As the world changes, the education community comes together

Our annual report for 2020
In memory of
Sir Fazle Hasan Abed KCMG
April 1936 – December 2019

“Change is possible through human acts of compassion, courage, and conviction. I have spent my life watching optimism triumph over despair when the light of self-belief is sparked in people.

I want us to keep lighting these sparks.

Yidan Prize for Education Development Laureate 2019
# In this report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>Opening statements</td>
<td>Dr Charles CHEN Yidan, our Founder and Chairman of the Board of Directors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dr Qian Tang, Chairman of the Advisory Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dr Koichiro Matsuura, Chairman of the Judging Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>About the Yidan Prize Foundation</td>
<td>Our work and vision as a Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Our medals, logos, and their meanings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>The work of our laureates</td>
<td>Introducing 2020’s Yidan Prize laureates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Checking in on our 2019 and 2018 laureates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>An update from our first laureates from 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>From zero to infinity</td>
<td>Notes from Dr Charles CHEN Yidan’s speech at the SMU Visionary Series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>Our community and partnerships</td>
<td>A warm welcome to HRH Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Introducing our new Council of Luminaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>About Dr Christopher Thomas—our new Director of Partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>How our year looked</td>
<td>A timeline of our events, celebrations, and ceremonies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07</td>
<td>Our structure and governance</td>
<td>About our various committees and what they do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>With thanks to our supporters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>Closing remarks</td>
<td>Final observations from Mr Edward Ma, our Secretary-General</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Opening Statements | Our annual report for 2020
We have not just an opportunity, but an obligation to forge a brighter future for education.

Dr Charles CHEN Yidan
Dr Charles CHEN Yidan

Our Founder and Chairman of the Board of Directors
“Everyone has the right to education”

Those words begin Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, written in the 1940s as the world still reeled from the after-effects of terrible conflict. Now as we emerge from a devastating global pandemic, they’re our beacon as we work to recover, restore, and rebuild.

We’ve faced the greatest ever challenge to education—
but take hope from the response

In 2020, 1.5 billion young people missed out on their normal education. At the start of 2021, 600 million were still out of school. The digital divide deepened, and children on the wrong side of it suffered disproportionately. Those already marginalized by poverty, gender, or disability faced greater exclusion. Some will never return, and yet more will struggle to regain what they’ve lost.

Yet we also saw extraordinary efforts to keep learning going. Governments, school leaders, teachers, parents, and students rose magnificently to the challenge. Educators found new ways to educate, rapidly turning to the technology at hand. And organizations linked arms to support them—including our Foundation, as we proudly joined UNESCO’s Global Education Coalition.

That’s the legacy we carry with us now. We have not just an opportunity, but an obligation to forge a brighter future for education: one built around systems that are both effective and equitable.

Innovation points the way to a more inclusive future

Just as the best teachers can animate a child with the spark of discovery, we must open our systems to scientifically rigorous experimentation. At the same time, we must make sure we’re reaching every learner. We see both pillars in the work of our 2020 Yidan Prize laureates.

Our Education Research laureate, Professor Carl Wieman, has transformed how students learn STEM subjects. His research challenges and tests preconceived ideas about both teaching and talent, offering robust methodologies for others to adopt and adapt. And, as Chair of the Board of Directors at the Global Partnership for Education, Julia Gillard reminded us at our December Summit, with the dawn of new vaccines, society’s debt to science has never been so clear.

CAMFED’s Lucy Lake and Angeline Murimirwa, this year’s Education Development laureates, are the first team to take the prize. Along with the network they’ve built, they’re breaking down barriers that marginalize girls and young women in sub-Saharan Africa. Once those doors are open, we’ll see who emerges: scholars, educators, and tomorrow’s leaders.
We must empower educators to reimagine the schools of the future

This year we welcomed a new member of our Board of Directors, UNESCO Special Envoy on Literacy for Development, HRH Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands. She reminds us that today’s young people are already growing up in a different world from the one we did—and we must work with them to shape the future of education.

More than ever, we need talented and motivated teachers and school leaders. We need educators who can adopt new insights from studies of early learning and child development; who can apply, test, and scale new teaching methods and a curriculum that’s made for 21st-century skills; and who can make personalized learning a reality, embracing the full potential of technology to make high-quality education available for everyone.

We can free schools from rigid constraints, and put students in charge of their learning

When Indonesia’s Minister for Education, Nadiem Makarim, joined us for our Asia-Pacific conference, he used the Bahasa phrase “merdeka belajar”. In essence, it’s “emancipated learning”: freeing the potential of a learner to get where they want to go in life.

Mr Makarim also described Indonesia’s curriculum as a “menu” which teachers can choose from and adapt, adding local knowledge and insight. Schools have the freedom to flex their budgets, enriching any area of learning they feel needs more attention. It’s the perfect example of what happens when we look at education through a more businesslike lens, changing education systems in a sustainable way while offering more autonomy to both teachers and learners. And it’s an example we can all learn from.

We must share what works more broadly—and more usefully

What educators need most of all is not just evidence, but evidence presented in a way that’s easy for policymakers and practitioners to grasp and apply. That’s at the core of our partnership with the OECD, which centers on the work of laureates Professor Carol Dweck, Professor Larry Hedges, and Vicky Colbert. As we explore the impact of Carol’s growth mindset interventions, Larry gives us a framework for sharing and using research while Vicky shows us how to inspire change on the ground.

We also applaud the launch of the World Bank’s Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel, which helps low and middle-income countries shape their education budgets around proven interventions. These are the crucial steps between having information, and using it wisely and widely.

With no time to lose, collaboration can accelerate our efforts

When we began the Yidan Prize in 2016, we had the goal of bringing together the brightest minds in education. This year, I’m very proud to say that we moved into a new phase of our work, forming our Council of Luminaries. The council is made up of researchers, educators, neuroscientists, psychologists, economists, statisticians, and innovators—diverse thinkers who are ready to pool ideas and tackle urgent issues. We’re excited to create this space for them to come together and push for progress, and for what will spring from this fertile ground.

We thank them and all those who contribute energy to our mission, and who have worked tirelessly to bring us to this stage. To my fellow Board members, the Advisory Committee, and the Judging Committee, I offer my deepest thanks, as we continue our commitment to work together and create a better world through education.
Opening statements

Our annual report for 2020
Dr Qian Tang
Chairman of the Advisory Committee
2020 has been an extraordinary year for society, the economy, and of course, education. Through all this, it’s remarkable that the Yidan Prize Foundation has been able to keep going and deliver results. In no small part, that comes down to the hard work of the whole Foundation family: the Board, the Judging Committee, the Advisory Committee, and, of course, the Secretariat.

More remarkable still is that the Foundation has continued to build momentum as it moves into its next phase. There were award ceremonies for Professor Usha Goswami and BRAC; there were virtual judging processes; there were even new global partnerships. This would be an impressive list of achievements in a “normal” year—more impressive still in 2020.

As an Advisory Committee, our role is to ask questions and add ideas
We went into 2020 with this in mind, having just overseen the independent third-party review of the Foundation that we proposed. Following this review, we had our first “family gathering” in January; everyone from the Yidan network came together. This created an opportunity for the whole organization to reflect on its role, impact, and progress. This year the Council of Luminaries was established which is designed to enhance the Prize’s intellectual capacity.

Ultimately, we have a five-year plan in mind
Another output of our “family gathering” was a longer-term vision for the Foundation. As a relatively young organization, our challenge is enormous: we want to change the world with education. We knew we needed an action plan. Included in this plan is strengthening our dynamic Secretariat—such big goals might call for a bigger team. And of course, we’ll be looking keenly to make sure that all family members of the Prize work more closely with one another to increase our impact as an organization.

But in the shorter term in 2021, we must focus on education’s global challenges
Looking at the UN’s fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG4)—inclusive and equitable education for all—we see a gap. One third of the allocated time has passed, but the world hasn’t yet reached a third of the targets: we’re not on track. Our progress has been hampered by the pandemic, which hit education systems everywhere hard. It also brought the paramount importance of education into sharp relief, and may yet spark innovation and change.

Really, the SDG4 and our goal as a Foundation are one and the same: to improve lives with education. To get there, the Advisory Committee will be looking at ways to work more closely with education systems and, through our prize, champion research that’s oriented towards policymakers. In other words, we need to spread our thinking further. In 2020, our Yidan Prize family grew and came closer together. Now it’s time for us to reach the rest of the world.
Dr Koichiro Matsuura
Chairman of the Judging Committee
Relatively early on in 2020, it became clear that this wasn't going to be a normal year—not for the education community, and not for the Yidan Prize Judging Committee. As workplaces and borders closed, we saw that our processes needed to change.

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**First, we made our prize nomination process more flexible**

We extended the deadline by a month while people were still getting to grips with remote working; 80% of our nominations came in during that extra time. We’re so grateful to every nominator who went the extra mile to deliver another year of outstanding entries across 103 different countries—from China to the Cook Islands, and Senegal to South Africa.

**We also adapted the judging process to work virtually**

Over five months, the independent judging committee carefully reviewed each and every entry. For the first time, we did this entirely virtually, with online discussions over seven time zones.

Interestingly, elements of this virtual process—such as having more time for reflection—worked so well that we’ll be carrying them forward into our plans for the years to come.

**We awarded our laureates based on their cross-disciplinary reach**

As judges, we’ve always believed in the power of combining education research with real-world application. This is, of course, why we have two prizes; one in each area.

Professor Carl Wieman’s work is inspiring because it’s so widely applicable. As this year’s Education Research Laureate, Carl deliberately looks for gaps where research can inform practice. In the words of another of my judging colleagues, Andreas Schleicher, he brings “a rigorous scientific approach to the improvement of science education ... he’s used science to understand how people learn science.”

This year’s Education Development laureates—Lucy Lake and Angeline Murimirwa of CAMFED—have not just created a “model with an inspiring multiplier effect” (in the words of my fellow judge, Dorothy Gordon). Their work involves evidence: third-party impact assessments and measurements, results, and studies. They can demonstrate the impact they’ve had and the millions of girls’ lives they’ve touched—before the pandemic, through it, and no doubt beyond.

In short, our research laureate’s projects have a clear real-world focus; our development laureates have research to prove the power of their work. It’s a virtuous cycle—hopefully one that’ll keep turning with our 2021 prize. To that end, I look forward to seeing a new set of outstanding nominations in the months to come.
About the **Yidan Prize** and our Foundation

How we’re building a better world through education
Our work and vision as a Foundation

We’re a global education foundation, nurturing the brightest ideas in education, and building a better world as a result. Where learning flourishes, so does society; we established the Yidan Prize in 2016 to champion the change-makers making that possible.

We believe progress happens when you join disciplines together: more specifically, we wanted to build a community that’s as strong in research and testing as it is in practical application. That’s why our prize spans two areas.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Research</th>
<th>Education Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The theory of learning—science, psychology, statistics—that can help educators gain a more methodical understanding of their approaches.</td>
<td>The practice of learning—new methods, ways to make education more widespread—so we can champion techniques that work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each year, we award our laureates a gold medal, a cash prize of HK $15 million (shared equally for teams), and a project fund of HK $15 million to help them scale up their work.

Crucially, we also create connections for our laureates: from our newly-appointed Council of Luminaries to the wider pool of people who attend our Conference Series or Annual Summit. We’re building a community—one with the power to change the way the world learns.
Our vision as an organization

When we look to the future, we see a group of education experts who inspire and nurture the best ideas, and create concrete change across the world. After all, a better education for all has the potential to overhaul every aspect of our lives, from the climate to the economy to public health.

Through our prizes, our laureates’ projects, and our Council of Luminaries, we see the Yidan Prize Foundation as a platform to bring change-makers together. Our success is our community’s success. We’ll measure ourselves through their work—from the students they reach to the improvements they see.
Artistry to reflect the efforts of educators

Our Yidan Prize Foundation logo reflects our work as an organization

Designed by ink-brush artist Dr Kan Tai-Keung, our logo echoes our name, and centers on two Chinese characters. The first is yi （一），the Mandarin character for “one”, suggesting the unity of our global community. Then dan (丹), here finished with the red bloom of a lotus flower to represent a loyal heart.

Together, these strokes create a door: a door to a better world, opened by education.
The yi symbol also forms the foundation of our gold medals

In both medals, you’ll again see “—”: a reminder for our laureates that our community is with them in spirit. And both depict a pine tree growing from a mountain rock; even from the toughest foundations, the evergreen branches of education can spread.

For Education Research, a figure meditates on the future

The medal shows a person posing meditatively, looking into the light on the horizon—forward into a better world, forged with a new understanding of education. And on the reverse, The Thirteen Classics: Chinese wisdom bound in a Western style to reflect the global reach of our prize winners.

For Education Development, the figure is ready to act

This time, they’re shown standing—they’ve gathered the understanding they need, and they’re ready to take it forward. For this medal, the reverse shows the twenty books of the Analects of Confucius to reflect the wisdom of the Chinese classics, passed down by expert educators across generations.
Our laureates, and how they’re building a better world

Introducing our 2020 laureates, and updating you on progress from previous years
IT’S OUR HONOR TO INTRODUCE OUR 2020 LAUREATES

Professor Carl Wieman
Our 2020 Education Research laureate
For Carl, changing education means changing the way we think: about science, about talent, and about how teaching and learning relate to each other. As a laureate, he plans to expand his world-renowned online learning platform, and more deeply analyze its effects.

Carl has long seen problems in his industry’s career path: academic performance isn’t always a good indicator of how a student will fare as a practicing physicist. Instead, Carl believes we should teach students how to make good decisions—like experts do. “Learning to use certain knowledge and reasoning processes to make decisions, that’s what good education is fundamentally about—learning to make better decisions in your life.”

To achieve that, we need to examine the relationships between teaching and learning, find the most effective methods, and tackle inequalities across education systems.
Carl believes it’s time to take a leaf out of medicine’s book

Since the 1800s, evidence has been the gold standard for evaluating medical interventions—something the pandemic threw into sharp relief in 2020. Why doesn’t education work the same way: with proof, information, and data? After all, as Carl points out, we know a lot more about learning than we did 20 to 30 years ago, and much more than is put into practice in our education systems or teacher training.

In fact, his own projects give us useful evidence of what works and what doesn’t. In one study, he found that students retained only 10% of information from physics lectures after 15 minutes. Then he applied the principles he’d uncovered in his research: working collaboratively, making decisions, solving problems, and taking feedback. Afterwards, students retained 90% of the information after two days—better still, their outlook on physics and problem solving improved. How might other educators use these findings in their work?
And we must also tackle the idea of “talent”

Even in the most select universities, professors tend to sort students into buckets: “more talent” and “less talent.” But what if they really believed every student could be successful when given the right kinds of educational opportunities?

“Our research is concentrated on showing how much of what within the science community is considered talent ... is actually just educational privilege.” That is, the privilege to pay for more and better education. Because of this, we’re systematically disadvantaging the students that we’ve defined as less talented.

Most importantly, education technology is poised to transform our approach to STEM

In 2002, shortly after winning the Nobel Prize, Carl launched PhET Interactive Simulations at University of Colorado Boulder (PhET was originally short for Physics Education Technology). It brings together his ideas on learning theory, science instruction, and technology. Using computer simulations—like weights on a seesaw or a skateboarder on a ramp—students can learn key concepts in physics, and tweak factors to see what changes. The simulations help students learn at their own pace, allowing them to experiment and repeat until they master a concept.

They’ve become a hit with students and teachers across all levels of education. To date, PhET has delivered more than 800 million simulations in 93 languages, to learners of physics, chemistry, mathematics, earth sciences, and biology. Carl and his team plan to use the Yidan Prize funds to take PhET’s work even further: more content, wider access, and work with teachers. He’ll also do research to examine the impact of simulations like PhET on teaching and learning in the developing world.

Carl sees a future where learning means students are “simultaneously constructing and expanding their science knowledge, skills, and ways of thinking through the use of interactive simulations—doing so with curiosity, creativity, and joy.”

As virtual education becomes an increasingly prominent part of many education systems, we think it’s the perfect moment for this future to come to fruition—and we’re excited to see how.
Ms Lucy Lake and Ms Angeline Murimirwa
Our 2020 Education Development laureates
Lucy and Angeline are our first team to take the prize, saying collaboration is key to the success of the Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED). As laureates, they plan to expand the organization’s Learner Guide program, which builds peer support networks among girls and young women to assist them on their educational journey.

When Angeline graduated primary school at the top of her class, she cried. People thought they were tears of joy because she’d done so well. But in reality, Angeline was thinking how hard it was going to be for her to move on to secondary education. For her family, and many like them, it would mean a financial struggle—or, more likely, not attending at all.

Angeline did get her education, with the help of a scholarship from CAMFED. Now, as CAMFED’s Executive Director for Africa, she embodies the central philosophy of their work: cultivating agency in young women and girls through education and social support.
CAMFED works with clients, not beneficiaries
As Angeline explains: “Education is a right. It’s not a favor. Girls born in marginalized families don’t choose to be in those contexts; if we keep looking at them as beneficiaries, there’s a limit to how much they can achieve. Let’s look at them as an investment … this is a gem, a gold mine, the best investment you can make.”

CAMFED began as a scholarship program, started by Ann Cotton in the early 1990s in Zimbabwe. It challenged the received wisdom of the time: that families didn’t want their girls in school. “We set out to prove that if you took poverty out of the equation, girls would be in school alongside boys,” explains Lucy, who joined as Executive Director for Programs in 1994, and became CEO in 2012.

Since then, they’ve launched the CAMFED Association—now 157,000 members strong—which supports girls on their educational journey post-graduation, and mentors young women to address big challenges in their societies. And they’ve expanded their work into Ghana, Malawi, Tanzania, and Zambia.

They extend their impact through partnerships
CAMFED bring data, evidence, and research findings directly from the communities in which they work. When they meet with policymakers, they use the data to give these communities a voice: to underline government accountability to every marginalized girl. This leads to policies and programs that are local, cost effective, and supported from many angles—winning champions among ministries of education at every level.

More than that, they put young people in the driving seat. Lucy points out that “if we’re really serious about shifting girls’ prospects, we have to shift their context.” CAMFED’s surveys found one of the highest reasons for girls dropping out is low academic self-esteem—and it’s little wonder when you consider that most marginalized students are using textbooks that reflect wildly different lifestyles to their own.

To help with this, CAMFED brought on curriculum experts to design new ones. And they created an editorial committee made up of local young people to represent the audience who’ll ultimately be using the books.
Expanding the Learner Guide program could keep five million girls in school

Right now, 92% of girls in sub-Saharan Africa never finish secondary education. Still more have their learning interrupted because of social and economic barriers. Accessing a consistent, quality education means far greater security as an adult: with the help of their Yidan Prize funds, CAMFED can offer that to more girls than ever before.

Learner Guides are recent scholars who volunteer for two years in their local secondary school. They’re trained to spot girls who are at risk of dropping out, and work with local authorities to keep them in school. They also offer mentoring and teach the “My Better World” curriculum, which focuses on life skills and wellbeing. Having experienced exclusion first hand, Guides recognize the challenges their mentees face. On average, each supports 50 marginalized girls over her two-year term.

In return, Guides can get loans to start their own small-scale enterprises. They’re also eligible for an internationally recognized BTEC qualification, opening up still more opportunities. It’s all part of a wide-reaching effort to achieve both quality education and a more secure future for girls and young women across the continent.

“I dream of a time when more women are occupying leadership positions,” says Angeline. “When there are more decision makers who understand intimately and personally what it means to be marginalized. They’re equal participants in decision making, meaning there’s inherent understanding from the top.” By investing in and empowering Learner Guides, Lucy and Angeline are one step closer to realizing that dream—and we’re so pleased to be part of it.
AN UPDATE FROM OUR 2019 AND 2018 LAUREATES

Professor Usha Goswami
Our 2019 Education Research laureate
Usha is deepening our understanding of how we process language, and where dyslexia and oral developmental language disorders might begin. With her prize funds, she’s been expanding her neuroimaging research to help us intervene earlier and more effectively.

Children with dyslexia often struggle in school. They see their friends learning more quickly, and teachers may assume they’re not trying hard enough. In Usha’s words, “they can become quite emotionally affected. Reading becomes a real negative that they avoid.”
Usha’s research shows us how important language play and music is

Her neuroscience research suggests that rhythm is the hidden factor in how children learn and process speech, and how they relate speech sounds to written words. In this work, she stresses the value of play-based learning and human interaction for a child’s development—parents, siblings, and peers play a role that technology alone can’t.
For her team, the pandemic has called for new ways of working
They’re planning research with a group of children; carrying out listening tasks and comparing brain data from “typical” developers to those with dyslexia or developmental language disorders. But various local lockdowns have called for adjustments, like finding ways to carry out the tasks remotely.

But it’s also thrown important issues into the light
Usha says these lockdowns have also made more people aware of educational inequities—even in wealthy economies like the UK’s. “Parents without home computers have to try and use cell phones to download teaching materials, with costly data charges. Deaf children may find it very difficult to benefit from online materials.”

Usha’s work is vital in helping us understand the developmental barriers to learning, and the kinds of access we can put in place to make sure all children get the right education.
Sir Fazle Hasan Abed
Our 2019 Education Development laureate
Sir Fazle sadly passed away in December 2019, but the work he began continues at pace. We spoke to his friend and colleague Dr Erum Mariam, Executive Director at the BRAC Institute of Educational Development, who described the team’s swift response to pandemic lockdowns.

BRAC’s work has always reinforced the importance of women as change-makers in homes and communities. When the pandemic took away opportunities for children to gather in play centers, the team switched to the most powerful technology at their disposal: cell phones.
The power of picking up the phone kept play-based learning on the agenda for BRAC

The BRAC team knew they needed to keep connected with parents, particularly mothers, throughout the pandemic. But how? Well, most people in Bangladesh own a cell phone—perhaps up to 90% (while only around 50% have internet). So in a matter of weeks, they set up weekly 20-minute phone calls, checking in on families, giving support to both parents and children, and suggesting games and activities to keep play-based learning alive. They call this telecommunications model *Pashe Achhi*, which means “beside you” in Bangla.
Now they’re wondering if they could use more of these methods in the future

“Cell phones could be a real game-changer for access and inclusion,” explains Erum. Online learning platforms might be exploding in popularity, but for BRAC, you can’t beat the “power of human connection” you get with a one-to-one call.

It also helps the team reach communities that might otherwise be completely disconnected. Before the pandemic, BRAC was already working with around 40,000 children in Rohingya refugee camps; cell phones have let the team stay in touch with 90% of them.

Working with our Foundation gave BRAC the confidence to change plans and grow

“Not for a moment did we hesitate,” says Erum. “We knew that Yidan would support us, and that gives us a lot of energy, and a lot of courage to do what we need to do.” Not only has BRAC been able to adjust its plans for expanding play-based learning in three countries, but they’re even exploring new ideas. With the help of another partnership, they’re finding ways to evaluate how they use mobile technology, echoing another of Sir Fazle’s founding principles: every intervention must be tried, tested, and improved at every stage.
Professor Larry Hedges
Our 2018 Education Research laureate
Larry wants to turn the loose-knit study of education into a more rigorous science—one that accumulates, interprets, and applies knowledge through testing. His 2020 had highs and lows: while one area of research went ahead smoothly, another was hampered by the pandemic.

Since becoming a laureate, Larry's focused his funding in two areas. First, on replicating results: Larry’s an advocate for proving that educational interventions aren't one-offs, and checking whether studies that appear to agree actually do. This work came on in leaps and bounds in 2020, with Larry publishing a number of papers and giving several keynote speeches on the topic.

But his other area of focus—coordinating work and sharing knowledge between research clearinghouses—ground to a halt when travel did. These conversations work much better face to face, when participants “can get away from the demands of their workday environment.” One to pick up when travel is back on the cards.
Clearly, the pandemic is both a challenge to research, and an opportunity for it

Larry certainly wasn’t the only researcher to find his work had to change or pause as pandemic restrictions rippled across the globe. But his expertise in research design meant he could guide fellow academics in how to swiftly adapt studies that were already underway—or about to be. It’s a major issue for researchers: funds and resources are precious, and can be hard to come by. “It’s important to salvage as much knowledge as possible from the resources you’ve already committed.”

And the disruption is, in and of itself, something we need to better grasp. “The pandemic is a vast natural experiment, changing how schooling is conducted for hundreds of millions of students. We now have the challenge of developing methods to best plan studies that will try to understand its effects.”
As with other laureates, Larry points to educational inequality as a major hurdle

“The major question is how to respond to a potentially dramatic increase in educational inequality, which is likely to place a greater burden on schools—and with likely the same or diminished levels of resources.”

Larry’s work on both designing and evaluating educational research will be key for the education community, as we all grapple with difficult questions like these.
Professor Anant Agarwal
Our 2018 Education Development laureate
Founded with Harvard and MIT, the edX platform gives learners access to over 3,000 courses from 165 institutions worldwide. With the help of Yidan Prize funding, people can “stack” online courses and programs that offer credit towards full degrees—more useful than ever as our lives move increasingly online.

One way is through edX’s MicroBachelors® programs. They’re built for adult learners with some or no college experience looking to progress their careers. Created by top universities and influenced by Fortune 100 companies, these programs come with real college credit, so learners can pursue a bachelor’s degree, while focusing on immediate job-relevant skills.

This modular, stackable approach to learning is far more affordable and accessible for many learners. But edX recognizes that there’s still much work to be done. They’ve launched a scholarship campaign called “Access For All” to drastically increase the number of learners who can access life-changing education. It’s timely, given the economic struggles and job losses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
edX believes teachers are adopting new lessons from the science of online learning

Teachers are beginning to treat education like engineering: continually iterating and improving. In 2020, they had to make a huge effort to learn how to teach online, understand how active learning works, and apply the latest research to teaching. Anant believes we haven’t seen anything yet: “In five to ten years from now, online learning will be a whole quantum leap better than where we are today.”
edX was ready for the explosion in demand that came with the pandemic

As the crisis unfolded, registrations to edX increased ten-fold. New learners took advantage of more time at home to learn something new, use their time while furloughed or unemployed to improve their credentials, or polish skills in their current roles. edX came together to accelerate the development of a new initiative: edX Online Campus. By providing universities with a catalog of edX courses, it gave faculty, students, and staff with remote teaching and learning resources.

Anant expects higher education to shift permanently to blended learning in the next few years. In fact, he believes it can be more effective than either fully in-person or online learning. “Blended learning will uncover the possibility of moving between work and school without having to choose one, or getting a head start on college before we leave high school. This brings us to a model of continuous, lifelong learning.”
AN IN-DEPTH UPDATE FROM OUR INAUGURAL LAUREATES

Professor Carol S. Dweck
Our 2017 Education Research laureate
Carol has spent much of her career challenging the longstanding idea that human intellectual potential is fixed. She’s shown how untrue this is: in the right environment, almost any student can build a growth mindset, and improve their intellectual abilities. After three years of working with the Yidan Prize Foundation, we asked her to reflect on the highlights of being laureate, and what she’s excited to explore next.

When Carol was awarded her prize, she was coming to the end of a rigorous study of students transitioning to high school in the US. The team, led by Professor David Yeager, were asking the question: could a short targeted growth mindset program make the switch to high school easier? The answer was yes—for low achievers, it made a meaningful difference to their grade point average.

Working with the Yidan Prize Foundation opened new avenues
The timely funding meant the team could continue the study for another year, and bring on board a data analyst to examine the longer-term impact of growth mindset interventions. And in that extra year, they saw promising results: for example, students who’d been through the program were more likely to sign up for advanced math the next year.

More recently, Carol and the team’s work on growth mindset has been at the heart of our partnership with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). They’d done a survey and, in all but a few of the 70+ countries involved, found a significant positive correlation between reading ability and the belief that intelligence can be changed—in other words, a growth mindset. “That was amazing! And they thought, well, there’s definitely something here.” It was the start of a fascinating collaboration.
There’s still much to learn about creating growth mindsets in classrooms

In 2020, Carol and the OECD both joined us for a virtual workshop to unpack the research around growth mindsets, and explore what it could mean for teachers in practice. “How do we create a global initiative for teaching teachers how to support growth mindset in the classroom? It made us think—and we’re still thinking—about cultural relevance: how to adapt growth mindset and teacher practices to any culture that wants to participate.”

For Carol, David, and their colleague Mary Murphy, it boils down to three areas for further exploration: what are the key teaching practices to promote? What are the most significant measurements to track? And what are the best designs for larger studies? They’re already piloting projects in all these areas with a group of teachers based in Texas, with a plan to take this program national.

Other Yidan Prize laureates, including Larry Hedges and Vicky Colbert, are already working with Carol on growth mindset projects too—and fellow luminaries have expressed interest in how it overlaps with their own work. “We don’t know all the luminaries yet, but we want to work with them to see how they could be involved.”

The pandemic could also show how growth mindsets help independent learning

Among the many tragic disruptions caused by the coronavirus, Carol believes there may be some positives. Schools have offered food, technology, and emotional support to families. Teachers say students feel more comfortable approaching them for virtual office hours than in person. And anyone’s who falling behind in class can now watch video lessons over and over to get a better grasp.

For Carol, it all raises interesting questions about the impact of growth mindsets on independent learning. Already a buzzing topic of discussion among educators, it’s more relevant than ever at a time when students are being asked to motivate themselves and organize their own learning at home.
As research continues, Carol is also busy leading a “secret life”

“I love thinking about new areas and proposing a new controversial perspective.” Carol says she’s developed “a new view of how the brain works in decision-making.” An unexpected bonus of her Yidan Prize funds has been hiring a neuroscience post-doctoral research assistant to work with her on this; together, they’ve submitted a paper to a leading psychology journal, so watch this space.

“I hope it will have really important implications for education—for how learning dysfunctions take place and maybe new ways of understanding and remedying them. I wouldn’t have been able to hire that post-doc or live a secret neuroscience life without the Yidan funding. Who knows what the theory will ultimately yield, but I’m extremely excited about that.”

A world with more growth mindset could be a world with more “we”

Carol reflects on her seminal book, Mindset, written with a focus on individual potential—something that’s still very relevant. But “what’s missing is the sense of ‘we’, the sense of contribution ... that’s what’s needed now, looking one, two or twenty years ahead: people working together, working as a ‘we’ and contributing to the ‘we’. I think that’s essential.”

For all of us who admire and learn from Carol’s work, it’s a world we look forward to living in.
Ms Vicky Colbert
Our 2017 Education Development laureate
Talking to Vicky, the first thing you’ll notice is consistency. From her early days as a sociologist, through her political office and many years at the helm of Fundación Escuela Nueva (FEN), her goal has never wavered. She wants quality education for every child, focusing her efforts on those in rural, hard-to-reach places with few resources and little connectivity. We asked her to look back on her time as a laureate, particularly the extraordinary challenges of 2020, reflecting on what’s changed—and what still needs to.

One of Vicky’s favorite sayings is “necessity is the mother of innovation.” As the driving force behind one of the world’s longest-running educational reforms (FEN has seen 17 changes of government), she’s seen that this is true more often than not. She laughs when she points out that Escuela Nueva—which translates in English as “new school”—isn’t very new anymore. Still, in 2020, the pandemic certainly spurred some fresh thinking in the FEN team and, once again, they rose to the challenge.

“Education is an activity, not a place”
That’s Vicky and the team’s starting point. And the teachers they work with in the remotest parts of Colombia certainly take it to heart. When the pandemic hit, FEN learned that the teachers they’d trained were taking their learning guides—a sort-of textbook, sequenced curriculum, and activity book in one—making copies and distributing them to children now staying home.

That they could do so is testament to the way Escuela Nueva trains teachers: using the same methodology they use with students. The learning guides are immensely pragmatic, reflecting that the teachers they work with—often in multi-grade schoolrooms—simply don’t have time to develop a full curriculum for all ages. “It’s like a recipe,” Vicky explains. “It poses the right questions. Some people even call it the ‘silent teacher’.”
Keeping teachers connected was key to keeping students learning

Up until last year, FEN already offered teachers small group “microcenters” for peer support: a space where they connected each month to share ideas and issues. In 2020, the team rapidly worked to scale this up into a full virtual campus. So when the Colombian Ministry of National Education came calling with an ambitious request, they were ready to spring into action. In partnership with the Ministry, FEN trained 1,000 teachers virtually. But they had a total of 7,000 requests, so there’s quite a goal for 2021 and beyond.

Vicky points out they’ll be able to do even more when they can get their campus translated. “The first priority is of course Colombia, and we’ll reach out to other Spanish-speaking countries.” But it would make a difference to have the content available in English, at least, as she knows there’s already demand from other countries to join in.

FEN also worked with displaced communities at the border with Venezuela

With support from UNICEF, the team piloted what they call “learning circles” in six areas, specifically to support children from displaced and migrant communities. The circles are satellites of a bigger local school, with which they share a curriculum. Dropping these children straight into those schools would be pointless, Vicky says: “They’d drop out the next week.” Before they’re ready for more mainstream education, they need to rebuild their self-esteem and social skills. Each circle has a maximum of 15 pupils, who get more one-to-one attention in a safe, caring environment.

“I always want empirical findings,” Vicky insists. “I’m a sociologist—I want evidence.” And the evidence is clear. Not only were the children confident enough to transition to main school; their attainment rates were above the national average. It’s proof that Escuela Nueva’s model can adapt to emergency situations and, with more families arriving over the border daily, it’s another project Vicky hopes to expand.
For Vicky, every part of education is a partnership: from parents to policymakers

To put children at the center of their learning, you have to transform what teachers do. For education to change lives, you must engage parents. For interventions to scale up, you must look to government. And for quality and sustainability, you need civil society and public–private partnerships. From day one, effective collaboration has been at the heart of FEN’s sustained and successful work.

Vicky’s bringing this spirit to our Council of Luminaries too. She’s already attended a workshop with fellow inaugural laureate Carol Dweck, and says that when she looks at the names of the members, all she can think is “I have to work with this one! I have to work with that one!”

Although FEN mostly works with learners who have little access to technology beyond a cell phone, the parallels in pedagogy between the Escuela Nueva model and that of massive open online platforms like Khan Academy are striking. Both reinforce how important it is for pupils to work at their own pace, guided by a teacher who’s more of a mentor or facilitator than someone there to dictate knowledge. It heavily underscores Vicky’s point: “This isn’t about quality education for the poor. It’s quality education for any child. For a long time, it’s been about bringing ideas from the north to the south. But now we’re bringing ideas from the south to the north.”

That’s a powerful theme among our luminaries: education that’s fairer, easier to access, and delivered by working together. With FEN’s wealth of evidence and the pioneering energy Vicky’s infused into decades of advocacy, it gives us great optimism for the future.
A spotlight on a particular event: Dr Chen’s speech at the Singapore Management University (SMU) Visionary Series
How education unlocks endless possibilities

In a moment, we’ll walk you through all of 2020’s events and their importance. But first we’d like to draw your attention to something that happened in 2019. While it might technically be outside the remit of this report, we think it captures many of our beliefs as an organization—ones that have crystallized as we’ve since moved through 2020.

In May 2019, 300 people gathered together for the SMU Visionary Series. It’s a space for eminent leaders with big ideas to change attitudes, societies, and even the world as we know it; gathering together industry players and deep thinkers from different spheres of influence to share their perspectives. (In this regard, the Series shares a similar goal to our new Council of Luminaries: creating results by working together across disciplines.)

It was Dr Chen’s honor to give the inaugural lecture. His speech was titled “From Zero to Infinity: how education unlocks endless possibilities.” The opening premise was that while the first step in any journey is important, what’s most important to the journey of education is what happens after zero.

Traditional Taoism tells us that the Tao creates one, one creates two, two creates three, and three ultimately leads to infinity. The progress of Tao is just like the journey of education.
He explained that the impact of education is infinite

Education might seem like it’s about individual people—a brilliant teacher, a bright student. In reality, the reach stretches much further. After all, none of the major developments we see in our world today are caused by one or two people acting alone. Each member of our society, no matter how insignificant he or she may seem, holds the potential to make the world a better place.

Dr Chen believes that education is the bedrock they need to do just that: fuel for technological innovation, social progress, justice, and equality. If we want to see social progress, we must see investment and effort put into education.

It also gives rise to innovation

Research from Ghent University and the University of Cambridge shows the more people participate in education, the more open their mindsets become—increasing the country’s overall innovation potential. It proves that well-planned educational policies aren’t just a societal good: they’re an economic necessity for any nation.

And that capability for innovation grows with cross-pollination

For Dr Chen, the education community must work alongside other industries to make the biggest gains. Just take the close links we see between Stanford University and Silicon Valley—a perfect example of how schools and the private sector can thrive together. Many of the Bay Area’s brightest companies have links back to the university, from Cisco to Netflix, and HP to LinkedIn. In no small part, that’s down to an entrepreneurial spirit that characterizes the campus and its teaching: risk-taking, learning for the sake of learning, trying new things. It creates a healthy circle of life for the local area and its economy.

But, Dr Chen concluded, each of us has the potential to create more widespread change

We don’t have to limit ourselves to local innovation. Dr Chen here referenced the Foundation’s annual laureates: “Their footprints spread far and wide across the surface of the globe.” This, he said, was the original vision he had in mind when he created the Yidan Prize: a space for “explosive outcomes and world-changing educational endeavors.”

It’s interesting now to reflect on these remarks within the context of 2020. With all the travel restrictions of the last year, fewer physical footprints have been left across the world—but certainly our community has still left its mark.

Speaking in 2019, Dr Chen had no idea what the next year would look like. But as many of us face new challenges and struggle to adapt to a different way of working and living, his closing remarks resonate louder than ever: “Never doubt that you hold the key to infinity.”
Our community and partnerships

In 2020, we broadened our network—and we’d love to introduce you
This year, we were delighted to welcome HRH Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands to our Board of Directors

Princess Laurentien brings with her a lifetime’s advocacy for literacy and learning, and unique experience of working with children, not just for them. She spoke passionately about this at our December Summit, where she also officially launched our Council of Luminaries.

The princess describes working with the Foundation as “fate”

She met Dr Chen at Number 5, the social innovation NGO she started with her husband. “We had an immediate connection. He embraced my vision that we can only truly innovate by co-creating educational solutions together with children and young people, which for me is key.”

Princess Laurentien sees a tremendous opportunity in the convening power of organizations like the Yidan Prize Foundation. She believes real, effective innovation can happen when we bring experienced practitioners together with scientists and pupils’ own voices. She quotes the late scientist David Bohm: “Free dialogue may well be one of the most effective ways of investigating the crises facing society and indeed the whole of human nature and consciousness today.”

For dialogue to happen, she believes we must create the right conditions

We must start with a safe setting, where people feel they can let go of their fears as well as ego. “You need an atmosphere that encourages people not to judge or speak from their own preconceptions, but think together by sharing insights, asking questions, and discover a common mission.”

“By the way,” she adds, “when I’m engaged in dialogue with children—something I’ve been doing extensively for over a decade—I hardly need to explain these rules of engagement … collaboration comes much more naturally to them. It’s adults who need more guidance as we’re often so stuck in our ways!”
As a Foundation, we know Princess Laurentien can help us grow

It’s always been our mission to spark, nurture, and develop ideas that change the world. The princess emphasizes how important it is to reflect different voices to make that happen: “I want to contribute to making the Foundation more inclusive and diverse, as I believe embracing curiosity and diversity as a basic mindset is a precondition to real and sustainable innovation. This goes from the composition of our different boards to listening to different voices. And that means opening up to unpredictability. This is always more unsettling because we humans tend to want control. We need to walk the talk about what we stand for in our mission of educational innovation.”

As an education community, she shows us all how to look beyond school buildings

The princess believes that our educational systems have been designed using outdated assumptions and frames of reference. As she put it at our Summit, we’re basing our thinking on “concepts of what children are that don’t exist anymore.” “Yesteryear’s mindset,” she calls it. For her, it’s a shift from thinking about education as “the obligation to learn” to considering that children have “the right to develop.” And we should let go of the notion that more experience in life means greater quality of thinking. “Letting yourself be surprised by the clarity of mind of a person half your age is a sign of wisdom.”

A future of digital learning, practical experience, and textbook learning can all help children grow into active citizens. Those things can also transform the role of teachers from “top-down educators, focused on knowledge transfer” to “inspiring coaches, who guide young people to places of knowledge and help them navigate in this increasingly complex world.” And, as she points out, home schooling during COVID-19 makes the important role parents play in their children’s education more visible.

Collaboration has the power to set a new agenda for education

“If there’s one thing innovation in general—and education in particular—needs, it’s collaboration and unexpected connections,” says Princess Laurentien. That’s the aim of our newly launched Council of Luminaries, and why its members represent such a broad range of disciplines, perspectives, and experiences. They’ve come together to spot shared issues and collectively find ways around them to use their collective voice and tremendous agenda-setting power to make education a political priority; to find gaps in our understanding of education and close them.

“We need this, particularly at a time of this global crisis in which millions of children and adults are falling behind in their development because of prioritization of other issues. Our youngest citizens of zero to four years old are already an underappreciated target group. Because of COVID-19, many childcare centers are closed, with huge long-term consequences.”

Just like the princess, we’re excited to see what happens when we bring yet more diverse voices together. With her vast experience in social innovation, advocacy, and different educational solutions, we know she’ll help us become who we want to be as an organization, and rise to the challenges of education in a post-pandemic world.
We launched our Council of Luminaries: a platform for change

Back in 2016, we created the Yidan Prize Foundation to create a better world through education. Since then, we’ve built quite a community. And in 2020, we realized that if we could better use the collective thinking of this community, we’d get to our goals faster.

Our Council of Luminaries brings together some of the world’s brightest and most determined minds to do just that. They’re not only changing how people learn, they’re changing how people think about learning.

Introducing our inaugural luminaries

Sir Fazle Hasan Abed KCMG
Founder and Chair Emeritus, BRAC
The late Sir Fazle championed education (particularly play-based learning) as a force for change. He founded BRAC in 1972, and today it’s helped 13 million children across 12 countries in Africa and Asia. We warmly welcome Dr Muhammad Musa, Executive Director, BRAC International and Dr Erum Mariam, Executive Director, BRAC Institute of Educational Development to represent Sir Fazle’s pioneering work in our council.
» Read more on page 30

Professor Anant Agarwal
Founder and CEO, edX
Anant’s starting point is that “everybody in the world should have access to education, no matter who they are, where they live, or what they can afford.” Founded with Harvard and MIT, edX gives learners free access to over 3,000 courses from more than 165 institutions worldwide. It’s being used by 3,000 organizations, countries, and institutions around the world to launch their own sites, including in China, France, Saudi Arabia, Hong Kong, and Jordan.
» Read more on page 38
Our community and partnerships | Our annual report for 2020

Mr Kamal Ahmad  
Founder, Asian University for Women (AUW)  
Early in his life, Kamal recognized the importance of access to education as a key pathway toward achieving a more just society. He’s devoted the last decade and more to building the Asian University for Women (AUW) in Chittagong, Bangladesh to educate women, particularly first-generation university entrants, from across Asia and the Middle East. AUW was established on the belief that no one community has a monopoly on talent; it’s in the public interest for our institutions to cultivate the talents of all.

Ms Vicky Colbert  
Founder and Executive Director, Fundación Escuela Nueva (FEN)  
Escuela Nueva was built on Vicky’s twin beliefs: all children have a right to quality education, and quality education is the best way to reduce inequality. Her work has demonstrated—first in Colombia, now around the globe—that with proper innovation, even small remote rural schools can develop active, cooperative, and personalized learning environments where children learn to learn, and where a new role of the teacher as facilitator and guide can be promoted.

» Read more on page 46
**Professor Carol S. Dweck**
Lewis and Virginia Eaton Professor of Psychology, Stanford University
Carol’s work shows that, in the right environment, students can build a growth mindset—improving their intellectual abilities, raising their level of attainment, and opening doors for the future. Creating these growth mindsets calls for a united effort between school settings and family life—peers and parents play a part, and teachers perhaps have the biggest role.
» Read more on page 42

**Professor Usha Goswami**
Professor of Cognitive Developmental Neuroscience, University of Cambridge
Usha’s neuroscience research suggests that rhythm is the hidden factor in how children learn and process speech. She recommends building strong links between education and psychology departments, and emphasizes the value of play-based learning and human interaction for a child’s development. Her work has the potential to reveal the origins for developmental language disorders, and is already laying the groundwork for more effective ways to tackle screening and intervention.
» Read more on page 26
Professor Eric A. Hanushek
Paul and Jean Hanna Senior Fellow and Professor, Stanford University and Hoover Institution
In graduate school, Eric asked himself: how could economics shape our understanding of learning inequality? How could it inform policymaking in that area? His research has inspired the growth and development of a new disciplinary subfield: the economics of education. With his colleagues, he’s shown that cross-country differences in economic growth are almost completely determined by the skills of the population. It’s a remarkable finding, and it’s reshaping the conversation on education policy all over the world.

Professor Larry Hedges
Chairman of the Department of Statistics, Northwestern University
Larry’s goal is to help transform the loose-knit study of education into a more rigorous science—one that accumulates, interprets, and applies knowledge through testing. Using that approach, he’s known for shedding new light on subjects like class size and school funding. Larry sees three ways to strengthen educational research: creating rigorous methods for research; training researchers; and improving how research findings are shared.
» Read more on page 34
Our community and partnerships | Our annual report for 2020

Professor Thomas Kane
Walter H. Gale Professor of Education, Harvard Graduate School of Education
Teaching has long been viewed as an “art”, not subject to scientific study—with the result that we know surprisingly little about the relationship between specific teaching practices and student achievement. Thomas led the Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) project to lay the foundation for a science of teaching. The study revealed that it’s possible to identify teachers and teaching practices that lead to faster student learning. Beyond his research on teaching, he advocates creating a research infrastructure to test, iterate, and scale educational innovations.

Mr Salman Khan
Founder and CEO, Khan Academy
“A free, world-class education for anyone, anywhere,” is Khan Academy’s mission. For Salman (better known to his colleagues as Sal) that means three things: making learning materials available in every major language and core subject; engaging learners and showing results; and turning learning into opportunity. Today, Khan Academy has more than 115 million registered users. Sal hopes the numbers will expand into the hundreds of millions in the next five to ten years, and that the model will keep showing measurable results.
Ms Wendy Kopp
CEO and Co-Founder, Teach For All

Wendy knows that children’s futures are shaped by early experiences with poverty, hunger, discrimination, trauma. The problems they face are systemic and complex, but solvable: the key, Wendy believes, is developing collective leadership. She founded Teach For America in 1989 and Teach For All (TFA), a global network, in 2007. The network is now made up of about 60 independent, locally led organizations around the world—organizations that believe meaningful, sustainable change calls for leaders who are both locally rooted and globally informed. To that end, these organizations recruit promising graduates and professionals for teaching positions in high-need schools. They develop them as leaders who work throughout their lives, at every level of education, policy, and beyond, to effect needed systemic change. Teach For All fosters connectivity and learning across the network’s staff members, teachers, and alumni to accelerate progress.

Professor Patricia K. Kuhl
Co-Director, University of Washington Institute for Learning & Brain Sciences

Patricia’s research reveals that, in her own words, “the early brain is born to learn, ready to learn—with certain conditions, kids can soar.” Early learning experiences shape children’s thinking skills, school performance, health, and behavior. Most of all, Patricia talks about learning as an interactive experience. Just one example is acquiring language: infants “crack the speech code” by gleaning statistical patterns from experience, and learning necessitates social interaction. If we could better understand the social and contextual ways children learn, we could uncover what motivates us to learn and stay open to ideas at all ages.
Ms Lucy Lake
CEO, CAMFED
People often talk about girls’ education in terms of secondary benefits: lower birth rates, better family health. But as leaders of CAMFED—the Campaign for Female Education—Lucy and fellow luminary Angeline Murimirwa know it’s about much more than that. Girls’ education is the foundation of social justice. CAMFED started out to prove that, if you took poverty out of the equation, girls would be in school alongside boys. Now there are 157,000 young women in their CAMFED Association network, and they work with clients in Zimbabwe, Malawi, Ghana, Tanzania, and Zambia. Lucy sees the council’s potential for championing ways to tackle inequality in education systems around the world in the drive for inclusive and equitable quality education.
» Read more on page 22

Ms Angeline Murimirwa
Executive Director—Africa, CAMFED
Together with Lucy Lake, Angeline is part of the first team to become Yidan Prize laureates. She was also once a client of the organization she now helps lead, having been among the first Zimbabwean girls to get a CAMFED scholarship. Angeline also knows the impact of being a decision-maker who’s experienced marginalization, and dreams of a time when more women occupy leadership positions—particularly women who’ve experienced exclusion first-hand. In this world, women will be champions from within the system, advocating for critical investments and driving reform, and making sure school systems are sensitive to the realities of those left behind.
» Read more on page 22
Our community and partnerships | Our annual report for 2020

Professor Carl Wieman  
Professor of Physics and Graduate School of Education, and DRC Chair at Stanford University  
Carl has noticed that academic performance isn’t always a good indicator of how a student will fare as a practicing physicist. And what’s often identified as talent actually comes down to the quality of someone’s education. For Carl, we need to focus on how students learn, and which practices most effectively support the success of all. As well as studying the effectiveness of teaching interventions, Carl has launched a STEM learning platform, PhET Interactive Simulations, at the University of Colorado Boulder. So far, the PhET project has delivered more than 800 million simulations in 93 languages to learners of physics, chemistry, mathematics, earth sciences, and biology—and he continues with his research to evaluate its impact on understanding and achievement.  
» Read more on page 18

Professor Zhu Yong-xin  
Founder, New Education Experiment  
Professor Zhu founded the New Education Initiative—China’s largest education reform experiment—in 2000 and has led its development ever since. Its systemic concepts and methods have helped to create an enabling structure for school ecosystems that empower teachers and students to achieve wellbeing through a growth mindset for learning at very low cost. Professor Zhu believes a good education brings the heart, soul, and mind into harmony. Learning increases wellbeing, and helps people discover their better selves—developing their full potential as students, teachers, or parents.
Dr Christopher Thomas joined us as Director of Partnerships

If there’s a common theme to this report, it’s the power of collaboration to improve education – both in terms of quality and accessibility. As a Foundation, we’re lucky enough to work alongside some of the brightest thinkers in the sector; in 2020, we strengthened these ties by bringing on Dr Christopher Thomas as our Director of Partnerships.

Chris is Social Entrepreneur in Residence at Stanford University’s Graduate School of Education. He was Advisor to the Education Global Practice at the World Bank, and he’s served in various strategy and management roles at the World Bank Group, including Lead Strategy Officer, Advisor to the Managing Director, and Manager of Human Development Programs in Asia and Africa.

In these roles, he helped the World Bank contribute to the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals, agreements on Financing for Development, and partnerships with the IMF and multilateral development banks. He holds an M.A. in International Affairs from Johns Hopkins University and a PhD in Education from Stanford University.

In short, his international interests and connections across the world make him the perfect person to help us build out our partnerships. In fact, he’s already been working closely with our new Council of Luminaries: getting to know their individual ambitions, and from there, creating overall goals for the group.

He’s keen to hear from organizations who would be interested in working more closely together with us or our laureates and luminaries. If that sounds like you, you can reach him at chris@yidanprize.org.
We strengthened our partnerships across the world

If we want our work to be truly global in its reach and representation, we need to:

- build relationships with other organizations to track emerging issues and challenges
- broaden the range of nominations we get for the prize, so we’re finding ideas from everywhere
- amplify our laureates and luminaries’ work—particularly in parts of the world with large populations, but constrained resources.

In 2020, we made the most progress on the first goal. Here’s how:

**We became a proud member of UNESCO’s Global Education Coalition**

We know that some of those children who faced school closures will never go back, thanks to economic and social barriers—many of them exacerbated by the pandemic. Millions of children are losing out not just on education, but on nutritional, social, and emotional support.

This is an urgent challenge the educational world must address. So UNESCO have created a coalition of international organizations, civil society, and private sector partners to share experience and resources to help these vulnerable children.

We bring our global network of education innovators to the table, and we’ve also been encouraging our laureates to reach out to organizations in the coalition too.

**We started work with the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)**

Along with the OECD, we’re supporting the work of our inaugural Education Research laureate, Carol Dweck, and trying to understand the impact of growth mindset on student outcomes and teaching practices.

If you’ve read our profile of Carol on page 42, you’ll know we hosted her virtual workshop with the OECD in September 2020; we also funded white papers into study design and measuring teacher effectiveness. And we’re working with the OECD to include growth mindset in their Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey in future years.
Our year in events

How we’ve stayed in touch while we’ve been keeping our distance
Our ceremonies, awards and events

The world went online this year. But that didn’t stop us celebrating our laureates, or getting together to share ideas. Here’s a rundown of the events we hosted and spoke at.

In January we presented our 2019 Education Development prize to BRAC

It was our great honor to visit the BRAC head office in Dhaka to present the award to Sir Fazle’s family on his behalf—and pay our respects to this education visionary too. During Dr Chen’s trip, we were even lucky enough to visit a BRAC school in Banai, and an early childhood development center in Banasree.
Then in March we presented Professor Usha Goswami with the 2019 Education Research prize.

This time we visited the University of Cambridge, where Usha works and teaches. On reflection, we feel very lucky to have managed this visit just before travel restrictions took hold.
In the same month we also held our European Conference Series

We came together at Jesus College, Cambridge to focus on two themes in education: international development and wellbeing. On the latter, Professor Stephen J. Toope, Vice-Chancellor of the university, told the group that “the university has a critical role to play in addressing the challenges of mental health.” We also heard from Dr Erum Mariam of BRAC, who brought the international development theme into sharp focus: the organization has spread education to millions of people in areas of poverty across the world.

In June we joined the Asian Venture Philanthropy Network (APVN) conference

Andreas Schleicher, Head of our Judging Panel for Education Research, and Director of the Directorate of Education and Skills at the OECD, gave a keynote speech on Scaling Excellence in Education. On top of that, Dr Erum Mariam shared BRAC’s ideas on education quality in the context of the pandemic.

Come September we hosted a workshop on Growth Mindset

In partnership with our laureate Professor Carol Dweck and the OECD, we gathered together experts and practitioners from around the world to present their plans and share ideas—all focused on applying the growth mindset philosophy across different educational settings.
Later that month we hosted our Asia-Pacific Conference Series

Needless to say, we had one theme in mind: education in a post-pandemic world. Is it possible to socially distance in a classroom? Will virtual learning eliminate economic differences in education—or exacerbate them? What does the research tell us about students’ mindsets in times of crisis? We gathered together policymakers, practitioners, academics, and philanthropists to talk it all through.

In October we were involved in the Tencent Dialogue Series

Alongside Tencent News and the Tencent Research Institute, we launched the fourth instalment of Tencent Dialogue: “a place to learn from the greatest minds of our time.” We heard from Professor James Heckman, winner of the Nobel Prize for Economics in 2000. A little like our Asia-Pacific Conference, the theme was the future of education in light of the pandemic: from digital learning to equal access for all.

At the beginning of December two of our new laureates took the stage

Lucy and Angeline had their first speaking engagement as laureates, taking part in J.P. Morgan’s panel, Educating women to advance society with the Yidan Prize. They shared their experiences of running CAMFED in Africa, and were also joined by Ruben Vardanyan from our Education Development Judging Panel.
Our year in events | Our annual report for 2020

Our year finished with a bang: our 2020 Awards Ceremony and Summit

Although we were disappointed not to welcome people in person this year, the occasion felt no less special online. First we gave our three 2020 laureates, Professor Carl Wieman, Ms Lucy Lake and Ms Angeline Murimirwa, their awards, officiated by The Honorable Mrs Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor, GBM, GBS, Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.
Next came the Summit, where we were delighted to have former Australian Prime Minister, Ms Julia Gillard, as one of our keynote speakers—along with our newest Board Director, HRH Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands. Finally, we were proud to announce the initiative we’ve been working on all year: our new Council of Luminaries.

A packed agenda to celebrate an unusual, but no less interesting, year.
Our structure

We’re supported by our Board of Directors, Advisory Committee and Judging Committee—here’s who they are
Our Board of Directors

Our Board oversees everything we do as a Foundation. In particular, they appoint people to sit on our Advisory and Judging Committees, and approve the judges’ decisions on each year’s laureates.

Dr Charles CHEN Yidan
Our founder and co-founder of Tencent
Best known for his work with Tencent and his philanthropy, Dr Chen has had a lifelong love of learning. These days, he spends most of his time on education initiatives, from our Foundation to the non-profit university he set up in Wuhan.

HRH Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands
Founder and Director, Number 5 Foundation and Special Envoy on Literacy for Development, UNESCO
Princess Laurentien believes in “unexpected experts”: letting children and students play a part in shaping their own learning experience. It’s a philosophy she’s used in her work as a UNESCO special envoy, and in the various educational foundations she’s established.

Professor Sir Leszek Borysiewicz
Chairman, Cancer Research UK and Vice Chancellor Emeritus, the University of Cambridge
With a career that spans both the research and educational worlds, Sir Leszek understands the joint aims of our Education Development and Research prizes better than anyone. In fact, his 2001 knighthood was in part based on his contribution to medical education.
Professor Rick Levin
Senior Advisor, Coursera and President Emeritus, Yale University
In Professor Levin’s 20 years as President of Yale University, he’s rebuilt the campus, redeveloped downtown New Haven, strengthened the university’s international programs, and co-founded Yale-NUS College. Now he acts as an advisor to Coursera—an online learning platform offering courses from 150 top universities.

Professor Tony Chan Fan-cheong
President, King Abdullah University of Science and Technology and President Emeritus, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology
Professor Fan-cheong might be a mathematician by trade, but as Assistant Director at the US National Science Foundation, he managed everything from astronomy to physics to material science. Today he splits his time between university positions and involvement with various global institutions and events, like the World Economic Forum in Davos.
Our Advisory Committee

Our Advisory Committee is an independent team that closely examines our work as a Foundation, and designs strategies to help us increase our impact on education around the world.

Dr Qian Tang
Chairman of the Advisory Committee and Former Assistant Director-General for Education at UNESCO
In his role at UNESCO until 2015, Dr Tang facilitated education programs in all 195 member states. In particular, he helped to draft and roll out the 2030 Education Agenda—the fourth goal of the wider Sustainable Development Agenda—that so greatly influences our work today.

Professor Cheng Kai-ming
Convenor of the Advisory Committee and Emeritus Professor, the University of Hong Kong
Professor Cheng started his career as a school teacher; now, as an emeritus Chair Professor of Education, he’s particularly interested in how societal changes impact education. He consults with organizations like the World Bank, UNESCO, and UNICEF on this topic.

Dr Manzoor Ahmed
Professor Emeritus, BRAC University
As Professor Emeritus of BRAC’S Dhaka University and Founding Director of their University Institute of Educational Development, Dr Ahmed is another one of our links to a brilliant organization. In particular, his research focuses on policy and planning for national learning systems.
Mr Marc S. Tucker  
President Emeritus and Distinguished Senior Fellow of the American National Centre on Education and the Economy
Mr Tucker focuses specifically on standards and assessment, and researches the countries with the best education systems in the world. He created the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy (later called the NCEE), and has advised governments—former US president Bill Clinton called him a major contributor to his policies.

Dr Jamil Salmi  
Global Tertiary Education Expert
In his role at the World Bank, Dr Salmi shaped policy on world-class universities. Now he acts as a consultant on tertiary education for institutions, banks, professional associations, and governments from Macedonia to Mongolia.

Mr Dankert Vedeler  
Chair of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) Governing Board and former Assistant Director General in the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research
In his role at the ministry, Mr Vedeler has reformed secondary education, rolled out wide-scale programs, and chaired the steering committee for Education for All (EFA). In this role, he worked with Dr Tang to draft the Incheon Declaration.
Our Judging Committee

Our judges put the “prize” into Yidan Prize Foundation: they go through each nomination carefully, analyze the entries, and decide on our laureates. There are two panels—one for each award—both overseen by our Chairman.

Dr Koichiro Matsuura
Chairman of the Judging Committee and former Director-General of UNESCO
With over 40 years in international relations, Dr Matsuura brings wisdom and a global outlook to our judging panel. His role as Director-General of UNESCO spanned ten years, in which time he led reform in many areas of great impact, from universal basic education to freshwater management.

Education Research Judging Panel

Mr Andreas Schleicher
Head of the Judging Panel and Director for the Directorate of Education and Skills, OECD
In his work at the OECD, Mr Schleicher analyzes and advises on policies for economic growth and social progress. He oversees several international assessments and surveys, most notably the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA).

Professor Bruce M. Alberts
Chancellor’s Leadership Chair in Biochemistry and Biophysics for Science and Education, the University of California, San Francisco
As a prominent biochemist dedicated to improving science and math education, Professor Alberts is on the boards of more than 25 non-profits—and in 2014, was awarded the American National Medal of Science by Barack Obama.
Dr Felice J. Levine
Executive Director of the American Educational Research Association (AERA)
Dr Levine is known for her work across a vast span of research and science topics—from big data to policy, and higher education to ethics. She serves on several steering groups and boards of national associations focusing on sciences, statistics, and data.

Professor Gerd Gigerenzer
Director of the Harding Center of Risk Literacy, Max Planck Institute for Human Development
In Professor Gigerenzer’s work in risk literacy, he trains federal judges, physicians, and top managers in decision-making, with the Swiss Duttweiler Institute calling him one of the “top 100 global thought leaders” worldwide. On top of all that, his books Calculated Risks, Gut Feelings, and Risk Savvy have won awards and been translated into 21 languages.
Our Judging Committee

Ms Dorothy K. Gordon
Head of the Judging Panel and Chair of UNESCO’s Information For All program
As a technology activist and a firm believer in internet for all, Ms Gordon’s judging perspectives are more valuable than ever in light of 2020’s online education boom. In particular, she draws on her government, corporate, and UN policy and management experience to find laureates who can make an impact.

Dr Steven Cohen
Professor at the School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University
In his work at Columbia, Dr Cohen is an expert in public administration with a focus on environmental protection, and leads several of the university’s programs in that area. He’s been Executive Director of their Earth Institute, a policy analyst and consultant to the US Environmental Protection Agency, and he’s written a series of books in the field too.
Dr Allan E. Goodman
President and Chief Executive Officer, the Institute of International Education
Dr Goodman runs the Institute of International Education, a non-profit focusing on global educational exchanges and development training. He’s created academic exchanges in Moscow, run diplomatic training programs in Vietnam, and authored several books on international affairs.

Mr Ruben Vardanyan
Social entrepreneur, impact investor, and venture philanthropist
Mr Vardanyan is a recognized expert on the global economy, entrepreneurship, and education, and acts as a strategic consultant on those topics to a range of organizations, from banks to business schools. He’s also co-founded several organizations over the years—like the Moscow School of Management SKOLKOVO, to name just one.
Acknowledgements

We offer our heartfelt thanks to the people and organizations whose generous support helps drive our mission.

**Honorary Investment Advisor**
Mr John Lo
Chief Financial Officer, Tencent Group

**Honorary Investment Advisor**
Mr Tsang Wai-yip
Group Financial Controller, Tencent Group

**Honorary Legal Advisor**
Mr Richard Pu
Co-head of Tencent Legal

**Honorary Auditor**
PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC)
Looking back at the extraordinary year that was 2020, it’s easy to forget that we’re still a young Foundation. We reached some significant milestones, but it’s not a moment to rest on our laurels. If the pandemic has taught us anything, it’s that we can’t afford to put education on the backburner—we must continue to build momentum.

Over the past year, educators really showed the world their passion for what they do.

For some of our laureates, school closures meant quickly changing their usual methods: picking up the phone when they couldn’t meet in person or moving training online. For others it was a question of rethinking how to carry out research or switching focus to projects that are more easily done at a distance. Through all their eyes, we’ve seen priorities shift—for teachers, learners, parents, and policymakers alike.

The pressure’s already on to go back to “normal”. But the pandemic didn’t create all our challenges: inequalities in education are as old as education itself. What we do next is vitally important.

We can build back better than before—if we work together and keep up the pace.

We’re proud to have launched our Council of Luminaries to tackle those long-held issues in education. We’re excited by the possibilities from brightest minds in education around the world coming together, asking the right questions, and searching for the next big ideas.

That kind of collaboration inspires us to keep growing and strengthening our own networks, too. We’re very fortunate to have support from our Board of Directors, Advisory Committee and Judging Committee. We were especially grateful to our judges for their willingness to adapt to a more challenging process: entirely online, over seven different time zones. But adapt they did, and they’re already planning to keep some remote judging in future—combined with face-to-face meetings when it’s safe to get together again.

Learning from the changes we’ve had to make is how we keep going and keep improving. Our laureates and luminaries are adapting, trying new things, learning what works, sharing ideas and then starting the process again. It’s a virtuous cycle that takes us closer to our goal: creating a better world through education.
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