming a teacher. Now, she brings her mentoring skills to class. Teaching isn’t just about managing students and conducting lessons, she says. It’s about helping every child reach their full potential —and becoming a better citizen along the way.



“Education can change your whole outlook on life from bad to good. An educated person has dreams that are inspired and will strive for greatness. When people are educated, they contribute significantly to families, communities, and society in many different ways.”

Elizabeth Mpumba

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Teaching together in India

Everyone in Nawagaon village knows Mr Dageshwar Ravte, or 'Ravte sir' by name. As a school teacher in the local government school, he quickly saw the benefits of Pratham's program. Soon, it wasn't just the village children learning science, math, and reading—it was their parents and neighbours, too.

But the journey didn't stop there. Ravte sir believes it's important to involve parents in their children's education, building a learning environment at home that works with the school. He invites parents to drop by classes, or visits them to talk about the children's learning.

Now, the whole village teaches together. And they all love Ravte sir.

"Initially it was difficult; people believed only teachers were responsible for their children's education. But I feel involvement of parents and the whole community is very important for the education of the children."

Dageshwar Ravte



Building a culture of reading in China

Principal Weixing Yuan wants to change the way students learn. So he decided to change where they learn.

He came up with a surprising solution. He designed a new school with books in the corridors and a garden on the roof. The idea was simple: improve the learning environment, and the rest will follow.

"The students are surrounded by books," he said. "It is hard not to love books and reading on this campus." And the students agree. Now, some stay late just to have a chance to read more.

In transforming the learning environment, Principal Yuan has transformed the energy and curiosity of teachers and students alike. Student grades have improved, too, which means everyone has a chance to shine.



"As far as the eye can see, there are books. The library has become a living, breathing part of the school—a school where students love to read."

Weixing Yuan

Photo: Shenzhen Xin'an First Experimental School, Guangdong

Educating around interests in Hong Kong SAR

At LST Yu Kan Hing Secondary School in Hong Kong, Vice-principal Wong Hok Shing Brian keeps learning student-centered.

That means he tailors learning experiences around what learners enjoy. Because every learner is different. So whether they're interested in esports, animal protection, or farming, there's an option to suit. It helps students take charge of their own learning, builds empathy, and positive values, and broadens their horizons in the process.

Students feel motivated—they're developing real skills for the future. And so do teachers—they're empowered to do their best for learners based on what they actually enjoy.

"Each student has their own unique strengths. Our mission is to help them fulfill their dreams by accompanying them throughout their learning journey. We hope to make an impact on their lives through our own."

Wong Hok Shing Brian





“Teachers can have a transformative impact on learners. And when students have great teachers, they have great opportunities.”

Edward Ma
Secretary-General, Yidan Prize Foundation

Supporting access to science education in Kenya

Teachers often say things like, “Wow! I wish I could have come across PhET earlier,” says physics teacher Godfrey Odhiambo. They tell him the technology will “brighten the faces of learners” by making STEM lessons more interactive.

“The teachers undergo intensive training for about five weeks. Through communities of practice, teachers continue to share among each other best practices and how to best design and implement PhET simulation-based lessons.”

Godfrey Odhiambo

Godfrey has seen how PhET’s interactive math and science simulations help both students and teachers. But he also knows that help needs to come with training. In his role as PhET Fellow, he gives workshops at secondary schools across Kenya, including two that support deaf or visually impaired students. He’s trained more than 200 teachers, encouraging them to share best practices that will brighten the faces of all learners.

Read more:

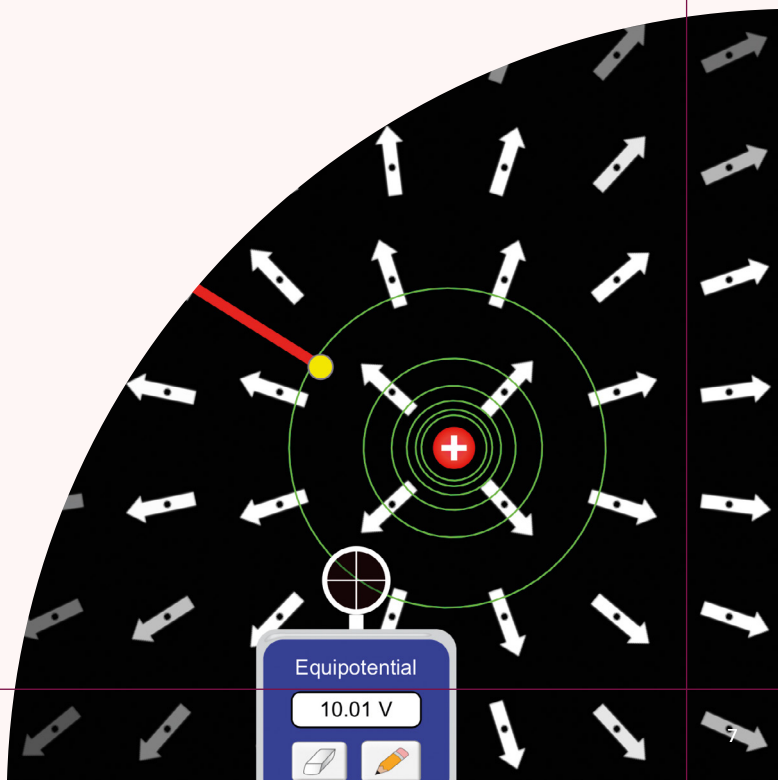


Photo: Charges and Fields: an interactive science simulation

Exploring how students learn best in the U.S.

Almost a quarter of Bronxdale High School students have special education needs, and the school serves a low-income community. But over the past ten years, Bronxdale has outperformed other schools in academic progress, graduation rates, and college going. In fact, it's been singled out as a model for 'restorative practices' that build a sense of community and responsibility.

The goal at Bronxdale is to "teach the way our students learn best," explains Principal Carolyne Quintana. Under her leadership, Bronxdale has created a safe, caring, collaborative community in which all community members—staff, students, and families—have voice, agency, and responsibility. Students engage in inquiry-oriented projects that they revise to meet shared standards and exhibit in performance assessments. They also learn social and emotional skills that support resourcefulness, perseverance, and resilience.

The result is a successful school serving diverse learners, using practices that are consistent with knowledge rooted in the sciences of learning and development.



"Our mission is to work together as a community so that kids understand what a community is in order to develop as self-reliant independent learners, who leave curious and know how to be thinkers and can solve problems and be creative."

Carolyne Quintana

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Giving girls equal opportunities in Zimbabwe

Lucia is a founding CAMFED Association member, businesswoman, and a Math teacher, who also studied public relations and human resources. But when she was a child, she had no shoes to walk to school in. Nor could her family always afford the fees. CAMFED changed all that.

Lucia says there are many more girls out there just like her. Working with CAMFED Learner and Transition Guides, she helps young women to complete school, start businesses, find employment, or get into further education. Together, they hope to make lasting change.

"I see a lot of 'Lucias,'" she remarks. "I hope I inspire them."

"Getting educated is a right. It is a right that will untie us as women from the snares of such things as gender inequality. Poverty cycles will be broken. Educate a girl and you educate the whole nation and the world. Break barriers and open paths to walk through for the next generation."

Lucia Punungwe

Read more:



Taking a positive approach in Hong Kong SAR

When Stephanie To and her team started to redesign the curriculum and introduce principles of Positive Education, it was the beginning of a journey for HKSKH Bishop Hall Secondary School.

Positive Education has its roots in positive psychology and focuses on building well-being so that everyone in the school community can flourish.

Through Positive Education, Stephanie helps students at Bishop Hall Secondary school find their own core strengths. And it's an approach that transforms lives. She and her team are already seeing learners regain interest and confidence.

While the journey towards Positive Education began as a change in curriculum, it also changed the culture—meaning the whole school thrives.



"Positive education is a journey for us. We're on the road, bringing like-minded people together to work towards a common vision."

Stephanie To



“One of my university professors taught us the importance of being open and transparent, of being fair and just —no matter what role we step into in life.

This has always stayed with me, both personally and professionally.”

Mabel Woo
Deputy Secretary-General, Yidan Prize Foundation

Bringing curiosity and creativity into math teaching in China

Over the past 27 years, Huifen Zhuang has gone from being a young math teacher to an award-winning 'super-principal', under the mentorship of Professor Zhu, 2022 Yidan Prize for Education Development Laureate.

Zhuang is a lifelong learner, keeping up to date with the latest research about effective teaching methods and the science of learning. She looks critically at how to improve teaching methods, by engaging and discussing her work with peers. All of this feeds into her own professional progress and development.

Zhuang shares her own love of math with her schools, teachers, and students, dispelling conventional stereotypes about math and building "curious and creative schools".



"I work hard to find a way of teaching math that helps children. I constantly research new teaching methods and ideas. My aim is to break through children's fears and remove all obstacles to learning."

Huifen Zhuang

Bringing mothers in Mexico back into education

Chemistry teacher and PhET Fellow Anel Cruz Castillo puts it best: “Education can reach everywhere and transform the world”.

She volunteers for En el Semáforo se Aprende (‘Let’s learn at the stoplight’)—an organization that supports families who live and work on the streets of Mexico.

Teaching on tablets at traffic lights, Anel uses storybooks and simulations to turn curbs into classrooms.

It doesn’t just spark learning in children. Inspired by what they see, mothers who left school unfinished are returning, too; after a year, nine mothers are back in education. And one now works at a Querétaro cultural centre where she’s learning to run children’s robotics workshops.

“Working with PhET gave one mother the confidence to help her to generate a very interesting relationship with mathematics and technology, since, like other mothers, she had not previously used a computer or any app other than instant messaging.”

Anel Cruz Castillo

Read more:



Strengthening leadership through mother and child learning in India

"I consider myself very lucky," says Swarnaprava Pradhan, coordinator for Pratham's early years program in India. After working with Pratham for over 18 years, she now coordinates early learning programs across 11 states, as well as developing content and training for the program.

But it was her experience with Pratham Early Childhood Development (ECD) initiatives, working with children aged 0–3, that gave Swarnaprava her most valuable insights. That was when she realized the importance of involving mothers from the very start. Seeing the difference this made, both for the children and for herself, was a real lesson in leadership.



"Building a strong learning foundation for children in their early years helps them immensely to start their formal education. With the help of the ECD program, I also got an opportunity to strengthen the foundation for my future."

Swarnaprava Pradhan

Putting research into practice in the classroom

A growing body of research shows that project-based learning can have a positive impact on achievement and engagement. What is it and what makes this approach so impactful in the classroom?

The human mind is designed for inquiry—for figuring out what things mean and how they work. When students seek answers to meaningful questions, their inquiries create deeper learning that can be applied to other situations and problems.

"Real and genuine knowledge is transferrable… It's the kind of knowledge you can use again. And that's the type of knowledge that is developed in project-based learning," explains Dr Linda Darling-Hammond, 2022 Yidan Prize for Education Research Laureate.

"We have evidence from many studies that students who engage in inquiry-based learning … do much better on real assessments and real tasks of critical thinking and problem solving. This can make a bigger difference for them in the long run in school and in life."

"When a student is deeply engaged, their brain is awake and alert, because they're engaged and they're interested. That engaged brain operates on connections. Connecting what we know to what we are now learning."

Dr Linda Darling-Hammond

Read more:



Great ideas spread around the world

At the Yidan Prize Foundation, we aim to showcase, amplify, and connect educators across the world, so that their stories reach a wider audience. We'd like to spark new conversations and promote new and diverse voices along the way.

This short collection represents a few of those voices.

To find out more about the Yidan Prize community, please visit our website:

“Teaching is the profession on which all other professions depend.”

Dr Linda Darling-Hammond
2022 Yidan Prize for Education Research Laureate

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