

Student Spotlights:

Making a difference through Master's Projects

Michelle Larsen: Making data meaningful



Michelle Larsen, an LPP student graduating in June 2012, decided to pursue a degree in educational leadership to become more influential in changing adult behavior. She realized the way to increase student learning was to get the adults in the school to change. This realization led to her School Leadership master's project, which sought to make data meaningful for teachers.

"The purpose of my project was to train teachers to get data in an efficient way and to get them to look at the data quickly so they can intervene for students who are not learning," Michelle said.

"Teachers are bombarded with data, but we don't organize it in a way that enables us to make change based on what we've figured out.

To help address this problem, Michelle worked with assistant principal Rhett Rowley, a graduate of the School Leadership program, to train a data specialist in the school who would be able to process data for the teachers. The teachers would give the assessment results to the specialist who would then enter data into a system that would process the data in a meaningful way. This process made it possible for teachers to give assessments, quickly receive results, and then take intervention steps if needed to help increase student learning.

"In the past teachers would give an assessment, and it would take forever for them to get the results back. When they did get it back, it wasn't organized in a way that enabled them to make decisions quickly," Michelle said. "It will take a year of baseline data to really see the effects of this change, but we do have information that shows the teachers are using the system and making decisions based on the data."

Michelle is married, and she and her husband have five children. She enjoys reading and traveling with her family.

Carrie Rawlins: Increasing teacher effectiveness through peer coaching model

Carrie Rawlins, an ExSL student, has been an educator for 20 years. She has taught elementary, worked as a counseling psychologist, and been a district instructional coach. Her master's project began as she researched with Shannon Dulaney, a professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Foundations. They were looking at data from a school in Provo School District and found that one teacher had helped a higher percentage of her English Language Learning students become proficient in the language arts test than the other teachers at that grade level.



"My master's project involved looking at data and then setting up a peer coaching model where teachers could identify their strengths and weaknesses and be able to talk with other teachers about what they wanted to observe and learn," Carrie said. "They had a pre-conference followed by observation sessions and a final post-conference where they talked about what they observed and how they could change their own instructional practices for the better."

Carrie said she wanted to help teachers learn from each other through this model. The number one effect she has observed from this model is an increase in trust between teachers and the effectiveness of PLCs. She said she has also seen students become more engaged in learning. She also believes the coaching model has helped improve the instructional practice community atmosphere in the school.

"I hope that the trust continues between all of the teachers in the school," Carrie said. "I hope as new teachers come on board in the school, they will feel there is a collaboration mentality and that teachers won't be afraid to have people come in and observe or to go in and observe other classrooms. It will be a more open-door environment, so the teachers will be able to feel safe and free to share those things that have maybe been a little bit more guarded in the past."

Carrie is originally from Idaho Falls, Idaho. She loves sports, art and education as well as spending time with her six nieces and nephews who are also attending BYU.

Thomas Paul: No more slipping through the cracks



Thomas Paul, an ExSL student from Massachusetts, has focused his School Leadership master's project on identifying struggling students through end-of-the-year Criterion Reference Test (CRT). He is piloting a program within his English department at Mt. Ridge Junior High that identifies students who scored a two on the English test. These students are close to the proficiency score of three, and the goal of the program is to help teachers identify who these students are and how they can help them achieve the proficient score.

"Those who score twos are usually the in-between kids that don't get a lot of attention, so we wanted to focus on them more specifically," Thomas said.

"What we're able to do is burrow down and figure out specifically what most students missed the previous year in the CRT and how we can bring them up to speed and prepare them for the next CRT."

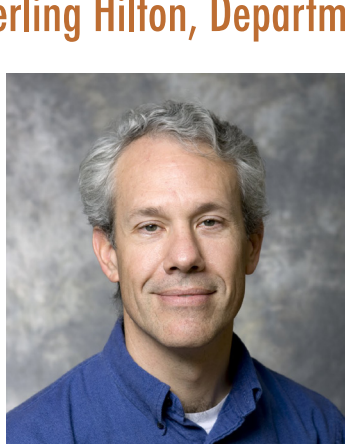
Thomas said they have used specific methods to help these students such as a co-teaching model where one teacher presents the lesson and the other simultaneously reaches out to struggling students to make sure they understand the concepts. Another method they use is having small group work where the teacher can travel through the classroom and make sure those who need extra help get it.

"We know that these methods are working. We're doing well, but it's still not enough," Thomas said. "There needs to be a systemic change that identifies the kids that are not growing and how we can help them. Hopefully we can find a different intervention that isn't just giving the kids extra help in class but is helping them through more specific methods such as tutoring and after-school labs."

Thomas lives in Utah with his wife and two children. He loves outdoor sports and traveling with his family.

Faculty Spotlight:

Sterling Hilton, Department chair



Sterling Hilton is the department chair of the Department of Educational Leadership and Foundations. Sterling earned his bachelor's degree in economics from BYU as well as two master's degrees: one in political science and one in statistics. Several years before earning a PhD in biostatistics from Johns Hopkins University, Sterling worked as a young intern at the US Consulate in Bilbao, Spain, preparing for a career in the Foreign Service. However, his plans changed when he realized his desires and goals laid elsewhere.

Sterling joined BYU as a statistics professor in 1996 and in 2003 joined the McKay School of Education. He taught and served on the doctoral committee until he became the department chair in 2009. In addition to his current role as the department chair, he teaches courses in data-driven decision making and quantitative methods.

"My primary scholarly focus is in the teaching and learning of statistics and mathematics. Current efforts in mathematics education focus on improving the capacity of elementary school teachers to teach for mathematical understanding," Sterling said. "The potential to impact the lives of students in a positive way is amazing. It is very rewarding to be able to take part in that."

Sterling has a deep love for teaching and cultivating excellent student-teacher interaction with his BYU students. "It's all about developing relationships of trust with students that allow for true learning to take place," he said.

"Without that trust it is difficult to help students work with and understand subject matter, especially in master's and doctoral programs."

Sterling enjoys spending time with his wife and four children. He is an avid runner and will rarely miss getting up early in the morning to jog or train for an occasional marathon.

Upcoming Events:

ExSL screening:

March 14

5:30 p.m.

Room 307 MCKB

Transition dinner:

March 6

4:40-6:30 p.m.

Legends Grille at BYU

Program website resources

Our website has been redesigned to have information and resources that will help you learn more about and go through the School Leadership Program. You will find resources such as:

- Student Handbook
- Track schedules
- Course schedules for each semester
- Registration form for the internship project

Placements

Kim Baker, Herriman Elementary

Alumni

If you have received a new position, moved or changed your contact information, we would love to know. We want to help you stay connected to the School Leadership Program.

Send any information updates to edlfsec@byu.edu.

Thanks!



DAVID O. MCKAY
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If you have a story to share in the School Leadership Newsletter, contact mckayprteam@byu.edu.