What inspired you to study educational change?

I worked in schools for a decade as a teacher, leader, and technology integrator before beginning my career as a scholar of educational leadership. Through these experiences, I witnessed schools failing to embrace new ways of structuring classrooms, curriculums, and staffing. When I arrived in my first education policy class, my professor offered frameworks and theories to help unpack why schools stagnate despite good intentions and excellent practitioners. As I further explored how culture, leadership, infrastructure, and policy work together to create a space in which change is possible (or not), I found myself re-examining my experiences in the classroom. I could better understand why it felt so challenging to make progress and nudge my colleagues in new directions. Now, I find myself framing the challenges of technology design and implementation in schools through the lens of educational change as it provides a path forward where schools are most stuck. For example, I am currently working on a project examining the decision-making processes of superintendents and district technology leaders in building 1:1 technology programs in their districts, and I am inspired by the ways these leaders think about change as multifaceted in the presence of technology.

What and/or who inspires you in the field? Why?

I feel extraordinarily grateful for my colleagues at the Neag School of Education at UConn. I am surrounded by supportive, brilliant scholars who consistently push me to grow my ideas. My professors and mentors, like Dr. Jennie Weiner, Dr. Sarah Woulfin, Dr. Chris Rhoads, and Dr. Morgaen Donaldson, are generous with their scholarship and allow me to learn from their groundbreaking work while encouraging me to build my own path. Similarly, I have been fortunate to find a community of scholars at UCEA who study technology leadership like Dr. Scott McLeod, Dr. Sara Dexter, Dr. Vincent Cho, Dr. Jayson Richardson, and Dr. Nick Sauers. These
thought-leaders have been so welcoming to me and supportive as I find my footing as a scholar. I highly admire their work and hope to continue to grow the field by exploring the organizational and institutional features that support and hinder future-oriented technology initiatives. In particular, Dr. McLeod’s work has greatly influenced my thinking on understanding technology through the larger lens of innovative, future-ready learning that reinvents how schools look and feel. He also inspires me to bridge the world of academia with that of practitioners by offering publicly accessible research through blogging and other social media platforms.

What do you believe to be the biggest challenge for educational change and what would be a first step to address this challenge?

The longstanding tradition of hierarchy in schools and specifically the norms associated with top down leadership, foster leadership structures that can prevent educational change (Harris, 2003; Spillane, 2005). Highly stratified leadership structures obfuscate decision-making processes and can prevent dissenting and diverse voices from participating. This can create leadership pipelines that exclude historically marginalized groups from becoming school leaders. There is also significant research (See Day & Harris, 2002; Harris, 2005; York-Barr & Duke, 2004) supporting the connections between shared decision making and positive outcomes for students and teachers. As school systems shift to more distributed forms of leadership that value the expertise and voices of all stakeholders, we may see movement in schools and their participation in change initiatives that shift fundamental features of teaching and learning. In my work, I explore these organizational features that make change regarding technology integration possible using underutilized lenses, like institutional theory (Lamb & Weiner, 2018b).

What are some new areas of inquiry and/or directions you think the field should be headed?

Within the corner of scholarship I inhabit, understanding technology initiatives in the context of educational change frameworks, organizational theory, and institutional theory offer new insights into why change is hard to accomplish, especially in the context of new tools like those offered through technology. My past work looking at the Los Angeles Unified School District’s 1:1 technology efforts in which we advocated for using institutional lenses in technology research (Lamb & Weiner, 2018a; 2018b) is helping me to build my future work. My dissertation will use the lens of institutional logics (Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012) to better understand and address the underlying beliefs about technology that teachers and administrators carry into their work that may impede or support educational change. I hope others will be inspired by this use of institutional theory and apply it to their questions as well.

Additionally, I think it is vital for me and my fellow scholars to use critical lenses (e.g., Crenshaw, 1990; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) to explore the intersection of race, gender, and educational technology.”
educational technology. Are our historically marginalized students getting access to the same kinds of experiences with technology as our more privileged students? As with most other educational opportunities, it seems clear they are not. We need to better explore this opportunity gap, deploy solutions, and partner with our colleagues using critical lenses to leverage all our best thinking.

References


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Alex Lamb is a third-year doctoral student at the University of Connecticut in the Learning, Leadership, and Policy Program in the department of Educational Leadership. She is a former humanities teacher and technology integrator. She is a Dean’s Doctoral Scholar and serves on the Dean’s doctoral committee to help support doctoral students at UConn. Alex is interested in the organizational and institutional features that impact educational technology programs in schools. Her research focuses on how schools, districts, and the larger educational field can create change-conducive conditions in technology rich environments, fostering the belief and behavior shifts necessary to create more effective, future-oriented, and equitable spaces. She has published on the 1:1 iPad program in the Los Angeles Unified School District, the need for institutional lenses in educational technology research, and fostering shared leadership in schools. Informing all of her work is her passion for uncovering and promoting ways school systems can better support women leaders and enact more equitable practices.