

Liyong Cheng



What Liyong Cheng has accomplished so far within the field of education makes for an impressive list. For the past 15 years she has been a professor at Queen's University Faculty of Education; she has received numerous grants worth a total of more than 1.4 million Canadian dollars to conduct research in the areas of assessment and English language teaching and learning; and she has dedicated her professional life to teacher education. To get here she has worked in universities and classrooms all around the world exploring how we can change our education system to better support student learning.

Liyong was born and grew up in China. Her English learning story began when she first took English classes at the age of 16 in high school. There her love for languages and linguistics was kindled. Because there were no textbooks available at that time, knowledge was passed on through the words of her teacher, and she hung on to everyone. When the English program was canceled, Liyong's interests did not flag. Her English teacher was transferred to work in the library, and that is where Liyong decided to spend her free time. It was there that she was first exposed, through Chinese, to many works of English literature.

After high school Liyong earned her undergraduate degree in English. She became a teacher of English at a university in China where she taught English for Academic Purposes (EAP). The goal of the EAP program was to prepare university postgraduate students for academic studies in English.

Ten years went by before the opportunity for further study presented itself. In 1992 Liyong's university and the British Council engaged in a scholarly exchange. British teachers were sent to teach the English program at her university and she was chosen to complete her master's in Teaching English as a Foreign Language at the University of Reading in the U.K. During the year Liyong spent completing her master's, her interests transitioned from pure linguistics to what was happening in the classroom.

Liyong left the U.K. to pursue her Ph.D. in education at the University of Hong Kong, where she investigated the influence of large-scale standardized testing on teaching and learning. She had grown up in an educational environment that placed great importance on large-scale standardized tests. In China such tests were highly respected and considered a fair way to evaluate a student's ability and learning. Thus her background influenced her interests and led her to focus her research on the relationship between teaching, learning and assessment. After working on this project for four years, Liyong concluded that teacher education was the key to changing learning in the classroom, and that teacher education was where she wanted to take her career. Her thesis won a competition for outstanding doctoral dissertation held by Educational Testing Services and was later published by Cambridge University Press as *Changing Language Teaching Through Language Testing: A Washback study*.

Upon earning her doctorate and completing two years' work at the School of Education and Languages, Open University of Hong Kong, Liyong became the recipient of a Killam postdoctoral fellowship and moved her work to the University of Alberta in 1998. The fellowship gave her the freedom to teach at the university and enjoy spending time with her son who was then ten years old. She worked for two years in Alberta until she accepted her current position at Queen's University Faculty of Education in

Kingston, Ontario. Since then she has been a part of the TESL community in Kingston (as well as TESL Canada), where she has taught numerous cohorts of Bachelor of Education, Master of Education, and Ph.D. candidates who would help immigrant and international students in their learning of English in Canada and internationally.

Liyong holds a unique position at Queen's. She is the only professor with a teaching and research background in Teaching English as a Second and Foreign Language. In addition, she works closely with colleagues from the Assessment and Evaluation Group (AEG). Liyong has a new research project on her agenda—her eighth SSHRC (Social Science and Research Council of Canada) grant, which she will use to study the validity of testing outcomes by examining the policies, practices, values and consequences of teacher-constructed grades in two distinct learning cultures: Canada and China.

Liyong's role in teacher education will soon be seeing a change. Now that the Bachelor of Education program in Ontario has changed from one year to two years, all education students will take Liyong's class (PROF506 English Language Learners) in order to support the growing student population of English Language Learners in Canada. This means a lot more teacher candidates will have the good fortune to learn from her, which will also benefit their students in the future.

Liyong's recent TESL Kingston workshop was entitled Supporting Teachers and Learners Through Classroom Assessment.



Heather Hosick is a writer and educator who has found her niche in teaching English as a second language. She began her career in Korea teaching ESL to children. Now she teaches ESL in Kingston to teenagers and adults. What she finds personally rewarding is hearing so many unique stories from across the globe. By speaking to ESL professionals in our area, she discovers the stories in our own community.