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The Encyclopedia of Female Pioneers in Online Learning, authored by Susan Bainbridge and Norine Wark (Routledge, 2022)

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Book Review: The Encyclopedia of Female Pioneers in Online Learning

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Encyclopedias are good reference tools that provide concise information that may or may not be available in other information sources. One feature of encyclopedias is that they are comprehensive. An encyclopedia consists of a particular category of knowledge or covers all branches of knowledge. One example is the *Encyclopedia of Distance Learning* (Rogers et al., 2009), which covers concepts, trends, issues, and technologies in the field of distance learning with over 100 research articles. Another example is *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Online Education* (Danver, 2016), which has around 350 entries and provides theoretical dimensions of technological aspects of implementing online courses.

The Encyclopedia of Female Pioneers in Online Learning by Susan Bainbridge and Norine Wark is a specialized encyclopedia that provides detailed works, accomplishments, and challenges faced by 30 female pioneers who have contributed to online courses, populated the use of learning management systems in their respective organizations, and overcome barriers to achieve success. These women pioneers have redefined the ways online education is applied and learned from. Results show that these pathfinders are focused on and involved in technology innovations, as well as having different approaches than men in various fields.

The Encyclopedia of Female Pioneers in Online Learning is presented in two parts. Part One includes the chapter titled "Initial Thoughts," which provides the introduction and background to the book, explaining its aim, scope, and structure. According to the authors, "The primary aim of this book is to introduce female pioneers in online learning to researchers, historians, writers, students, and other stakeholders of DE [distance education] and online learning" (p. 4). It covers 30 interviews of women pioneers who tell their own stories and experiences in the field. This approach provides a personal perspective of the women leaders and honors their achievements.

The interviews cover the following 13 questions:

- What was your educational and experiential background before you became involved in online distance learning?

- In what year did you begin to look specifically into online distance learning (ODL)?

- What were the circumstances in your world that initiated this interest in ODL?

- Which female researchers or female colleagues piqued your interest in ODL?

- Who would you identify as the early female leaders/founders in the field of ODL?

- What are some of the goals that you strove to achieve in the field of ODL?

- What are some of your accomplishments in the field of ODL that you would like to share?

- What are some of the challenges that you faced in the field of ODL over the years?

- What was the state of DE when you first entered the field as opposed to ODL in 2019?

- What interesting memories would you like to share about the beginning of ODL?

- What were your specific ODL research interests, and have they changed/evolved over the years?

- Could you please describe the learning environment that you currently work in or have recently worked in?

- Can you suggest names of other female pioneers in distance education or ODL that you think we should include in the book? (p.451)

Each interview provides the academic profile of the female pioneer, a picture of the leader, awards received, a list of publications, and a transcript analysis summary. A link to the recorded interview along with a QR code is also included.

Part Two of the encyclopedia presents the analysis of the 30 interviews (Worlds Who's Who) and a chapter entitled "Final Thoughts." The first section of Part Two is presented in the form of a research report, which includes the research methodology, results, discussion, and conclusion from the 30 interviews. Based on the interviews with the female pioneers, a few salient findings are synthesized as follows:

1. Implementation of the new initiatives was the most popular response from pioneers.

2. Important accomplishments reported were:

   - Introduction of new programmes and/or courses

   - Networking

   - New policies

   - New funding structures

   - Setting up new centres and institutions

- Literary contributions

- Distance education advocacy initiatives

3. Another accomplishment reported was the research conducted in open and distance learning. The research interest was in the following areas:

- Instructional design

- Distance education learning environments

- Open distance learning theory

- Quality assurance

- Institutional development

4. On benefits of distance education, the pioneers reported the following benefits:

- Social justice

- Information and communication technologies

- Continuing education

- Community development and flexibility

- Job opportunities

- Asynchronous learning

While analyzing the interview transcripts, the authors also reflect on themes emerging from the data and their interpretation. While the qualitative nature of the study and its execution are comprehensive and systematic, the authors also highlight the limitations of the study, which come from heavy dependence on English-speaking pioneers and resources available to the researchers. The authors mention that they used "a snowball strategy … in this study to gather information as other search strategies yield sparse results" (p. 448). The authors suggest that other researchers could employ this strategy to collect meaningful information.

The last chapter of the book covers pertinent and other interesting findings derived from the data. The authors point out the key implications of the study for policymakers, administrators, and others in the business of ODL and online learning. The profound finding is that women have not been adequately represented in the literature. Data provided a partial explanation of the reasons for underrepresentation. However, conclusions elaborate on team accomplishments by women. One of the possible reasons for underrepresentation alluded to in the discussion, though not critically examined, is less self-citation in research published by women scholars. Another finding is that changing people's mindsets can be daunting,

especially in the context of technology adoption in the future. Based on the interviews, the authors also allude to the possibility of the "Matilda effect" (i.e., more work by women leads to more profit and recognition of men) in distance and online learning. While more work may be needed in these areas, the book highlights some areas of future research. Women pioneers used different terms and definitions of DE, and the authors accepted the definitions.

Six questions arose from this study for future research:

1. Can the hypothesis of the Matilda effect be validated?

2. Is a patriarchal approach by female pioneers recognized more in the academic community?

3. Are female pioneers who emulated self-confidence and pro-social attributes more likely to achieve high status?

4. Are male pioneers more likely than female pioneers in the field to cite themselves in publications?

5. Why can only a few female pioneers who held leadership positions in the field be identified?

6. Would the same study conducted with male pioneers yield the similar results? (p. 488)

The objective of this encyclopedia is to capture the voices and contributions of female pioneers in online learning. It is a specialized encyclopedia that provides detailed and technical information on experiences of pioneers of online learning. The authors interviewed the female pioneers of DE about their innovations in online education, culminating in a wealth of information, experience, and practical strategies for all practitioners and leaders.

The encyclopedia is unique in many respects. Challenging the Matilda effect in the usually known men's world of ODL, the book documents significant contributions by 30 pioneering women scholars who made the ODL and online learning world richer and better. The choice of methodology is another novel feature. While the interviews took the form of case studies, the methodology deviated from the known critical, natural, and appreciative inquiry models. By coding information, the authors have tried to restrict the influence of their personal perceptions and worldviews in assessing the contributions of the selected women pioneers.

In short, this volume will not only interest researchers, students, and teachers, but it will also provide policymakers and EdTech companies leading in online education a comprehensive view of online learning as perceived by 30 female scholars from six continents, and it will catch everyone's attention. The world will wait for another volume containing information about more pioneers that will answer the research questions raised by the authors in this volume.

The Encyclopedia of Female Pioneers in Online Learning should find a place in all reputed libraries for the novelty of the subject and methodology and its rich content. Readers will find the individual stories as inspiration to change the world of distance and online learning for the better.

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