SCIENTIA POTENTIA EST is a famous Latin aphorism that roughly translates to ‘knowledge is power’. Although the phrase can be interpreted in numerous ways, it is generally understood to emphasise the importance of knowing things – that through learning, an individual’s potential has an increased chance of being realised. However, it can also be taken to mean something more profound. In this increasingly globalised world – where modern technological advancements are bringing people closer together – one’s thoughts, beliefs and actions potentially have ever further reaching consequences for many worldwide audiences. This crucial aspect of contemporary life accentuates the importance of knowledge and its primary source: education.

One only has to think of what are arguably the largest looming threats of the 21st Century – global warming and climate change – to understand the power that knowledge and education has for all of us. Educating citizens and future generations about the importance of environmental responsibility is key to ensuring the Earth remains habitable for future generations. There is also the profound impact of educating people in ethical values that lead to a productive, tolerant and peaceful global society, free from threats of alienation, war and destruction. Indeed, it is easy to make a case for the importance of education and difficult to overstate it.

A TROUBLED HISTORY
While the significant and numerous benefits of education are easy to understand and appreciate, the best methods of educating are not quite so straightforward. A crucial means of addressing this complexity has been the emergence of education research. This field of enquiry relates to a range of methods through which researchers evaluate varying aspects of education, including leadership, management, policy, teaching practices, training for educators and the best means of imparting knowledge.

But the history of educational research has not been without its problems. Indeed, many studies and publications refer to some of the issues central to the field. In 2000, educational historian Ellen Condliffe Lagemann published a book entitled An Elusive Science: The Troubling History of Education Research in which she traces a brief chronology of educational research, citing its lack of influence on policy and practice – two areas one would expect to be directly influenced by research findings.

KEEPING YOUR HEAD
In response to some of these challenges, Professor Jill Jameson is among those researchers, working in collaboration with other scientists, who have been conducting investigations and presenting their findings to policy makers, researchers, practitioners and those responsible for implementing changes to educational practice at various levels. Jameson works in the Faculty of Education and Health at the University of Greenwich, in a range of educational contexts, to enhance knowledge through empirical research and improved theoretical understanding.

Jameson’s work traverses several educational subfields to influence the ways in which educational institutions are managed, as well as improving what students can – and do – achieve. In addition to her role as Chair of the Centre for Leadership and Enterprise and former role of Director of Research and Enterprise, Jameson is Chair of the Society for Research into Higher Education, with specialist research areas in eLearning, leadership, professionalism and communities of practice in post-compulsory, further and higher education.
A KEY FOCUS of Jameson’s ongoing research is identifying specific problems associated with leadership in higher education and finding strategic solutions. Funding cuts, global competition, internal pressures and external policies have burdened many educational institutions, increasing the already considerable pressure placed on the leaders of these extremely complex environments. Jameson is acutely aware of the impact these pressures can have on decision making in situations such as these: “It is important for those in leadership positions not to overreact to fears about uncertainty in ways that are micromanagerial, destructive, punitive or unfair, or they risk losing the trust of staff and students,” she explains. “Leaders can be supported to understand why it is better to reflect and exercise self-controlled constraint in finding innovative, long-term solutions, rather than giving in to knee-jerk performative responses.”

OPERATING WITHIN UNCERTAINTY
In one paper, Jameson sets out methods of managing the uncertainties of future higher education. With specific reference to English higher education institutions, she identifies one particular quality she considers imperative to handling the complex challenges of leadership in uncertain times to develop and maintain higher levels of trust. Termed ‘negative capability’, this attribute is vital to combat the erosion of trust that has been generated by government policies, particularly the significant increase in tuition fees.

Negative capability was first coined by the Romantic poet John Keats. It broadly refers to resisting the idea that all knowledge fits into preconceived systems. In response to uncertainty, the concept proposes that there is always scope for increasing knowledge by reflecting on a situation, as opposed to acting in ways that have been predetermined through history or convention. Jameson’s allusion to this concept within the sphere of higher education is used to describe a type of leadership that is stoical and resilient, tolerating uncertainties and achieving results, despite difficult economic demands and multiple ongoing pressures. The ability to appreciate that short-term, ill-fitting ‘quick-fix’ solutions might lead unexpectedly to negative consequences, causing serious, long-term problems is essential in resisting the compulsion to impose changes that could prove unnecessarily destructive. Jameson has carried out a variety of research to enable improved understanding of how and why stoical tolerance of uncertainty, and the long-term fostering of trust and values-based leadership, are important in difficult management situations.

Her findings and recommendations have enabled leaders of institutions and teams to function more effectively than might ordinarily be possible in environments where trust is low and poor approaches de-incentivise staff. “We can provide evidence of the ways in which leaders can improve levels of trust in their institutions, which isn’t easy – you can’t just go to the supermarket and buy a packet of trust,” says Jameson. “But it is possible to develop enablers of trust in educational institutions. The key concepts for leaders here are openness, integrity, benevolence, competence, humility, reliability and procedural fairness. My work recommends better communication systems, open decision making, fair appointment procedures and shared ethical value systems.”
Jameson’s work traverses several educational subfields to influence the ways in which educational institutions are managed, as well as improving what students can – and do – achieve.

ANOTHER KEY ASPECT of Jameson’s field of inquiry is understanding and charting the progression of students and apprentices from further to higher education. Potential and progression can be said to operate on a ‘sliding scale’, where each individual can realise their own capabilities at differing times for various reasons. In wanting to ascertain the ways in which further education colleges in England contribute to the long-term achievements of students in higher education, Jameson led a research project that further developed the groundbreaking work of her colleagues Hugh Joslin, Sharon Smith and Rachel Thompson.

The Higher Vocational Education and Pedagogy (HIVE-PED) team, linked to the ESRC HIVE-PED Research Seminar Series, conducted research that demonstrated how further education colleges in England provided an essential route to higher education for students who, for various reasons, were unable to fulfil their potential while in compulsory education. During this five-year study, funded by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, the team tracked the progress of more than 1.8 million students over some years and found that 48 per cent of them went on to higher education. Notably, 41 per cent were classified as educationally disadvantaged, demonstrating the importance of providing people with a ‘second chance’ to gain further education. Alongside this, the team looked at the progression of apprentices in England and found that nearly 20 per cent of advanced-level apprentices went on to higher education. Interestingly, many of these progressed several years after completing their apprenticeships, showing the benefits of leaving a route to higher education open and easily accessible.

DEFYING THE IMPOSSIBLE

One final aspect of the investigation, jointly funded by Linking London, London Councils, Kings College London and the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, focused on further education in the capital. The team showed that 77 per cent of the tracked students were from disadvantaged areas and 61 per cent were from black and minority ethnic groups. Notably, 55 per cent, when tracked over 5 years, of the students went on to higher education, which is a higher rate than the national average.

The originality of Jameson and her team’s research lies in their achieving what was previously thought impossible: matching individual student records across the further education-higher education sectors. The team developed an original, complex ‘fuzzy matching’ system that was able to match Individual Learner Record data from further education with Higher Education Funding Council for England student records to trace individual student progression. This culminated in the matching and subsequent tracking of millions of learner progression records.

Ultimately, Jameson and her collaborators have provided the public with access to a reliable dataset that directly shows the crucial contribution that further education colleges in England make to long-term student achievement in higher education.
eLearning and eLeadership

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES HAVE developed over the past couple of decades to the extent that they are now a fundamental part of human experience. Indeed, engagement with digital technology has now reached the point where there are more smartphones on Earth than there are people. Such developments have enabled an increase in ‘connectedness’ around the world, bringing people closer together and facilitating instantaneous communication. However, there still remains a lack of knowledgeable leadership and management at senior levels in making effective use of educational technologies across education.

Somewhat ironically, it is the students who find themselves in a position where they are often more informed than their teachers about innovative and challenging uses of digital technologies, not least because in many cases they form part of a generation that has never known anything different. However, there is significant scope to employ digital technological advancements within the field of education, through initiatives in eLeadership and eLearning. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s Programme for International Student Assessment (OECD PISA), recently assessed digital skills within education and found that, despite significant investment in digital technologies, many students who use computers excessively and unwisely perform poorly. In addition, the OECD study found that there was a distinct lack of effective implementation of digital technologies to facilitate deep learning. Improvements in eLeadership in education are therefore vital.

LEARNING WITH EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

Jameson is heavily involved in communicating with stakeholders about emerging technologies and the benefits they can provide to students, educators and leaders in education. Indeed, one of her roles is Co-Founder and Co-Chair of the Emerging Technologies and Authentic Learning in Higher Vocational Education (ETinEd) Conference in Cape Town, South Africa, which took place earlier in 2015 at the Educational Technology Inquiry Lab. One key aspect of the conference was promoting the use of emerging technologies for pedagogical use as a means of transforming teaching and learning processes.

Jameson acknowledges that, in terms of employing digital technologies effectively, education is an area that needs to catch up with other sectors: “Education is out of step with technology; eLearning has, as yet, insufficiently changed the way in which we view and experience education. More student-centred, collaborative, innovative digital methods of educating need to be embraced” she asserts. “Students need to be engaged in well-designed teaching environments that explore the possibility of technology to enable richer and deeper learning opportunities.”

In light of the potential that digital technologies hold for effective educational practice, the British Journal of Educational Technology produced a special issue focusing on eLeadership, in which Jameson was Editor and a contributor of an article on eLeadership in higher education. In this, she argues that a new fifth ‘age’ of educational technology research is upon us. Through more research, development and training, educational leaders can make effective use of current and future technological advancements that will lead to better management and improved education practice.

EMPOWERING EDUCATION

As is evident from her numerous pursuits and involvement with powerful educational research tools, Jameson is keenly dedicated to uncovering more about the best methods of empowering leaders to manage policy and practice. The findings from her research – both now and in the future – seek to encourage an appreciation for effective education. Ultimately, Jameson and her team’s work will benefit institutions, the leaders and employers of those institutions, and those who attend. As the knowledge garnered is communicated throughout an increasingly globalised world, the inhabitants of learning environments will grow through positive evolution. Such is the power of knowledge.

ENABLING TRUST AND FOSTERING ELEARNING AND VALUE-BASED COLLEGIATE LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION

OBJECTIVES

• To build trust and shared knowledge of values-based leadership in communities of practice
• To use emerging technologies for sharing authentic learning opportunities
• To find improved eLeadership solutions

KEY COLLABORATORS

Hugh Joslin; Professor Ian McNay, University of Greenwich, UK • Sharon Smith, Canterbury Christ Church University, UK • Professor Dick N’gambi, University of Cape Town, South Africa • Professor Vivienne Bozalek, University of the Western Cape, South Africa • Professor Ann-Marie Bathmaker, University of Birmingham, UK • Professor Kevin Orr, University of Huddersfield, UK • Professor Paul Gibbs, Middlesex University, UK • Nick Rushby, Chief Editor, British Journal of Educational Technology

PARTNERS

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JILL JAMESON has two Master’s degrees from the University of Cambridge and Goldsmith’s College, respectively, as well as a further MA and PhD in Computers in Education from King’s College London, UK. She is Principal Investigator for the 2013-16 ESRC Research Seminars Project on Higher Vocational Education and Pedagogy in England. She leads a group of professors and expert academics/practitioners and policy makers from around the world.