

The Encyclopedia of Female Pioneers in Online Learning, 2023

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[See table of contents](#)

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The Encyclopedia of Female Pioneers in Online Learning, 2023. By Susan Bainbridge and Norine Wark. Routledge. 492 pages. ISBN 978-1-003-27532-9 (ebk)

Reviewed by: Dr. Diane P. Janes, Thompson Rivers University

Introduction

The Encyclopedia of Female Pioneers in Online Learning by Drs. Susan Bainbridge and Norine Wark is an overview of the work and experiences of 30 women - early adopters of online and distance education in their countries (although even they struggle with what to call their focus of study and practice, as discussed in Chapter 32). Building on the use of "...career profiles, original interviews, and research analysis..." (p. 1), the book is a testament to the space that women in this field, have occupied and continue to occupy in the modern-day world of technology enhanced global education. The book is divided into two parts.

Part One

When I was first approached to write a review of this book, I was struck by how many of the women noted in its pages, that I had either met or read about (as early authors in a field that I called my own) and then by how many I had not encountered in my 25+ year career in online and distance learning.

The process for adding a woman to this work was detailed and systematic. In Chapter 1, Initial Thoughts, the authors describe how they began the conversation which ultimately became this book; the work on women in this field in any part of the world was scant at best, and nonexistent at worst. Their original thinking of a wide exploration of females in distance education was soon seen as somewhat hopeless, and they quickly were moved to see that "...the authors needed to focus on female pioneers of online learning [as] This was the era...where the greatest number of female pioneers were still alive and able to tell their stories in their own words" (p. 4).

To arrive at the 30, they started a list of possible women; they created guiding terms and definitions that they felt were in line with being a pioneer and they combined these terms and

definitions with the idea that the “...potential candidate[s] had to have initiated their founding activities somewhere between 1970 and 2000” (p. 5) with the year 1980 as the date where they began to work in the field (p. 396). If they included someone who began their work after the year 2000 it was with the understanding that online learning was new to their country or was “...novel in some respect” (p. 5). After starting with their initial list of potential interviewees, the authors asked those early interviewees to offer up the names of women they saw as pioneers, and so the list grew, and then was again narrowed down to 30 for this work. They were limited to the English language as the main communication medium, and to those pioneers who were well enough to agree to participate.

In total, Bainbridge and Wark interviewed women from the countries of Argentina, Australia, Canada, China, Germany, India, Indonesia, Israel, Korea, Marshall Islands, Namibia, New Zealand, South Africa, Sri Lanka, USA, and West Indies, with several of the interviewees having significant work and practice connections in multiple countries during their careers.

Each subsequent Chapter, 2-31, contains a full list in alphabetical order by last name of the women interviewed as well as the interview itself, a transcript analysis summary and the transcript of the interview, in addition to the interview questions and a detailed publication summary for each woman. Using the QR code provided, readers can access the actual interview recording located on YouTube. The content and structure for each interview is detailed and follows the same pattern for each interview.

Part Two

Initially, when I began the review of this book, I was unsure of the necessity for this second part. As someone with a background in history and a strong bias toward narratives and stories, I was wanting to hear the raw experiences of the women and wondered to what end the final section (Chapters 32-33) could add to this already rich trove of anecdotes. As a researcher, however, I also wanted to know more about how this work was accomplished. And these two final chapters satisfied that side of my inquiry.

In the first part of Chapter 32, the authors detail the methodology used, the research questions they posed, and the depth used to select the interviewees, and coding used in their thematic analysis. Themes ranged from background, benefits of distance learning and learning environment to challenges, accomplishments, interesting memories, and so on (p. 399). Each theme, once identified by the authors, was then explored in more depth further in the Chapter.

The final chapter, Final Thoughts, is thought provoking and worth follow up and analysis in its own right. They explore the Matilda effect (coined by Rossiter in 1993), which was described (and quoted in this work) as “[T]he more [a] women worked the more the men around her profited and [the] less credit she got” ([Rossiter, 1993,] pp. 336-337)” (Bainbridge & Wark, 2023, p. 333). They go on to cite examples found within their own work on this volume that are suggestive of the Matilda effect in play. This phenomenon is worth a fuller examination. This

final chapter is, I feel, a call for other researchers to start to examine some of the issues discussed in Chapter 33 as it pertains to the work of women in online learning around the world.

Conclusion

Overall, this work is a rich and rewarding read. The depth, breath, and individual experiences of each of these pioneers is on display for all to see. They are a collection of the wealth of past knowledge and history; and for future generations of women in online learning, they are a pathway to the future. The issues that surround these pioneers and how their work was disseminated is also worth exploring.

This book, however, has only scratched the surface, and I hope that if Bainbridge and Wark have not already begun the work to add to this list of pioneers (the authors hint, on p. 488, that they have currently 47 further possible interviewees so that a second volume is possible), then hopefully someone has reached out to them to continue this work.

Even in the time between the interviews and the publication of this work, two pioneers have left us – the work is dedicated to them – Chere Campbell Gibson (1945-2020) and Chandra Gunawardena (1940-2021).

There are many more voices to be heard from women in this field, and time waits for no one.

I look forward to continuing to hear these voices!

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