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Prof. Dr. Emine Demiray, Anadolu University, Turkey
Postal address: Anadolu University, Open Education Faculty
Yunusemre Campus 26470 Eskisehir-TURKEY
Tel: +90 (222) 335 05 80 ext.5829
Fax: +90 (222) 320 45 20
E-mails: intwojde@gmail.com or edemiray@anadolu.edu.tr

Executive Editor

Ufuk Tanyeri, Ankara University, Turkey, ufuktanyeri@ankara.edu.tr

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Contact Addresses of the int.WOJDE

Owner of the int.WOJDE

Prof. Dr. Emine DEMIRAY

Postal Address:

Anadolu University, Open Education Faculty, Yunusemre Campus 26470 Eskisehir-TURKEY

Phone: +90 222 335 0581 ext. 5829, Fax: +90 (222) 320 45 20

E-mails: intwojde@gmail.com or edemiray@anadolu.edu.tr

Executive Editor

Lecturer Dr. Ufuk TANYERI

Postal Address:

Ankara University, 06920 Nallihan, Ankara TURKEY

Email: ufuktanyeri@ankara.edu.tr



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From the Editor

Dear readers of intWOJDE

We present our Volume: 12, Number: 2 issue to our valuable readers.

In this issue, there are seven articles and one book review. We thank our authors for their valuable contributions to our journal.

The first article prepared by Hilary SCHMIDT and Debbie LACARTE and entitled "A Lifelong Passion for Distance Learning: Norine Wark". This biographical paper explores Dr. Wark's life and career, with a focus on her relationship to distance learning and her contributions to the field. Dr. Norine Wark is an award-winning scholar, educator, researcher, and writer in the field of open, digital, and distance education. Dr. Norine Wark is the co-author of the Encyclopedia of Women Pioneers in Learning.

The second article entitled is "A Profile of Susan Bainbridge: Finding Your Voice" written by Dr. Katherine LEBLANC. This biographical paper explores Dr. Susan Bainbridge's life and career, with a focus on her relationship to distance learning and her contributions to the field. Dr. Susan Bainbridge is many things to many people. She is a mother, an educator, a philanthropist, a writer, a humanitarian, a feminist, an activist, and a mentor. Dr. Susan Bainbridge is the co-author of the Encyclopedia of Women Pioneers in Learning.

The third article prepared by Dr. Elnour Mubarak M.A.Omar and entitled "Female Disabled Learners in Asynchronous Learning Environment During The Covid-19 Pandemi: A Qualitative Study Of Females Experiences ". The main purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of female disabled learners in asynchronous learning environment in Open University of Sudan (OUS) during the COVID-19 Pandemic time.

The fourth article entitled is "Whole School Improvement Programme (WSIP): A Female Headteacher, Serving in Public School Perspectives" written by Sultan ALAM. The research focuses on delving into the experiences of a female headteacher in a public school who participated in a WSIP initiative and effectively implemented its teachings in her educational institution.

The fifth article prepared by Dr. Norine WARK and entitled "An Interview with the Indomitable Lisa Marie Blaschke: Champion Of Heutagogy (Self-Determined Learning)". During this interview, Blaschke describes his educational and experiential background, as well as his interests, goals, achievements, challenges, and research on distance learning.

The sixth article entitled is "The Only Woman in The Room: How Era, Culture, and Social Norms Influenced Two Very Different Women, Hedy Lamarr And Caroline Seelig" written by Glenda HOLLETT and Dr. Susan BAINBRIDGE. In this article Hedy Lamarr and Dr. Caroline Seelig's life and contributions to education are described.

The seventh article prepared by Dr. Sukmaya LAMA and Dr. Juri HAZARİKA and entitled "Yoga as a Career Choice for Women- A KKHSOU Study". The paper explores the prospects and challenges that Yoga offers as a career choice for women through the narratives of the learners.

In the book review section there is a study titled "Encyclopedia of Women Pioneers in Online Learning" written by S. Bainbridge and N. Wark and published in 2023. Book review by Ed.D. Peggy Lynn MacIsaac.



We would be very happy to publish your studies on women and distance education in our journal. We hope to stay in touch and wish to meet in our next Issue, on April 2024.

Cordially

Prof. Dr. Emine DEMIRAY
Editor in Chief

A LIFELONG PASSION FOR DISTANCE LEARNING: NORINE WARK

Hilary SCHMIDT
hschmidt1@athabasca.edu
Athabasca University, Canada

Debbie LACARTE
dlacarte@shaw.ca
Retired Educator and novelist, Canada

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ABSTRACT

Dr. Norine Wark is an award-winning scholar, educator, researcher, and writer in the field of open, digital, and distance education. Coauthor (with Dr. Susan Bainbridge) of the groundbreaking *Encyclopedia of Female Pioneers in Online Learning*, as well as numerous other academic publications, she is a recipient of the prestigious Governor General of Canada Gold Medal Award for Academic Excellence (the highest award for a graduate student in Canada).

Distance learning is more than an academic focus for Dr. Wark: it is a lifelong passion and an integral part of her life since the earliest days of her childhood. As a learner, teacher, researcher, mentor, and scholar, Dr. Wark's commitment to excellence in open, digital, and distance education is unparalleled.

This biographical paper explores Dr. Wark's life and career, with a focus on her relationship to distance learning and her contributions to the field. It briefly reviews her early and later childhood, the foundations of her teaching career, and explores her graduate and postgraduate work in the field of open, digital, and distance education.

Keywords: Women researchers, distance education, educational technology, online learning, digital education, ODDE, Norine Wark

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Norine Wark is a multiple award-winning scholar, educator, researcher, and writer. Coauthor (with Dr. Susan Bainbridge) of the groundbreaking *Encyclopedia of Female Pioneers in Online Learning*, as well as author and coauthor of numerous other academic publications, she is a recipient of the prestigious Governor General of Canada Gold Medal Award for Academic Excellence (the highest award for a graduate student in Canada).

Norine's¹ research focuses on historic and emerging theory and practice in distance learning, as well as the technologies that enable such learning. Distance learning is more than an academic focus for Norine: it has been an integral part of her life since her early childhood.

¹ Dr. Wark is referred to by her first name, Norine, throughout this article. The authors wish to acknowledge that female academics are less likely to be referred to by their title and surname than their male counterparts, a phenomenon known as "untitling" that has been attributed to sexism, misogyny, and a persistent undervaluation of women's expertise (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2021; Ro, 2021; Shurchkov, 2021). Nonetheless, Dr. Wark has expressed a preference for her first name to be used within this biographical article.

This paper explores Norine's life and career, with a focus on her relationship to distance learning and her contributions to the field.

EARLY CHILDHOOD: INTRODUCTION TO DISTANCE LEARNING

Norine's earliest encounter with formal education began at her kitchen table, lit by a kerosene lamp, when she opened a manila envelope that contained her very first distance learning package (Athabasca University [AU], 2019b). Norine and her family lived in an isolated line shack in the northern Rocky Mountains in a remote part of British Columbia—so remote that the manila envelope arrived from a post office box more than 300 kilometers away, over rivers that could only be crossed when the water was either low enough or frozen (AU, 2019c). With no school for hundreds of kilometers, she and her siblings studied at a distance with the support of the province's centralized Correspondence Education Branch and under the guidance of their mother (N. Wark, personal communication, August 22, 2023; Winkelmanns et al., 2010). The distance learning curriculum enabled Norine to discover the wonders of the wider world, far beyond her wilderness home (AU, 2019b).

Despite her family's remote location, Norine recalls an early childhood filled with numerous opportunities to learn, and her natural curiosity led her to eagerly engage. "For me, it's always been new learning," she says. "I like something until I master it." Once she learned to read at the age of four, she fell in love with the magic of books, an endless source of new discoveries. Learning about survival in the remote north was also a necessity, including everything from how to keep warm and clean with no electricity or running water to how to survive a trip to the outdoor privy in -50°C temperatures. Norine learned how to garden, fish, hunt, butcher, harvest wild plants and berries, cook, bake, preserve, and can, as well as how to chop the wood used for cooking and heating (N. Wark, personal communication, August 22, 2023).

Norine's father, a truck driver, was away from home for up to three months at a time, but when he arrived, he would bring the precious manila envelopes from the post office box with him. Time to read and to learn was a luxury in an environment where subsistence and survival consumed the vast majority of time (N. Wark, personal communication, August 22, 2023). Still, Norine completed her Grade 1 curriculum in only six months and delighted in the control she had over her own education (AU, 2019b).

Shortly after completing her Grade 1 curriculum, Norine's life changed radically. The family home was located within the 350,000 forest acres that comprised the flood zone for a new hydroelectric dam (Loo, 2007). With the project a year ahead of schedule, residents were notified by mail that the flooding would go ahead; Norine's family received the notification almost too late. Abandoning their home and garden, they packed all their belongings onto two flatbed trailers and fled to safety (N. Wark, personal communication, August 22, 2023).

LATER CHILDHOOD: ADJUSTING TO IN-PERSON SCHOOLING

Norine's family resettled on farmland in a rural area on the Alberta prairies, an environment entirely foreign to Norine. Although she was now able to attend school in person, she found it difficult to adjust to the regimented structure of public school in Alberta after the freedom of learning at home. For Norine, the tangle of rules and schedules created an atmosphere of rigid inflexibility rather than enhancing her natural curiosity and excitement in learning. This experience reinforced Norine's conviction that all learners at all levels need to find their own "north star," or motivation and goals for learning (N. Wark, personal communication, August 22, 2023).

Norine's family eventually returned to northern British Columbia to settle in the small community of Moberly Lake. Public schooling in Chetwynd, the closest village, contrasted sharply with the rigid system in Alberta. Students behaved disrespectfully and teachers

struggled to manage the classroom. Bullying and fighting were rampant in classes, hallways, and bathrooms, and on the school grounds (N. Wark, personal communication, August 22, 2023).

Despite the challenging environment, Norine excelled academically. Although Chetwynd's tiny high school did not offer all of the academic prerequisites for university entrance, Norine gratefully reconnected with the province's Correspondence Education Branch and graduated with all of the required prerequisites for university entrance, along with numerous awards for academic excellence—including a university scholarship award for an essay and oral presentation about two proposed hydroelectric dams. She also received trophies and prizes for sewing and art, twin passions that continued throughout her adult life (N. Wark, personal communication, August 22, 2023).

EARLY ADULthood: MARRIAGE AND UNIVERSITY

Following her family's wishes and the common practice in northern British Columbia at the time, Norine married early, at the age of 19. Two years later, in 1981, her first child came: a son, Adam. A daughter, Carlyn, was born in 1985 (N. Wark, personal communication, August 22, 2023).

As a young wife and mother, Norine ran two part-time businesses: she offered accounting services to local businesses and individuals, and she ran a clothing design and sewing business. The design business blossomed: within a few years, she had a downtown storefront and employed two seamstresses. Her reach extended far beyond Chetwynd: she travelled and showed her designs at national and international fashion shows, and even met up-and-coming designer Vera Wang, who is now one of the world's most prominent fashion designers, particularly known for her formal gowns and wedding dresses (N. Wark, personal communication, August 22, 2023).

Despite these successes, Norine's marriage was unhappy and came to an end shortly after Carlyn's birth. A second daughter, Andrea, was born in 1987 after the marriage had ended. With three young children under the age of 5 and a business that—while thriving—was not profitable enough to support her family, Norine returned to university to become a teacher (N. Wark, personal communication, August 22, 2023).

Pursuing teacher education as a young single mother living in northern British Columbia in the 1980s was not an easy task. A small college located 100 kilometers away offered a program in partnership with Simon Fraser University (SFU); for two and a half years, Norine made the 100-kilometer drive every weekday to attend classes. She also attended a summer session at SFU's main campus, over 1000 kilometers away in Burnaby, British Columbia. Instrumental to the completion of Norine's training, however, was extensive distance education: through print, audiovisual, television, and teleconferencing technologies, Norine completed course after course. The experience was exceptional:

Distance education packages were well-designed, content-rich and, for the most part, enabled self-pacing. There was time to investigate, to reflect, to imagine, and to explore outside the box. I had to work much harder in the distance courses. I believe that learning at a distance molded me into an insatiable, self-determined learner. (AU, 2019c)

Norine survived economically with a combination of student loans, her part-time income as a designer/seamstress/tailor, and scholarship funds. Her high GPA meant her tuition fees were waived, which helped tremendously (N. Wark, personal communication, August 22, 2023).

After completing her teaching diploma in 1991, Norine was awarded a Bachelor of Education degree in 1997, with minors in environmental studies, criminology, and psychology. Throughout this early stage of her academic career, she achieved academic excellence, earning numerous awards and scholarships from Northern Lights College and SFU, including the coveted SFU Dean's Award for Academic Excellence (Wark, 2023a).

TEACHING CAREER

In 1991, Norine embarked on her teaching career at Windrem Elementary School in Chetwynd, which she had attended as a child. She later transferred to Crescent Park Elementary School in Dawson Creek, British Columbia, and then moved to Central Middle School, also in Dawson Creek (N. Wark, personal communication, August 22, 2023).

During the early years of her teaching career, British Columbia's Ministry of Education introduced a new curriculum, shifting from the traditional teacher-centred paradigm to a learner-centered curriculum and assessment approach. During this shift, Norine saw firsthand how students' learning and motivation improved as they took greater control over their own learning. "When children took control of their learning, they just blossomed," she says. As a teacher, she strived to connect learning inside and outside of the classroom, providing opportunities for her students to participate in environmental awareness and stewardship activities, as well as in community service. She embraced project-based learning, initiating collaboration with other teachers to plan, design, and implement cross-curricular projects. For example, she collaborated with three other teachers to plan a year-long integrated, thematic unit on BC history, incorporating literature, math, history, and geography, culminating in weeklong trip for 117 children to Barkerville, a Canadian National Historic Site (Barkerville Historic Town & Park, n.d.; N. Wark, personal communication, August 22, 2023).

She rose to the rank of master teacher within the district, and was the founding member of local numeracy and literacy committees, as well as an active member of her district's science and environmental education committees (Wark, 2023a). Among other services, these committees helped revise the existing British Columbia Ministry of Education curriculum. Soon Norine was traveling around the province and advising the Ministry on student portfolios, group learning, and other educational strategies. During her travels, she also began to realize just how disconnected teachers were from each other, not only in their own schools and districts, but between districts (N. Wark, personal communication, August 22, 2023).

Moving from the classroom in 1998, Norine became a learning assistance teacher for students two or more years above or below grade level, with diverse physical, emotional, social, cognitive and/or behavioral needs and abilities (Wark, 2023a). In this role, she created several web-based courses for learners who were unable to attend face-to-face classes. As she worked to create these courses, Norine decided to pursue additional formal education to develop her distance education, research, and writing skills. She believed that this would help improve student learning, as well as teacher-teacher, teacher-administrator, and teacher-Ministry communication, interaction, and understanding (AU, 2019c; N. Wark, personal communication, August 22, 2023).

GRADUATE EDUCATION

After careful research into the options, Norine embarked on a Master of Distance Education degree, which she earned studying at a distance through Athabasca University. She continued to teach in the public education system and raise her family as she completed her graduate work; she was awarded the degree in 2003. The educational experience through Athabasca University was so positive that Norine chose to pursue her Doctor of

Education in Distance Education through the same university (N. Wark, personal communication, August 22, 2023).

Norine's doctoral studies stemmed from her desire to support learners in regaining their natural curiosity and drive to learn, as well as enabling them to become "masters and directors" of their own learning (AU, 2019b). Her dissertation was a pioneering study that employed a novel mixed-methods methodology. *Shifting Paradigms: A Critical Pragmatic Evaluation of Key Factors Affecting Learner Empowered Emergent Technology Integration* (Wark, 2018) provided an in-depth look at online graduate learners' use of 16 emergent technologies. Using a critical pragmatic lens, she designed a paradigm shift framework, paradigm shift model, and an emergent technology taxonomy, adaptable to any learning context or environment, to facilitate teaching and learning in a rapidly changing world (Wark, 2018).

She has since published extensively on this topic, including a book chapter and international journal articles, as well as delivering international conference presentations (see Appendix for complete list of publications). A forthcoming book expands upon and extends her dissertation (Wark, 2023b). One of her papers was a Best Paper Award finalist at the International Council on Distance Education (ICDE) World Conference on Online Learning (Wark, 2023a).

During her doctoral journey, Norine not only pursued her own research but also collaborated with academics around the world on 14 major research projects, resulting in numerous other international peer-reviewed presentations and publications (see Appendix). Together with Dr. Mohamed Ally, Chair of her dissertation committee, Norine published extensively in the areas of mobile learning, augmented reality, and artificial intelligence (e.g., Ally & Wark, 2016a, 2016b, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2018). One coauthored publication received the Best Paper award at the 17th World Conference on Mobile and Contextual Learning, while another was awarded 8th place at the European Distance Education Network Research Workshop in Leuven, Belgium (Wark, 2023a).

Norine completed her Doctor of Education degree in 2018 and was honored with the Governor General of Canada Gold Medal Award for Academic Excellence at Convocation 2019 (AU, 2019c). In addition, she received AU's Doctor of Education Convocation Scholarship (AU, 2019a). As the university's top graduating student, Norine was invited to address the convocation assembly. Her inspiring speech highlighted her passion and commitment for distance education and, in a characteristic fashion, encouraged Athabasca University's graduates to go out and change the world (AU, 2019c).

Norine's now-adult children (Adam, Andrea, and Carlyn) and her second husband (Jack) were present at her convocation. They are pictured below, with Norine and Dr. Mohamed Ally.



2019 Athabasca University Convocation. From left to right: Adam, Andrea, Carlyn, Dr. Mohamed Ally, Norine, and Jack

POSTDOCTORAL CAREER

Norine has continued to pursue numerous innovative projects since completion of her doctoral degree.

In collaboration with Dr. Susan Bainbridge, she researched and wrote *The Encyclopedia of Female Pioneers in Online Learning* (Bainbridge & Wark, 2023), which was recently published by Routledge. In preparation for this work, Norine and Susan² identified and interviewed 30 female academics whose work in online learning was far ahead of its time; for example, Starr Roxanne Hiltz created the world's first fully functional online learning management system, or "virtual classroom," and implemented it with a full-scale field trial in 1986 (Bainbridge & Wark, 2023). The encyclopedia is a monumental achievement, highlighting the accomplishments of numerous female pioneers whose work has been systematically under-recognized in the field; it has been described as a "rich and rewarding read" (Janes, 2022, p. 3) and a "fascinating compilation," (Nyangara, 2023, para. 1) whose readers "will find the individual stories as inspiration to change the world of distance and online learning for the better" (Parhar, 2023, p. 109). Together, Norine and Susan are working with several graduate students and other collaborators to explore these pioneering female academics further, with a particular focus on mitigating the *Matilda Effect*, a term coined by Rossiter (1993) to describe the systematic under-recognition of women's work in technical and scientific fields, which Norine and her collaborators theorize extends to the field of distance education (Bainbridge & Wark, 2023; Schmidt et al., 2021).

In celebration of International Women's Day 2023, Norine and Susan provided a keynote address to the Flexible Learning Association of New Zealand and the Open and Distance Learning Association of Australia, highlighting the evolution of their research and the pioneers' shared passion for social justice (Flexible Learning Association of New Zealand, 2023).

² Dr. Bainbridge is referred to by her first name, Susan, to honour Dr. Wark's previously discussed preference within this article. Once again, the authors wish to acknowledge the phenomenon of "untitling" for female academics (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2021; Ro, 2021; Shurchkov, 2021).

Norine has numerous other manuscripts in preparation, including journal articles, a two-volume autobiography, and two handbooks. She takes an active role in coaching and supporting graduate and postgraduate students in the field of distance education and remains closely connected to Athabasca University. She provides international volunteer services within the distance learning community (including peer review for two international journals in the field) and is a founding member, vice president, and treasurer of the budding international nonprofit organization, 21st Century Association for Lifelong Learning (<https://2stCALLing.net>; N. Wark, personal communication, August 22, 2023).

LOOKING AHEAD

Norine's future plans include academic research, writing, and presentations, particularly in the areas of historic and emerging theory and practice in distance learning, as well as the technologies that enable such learning. She will continue to support graduate and postgraduate students in their academic journeys and to contribute to international nonprofit organizations aiming to improve education for all.

"Education is power," Norine says. "And education is for everyone." Her own life history perfectly illustrates these principles. For Norine, enabling and empowering learners to take control of their lives and their learning is a never-ending delight.

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BIODATA and CONTACT ADDRESSES of the AUTHORS



Hilary SCHMIDT is nearing completion of her Master of Education in open, digital and distance education through Athabasca University. She also holds a BA (Hons) in English literature from Simon Fraser University and a post-baccalaureate certificate in technology-based learning from Athabasca University. Her academic interests include trauma-informed educational practices, online learning, learning theory, learning experience design, and gender issues in education.

Schmidt, Hilary
Athabasca University
Address: 1 University Drive, Athabasca, AB Canada T9S 3A3
Phone: 1-800-788-9041 ext. 6179
E-mail: hschmidt1@athabasca.edu



Debbie LACARTE, BGS, MEd, is a retired primary teacher. Norine Wark was her sponsor teacher during her last teaching practicum. Debbie is currently authoring her first fiction novel (untitled) and is compiling a handbook, *Read Write Now*, in which she shares her knowledge and love of teaching beginning reading and writing. She lives with her husband of twenty years, Peter Shaw, in Dawson Creek, BC. She enjoys spending time reading, crocheting, and keeping in close touch with family and friends.

Lacarte, Debbie
Address: 1105 95th Avenue, Dawson Creek, BC, Canada V1G 1J2
Phone: 1-250-782-1643
E-mail: dlacarte@shaw.ca

APPENDIX: PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

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A PROFILE OF SUSAN BAINBRIDGE: FINDING YOUR VOICE

Katherine LEBLANC
kleblanc2@learn.athabascau.ca
 Athabasca University, Canada

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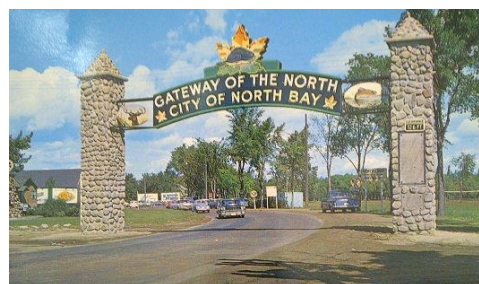
ABSTRACT

To be an effective leader, individuals must learn to 'find their voice.' Susan Bainbridge has worked tirelessly to ensure that those with whom she works are empowered to confidently reach their intended goals, through building their understanding of the importance of voicing their ideas and visions. This paper profiles her life and accomplishments, as well as her beliefs and intentions with those she instructs, mentors, assists, and coaches. It overviews Bainbridge's philanthropy and her firm conviction that helping one person at a time to overcome their challenges adds value to your own existence. Changing one person's life, ripples out across their family and community. Although she has quietly worked on her projects for a lifetime, she now shares her story only in the hope that it will encourage readers to help others throughout their own lives. Leadership is facilitating and motivating others to be the best they can be. It is also about finding the joy in giving, and watching others succeed and find happiness.

Keywords: Susan Bainbridge, distance education, online distance learning, leadership, philanthropy, feminism

Writing a story of the accomplishments of women is essential. It is vital for women and girls to be exposed to positive role models. It is also important that society celebrates the accomplishments of women and shares their stories. Dr. Susan Bainbridge is one of those role models whose life and achievements are celebrated and shared here.

Dr. Susan Bainbridge is many things to many people. She is a mother, an educator, a philanthropist, a writer, a humanitarian, a feminist, an activist, and a mentor. No matter what hat she wears, her focus has been on improving the lives of others. This is evident in the way she connects with people through interaction and empowerment. Susan was born and raised in North Bay, Ontario, Canada. This small city, located in Northern Ontario, is often referred to as the Gateway to the North. North Bay sits on Lake Nipissing and is situated approximately 300 kilometers from Toronto, the province's capital, and Ottawa, the capital of Canada. Susan grew up in a loving and caring family. She had very close connections with her maternal grandmother and grandfather, as they were instrumental in helping to raise her. As the granddaughter of a local politician, Susan learned at an early age the importance of making connections with people, listening to what others had to say, and understanding that her own voice was important. As early as three years old, Susan was accompanying her grandfather on the campaign trail. Susan truly enjoyed spending time with her grandfather and, at the same time, learned the importance of politicians hearing concerns of their constituents and actively try to find solutions for their communities. Looking closely at Susan's life, one can easily see the major influence her family has had on the person she is and her significant presence in the world she lives in.



Susan has always felt the drawing need to help others. This is a theme that has run through her entire life. She willingly gives to others. This is an attribute that was instilled in her persona early in her childhood. Each year at Christmas, her father would prepare a cheque for the Salvation Army. When the Salvation Army knocked on her parent's door, she watched her father give them the cheque. Susan looked at her dad and said, "that is a lot of money." Her dad told her that if it does not hurt to give, you are not giving enough. This is a sentiment that would stick with Susan throughout her adult life. She always gives, even when it hurts.

There is an old saying that "children should be seen and not heard." This was not Susan's experience growing up. Susan was empowered by her grandfather to use her voice. She recalled a time at the dinner table when the adults were participating in a discussion; she interjected into the discussion to ask if she could say something. It was her grandfather that stated, "of course, as long as it is of value." Susan used her voice that day, and learned that her voice had meaning and was significant.



Susan also acknowledges that women often must learn to find their voice. She did so at the family dining table, but she attributes that to the men and women in her family who supported her in finding her voice. Today, she encourages, inspires, and promotes other women to do the same; to find their voices, so their stories can be shared.

Not only did Susan use her voice at home and with her family, but she used it in school as well. When Susan entered high school, she was elected as president of the student council. This was the beginning of her formal leadership experience, as she would go on in life to lead educational teams and structures in the years to come.

When Susan was in high school in Ontario, the province offered grade 13. In some jurisdictions it was a compulsory year for students who wished to attend post-secondary education. Susan knew she wanted to further her education and aspired to enter the field of law; however, her mother had different views on this. Her mom told her that "women do not do that," and encouraged her to choose a more suitable career, like teaching or nursing. So, after graduation in 1969, Susan began her pursuit to become a teacher.

At that time, there was not a Bachelor of Education program like the ones present in Canada today, so Susan went to Teacher's College in North Bay. This college, originally name Normal School until 1953, was known for hiring faculty that provided a rigorous program which created well-prepared teachers. After one year of college, Susan took the opportunity to pursue a bachelor's degree through distant education courses, which were delivered via the television through the Knowledge Network. This would be Susan's first experience with distance education, but it would not be her last. In fact, over the course of her life, she would take online courses, teach online, and provide opportunities for her own children to receive education online.



Susan's extensive teaching career began in Ontario; however, there was a time in her first two years of teaching, she was not sure if it would continue. Her strong will and her fight for equal rights for women nearly lost her that first job. In the early 1970s, there was a formal dress code for women. They were expected to wear a dress or a skirt at work. Susan did not wish to conform to this dress code. She broke the women's dress code and wore a pantsuit to work. Susan had not been at the school for more than two hours when she was told by the Superintendent at the time that she needed to change. Susan's response was a hard "no." Not only was Susan adamant that she would not conform, she indicated to her Superintendent that the rules needed to change or she would take her cause to the local news station. Her employers explained that the rules would not be changing, so Susan did

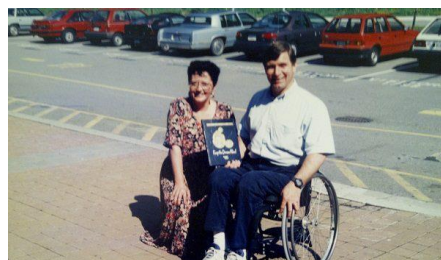
the interview with the news station as promised. When she got to school the next day, she was not sure what the response would be. Her principal met with her and explained to her that she did not have to wear a dress at work and her professional dress would suffice. This would be the first of many times Susan would fight for women and help to empower them, especially in the workplace.

One of Susan's passions has always been to travel and see the world. After two years of teaching in Ontario, Susan yearned to explore. In 1972, she accepted a teaching position in Fort Good Hope, Northwest Territories, Canada. Fort Good Hope was a very small, Indigenous community in Canada's high arctic. Susan quickly learned to adjust to the harsh climate, to the varying daylight hours, and new cultural experiences.

After two years in the Northwest Territories, Susan's next adventure took her to the Yukon, Canada. Susan would spend the next ten years in the Yukon where her leadership skills would continue to grow. She took on various leadership roles in the Yukon, including becoming the principal of her school. Her leadership abilities were recognized by the newly appointed leader of the Territory, and she was given the position of Chairperson of the Yukon Housing Corporation.

During Susan's ten years in the Yukon, she also became a mother and started raising two of her children there before moving to Vancouver, British Columbia.

Susan was fortunate during her time in the Lower Mainland as her progressive school district allowed her to teach at the same school her children attended. Her third child was also born while she was living in the Vancouver area. Susan was a working mom with three children to raise. She had found her niche professionally teaching high school and loving it. Her own daughter, Melissa, explained that students at the school loved having her as a teacher. Melissa recalls that her friends would often tell her that her mom was their favourite teacher, and explained how students felt the learning came alive when her mom was teaching them. Melissa attributes her popularity at school to her mom. When you have the most popular teacher as your own mom, it makes being at school a lot easier. Melissa and the high school students are not the only learners who speak highly of Susan as an educator, the many people who she has mentored, advised and taught after leaving Vancouver, would also explain that Susan significantly contributed to their learning.



While Susan was teaching in the Vancouver area, her husband at the time was a RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) officer. He was deployed with the United Nations and stationed in the former Yugoslavia. It was 1992 and the fall of communism in Eastern Europe led to the breakup of this country. This also led to civil war within the country. With her husband deployed, Susan remained in Canada. However, she took the opportunity to travel with her children to safe areas or 'green areas,' as they were referred to within Yugoslavia. Her daughter, Melissa, recalls sitting on the roof of a house, in a safe area, watching the bombing in the distance and hearing the sounds of machine guns. One would think that this would be a terrifying experience, but once again, Susan and her family found a way to help others. They chose to hand out Christmas gifts to those in need. As a family, they made sure that those in need were provided for. Again, Susan made sure that the most vulnerable people in the community were being served and cared for.

While in Yugoslavia, Susan was aware of the lack of basic necessities that plagued the war-torn society. She wanted to know what they needed most and what she discovered was that they needed medicine. Getting medicine into a country in the depths of war was no easy task, but as always, Susan was determined that something needed to be done. When

she returned to Vancouver, her philanthropic attributes were once again sparked, and she was determined to help. She started talking with doctors and medicinal salespeople. She discovered that much of the medicine that was needed was thrown away the moment that they expired. However, medical experts assured her that the medicine was still good. Upon learning this, Susan started collecting expired medicine from many wonderful providers. She often opened her front door in the morning to see boxes of medicine quietly left by well-meaning providers and proceeded to make sure that the medicine got to those who needed it most.

After her visit to Yugoslavia, Susan returned to Vancouver and to her work as a teacher. However, she was also struggling as a mother because of the issues that were occurring in the area that she was working and living in. Drugs were becoming a problem in the high school, and this was something that she wanted to protect her own children from. Susan made the decision that she was going to relocate.

Susan's next journey would take her to Japan, where she would stay for the next ten years. Again, Susan was able to continue to develop her leadership abilities as she continued to reinvent herself. While at a private school in Japan, Susan would find a new niche as managing director of the chain of schools, where she would oversee both the business side and the educational components of the organization.

As quality education is of the utmost importance to Susan, she began exploring what opportunities may be available for herself and for her children. She looked to the University of Southern Queensland (USQ) in Australia for what it could offer she and her children. What she found was that this university provided a quality undergraduate degree through distance education. She also quickly discovered that the Japanese Yen went further in Australia than it did in Canada, so the choice seemed obvious. She and her children, Matt and Melissa, would pursue their education via this route. Susan would attain her Master's degree through USQ and later her daughter, Melissa, and son, Matthew, would follow in her footsteps and achieve their undergraduate degrees from USQ.

As Susan was nearing the end of her ten years in Japan, her desire to travel once again surfaced, and she took the opportunity to relocate to South Korea for work. Accompanying her, was her son, Matthew. Susan spent 14 months as Director of a Maple Bear School. As Director, she continued to refine her leadership skills. This position also provided her with the opportunity to deepen her understanding of early childhood education.

When the opportunity to travel to the United Arab Emirates was presented to Susan, she was once again on the move and onto a new adventure. Susan began teaching at The Higher Colleges of Technology. It was during her time in the UAE that she made the decision to begin her Doctorate, as she wanted to teach at university. Susan made the decision to study at Athabasca University. This university is physically located in Alberta, Canada; however, the structure of the university entices people from all over the world, as it is an open university whose delivery is completely online. Susan would continue teaching while working towards her doctoral degree.



Athabasca University requires that doctoral students participate in class work prior to beginning their dissertation. The university also expects that the dissertation will have online or distance attributes within the research. As Susan had spent most of her adult life either engaging in distance learning, or having her own children take their classes with this format, it was the perfect fit for her. Anyone who knows Susan understands that her work would also have a humanitarian aspect to it. As she has stated, she would like to see educational technology become the 'great equalizer,' and that all citizens of the world

would have access to the same knowledge and information. Therefore, her research set out to do just that.

As a doctoral student, Susan made the decision that her research would take her to Nepal. This choice would again take her on a humanitarian adventure and change the lives of many



people. Susan's research topic was "development and evaluation of a pedagogical model for an open university in Nepal based on geographical, regional and linguistic factors." The people of Nepal had just endured a civil war that lasted from 1996 to 2006. This caused many people to leave their villages and move to cities. Many Nepalese did not have computers or access to the internet, and were trying to recover from a war that divided their nation. The people of

Nepal were also divided by a Caste system, which made equal access to all Nepalese an almost insurmountable task.

First, the students needed to have access to computers. Susan set out to find 50 computers for the school that she was working with in Nepal. Getting the computers would be easy; it was getting them to Nepal and to the school where Susan needed to lean into her creative prowess. However, the computers could not just be sent to Nepal. She was warned that there were often thefts that occurred and that the computers might be stolen. Leaning into her ingenuity, Susan and friends started putting the word out around the Edmonton, Canada area and tapped the shoulders of many doctors who travelled to Nepal to climb Mount Everest. One by one, doctors arrived in Nepal carrying two computers each. The principal at the school would meet them and take the computers to the school. While this process was time-consuming, it did provide technology to the students.



Helping this Nepalese school to get computers was not the only philanthropic adventure that Susan would engage in during her time in Nepal. She would also change the life of a young Nepalese girl who was not high caste. The impact of that help would be felt in the next generation for this family.



While visiting at the government school, Susan found herself drawn to a young Nepalese girl who had a love for education and a desire to be a lawyer. Asmita was in grade 9 when she and Susan's paths crossed. Asmita recalls first meeting Susan and being drawn to her. She knew Susan was working to get computers into her school. The two would create a lasting relationship and, when Asmita was in Grade 12, she and Susan made plans for her future.

The war had been very hard on Asmita and her family. The family had to flee their village and seek refuge in Kathmandu. They were forced to leave everything behind. Asmita recalls that her family did not have the skills for the city. Her dad moved to Saudi Arabia to find work so that he could support the family, and her mom started cooking in a café. However, the family was still very poor and there would be no money for further education, which was this young girl's dream.

Asmita recalls her headmaster coming to see her one day and telling her that Susan wanted to help her. Susan knew her parents were struggling financially, and she also knew that this young lady wanted to pursue further education. Susan asked her, "What do you want to be?" Asmita wanted to either be a nurse or a lawyer. Susan told her she would help her

as much as possible. However, Asmita's mother wanted her to get married. Susan explained that she would talk with Asmita's mother and help this young lady pursue her educational dreams. Susan was true to her word. Not only did she help to convince the family that education was important, but she also committed to financially supporting Asmita. Her father's words must have resonated with Susan the day he gave that cheque to the Salvation Army.

Asmita did go to university and, as Susan promised, she supported Asmita through it. While Asmita is married now, she too is paying it forward. She helps her family financially. She said Susan inspired her and she wants to be just like her, and in many ways she is. Like Susan, Asmita is giving back. She is encouraging her family to pursue further education and she is helping her community by giving what she can. She knows the impact Susan has had on changing the course of her life.

Susan has made an impact on the lives of many people and continues to do so. After defending her dissertation in 2013, she began teaching with Athabasca University. As Melissa explained about her mom, the high school teacher, Susan's doctoral students reiterate the same sentiment many years later. Whether it be a student in her class, or a student she is mentoring in the doctoral or master's program, the opinion is that Susan makes learning come alive. She is there for her students and, although the learning is virtual, it is as if she is right in front of her students making sure that they enjoy learning.



Passing the Torch

When talking about her, students say that being a student of Susan's is a privilege. In fact, there is a collective gratitude amongst many of her doctoral students due to the extensive support she has provided them throughout the doctoral process. Her students describe her honesty and her ability to make them feel collectively that they can overcome any hurdles as two of her greatest attributes. As a teacher, she is approachable, has an amazing sense of humour, and is authentic. Bonnie, one of the students Susan mentored, stated that, "I am a better teacher because of Susan. She makes her students feel connected to her because she really listens and hears what we say."

Susan teaches virtually. She is a strong proponent of online education and believes that it has the capacity to equalize educational opportunities. While there are those who will adamantly state that online education does not have the same impact or create the same connections as face to face, they have not had Dr. Susan Bainbridge as their online instructor. Susan connects with her students. She is present in their learning, and she genuinely cares about them and their learning experiences

Although Susan has been an advisor for many doctoral students while working at Athabasca University, it was her student, Denise, who, like Asmita said, "I would love to do what Susan does." Denise describes Susan as an inspiration and someone who helps her students through hurdles. In fact, Denise credits her convocation to Susan. Many of her students do! Helping others to get through hurdles is a skill of Susan's. Whether it be helping to get computers to a school, helping to get medications to those in wore torn countries, or helping her doctoral students overcome their obstacles, Susan shows that there are no obstacles that cannot be tackled.

Susan is also a writer. While she has many blogs that can be read on the Internet, she is also a novelist. In 2010, Susan wrote the novel, *Hoarfrost and Cherry Blossoms*. The novel is set in Northern Canada. While this book draws on many of her own experiences when living in isolation, it illustrates Susan's ability to captivate the audience with humour, even when the main character is facing tenuous circumstances.

Susan is co-author of *The Encyclopedia of Female Pioneers in Online Learning*. This book highlights 30 women who have made significant contributions to online learning. As an advocate for women and their voices, this book showcases the importance of these pioneers' contributions. Susan makes a point of noting that she does not work toward equality of the sexes, but towards equity. She emphasizes that this is an important point. Many men have helped her throughout her life. She has never experienced men treating her poorly or hindering her progress. Susan believes "No human being is born equal to any other on earth. We cannot aim for equality; it is a fallacy. We to work toward equity for all people."

Dr. Susan Bainbridge is an amazing woman. Her friends will say that, although she is not a Rockefeller, she is a true philanthropist. This is evident by all that she has accomplished through her advocacy for the most vulnerable in society. Her children are so proud of her and call her their "rock." Her students say that she is inspiring and uplifting. She can get them through any hurdle that they may experience. Susan truly listens. Susan is a novelist, a teacher, a friend. Susan is a mentor and she is a humanitarian. Susan is many things to many people. While she may have wanted to be a lawyer when she finished school, there are many people who are certainly glad that her mother won that argument so many years ago.

SOURCES:

Interviews carried out August and September 2023 with: Bonnie Marlow, Denise MacIver, Asmita Gurung, Melissa Serena, and Susan Bainbridge.

Images: Susan Bainbridge

BIODATA and CONTACT ADDRESS of the AUTHOR



Dr. Katherine LEBLANC a life-long educator. She was a recipient of the 2019 Canada's Top Principal award. She also earned a recognition award from the Canadian Association for Teacher Education (CATE) in 2023 for her dissertation. Katherine's Doctor of Education in Distance Education (2023) and Master of Education in Distance Education (2017) were obtained from Athabasca University. Her Bachelor of Education (1990) came from the University of Regina. Katherine has worked in elementary and secondary education as a teacher and a principal, and as a Superintendent of Schools

in Saskatchewan and Nunavut, Canada. She also does sessional work with the University of Prince Edward Island, teaching in their master's program.

LeBlanc, Katherine
Ministry of Education, Government of Saskatchewan
Address: 409A Park Street
Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada S4N 5B2
Phone: 1-306-787-6930
E-mail: kleblanc2@learn.athabascau.ca

FEMALE DISABLED LEARNERS IN ASYNCHRONOUS LEARNING ENVIRONMENT DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMI: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF FEMALES EXPERIENCES

Elnour Mubarak M. A. Omar

dr.norkmar@tld.insitute.ae

TLD institute for training, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

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ABSTARCT

The main purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of female disabled learners in asynchronous learning environment in Open University of Sudan (*OUS*) during the COVID-19 Pandemic time. The study used qualitative research -an exploratory research design; an interview technique was used. A purposive sample was carried out, and three female disabled learners were participated voluntary. The data were collected from participants who spent more than three semesters in (*OUS*) in intake 2020 -2021. The result showed that negative and positive experiences towards online learning environment during COVID 19 time. Asynchronous learning during the COVID-19 pandemic did not meet the needs of female disabled learners in terms of accessibility limitations; network coverage and download files. Learner–learner interaction; learner-content and learner–instructor interaction did not satisfy female disabled learners during the COVID-19 pandemic in (*OUS*). The study recommended that female disabled learners need an immediate interaction among leaner-learner interaction; learner- content and learner – instructor interaction during the COVID-19 pandemic in (*OUS*).

Keywords: Female disabled learners, interaction components, asynchronous learning, COVID-19.

INTRODUCTION

The 21th century has been considered the age of innovation of the World Wide Web (*WWW*). Instant Information and Communications Technology (*ICT's*), are used in many fields of knowledge such as medicine, engineering and education is no exception. It has been acknowledged that the internet in educational arena has changed the role of teachers as well as learners. It is clear that distance education provides a chance of interaction between instructors and learners either inside the classroom or outside such as café, library and even in office. In fact that, interaction has been categorized in common into four major parts such as interaction between student–student, student-instructor, student-course content, and vicarious interaction (Moore, 1989, Moore & Kearsley, 1996). Interaction has been categorized into three parts are as follows:

The first type of interaction learner-content interaction that occurs between the learner and the content or course discipline. Interacting with content that results in changes in the learner's understanding, the learner's perspective. This type of interaction occurs when learners change information and ideas they encounter in a text, blogs, television program, lecture, or elsewhere (Holmberg, 1986). This kind of interaction occurs when the mode of learning is a regular interaction such as face-to-face or it can be occurred via different types of educational media for instance threaded discussion, blogs, emails or even phone calls.

Student-student interaction is a form of communication between student-student while they discuss course content, assignment, a project or activities in this circumstances a student gives some comments and questions which are related to the course or he/she can clarify undistinguished points in the course or a project. Therefore, it sometime occurs through off line for instance email, SMS, or face -to -face interaction in a café or a bus station. Whereas, Learner -Instructor interaction is a communication process that occurs between a student and his/her instructor therefore, instant interaction can be within an online course or during communication with learners or offline (personal dialogue). This kind of interaction is crucial for learners and they can feel in a real environment it occurs face -to-face between two people or more in the library or in a café ...etc.

Thus, the theoretical framework is the interaction between learners - instructors, learner – learner interaction and learner – content interaction and vicarious interaction / materials. Interaction played an essential role in learning expansion by using various instruments, tools, mediation, etc. Thus, social interaction theory highlights the potential impact on teaching and learning using new tools as vehicles for modernizing, contextualizing, and transforming activities procedures, focused on learning development and social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978).

ASYNCHRONOUS LEARNING IN SUDAN DURING THE COVID -19 PANDEMIC

Sudan has acknowledged distance learning waves in the third decade of 20th century and at that time there was scarcity of formal education opportunities. Therefore, most of Sudanese learners had gone abroad to acquire knowledge. In the earlier of 1960s, the national T.V had attempted to disseminate asynchronous learning program by offering English language program throughout the capital city – Khartoum and the program was using for a limit period of time approximately two years and terminated. Furthermore, during that time University of Khartoum was endeavoring to deliver distance education program particularly in 1963 which was vocational program was targeting a few groups of learners. Whereby, in the earlier of 1990s Sudan was taking series steps toward installing distance education and was establishing Open University of Sudan as well as some higher institutes which were beginning to adopt the philosophy of distance education. In fact that, distance education learners attend a physical site for a few hours per week in institutional colleges (Elnour & Elhadi 2020).

The Corona Virus (COVID-19) emerged in the world in the December 2019. Therefore, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced that COVID-19 is a global pandemic in March 2020. It spreads and covers many countries in order to prevent it strict regulations have been taken such as lockdown and social distancing, while some countries preferred to use immunity methods. To stop the spread of this pandemic these steps have been adopted seriously such as working from homes, flexible working hours, because the authorities are afraid of people infect each other. The government banned face-to-face activities, including teaching, in order to contain COVID-19. So, many health ways have been taken such as keep distance roughly one meter; sanitized hands and face masks are compulsory to be used in public places as a result shut down schools, universities, stadiums and many other activities, really the situation forced all levels of educational institutions to use emergency remote teaching into practices (Elhadi & Elnour, 2022).

In the Sudan circumstances ministry of higher education has introduced an initiative to provide hundreds of millions of students with effective online learning from their homes using Moody application with the help of the Open University platform. The rapid COVID - 19 potential explains technology in education is receiving special attention, especially in the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic witnessed the early entry of the Internet in institutions of tertiary level (Viju, 2021). Obviously, many countries of the world have been

offering distance learning program while during the pandemic the states have encountered many challenges, and barriers in terms of educational courses delivery, and becomes more difficult, which will widen the pre-Covid-19 education funding gaps (Viju, 2021).

In particular female learners with disabilities may they have been encountering great obstacles and barriers, since the COVID -19 pandemic has disseminated throughout the universe and may learning tools they need are not always available, therefore experienced disabilities in distance education environment during the COVID -19 pandemic are crucial to be highlighted. Therefore, many studies have been conducted in disabled learner's education in asynchronous environment. It seems that female disabled learners have faced lack in terms of face to face interaction between teachers and learners and tools affordability ...etc. Moreover, some previous studies have documented in both negative and positive manners. This study attempts to explore disabled learners' experiences in asynchronous learning in Open University of Sudan (*OUS*) during COVID-19 time. Identify thoroughly experiences of female disabled learners toward interaction components in asynchronous learning in Open University of Sudan (*OUS*) during COVID-19 time.

Studies have been conducted in disabled learners in distance education environment. Special education teachers expressed both positive and negative experiences towards distance education practices in primary education; the use of materials suitable for students' needs is inadequate (Nedime et al., 2020). The application of e-learning technologies allow disabled students for cognitive, social, and education interaction during the pandemic. Whereas, lecturers reported that accommodations were appropriate for students and disability resource centers neglecting to contact students after the transition to online instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic (Abed, 2020).

Difficulties in organizing distance learning for disabled students permits the researchers to offer some advices to be implemented for this kind of education, more success in terms of course completions, and certain types of disabilities appeared to be more amendable to certain types of assistance in education arena (Logan, et.al., 2020). Including students with disabilities in distance education a similar study showed that individuals with disabilities and offering flexible learning and virtual mobility, individuals with disabilities in a user-center design so that accessibility and usability are achieved, Eleni et.al 2020. The links between education and society are strengthened (Susan, 2004). Whereas, the study highlighted that the problems of self -organization, fatigue, low mood, lack of live communication and technical problems with the Internet communication are real barriers of distance learning for students with disabilities in a pandemic time (Denisova et al., 2020). However, parents and educators had generally neutral attitudes toward distance learning, although educators agreed that their students were obtaining educational benefits during distance learning (Miguel, 2021).

A similar study showed that support services are needed for undergraduate and postgraduate students with learning disabilities whose attending Saudi institutions of higher education, so learning disabilities of the council for exceptional educational was supported in higher education (Mohaned & Todd, 2020). The results of different study showed that more than 60% of respondents had experience using Moodle, Google Classroom, and Blackboard; 80% of teachers had training from their institution for the use of virtual platforms and students attitudes, and student's attendance at class sessions (Marco et al., 2022). Whereas, parents were pleased with the outcomes that their children were experiencing in online learning, but some issues still exist for educating students with disabilities within this environment (Paula et al., 2014).

Thus, a lack-disabled people specifically lack of the student perception knowledge with hearing and visual .Teachers experienced the greatest difficulties in determining the presentation form of the lecture material, monitoring and evaluating independent works of

students with problems of hearing, vision and movement (Movkebayeva et al., 2020). Whereas, the majority of previous studies stated that female disabled learners were not able to benefit from distance education environment during COVID-19 and also they were stated that there are not enough interact with instructors, learners and exercises provided in the course content; female disabled learners and need more orientation and guidance. So, low self-motivation and self-organization, fatigue, low mood, lack of live communication and technical the problems with the Internet communication and distance learning platforms (Denisovl et al., 2020). Based on previous studies the questions are formulated below:

1- What are female disabled learners' experiences in asynchronous learning environment in Open University of Sudan (OUS) during COVID-19?

2. What are female disabled learners' experiences toward interactions components in asynchronous learning environment in Open University of Sudan (OUS) during COVID-19?

METHDOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

To understand in -depth the experiences of participants during COVID-19 Pandemic crisis, the present study used a qualitative research – an exploratory research design has been applied in this study in order to detail the meaning of an individuals' lived experiences and tries to understand in depth the phenomenon of those who directly involved (Creswell, 2014).

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND PARTICIPANTS

Before interviewed participants, ethical approval was not obtained from the dean of languages program in (OUS) because of spread of COVID -19 pandemic .The present study was carried out during COVID -19 pandemic crisis, selection of participants was based on the availability of them, in fact they agreed that to participate due to personal decision. Really, participants were chosen and contacted via mobile and WhatsApp simultaneous interaction. In line with this premise, open-ended questions was used to encourage participants to be honest share experiences.

A second ethical informed consent is done that participants were provided with sufficient information about the research objectives that allows them to make an informed decision about whether they will or will not participate in this study. During the interview process, participants were reminded about the research objectives over and over, and also of their option to terminate their involvement in the study at any point. Consequently, during the transcription, no names were mentioned.

Third ethical consideration is that the actual names of the participants were coded to keep their personal identity confidential for instance, participant 1 coded (P1); participant 2 coded (P2) and participant 3 coded (P3) in this article respectively. The interview process notes were taken only for accurate transcription of data while during the real interview the researcher emphasized on the details information .To protect interviewee identities, only data relevant to the study concerning their backgrounds were recorded. Transcription of the recorded interviews was performed with focused attention to every word, with subsequent rereading and listening to minimize errors (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Validity should be assessed occasionally throughout this study. The findings should be subjected to control tests and questioning, with the researcher performing theoretical

interpretation. The consideration of validity is not outcome oriented; rather, it lies in planning, design, interviewing, transcribing, and data handling. In the current study, control testing of the interview questions was conducted through the deployment of the pilot study. Participant responses in the main study were probed in a manner that provided opportunities to clarify, control, and validate responses. Therefore, during the meeting the researcher was committing that all information will be kept confidentially and to ensure privacy. It will be deleted after completion of the study.

INSTRUMENTATION AND DATA PROCEDURES

Then, pilot implementation of the questions was made with two special education and thus, the interview questions were finalized. This research can be reached during the pandemic period and is applied with female's special education. Participants of this study were 3 undergraduate learners (age range 25 - 37 years). In this study, the sampling frame was obtained from disabled learners at (*OUS*). Participants of this study were chosen purposively. The researcher was fixing meeting time with the target interviewers, and they have informed twice and they have verified that they were willing to share their own learning experiences during COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Before embark the initial interview, the researcher was explaining thoroughly the purpose of the study to the participants, which is to explain participants experiences during courses offered by (*OUS*). The interview was taking half an hour in a public garden and the participants were coming on time as they have promised. The interview was carried out in Arabic language and translated to English language.

DATA ANALYSIS

The researcher conducted the interview, which carried out in Arabic language, and translated to English language. The data have been transcribed in the word program, pertaining to the analysis of this study there were three major themes were discussed thoroughly namely: Interaction learning environment during COVID-19 time in this point learners emphasized that "we can not interact via WhatsApp due to decrease of internet service and even no electricity power". They added "the internet services such as broadband services becomes extremely expensive". This result is in line with Nedime et al., 2020; Abed, 2020; Logan et al., 2020, Eleni et al. 2020. The second of the theme of this study is learner -learner interaction, the study was showing lack of interaction and much homework and activities of the course content were postponed and they said "We cannot communicate with peers to guide each other therefore we feel isolated" this result is in line with Susan, 2004; Miguel, 2021; Mohaned & Todd, 2020. The third themes is learner –instructor interaction. Learners told that "Frankly there is scarce of audio /visual materials it revealed lack of academic atmosphere inside house, and we have lost contact with peers and instructors during COVID-19 time could be passed through. This result is in line with these studies, Marco et al., 2022; Paula et al., 2014; Movkebayeva et al., 2020, Denisov, 2020.

The final transcriptions code showed that participants were not shared lived experiences about distance education COVID -19 pandemic crisis in (*OUS*). The researcher passed through this step and categorized it into chunks in order to be analyzed. Thus, it have been refined and filtered the themes clearly to discuss and report in the findings of the present study. The participants were shown negative and positive experiences towards distance learning environment during COVID -19 in (*OUS*) for instance technical limitations, which were mentioned by almost of the respondents in this study. Female learners with disabilities showed also the disadvantages of course activities in distance learning during COVID -19. Absence effective interaction between learner – learner interaction and learner - instructors interaction these factors disappointed and frustrated learners and made negative experiences. The result was formed via a tangible interview. There are three

themes were highlighted thoroughly in this study. (1) The disabled learners' experiences toward an online learning environment during COVID-19. (2) Learner -Instructor in an online learning during COVID-19. (3) Learner – Learner interaction and learner – content interaction in an online learning during COVID-19. The themes are follows:

Theme 1: Online learning environment during COVID-19

In fact, learners showed various experiences toward online learning environment during online COVID-19 time. The explanation from the disabled learners' experiences as follows: P1: Obviously, online learning environment during COVID-19 showed many barriers and makes me frustrated because, there is no tools and applications that provided via website of the university and collaborative projects for instance Wikis; Forums and Blogs ...etc.

P2: Really, many challenges were occurred such as technical problems. I will tell you straight out that the internet connection / coverage during the online classroom environment was a complete disaster.

P3 and P1: Another important thing happened is that increases the cost of broadband because, high demand on that device and I could not buy a new device because of my parents are retired. That is disappointed me in an online learning environment during COVID-19 time.

P2: I really struggle that time at home because, could not attend on time online interaction and submit academic activities before deadline. I was quite dissatisfied with my own work due to a poor internet connection. Frankly, there is scarce of audio /visual materials to pass through in the e-library.

In the light of mentioned interview transcription, it is obvious that disabled learners showed various experiences in an online learning environment during COVID-19 time. It means that all of them showed negative experiences towards online learning during COVID-19. Moreover, some of the learners said that in an online learning during COVID-19 time faced challenges, and they could not manage it, and some answers showed that negative experiences such as frustrated, and disappointed. These results is aligned with Nedime et al., 2020; Abed, 2020; Logan et al., 2020; Eleni et al., 2020.

Theme 2: Interaction components

P1: I am quite happy when the instructor appears in the online classes.

P2: I am frustrated sometime because there is technical barriers such as no power consistency but, I'm feel also build a good academic relationship with our instructor who gives immediate feedback. Learner- instructor Interaction needs more practice and more activities and integrated us with that make learners feel confident.

P3: I am delighted with online interaction because, the instructor guides me and highlights some points in the course content carefully and precisely.

P1 & P3: We always feel captured critical thinking of this course and never feel we run out of ideas during our interaction with the instructor.

P1: I really, did not find a consistent interaction with my peers who make me frustrated throughout day. I think learner – learner interaction needs to use advanced technology to improve interaction among peers -instructors to share and collaborate confidently.

P2: I interest with peer – peer interaction because, it facilitates to comprehend all the given activities.

P3: I sometime feel the lack of learner – learner interaction and to cope with them because I am sometime unable to catch main points they discussed due to technical problems. I do not think maintain learner - learner interactions during the online classroom can encourage me to understand further the course and its relevant activities.

P1: I am not satisfied with learner - content interaction because, it was posting in chunks and I could not absorb it clearly.

P2: I am quite frustrated because, sometime there is general ideas in the course content and I have attempted to adopt with multimedia to facilitate understanding the course content.

P3: I am delighted to some extent with learner -content interaction because, it provides new knowledge. I feel learner – content interaction gives sufficient learning materials.

P1 & P2: We always feel isolated from course content interaction because there is new concept that unfamiliar with and there are less activity were provided.

P3: I really, think learner – content interaction provides valuable knowledge and Audio - Visual elements.

P1: I think learner-content interaction needs more practice and more activities to be conducive.

P2: I am satisfied with learning materials that have been providing when I passed through the content.

Pertaining to theme 1, 2, and 3 had shown that positive and negative learners experiences towards learner- instructor interaction; learner – content, and learner-learner interaction components that were occurring in an online learning environment during COVID 19 time. Based on the data transcription and a tangible interview, it obvious that this study showed disabled learners perceptions that have shown positive and negative experiences toward learner- instructor interaction; learner – content and learner- learner interaction. This result is aligned with Susan, 2004; Miguel, 2021; Mohaned & Todd, 2020; Marco et al., 2022; Paula et al., 2014; Movkebayeva et al., 2020; Denisov, 2020.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Female disabled learners stated that some activities need more clarification from instructors, which are not simple for all female disabled learners. There is accessibility problems at homepage and local network coverage during download files. During this period of COVID-19, learners need support of families to pursue their educational practices and interaction with instructors; their peers and course content successfully. The result also revealed that family income and materials availability played a great deal of role in facilitating an online learning interaction for female disabled learners at (OUS) during COVID-19 time.

In this respect, this research study showed that; the distance education applications carried out during the covid-19 period did not meet the needs of female disabled learners in terms of network technical barriers; learner – learner; learner - instructor and learner - content interaction. Female disabled learners have not considered the instructor to learner interaction; learner - learner interaction and learner -content were not done effectively.

Therefore, it is necessary to take into consideration to diminish technical problems such as network coverage that may arise in emergencies specifically synchronous learning such as SARS or COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations have been taken seriously to develop online interaction environment to female disabled learners during COVID-19 period at (OUS): It is necessary to prepare alternative educational method for female disabled learners at (OUS). An advanced materials and interactive instructors 24/7days in charge; learner - learner; learner – content and learner – instructor interaction should be done effectively.

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BIODATA AND CONTACT ADDRESS OF THE AUTHOR



Elnour Mubarak M. A. OMAR received his PhD degree from Islamic University Malaysia in E-learning 2009 and was a lecturer at Open University of Sudan, Albayan College for Science and Technology, Peace College for languages and Translation. Was an advisor at ARN Institute for Training, Madinah, Saudi Arabia especially a lecturer to TLD institute for training – Dubai -United Arab Emirates. He was an academic writer for educational issues to Sudan vision newspaper. He translated several academic books from English into Arabic. He has written Pace series English books to ARN Institute for Training. Also participated in 21 international conferences in Educational discipline in Canada, Italy, Spain, France, Thailand, Bahrain, South Africa, China, Malaysia etc.

Mobile: +971569535261

Email: dr.norkmar@tld.institute.ae

WHOLE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME (WSIP): A FEMALE HEADTEACHER, SERVING IN PUBLIC SCHOOL PERSPECTIVES

Sultan ALAM
sultan.alam@aku.edu
The Aga Khan University, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The research centered on delving into the experiences of a female headteacher in a public school who participated in a WSIP initiative and effectively implemented its teachings within her educational institution. This initiative stands as a flagship program of AKU-IED, PDCN in the specific context of Gilgit-Baltistan. Its aim is to introduce educational reforms in the region through formal in-person and distance education modes for headteachers.

The results revealed that the WSIP intervention wielded a substantial influence over the female headteacher's professional methodologies. This led to a transformation in her mindset and a noticeable enhancement of her skills. The headteacher displayed a heightened commitment to refining learning environments, specifically underscoring the significance of community involvement, fostering team cohesion, and motivating educators to attain greater results. She also displayed an increased awareness of the developmental needs of students, including portfolios development, cultivating interactive learning classrooms, and introducing innovative assessment protocols. Notably, she encountered no discernible obstacles to leveraging her professional capabilities despite her gender.

The research suggests that greater consideration should be devoted to the role of female headteachers in initiatives aimed at enhancing learning. The effectiveness of such endeavors is profoundly intertwined with their active engagement. Augmenting the competencies of headteachers in this regard could potentially optimize student performance, particularly team-building and improved academic results. Collectively, this study underscores the noteworthy influence of the WSIP intervention on the professional methodologies of a female headteacher, serving in a government school situated in the Gilgit-Baltistan region of Pakistan.

Key Words: Distance Education, Instructional Leader, Curriculum Leader, WSIP, CELM, Conducive Environment

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental right that should be accessible to all, regardless of gender. Historically, women have faced numerous barriers when it comes to pursuing education. However, with the advent of distance education, a powerful tool for overcoming these obstacles, multiple challenges have been resolved up to a certain magnitude.

Distance education has emerged as a great means for promoting gender equality and empowering women. By providing access to education, flexibility, safety, and the means to overcome social and cultural barriers, distance education has the potential to transform the lives of countless women worldwide. As women gain education and economic

independence, they become catalysts for positive change within their families and communities. Therefore, investing in distance education for women is not only a matter of individual empowerment but also a step towards a more equitable and prosperous society for all.

Sensing the role of school principals, especially women in such positions, it becomes essential to offer a range of capacity-building options, whether in-person or through distance learning methods. The primary objective of these interventions is to furnish these educational leaders with comprehensive knowledge and insight into the significant responsibilities they undertake within a school environment. As the primary professionals at the forefront of educational institutions, school heads bear a greater load of responsibilities compared to other team members. They are required to assume a multitude of roles that change frequently throughout the day. Concurrently, within a single day's operations, these leaders take on various personas, including that of a manager, administrator, instructional leader, pedagogical leader, curriculum leader, and coach (Day, 2004). These diverse roles necessitate a delicate balancing act to ensure the seamless operation of the school. This challenge is amplified for female leaders who also juggle certain maternal obligations. At times, school heads delegate specific roles to teachers due to prolonged engagements in particular tasks, which ultimately affects the teaching methods employed by educators.

In such scenarios, it becomes essential for the headteacher to maintain an adaptable approach to both academic and non-academic responsibilities, all aimed at enhancing the school's performance. According to Smith (2008), effective school leaders, who act as catalysts for change, cannot confine themselves to mere managerial roles. In the contemporary landscape, "school leadership is characterized by higher demands and dynamism. A principal must embody a distinct profile" (p.242).

Recognizing the pivotal roles of headteachers, various donor agencies, Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), and public-sector institutions have introduced diverse initiatives for enhancing schools' effective roles in the Gilgit-Baltistan of Pakistan region. These organizations offer both center-based and customized distance education courses to headteachers, targeting improvements in schools located in remote areas of Gilgit-Baltistan. Through these initiatives, they aim to elevate educational standards through innovative strategies. Given their role as change agents, the success of these initiatives hinges largely on the skills of headteachers, as they are directly or indirectly responsible for implementing these initiatives within their schools. As Fullan (2001) notes, "the principal has historically been the 'gatekeeper' of change, often determining the fate of external innovations or internal teacher-led initiatives" (p.59).

In Gilgit-Baltistan, the Professional Development Centre North (PDCN) stands as the leading institution in the educational realm. Operating since 1999, this institution serves the educational landscape of Gilgit-Baltistan and is an integral part of AKU-IED, focusing on the northern context of Pakistan. The institution aspires to be a leading and widely acknowledged academic establishment, especially in the realm of professional development for education. It aims to positively impact the socio-economic conditions of the northern territory through fostering peace, harmony, and unity. The institution's functions encompass leadership and management training for school heads, middle and senior managers, curriculum enrichment, and research (Khanji & Ali, 2006). To realize this vision, the institution dedicates significant attention to enhancing the capabilities of headteachers in both public and private schools across Gilgit-Baltistan.

Since 2000, the institution has adopted a tailored WSIP model (see figure one) that places considerable emphasis on providing professional training for school heads. In this context, it creates avenues and environments to involve headteachers, particularly female leaders

from project schools, in transformative reform activities, proposing in-person and distance education courses. During its inception phase till date, the institution has served over 1000 schools across all the 10 districts of Gilgit-Baltistan, including the district of Diamer, Hunza, Ghizer, Skardu, Gangche, and Astore. These services persist, with numerous headteachers and teachers of all genders enhancing their professional competencies and bringing visible improvements to their schools. These improvements encompass areas such as academic achievement of students, increased participation of parents and communities in school affairs, effective team-building initiatives by school heads and teachers, and advancements in the physical infrastructure of the schools.

Given this context, the study aims to delve into the perceptions and experiences of headteachers regarding the WSIP initiative. Specifically, it focuses on exploring the post-participation experiences of a female headteacher from a public school, who has successfully translated the acquired knowledge into practice within her school setting.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of this study transcends the immediate audience of school headteachers, encompassing a broader spectrum of stakeholders including policymakers, educational researchers, and interested parties committed to enhancing educational practices and results. The study's findings possess the capacity to shape the development of policies and initiatives tailored to bolstering headteachers' endeavors in enacting transformative changes and enhancing overall school achievements.

Furthermore, the study holds the potential to enrich the reservoir of knowledge pertaining to effective leadership practices and strategies for managing change within educational contexts. The insights garnered from the study can serve as a compass for researchers to identify gaps in the current understanding and pave the way for future investigations in this domain. Ultimately, the study's significance lies in its potential to align with the continuous endeavors aimed at elevating the caliber of education and fostering improved learning outcomes for students.

PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTION

The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of a female school headteacher who have participated in the whole process of WSIP and implemented the whole learning in the school. So, the study was guided with the following main and subsidiary questions to probe the subject matter:

How does the female headteacher perceive WSIP intervention and its implementation in school, specifically with regards to the challenges faced and coping strategies employed?

SUBSIDIARY QUESTIONS

1. What specific challenges did the headteacher face during the WSIP intervention and implementation process?
2. What coping strategies did the headteacher employ to overcome these challenges?
3. How did the WSIP intervention and implementation process impact the headteacher's leadership practices and approach to education?
4. What improvements in the school's practices and student outcomes did the headteacher observe as a result of the WSIP intervention and implementation?

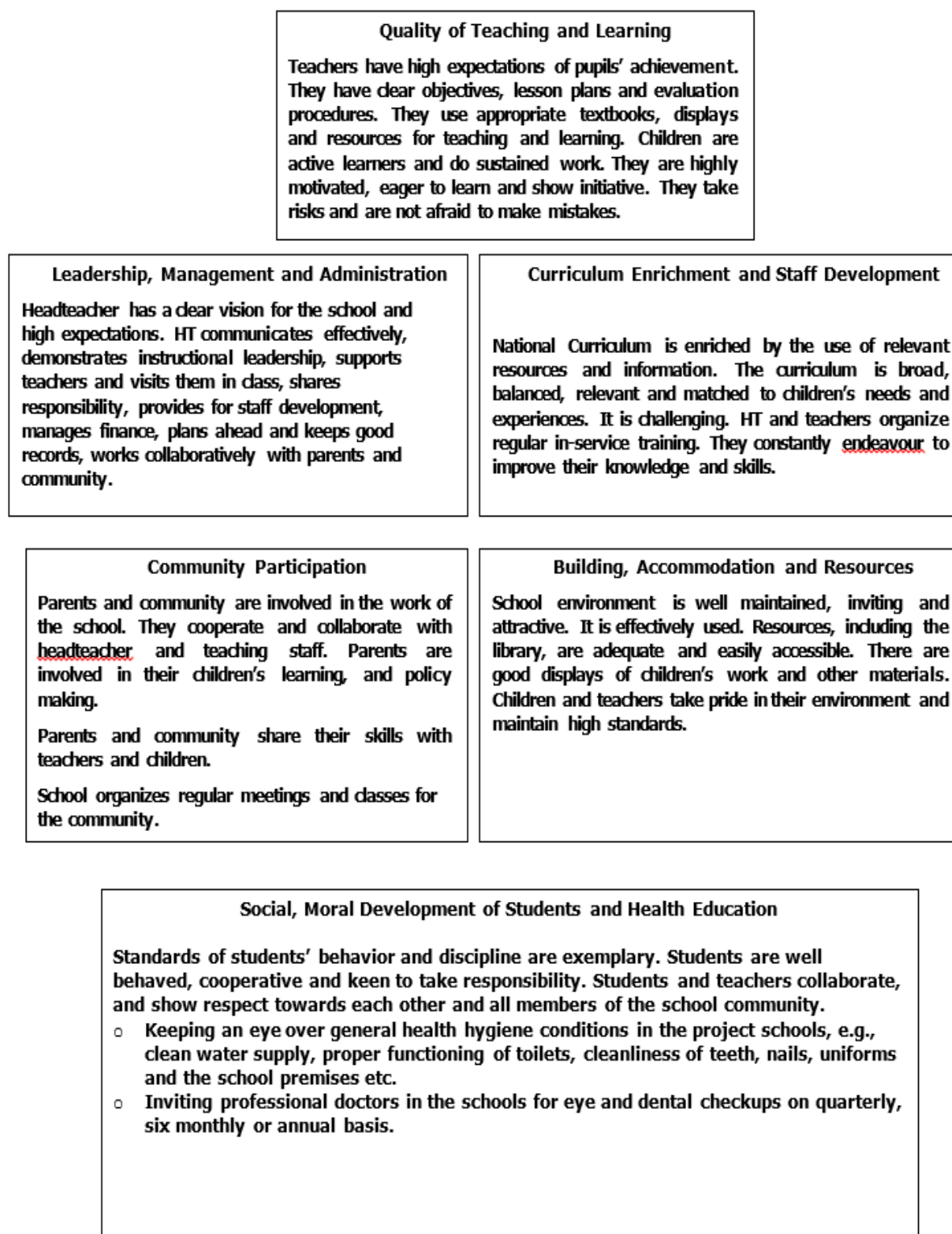


Figure 1. WSIP MODEL

LITERATURE REVIEW

WSIP, the school improvement model is an approach aiming to enhance the quality of teaching and learning, and students' outcomes by concentrating the school as a learning organization and a community of practice. The program involves the participation of Professional Development Teams (PDTs) in all aspects of school life that impact student learning, and it focuses on six areas:

- 1. Quality of teaching and learning**
- 2. Leadership, management, and administration**
- 3. Community participation**
- 4. Curriculum and staff development**
- 5. Building, accommodation, and resources**
- 6. Social and moral development of students and health education**

Its overarching principle is to treat the school as a unit of training rather than the individual, with the long-term aim being the development of effective group dynamics and collegiality amongst teachers, students, and communities for the purposes of ongoing educational dialogue and improvement (Muhammad et al., 2000, p.4). By focusing on these six areas, WSIP aims to improve opportunities for children to learn through whole school improvement, which involves the entire school community in a collaborative effort to enhance the learning environment and student outcomes.

The program intensively focuses school for whole academic year with less intensive support in the following year. A designated Professional Development Teacher (PDT) works in four days a week. They work with all stakeholders including teachers, headteachers, students, and parents. Jointly, they work on finding appropriate strategies for improvement. Through collaborative efforts with all stakeholders, the PDT aims to create a supportive and inclusive learning environment that is conducive to student learning. This approach, besides improving the quality of teaching and learning fosters a sense of collegiality and collaboration among whole school community. Ultimately, WSIP is a comprehensive approach to school improvement that aims to enhance student outcomes through the active participation of all stakeholders.

During the intervention stage, intensive school-based support is provided to all project schools. This included co-planning and co-teaching of lessons and organizing regular workshops on selected topics and arranging workshops for teachers of all schools in the cluster. This is supplemented by brief centre-based orientation sessions for all teachers. More importantly, a formal field-based training programme is organized for headteachers of WSIP schools at PDCN.

To see the effectiveness of the programme, few studies and reports undertaken on WSIP reflect that this programme has shown a good impact on the participating schools. Studying the impact and sustainability of WSIP, Shamim (2005) found out that this programme has shown an impact in all the elements of WSIP, particularly enhancing the teaching and learning processes in classrooms. Teachers have shown tolerance towards students and students have developed confidence. Another component of WSIP for headteachers, CELM has brought about a significant development in headteachers' knowledge and skill (Madhani, 2003).

Similar kind of evidence are also provided by various reports (WSIP annual report 2004-08) produced internally by PDCN and other external funding agencies. Studying the effect of the Educational Leadership Programmes for headteachers, Ahmad (2004) explores that it remained helpful in creating enthusiasm among the headteachers as it provided maximum opportunities for them to look at their potentials by involving them in small

groups, whole class activities and presentations. They are encouraged to think and find out solutions to problems by themselves instead of depending on others.

Northern Pakistan Education Project (NPEP) 2007 report on Phase 2 monitoring mission found sustainable impact of WSIP. For example, at the government high school Sarpa¹, they witnessed strongly enhanced enrolment and exam results. They discovered that the programme has reached over 10,000 children. They report that the success of the programme has led to the development of schools that could serve as key cluster schools as part of an integrated education strategy for the area after the project.

The monitoring report of European Commission (EC) 2006 on support to the NPEP states that WSIP and other programmes conducted by PDCN have shown a larger effect than so many other intensive programmes and an obvious change in schools which means that they are acting as the 'lighthouse or beacon' schools in their area. Similarly, the EC (2003) report on evaluation mission depicts that the WSIP approach with both WSI and CELM courses made a substantial change in schools.

Headteachers, being the crucial players in bringing improvement reforms, the literature on headteachers' practices has widely been studied. In this regard, the literature proposes multiple perspectives about the role and practices of headteachers in school improvement process. For instance, various studies (Morse, 2001; Hoban, 2002; Harris & Chrispeels, 2006) advocate for holistic approach of headteachers for school improvement and to increase students' outcomes. Similarly, Sergiovanni and Starrat (1998) also emphasize on role of headteacher as an instructional leader for developing, improving and promoting teachers' and students' progress.

Reflecting of causes of students' failure, I consider that parents show lacking attitude towards their children learning at homes. It is established that the success stories of student's achievement are those where parents engage with their children at homes (Alma & Janet, 2008; Nicky & David, 2005). Here, the head plays crucial role in educating parents. It is the headteacher who acts and invites parents as, principal behavior influences parental involvement and the role of school principal is crucial in embedding parental involvement work in school policy and culture (Dayson, 2007; Griffith, 1999).

Contrary to the developed world, research studies pertaining to Pakistan context shows another picture of a headteacher's role for improving schools. In this connection, Memon (2003) studies ratify important role of school headteacher but he found very limited role of school heads.....they interact with students to resolve conflicts and maintains students' fee record. Likewise, Khaki (2005) mentions that..."the public school systems in the developing nations allow heads little room for leadership enforcing more managerial approach" (p.69). Retallick et al., (2004) and Memon (1998) highlight the reasons of limited roles as lack of professional capacities of headteachers and they are limited by the rules of the system which encourages top down approach. Probing other limitations, Memon and Bana (2005) mention that "headteachers are recruited and promoted on the basis of their teaching rather than their leadership and management experience or qualification. Hence, most schools are functioning without qualified and trained headteachers" (Memon & Bana, 2005, p.163).

To overcome those obstacles, Kanwar (2000) suggests that "principals need to be aware of the latest approaches in school leadership" (p.101). Likewise, Shafa (2005) expressed that "it is possible for headteachers to engineer creative solutions if they have a compelling vision for their schools" (p.275). Practically, the fulfilment of official requirements pay primary importance than student's development. As Akhtar (2007) rightly argues that in developing countries individuals need to work hard and look back to see whether or not

¹ Pseudonym used for the real name of the school.

requirements of a particular job have been fulfilled. And the heads should focus on pupils' learning as a vital factor for school improvement (Riaz, 2008).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study focuses on studying the WSIP experiences of the headteacher who played leading roles in implementation of her learning, therefore to generate richer experiences, case study method seemed pertinent. As Creswell (1998) advocates that, "Case study provides the researcher with an opportunity to involve multiple sources of information which are rich in context" (p.61). Therefore, these multiple resources under case study method helped in triangulation of the data which ultimately enhanced the validity of research findings.

While selection of the research participant, following criteria has been developed:

1. Schools have undergone WSIP intervention
2. School headteacher has participated in the whole cycle of WSIP (one-year program)
3. The selected school headteachers must have one year of working experience after taking part in WSIP intervention
4. They show willingness and volunteer to participate in the study and are interested in sharing their experiences.

An in-depth interviews protocol was used to gather the essential data. This tool allowed to ask open-ended questions and probe for elaboration and clarification. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) propose that, " By probing an interviewee's responses, we are likely to add to the richness of the data, and end up with better understanding of the phenomenon we are studying" (p.95). The interview process was conducted through a pre-defined interview guide along with recording of whole responses.

Besides formal interviews, observations were also carried out bridge the interview data with actual practices and to gain deeper understanding of headteacher's roles, as "actions can be best understood when it is observed in the setting in which it occurs" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; p.30). Similarly, analyzing the pertinent documents continued to relate the experiences with the actual happenings in the school.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The study remained helpful in generating beautiful practices of a female headteacher, gained through participating in the WSIP intervention and its implementation. While analyzing the gathered data, following overarching themes were generated as findings of the study:

CHANGE IN PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDE

The data revealed that WSIP has been instrumental in bringing about changes in the female headteacher's perceptions regarding school improvement measures. This was seen as leading change in her practices, resulting a profound improvement in various dimensions of school improvement areas.

One of the essential pillars of WSIP is the involvement of community members in school matters. The data presented that the headteacher realized that she possess a strong authority in the school to lead the whole team of stakeholders including community members, teachers and students. She can perform her roles if she involves all these stakeholders in school matters. This creates motivation in the community, and they can

play their part successfully.

Headteacher discussed that she considers teamwork as a vital force to achieve success. Regarding school management, the head mentioned that when she joined the school, there was no deputy headteacher, and whenever she had to go to the office for meetings or remain outside the school premises, teachers were facing problems in managing the school. Through WSIP, she was convinced about the effectiveness of teamwork. To address this issue, she designated a deputy headteacher, prepared various committees by the teachers and assigned different responsibilities according to their interest, expertise and readiness. She involved them in all the school related tasks. All these activities ultimately remained useful to develop students in their academic and non-academic activities. Overall, the adoption of a participatory approach by the headteacher has the potential to create a more collaborative and effective learning environment, benefiting both teachers and students alike. Headteacher admitted that encouragement of teachers is a significant factor in proper implementation of planned activities. She shared that before WSIP intervention, she was unaware about providing encouragement to teacher, considering that teachers have to obey her orders. WSIP informed her professional practices to involve all the teachers in various dimensions of improvement areas with proper encouragement on their improved practices. She shared her practices as:

To encourage teachers, I acknowledge the teachers as a whole. There was no encouraging procedure before WSIP but now I have changed this. I found that all the teachers do not perform their duties in the same way. They knew they get same reward for whatever they do. This was de-motivating many teachers who were working with total commitment. To encourage them, I planned a new strategy. I announced that I will declare best teachers in the next annual day. I developed criteria. This included teachers' attendance, quality of teaching, subject results and best day mistress who cares all the school tasks in a day. Only 7-8 teachers got awards on the annual day. This created motivation among all the teachers and they also started to compete with the other teachers. (Interview)

One of the major changes the headteacher regarded was the beliefs about student's critical role in schools. She believed that activities should be developed that could foster students' development every day. She acknowledged that WSIP guided her in changing the traditional practices which emphasized on teacher-centered teaching and considered students as passive recipients of information. Now, the trend has changed and all the activities regarding students learning has been recorded and needful changes are made accordingly. For example, one of the important procedures to monitor student's progress is the introduction and preservation of portfolios. The head mentioned that she learnt about the concept of student portfolio for the first time in WSIP. She began to realize the importance of portfolios for tracking students' academic development. Now she has motivated her teachers to work on portfolios and make it a regular practice.

The analysis of some of the documents showed that school observe different approaches to monitor students' progress. While exploring certain teachers' diaries, it was found that teachers have maintained proper records of students' co-curricular achievements along with academic results tool.

ENHANCED CHILDREN LEARNING

Major contributions of WSIP from the headteacher's perspectives can be seen in the degree to which students are involved in learning activities. To improve the learning capabilities of students, the head continuously arranges meetings with her teachers. They develop lesson plans together, co-teach lessons and observe each other's in the classrooms and make needed amendments in their teaching approaches to improve students' learning.

The head further shared her school practices aimed at students' involvement in the learning process. She commented:

Earlier, I used to transmit information through lectures. I treated students as empty vessels. WSIP guided me towards adopting a child-centered instruction. I came to believe in the fact that whatever happens in the school, it is meant for learning and developing students. Without their active involvement, the activities we carry out are useless. (Head Interview)

She added that to meet the students' learning needs, she planned different activities with the teachers to ensure maximum student participation in classroom activities. To do this, she used different tactics in the school. For example, once students were given a topic to make displays and prizes offered to winners. This created motivation among students. To add their understanding, students search library books and other resources at homes to find out attractive material regarding the topics. For deciding the winners, they call one of the local artists. On the annual prize distribution day, they distribute prizes among the successful students. So endorsed WSIP pillar 6, focusing on social and moral development which aided her skills on how to enhance students' motivation and confidence in learning.

In this regard, many displays in and outside classrooms indicated that students are involved in development of various displays. While observing some of the classrooms, it was found that, besides displays on the walls, different models were made by the students by using local materials. These all resources are well-organized in respective classroom and are readily accessible.

CREATION OF CONDUCTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR LEARNING

The data suggested that headteacher has attempted to establish association between student's learning and a supportive school or classroom environment. Pointing towards her school environment, the head claimed:

Through WSIP, along with learning about management related tasks, I also realized the importance of facilitative environment inside and outside the classroom. I focused on improving classroom management alongside working for improvements in various areas for school improvement. To achieve my objectives, I conducted various sessions for the teachers and we planned different strategies together. (Headteacher Interview)

The headteacher shared an example that being the most populated school of the region, furniture in the classrooms has been a bigger problem for her in the last few years. To overcome this situation, she paid sincere attention towards this problem and put this plan at the top of the list. For this she also consulted with the chairman of SMC who is also the member of the Northern Areas Legislative Council (NALC). She picked this idea from WSIP theme, endorsing community participation for school improvement. Applying this concept, and by generating multiple resources, she was able to resolve this concern and now all the classrooms are equipped with furniture and students do not have any problem regarding their seating arrangements.

The teaching approaches in and outside the classrooms in schools indicated that teachers use different teaching styles for better lesson delivery. For example, in an observation, it was seen that students were relaxed at work in the school ground. Moreover, a supportive culture was reflected when teachers were moving around the classes helping them in their assigned tasks.

INSTIGATION OF NEW ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES

A notable aspect of evaluating students involves the creation of examination papers to gauge their comprehension and knowledge. This is a prevailing practice in numerous schools, particularly those affiliated with government educational systems. These schools often tend to emphasize students' ability to memorize information by rote. Students are often required to reproduce notes on specific subjects. Success in this approach hinges on whether students have managed to memorize the given questions. Unfortunately, this method of assessment hampers students' inherent potential, as it assesses them not based on their grasp of concepts, but rather on their ability to recall factual details. The head pointed out:

Through WSIP, I realized the importance of test development and assessment procedures following latest methods. After that, I also arranged various workshops on development and assessment of papers and currently my teachers follow the same pattern. This method also remained instrumental in modifying old practices of students which were based upon rote learning. To ensure transparency, I had made different committees of teachers to review assessment processes and results. (Head Interview)

Responding to a question about test designing, the headteacher said that teachers give equal share to each chapter and select important topics from these chapters. The analysis of few question papers suggested a change in the paper pattern and showed that teachers have tried to use new methods of developing papers including short questions which were based upon the conceptual evaluation of students.

MOTIVATION TOWARDS INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The narratives shared by the headteacher showed that the head had internalized change processes for improving learning areas. In this connection, the headteacher shared that WSIP was helpful in enabling her to see prospects for change in their schools. She did not have a clear idea about their important portfolio in the school earlier. During the implementation of WSIP learning, she conceptualized and developed school's vision and mission to guide their activities. Referring towards the school vision, the head specified:

Before the intervention, I have little knowledge about vision. I considered that I am the only person in the school and whatever I propose is right. I have to guide the teachers to complete the given textbook syllabus. In my opinion, teachers are my followers having no right to resist. They were also following the traditional approach of "the boss is always right". Now I realized that we have to work together for a collective goal. (Headteacher Interview)

She considers WSIP as a visionary approach in her career. She commented that vision provides direction about the future. The headteacher is the visible authority in the school and directs all the members of the school as the front leader. She further explained that she, along with the teachers, SMC members and the professional input of PDCN faculty members made a vision for their school. It is based on developing students' thinking, refining their opinions and developing their confidence, and developing leadership qualities in them to guide the society.

The headteacher further explained that, following the directions in vision statement, they developed activities to move towards achieving the vision. She said that during the WSIP intervention, they knew about how an SDP is made. Following that path, they prepared the SDP and activities were indicated which were directly leading towards the vision.

INITIATION OF SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING (SDP)

Headteacher believes that SDP plays an important role in smooth functioning of school activities. In this regard, the headteacher' responses and displayed school development plans pointed out that they perform their roles and responsibilities in an organized way. The SDP in school was reflecting achievable targets within given periods. Sharing her views about the SDP, headteacher said:

Before WSIP, I possessed little knowledge about SDP but did not have any idea about realistic plan. If I would have tried to make it, it was just to decorate my office. My plan for school development would not include any change in real practices of the school. For example, I was taking so many areas of improvement at a time and planning many activities in a year, but at the end of year when I looked at it, I had hardly accomplished any of the tasks. WSIP workshops helped me to learn about development plan. I involved all the stakeholders in the SDP and observed that many objectives were achieved as I had selected those targets which were achievable within my resources and timeline. (headteacher Interview)

While probing to various aspects of learning, it was noted that the school works under a pre-planned SDP made at the beginning of the academic year. Their plans showed the activities which were directly related to school improvement and student's developmental needs. The SDP was representing various events to celebrate at different stages of academic year. For example, Environmental Day, Independence Day, and Defense Day celebrations were shown in their appropriate dates. These events also indicted the task delegation for relevant persons to involve in the events and the main focus was given to students in different activities.

IMPROVEMENT IN PROFESSIONAL CAPACITY

The headteacher believed that WSIP has led to develop professional capacities. It has caused revolutionary changes in her beliefs and practices. The head highlighted certain areas experiencing significant changes in professional dimensions. Some of the important areas showing a remarkable shift are discussed in the following sections:

IMPROVED PRESENTATION SKILLS

The headteachers was of the view that WSIP has immensely affected her professional lives. Elaborating on this, the head commented that in her early years, her father would advise her insisting that "learn to stand on your own feet". She learnt this practically in WSIP. She explains how her presentation skills got improved:

Before the intervention, I had the knowledge but I did not have the confidence and fluency to present something in front of an audience. Through different presentation in WSIP, I developed the confidence along with presentation skills. Various delegations from AKU-IED, PDCN and other donor agencies visited my school. During their visits I presented my success stories after WSIP. All these activities improved my presentation skills. (Headteacher Interview)

The headteacher further explained that through her enhanced presentation skills, she started assisting other teachers in improving their skills. She, quite frequently arranges workshops in the school and encourages teachers to lead the sessions according to their subject competencies. This also provided the teachers with a platform to improve their presentations capabilities.

In headteacher's view confidence is one of the key tools for meaningful interaction with

different stakeholders. This confidence is developed as a result of improved professional skills. WSIP helped in boosting up of self-confidence through various activities including presentations during WSIP sessions. Additionally, to build the confidence of teachers, she asks teachers to lead morning assemblies and present their views on different topics. This practice helped the teachers to improve their power of expression and enhanced their confidence.

IMPROVED OBSERVATION SKILLS

Headteacher views that WSIP remained instrumental in developing observation skills. She considers that being the heads of the school it is essential that they must possess strong observational skills to see the successful implementation of the initiated programmes. Presenting her views the head said:

I improved my observation skills by visiting classrooms along with the PDTs. This also developed leadership skills among students and teachers as their teaching approaches were modified through PDTs feedback. Before the intervention, I developed personal skills by participating in CELM, but WSIP developed these skills both in teachers and students. (Headteacher Interview)

DEVELOPMENT OF MOTIVATIONAL SKILLS

While revisiting her improved practices, the head reflected that their existing success stories are linked with strong motivational skills. She considers that through different activities in WSIP, she has developed these skills. To reinforce her feelings, headteacher shared an example:

A year after WSIP action implementation phase, I guided the teachers to prepare lesson plans on modern approaches which supports maximum encouragement to students. They sometimes resisted the idea with the excuse that they cannot complete their syllabus. I provided support by arranging consecutive workshops. I showed the procedure; for example, divide the courses into terms, then into months and weeks. I used some model examples to motivate them to plan their daily lessons. This has now become a routine practice in our school. (Headteacher Interview)

While carrying out informal discussions with the teachers and observations, it was found that the successful implementation of various activities showed a link between headteachers and teacher motivation. The school depicted a very cool and busy environment where teachers and students seemed engaged with different activities.

IMPROVED REFLECTIVE PRACTICES

The notion of reflection was quite new for the headteacher before joining in WSIP. She shared that she possessed little idea about reflection and its important role in school life. Referring towards improvement in such practices, the headteacher remarked:

Before WSIP, I did not know what reflective practice was about because I never engaged in reflection process. WSIP informed me about the importance of this aspect in school life. I encouraged teachers to maintain reflective diaries on a regular basis and write their views after classes and share them with all the teachers for feedback. By doing so, they improved their plans by making needed amendments. I consider the successive success in my school is due to revised activities based on reflection. (Headteacher Interview)

The headteacher further elaborated that although she and her teachers do not follow proper reflective diaries, they share successes and challenges among themselves on a regular basis. They discuss the causes for failure and amend their activities to overcome them. Thus they find a way to engage in reflective events that take place in the school.

EFFECT ON TEACHING PRACTICES

Headteacher considers that WSIP not only improved their understanding in various dimensions of school, it also helped them to improve their teaching practices as well. Different activities, for example, observing classrooms with PDTs remained helpful in improving their teaching capabilities. Discussing about her changed attitude towards teaching, the head presented:

Through WSIP intervention, I did not only develop my teaching capabilities with the teachers, but they also helped me in sustaining change in their practice. After intervention, I involved the teachers in developing local low-cost and no-cost materials by using available resources. All these activities further strengthened my teaching skills. (Headteacher Interview)

She further expressed that a year after WSIP intervention school-based workshops continued to improve teaching practices. This practice helped teachers to develop lessons full of interesting activities for students. Now her teachers are developing stories and other appealing pictures and students show lot of motivation towards these activities.

The headteacher explained further that WSIP workshops focus on different topics pertaining to school improvement. Certain times, subject specialist teachers are also involved in leading specific sessions. She reflected that all these actions not only improve the teaching capabilities of teachers, they also boosted their confidence as well.

The informal discussions with some of the students showed that they enjoyed the way they were being taught. Analysis of various documents, for example, teachers' lesson plan diaries reflected that the teachers deliver in a planned way. Moreover, students' confidence in responding to my questions and observation of the teacher exhibiting friendly attitude towards student suggest that serious efforts are carried out at school level to positively improve students' learning.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Capacity-building interventions either formal in-person or distance modes play a crucial role in developing professional competencies of headteachers. The distance education programmes are even more important for female professionals who cannot attend face-to-face due to various barriers, particularly in the context of Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan. Distance education for women is a vital educational approach that provides accessibility, flexibility, and safety. It breaks down barriers, enabling women to pursue education without geographical or cultural constraints. This approach empowers women by offering the flexibility to balance education with other responsibilities, enhances safety by eliminating travel risks, challenges societal norms, promotes economic independence, and contributes to gender equality and social progress. Overall, distance education for women plays a crucial role in empowering and advancing women's education and societal development.

The research centered on investigating the experiences of a female headteacher in a public school who has overseen the implementation of WSIP within her school. It delved into the impact of this obligatory program on the female headteacher, a perspective that had not

previously been examined, in order to uncover the experiences of headteachers who actually drive transformative efforts in educational institutions.

The study revealed that WSIP, offering in-person and distance education models, has been a significant contributor in bringing change in attitudes and professional capabilities of the headteacher for leading their schools. It shows a link between the headteacher's learning in WSIP and the initiatives she has taken in her school. The head faced certain barriers while implementing school improvement activities, but she felt that being a women didn't hamper her plan. Mostly, the challenges were pertaining to organisational policies, societal practices and traditional practices of teachers in the classrooms. The head handled these barriers by applying situational leadership approach which emphasizes on acting in accordance with the demands and needs of the situation (Snowden, 1998).

The headteacher regard WSIP approach and learning as very essential input for developing the visionary attitudes, which is equally important aspect to lead a team of diverse groups in schools. It proves Sergiovanni (1998) views that visionary leadership provides vision, motivates and inspires schools to change. While carrying out interviews with the headteacher, deliberations with the teachers and students, it was found that the visionary approaches have shown a positive impact to bring change initiatives in their schools. Some of these changes are reflected in the form of strategies to improve students' academic and non-academic aspects, modifications in teachers' attitude towards their profession, and developments in cultural and structural aspects of the schools.

The effective practices adopted by female headteacher in a public school challenged the general delusion about public schools where headteachers work under the umbrella of dominant bureaucratic rules and structures, follow top-down approach and having limited choices to bring improvement reforms (Memon, 1998; Memon, 1999). It informed that following the structures, how a headteacher can integrate new ideas into existing practices. It can be said that the headteachers who are equipped with professional skills can bring improvement in their schools, despite working under strict policies and gender-based misconceptions.

The effect of WSIP intervention, in-person and distance education modes was evident through attitudinal changes of headteacher, enforcing her to realize the importance of students within their school buildings. She has changed her traditional assumptions which were based on certain fallacies, considering students as receptors of information. One of the sharing of the participant in changing the attitude of "jug and mug theory" (Boomer, 1992) was quite impressive. The activities carried out in the school showed that WSIP remained very effective in revising this theory. The students seemed relaxed in their tasks by actively participating in new approaches of teaching.

A general trend in developing countries is that instructional leadership functions are relatively rare in schools and the heads are likely to adopt a stance in favour of management and administration (Oplatka, 2004). But WSIP approach remained effective for the headteacher to invite her for creating an encouraging environment to improve students' learning through instructing teachers. It endorsed Barth (2001) that various dimensions of improved practices depict the notion of effective leadership where effective school leaders foster rich learning environments for students and adults in their buildings. The headteacher has developed an attractive learning environment inside the school and classroom environment was quite facilitating where students were motivated towards learning and teaching approaches. Although the headteacher's job also demands for some management roles but the success always relies on the balancing approach between instructional and managerial perspectives and as a professional, a head must possess the aptitude to maintain a balance between various important roles.

While applying the distance education activities effectively, the female headteacher was aware about the true sense of change. It is a difficult task in the context of Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan to bring change initiatives due to societal pressures, gender-related stereotypes and conventional practices in the schools. Being professionally sound, these hurdles didn't seem to have any negative impact on female head's approaches. According to Hargreaves and Hopkin (1991), "change always challenges current assumptions and practices. Schools have to choose which changes to make and then devise strategies for implementing them in the interest of school improvement but without damage to existing good practice" (p.84). The SDP in the school showed that it was developed according to needs of the school and activities were designed which motivate communities towards school. It can be concluded that development of SDP, a major emphasis of WSIP for school improvement is being carried out in schools. Certain discussions with the headteacher revealed that WSIP provided her the kind of learning which remained instrumental in looking for real needs of the school and she has shown it through development of meaningful SDP.

One of the objectives of CELM, demanding heads to adapt their learning in distance education approaches is to develop headteachers for leading their schools professionally. This professional attitude demands for the creation of supportive culture where team members show their cooperative hands to each other. Various practices in the school depicted that the headteacher has created a supportive culture through arranging in-school workshops for professional development of teachers. In workshops they focus content areas, teaching strategies and other needed school based developmental activities. As, Ali (2007) points out, "a supportive school climate inspires and facilitates the development of the value and practices, such as shared understanding of learning, opportunities for dialogue or interaction, mutual support, and the will to innovate" (p.283). The activities carried out in the school also verified the notion of good schools which "foster collegial interaction by creating professional environment that facilitates the work of teachers" (Sergiovanni, 2000, p.96).

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BIODATA and CONTACT ADDRESS of the AUTHOR



Sultan Alam is Senior Instructor and Coordinator of School Improvement Program (SIP) at The Aga Khan University-Professional Development Center North (AKU-PDCN). He holds an M.Phil and M.Ed degrees in Educational Leadership and Management from Virtual University and Aga Khan University, Pakistan. He earned his M.Sc in Environmental Sciences from University of Karachi Pakistan. He has been serving in Gilgit-Baltistan region, one of the remotest parts of Pakistan in improving educational standards in the territory. His research interests include school improvement, leadership and management and environmental education.

Sultan ALAM

Address: AKU-PDCN, University Road, Konodass Gilgit, 15100

Phone: +925811-454132 Ext. 8814

E-mail: sultan.alam@aku.edu

URL: <https://www.aku.edu/iedpk/faculty/pages/profile.aspx?ProfileID=24&Name=Sultan%20Alam>

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE INDOMITABLE LISA MARIE BLASCHKE: CHAMPION OF HEUTAGOGY (SELF-DETERMINED LEARNING)

Norine WARK

norinewark@gmail.com

Education, Technology, & Research Consultant, Canada

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ABSTRACT

This interview with Dr. Lisa Marie Blaschke traces the journey of a Wisconsin farm girl who first dreamed of becoming a journalist. Upon graduating with a technical writing degree in medicine, Blaschke eventually became a corporate manager of a technical firm which, in turn, led to a career as an educator and program manager in the field of distance education. Today, Blaschke balances a blended career in the corporate and academic worlds. During this candid interview, Blaschke discusses her educational and experiential background, as well as her interests, goals, accomplishments, challenges, and research in distance learning. Drawing from her observations and experiences in the corporate and academic fields, Blaschke identifies the value and power of learner agency in any learning environment. In this interview, she discusses this insight and how it has inspired her to champion the learning approach known as heutagogy (self-determined learning). She also reflects on changes in the field of distance learning over the span of her career, offers some pearls of wisdom, and then shares her current and future plans as she moves into semi-retirement. In documenting the trials and tribulations of her epic journey through corporate and academic life, this interview highlights how determination, resilience, tenacity, and grit have been integral to Blaschke attaining her goals and achieving her dreams.

Keywords: Distance education, heutagogy, hyflex learning, learner agency, Lisa Marie Blaschke, online learning, women researchers



"Believe in yourself; just keep going, keep working at it. If you set your mind to it, and you keep working towards your goals, you can achieve them." – Lisa Marie Blaschke, PhD

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Lisa Marie Blaschke is renown in academic and corporate environments for promoting heutagogy (self-determined learning; Hase & Kenyon, 2001; 2013) and hyflex learning. What is perhaps less known about Lisa Marie, however, are the paths that she has traveled, the achievements that she earned, and the challenges that she addressed in her desire to help others become lifelong masters of their own learning.

Lisa Marie grew up on a farm near a small town in Wisconsin, USA. Intent upon becoming a journalist, she began attending the University of Minnesota in 1982. In 1987, she graduated with a Bachelor of Science in the emerging field of technical communications, focusing primarily on the topic of medicine. Unfortunately, she was not able to transfer much of what she learned at university to her first career, which was in banking.

Lisa Marie eventually began working in the corporate world as a technical writer and trainer before transitioning into a management position, whereupon she discovered a wealth of new skills that she wanted to share with others. Upon contacting a university with the offer to teach as a visiting educator, she learned that she needed at least a Master's degree to do so. This news prompted Lisa Marie's return to university in 2000. This time, she joined a joint Master's program offered by the University of Maryland in the US and Carl von Ossietzky Universität Oldenburg in Germany. There she learned about the foundations, the business, and other aspects of distance education while earning a degree in the management of distance learning, which she completed in 2004.

In 2010, an article that Lisa Marie and Dr. Jane Brindley published in a reflective journal won a Best Paper Award. That prompted Lisa Marie to return to university to earn a PhD that year. Undeterred by academic, career, family, and even life-threatening health challenges, Lisa Marie staunchly resolved to complete the degree. After working on her PhD for a few years, she was informed that she required a different Master's degree. She promptly enrolled in a Master of Business Administration program in educational management, which was completed in 2014. In 2018, Lisa Marie finished her PhD in distance education.

The following interview captures the trials and tribulations of Lisa Marie's epic journey through corporate and academic life, exemplifying that determination, resilience, tenacity, and grit are integral to reaching her goals and achieving her dreams.

INTERVIEW WITH LISA MARIE

In the following interview, questions asked by the interviewer, Dr. Norine Wark, are italicized. Dr. Lisa Marie Blaschke's responses are presented in regular font. Sections of the interview are divided into: educational and experiential background; initial interest in distance education; goals, accomplishments, and challenges; research interests; the past, present, and future of distance education; interesting memories; pearls of wisdom; current activities; future plans; and final thoughts.

Educational and experiential background

What is your current institutional affiliation?

Currently, I do not have an institutional affiliation. I'm semi-retired, working as a Learning Consultant.

What is your educational background?

After graduating from high school, I went to the University of Minnesota from 1982 to 1987. At that time, I wanted to be a journalist, which was my first area of study. I soon found that there was no money in journalism; I needed to pay back my student loans, so I switched my major to technical communication, which was an emerging field about better communicating technical information. I graduated in 1987, with a Bachelor of Science in technical communication.

I didn't return to university again until many years later, because I wanted to teach and to share what I had learned from the work world. In the US, I had transitioned into management very quickly; I think I was a technical writer, technical trainer, for about two years before I began managing a technical communications team. I then moved to Germany to work for a computer software company called SAP. They were very small at the time – about 1000 employees. This is a long way to answer your question. What you want to know is what degrees I had, but I think I need to tell you the path I took to get there, because there's a big gap between 1987 and 2001, when I started my master's degree at University of Maryland and [University of] Oldenburg. When I moved Germany to work for SAP, I also moved quickly into management. At that time, SAP was hiring many, many people and very, very quickly. During the hiring process, I began to realize that I needed to have people who were ready to hit the ground running—and that wasn't happening. I was learning a lot about what it was like to be a manager within an international company, so I contacted a university and said, "I would be really excited to share my experiences with you and to teach, maybe be a visitor within your classrooms." They said, "Well, unless you have a master's degree, we won't even look at you as an as an option for coming to speak at our institution."

So, I went back to school in 2000, and I got my master's degree in distance education and e-learning through the University of Maryland. They had a partnership with Oldenburg, and offered an international master's program developed by Ulrich Bernath and Gene Rubin that taught people how to be managers of distance learning programs. You learned about the foundations of distance education, the history, the business of distance education, and different aspects of distance education, like the training and learner support, and the role that it plays. I completed that degree in 2004.

Then I started to teach in the University of Maryland/Oldenburg program, starting as a teaching assistant and then moving into teaching soon afterwards. While teaching was when I decided to do my PhD. I'm going to be really honest. Someone once told me that the only way you're going to be recognized within academic circles is if you have a doctorate or a PhD. To get those creds [credentials], you have to go through that process. My argument had always been that you don't absolutely *need* to have a PhD. We had done things when I worked for SAP in the mid-90s, where we were looking at learning design, and we were moving masses of Training and Documentation into an online information object-based environment. We were doing all these exciting things that hadn't even happened in academia yet. Cutting edge stuff. When I spoke with my colleague, Peter [Shea], about my thinking, I said, "Why get a doctorate? What difference does it make? I have all this great experience!"

And he [Peter] said, "Because when you study for a PhD or a doctorate, you must do it with rigor. And that's something that isn't always the situation within a work environment."

I thought, "Okay, I'll buy that." And so I decided to pursue my PhD.

Around that time, Jane Brindley and I had published a paper in a reflective learning journal. That was when I was first introduced to this idea of heutagogy (which I'll go into later). That first paper was the start of my publications-based PhD, the first paper that I wanted to include in my doctoral work. When Jane and I won the [Best Research Paper] award, her husband, Ross Paul, who was President of University of Windsor at the time, said to me, "Heutagogy? What the heck is heutagogy?", and I said, "Ross, I am going to write you a paper and explain to you what heutagogy is." So, I wrote a paper about heutagogy for Ross. It was a literature review, looking at all the research that had been done on heutagogy. I think that was in 2010. The article was later published in IRRODL [International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning] in 2012, and it became the cornerstone of my PhD work. I started the PhD around 2010-2011 through the University of Oldenburg. By 2014, I had all of my publications together and was ready to submit. Everything was on track: I had been assured I would be accepted into the Oldenburg doctoral program, and Stewart Hase, Chris Kenyon, and I had just published our first book together (Blaschke, Kenyon, & Hase, 2014), and I was very excited!

On the day that I received our published book in the mail, I also got a letter from University of Oldenburg, rejecting my application to their doctoral program, the reason being my US master's degree was not comparable to a German master's, even though the program had been done in conjunction with the University of Oldenburg. I went from extreme euphoria to crashing through the floor in the space of about five minutes. I was a wreck for the rest of the weekend and I thought, "Well, *what* am I going to do now?" I met with my advisor, and we looked at the different options. In the end, it was decided that I should complete a master's degree in Germany that would be recognized by the German Department of Education. So, although my PhD was technically finished, except for bringing all the pieces together, I needed to first go back and get a master's degree at a German university. I did this through the Center for Lifelong Learning at the University of Oldenburg, and was able to use much of my prior learning toward the degree (they have a PLAR [prior learning and assessment recognition program] there). Two years later, in 2016, I had my MBA in educational management, and then it was on to finishing the PhD in 2018.

That was my journey through academia. I have a Bachelor of Science degree in technical communication, I have a Masters of Distance Education and E-learning through the University of Maryland, and then the publications-based PhD, which spreads from 2010 to 2018, with an MBA somewhere in there around 2014 to 2016.

That's a long answer to a question that's usually probably very short.

Thank you very much for that. I think you've partially answered the second question in your first question. But I would still like to ask you the second question, to make sure we capture other elements. So, what was your experiential background before you became involved in the field of distance education?

As I mentioned, I started out as a tech writer and a trainer for a bank in the United States. I was at a conference presenting our approach to creating documentation and training within our organization, which involved our users making decisions about what needed to be documented and how it needed to be documented, ultimately taking on a trainer's role. At the time, it was a unique solution. Someone from SAP saw me there and then later interviewed me for a position to come to Germany and work for SAP. At the time, nobody in the States knew what SAP was. People were saying, "SAP? Why would you work for a company called *sap*?" But it was exciting times.

I think the company has nearly 100,000 employees now. At that time, there were about 1,000-1,500 employees. Recently, when driving around the SAP campus, I showed my visitors the building where it all started. I told them how we would lunch with the board of directors and that SAP was more like a family than big business. If you had an idea, you could talk to the board about it. You could bump into them in the hallway, or in the café, in the coffee corner, and just pitch your ideas. We were able to do a lot of things that are probably a more challenging now. Once a company reaches a certain size, things start to slow down and there's more bureaucracy. It was exciting to be part of SAP at that time and to be involved and at the level of management where I was working with the board of directors and trying out new things. In academia, exploring new idea can be more challenging because you need all the approvals first. We didn't need as many approvals [in SAP] in order to make things happen, and we also had more funds than you usually do in academia. It was a very, very good time.

I left SAP in 2003. We had adopted our son from Russia in 2000, and then our daughter was born a year later. And so, I became a "stay-at-home mom." I use quotation marks here because I was at home and I was a mom, but I wasn't your traditional stay-at-home mom: I was doing some work for SAP, I was working on my master's degree, and at the same time raising two little kids. I was juggling a lot at the time.

Around 2007, I started to work for University of Maryland in their Master of Distance Education and E-Learning program, and then after about four or five years became the director of the program in Oldenburg. I was then with the Center for Lifelong Learning until 2020, when I left to join a startup called Learnlife in Barcelona, where they use self-determined learning in the K through 12 sector. About a year ago, I decided that maybe it was time to slow down a little, although I haven't really. I call myself semi-retired because I guess I'm too afraid of full retirement. But I am enjoying my free time, and now I'm choosing to do the things that I like to do. It's a good phase to be in.

Initial interest in distance education

What initiated your interest in the field of distance education?

Initially, it was my experience at SAP. I saw the work that we were doing as the future. Globalization was happening in the 1990s, and as we became more global, language and translation became a huge issue. Production of all this documentation, all this knowledge, and then translating it into all of these different languages was a huge expense. That was the driving force behind taking information objects and creating a design where we could reuse information objects across the entire knowledge spectrum—whether it be training, marketing, or online documentation—that you'd be able to reuse and parcel out. Because at the time, we were producing giant trainer and user handbooks. By moving these into the online environment and using an information design where we could categorize different types of information... well, it was like a giant jigsaw puzzle, organizing all the different pieces of information.

I knew of online learning, but I had no idea that there was a long history to distance learning. I'd taken a distance education course in journalism when I was a senior in high school. That was your typical course: you prepared your assignment, put it in the mailbox, and sent it to the institution, and then three weeks later, you got a response from your teacher. It was not anything like it is today. But to me distance learning wasn't what I was doing at SAP. We were doing stuff that was, for me, groundbreaking. If I was going to get a master's degree, I wanted it to be in that area. I saw online learning as the future of what we were doing with knowledge, especially in the workplace.

Goals, accomplishments, and challenges

What are some of the goals that you've had over the years?

Oh, wow. I think one of my first goals was to be successful as a writer. I've always written from the time I was very young, until now, and have had a number of different writing roles. When I was in high school, I was the sports editor of the local newspaper, traveling all over Wisconsin and reporting on the different sports. People would say, "I had to take out a dictionary this week, because I didn't know some of the words you were using." It was always a challenge for me to find new ways to express myself. That was always a big goal—to have a successful career as a writer.

Another big goal was to become a mom; unfortunately, it didn't work out in the beginning. After many years, we decided to adopt, and that was probably... My ex-husband and I talk about this often. It was probably *the* thing where we have had the biggest impact on a person's life, more than anything we've done in our careers. It was a life-changing experience. And our son is such a wonderful, wonderful kid. Both my kids are wonderful. But that was a big goal for me; to have children. I remember telling people that I had done many projects when I worked for SAP, and then later within academia, but motherhood was the only position where I saw the fruits of my labour; the work that I put into it. I always saw the fruits of my labour. Being a mom is, and was, such a beautiful experience. It's something I have never regretted and never will.

Another goal was to travel the world. I grew up in—I don't want to say poor, but definitely lower middle-class conditions. There wasn't enough money to do a lot of traveling. I spent my vacations as a kid in the back of a station wagon traveling to different parts of the US. I wanted to see the world, but I had a lot of student loans to pay back, so I knew that wasn't going to be possible, which was part of the reason why I went to work for SAP. I thought, "Well, I'm going to get six weeks of vacation there, and hopefully be able to travel and see Europe."

And then, of course, the PhD was always one of my goals. When I was at university, I wanted to continue with my education, but was not accepted within the graduate communications program at University of Minnesota. My dear friend, who recently passed away, Fred Amram, managed to pull some strings to get me into a similar program, not the program I wanted to be in. He said, "Once you get your foot in the door, then you can do it." But I decided that I wasn't going to. I was very naïve at that age because I thought anything I did was going to be on my own merit; I didn't want anyone else helping me. I guess what I've learned over the years is you have to take those opportunities and make the most of them. It isn't about not getting in on your own merit. It's about what you do once you get there. I didn't get my master's degree until almost 20 years later. It took a long time to get there, but it was always a goal.

What are some accomplishments that you would like to share?

I think one of the first accomplishments, was when I worked for SAP. There were a lot more men than women in the organization. Within five years of working for SAP, I'd managed to move up to a position of working directly for a member of the board and had cost center responsibility. Now, I know that doesn't sound like a big deal but back in the day (1995), it was. There were hundreds of men who had cost center responsibility who could manage projects and make decisions about how money was going to be distributed and managed within the organization. At that point in time, when you got emails that were sent to upper level management, you'd see the three women that were listed, and then the names of over

a hundred men. It was a big deal to be at the table, and working as a woman in a high-tech environment with many “alpha males” was a real learning experience.

My aunt sent me a book at the time that was hugely helpful. It was called, *Games Mother Never Taught You* [(Harragan, 1977)] and was all about the games that are played within boardrooms and organizations, and that how they're played are very different from how women play games—they're much more competitive. There was a lot of good advice in that book. That was a major accomplishment: having a leadership role in designing and developing the information landscape that I believe SAP still uses.

I already mentioned the best research paper award that Jane Brindley and I won for our work [(Blaschke & Brindley, 2011)]. For me, the award signified that move from the work environment to academia. I knew that I could succeed and excel within a corporate environment, and I wanted to see if I could also do the same within an academic one. Receiving the Best Research Paper Award was a major stepping stone in transitioning from the corporate world into academia.

Other accomplishments... I would say the work that I have done with EDEN (European Distance and E-Learning Network, which is now EDEN-DLE [EDEN Digital Learning Europe]). I was elected to the management board, became a Vice President, and then a Senior Fellow. All of these were huge accomplishments for me. It was wonderful working with the EDEN organization, establishing and leading the Council of Fellows. The EDEN network was so important in furthering my academic career, but also in providing opportunities to engage in new and exciting projects.

As an instructor, I think the biggest accomplishment was when I won the Stanley J. Drazek Teaching Excellence Award in 2016. I had been nominated by my students, I think seven or eight times. For each time you were nominated, you had to go through a regimented process. You also described your teaching philosophy to show proof of your teaching excellence. I'd done this each time that I was nominated by my students. For me, it was about my students... It wasn't so much that the institution recognized excellence in my teaching, but it was something my students did, and they did it consistently over the years. So when I finally did win the award, it meant a great deal to me that my students consistently and persistently recommended me for the award. I think as a teacher, when your students do that, it means even more than if your institution gives you a teaching award. Those were the some of the biggest accomplishments.

What were some of the challenges that you faced?

I have already talked about being a woman in a high-tech environment and some of the challenges there, so I'm not going to go into that. After I'd left the corporate world, I remember having coffee with some of the ladies from the town that I lived in, with my son and all the other children. They were talking about the best kinds of potatoes you could make, whether they were the potato flakes that you got at this grocery store, or whether it was the potato powder that you got from this other grocery store, or whether it was real potatoes. I remember sitting there thinking to myself, “Oh, my goodness! A week ago, I was sitting in a boardroom talking about the future directions of the organization and what we needed to put into place to realize our goals. And now I'm talking about mashed potatoes.” It was a challenging transition.

And then, other challenges... Receiving My PhD was a huge challenge. I already mentioned that I needed to get a German MBA before I could move on to the PhD. On the one hand, I was getting recognition within my network and within the field for my publications. I was invited to give keynotes and to present my research at a number of distance learning

conferences, which was significant for me as a graduate student. Every time I would talk about my research, I would get feedback from my peers, so it was molding my research. Every time I would submit an article to a journal, it was almost as if it would split the readership. One reviewer would say, "This is a great article, we need this in academia, this needs to be published." Then the other reviewer would basically say, "Ah, this is [BS]." Then I would have to work at trying to find some common ground.

Although I was getting support from my professional network, I struggled a bit with my advisor. I hear stories from other grad students about the pivotal role that their advisor played in their PhD, and I wish I could have had that. But on the other hand, I had so many people within my network who were helpful and supportive and wanting me to succeed, and giving me good ideas on how to navigate the system. My problem was that I didn't play the academic game as well as I probably should have. Whether you're working in corporate, or whether you're working in academia, or whether you're learning within the school system, it's a game. And you have to learn what the rules are, you have to learn how the game is played. And if you want to succeed, you have to play the game the way that you're expected to. I think that you don't see a lot of people coming back to academia after many years of work experience, because they've already figured out how corporate works, or they've already figured out how academia works. It's challenging transitioning from one to the other. I did it, but I don't know if I would do it again, because it was a lot of stress.

But the biggest challenge for me was at the end of 2017. I had completed about 20 pages of my PhD dissertation introduction (plus the five publications), and I had told my family, "I'm clearing my plate, I'm taking the rest of the month off and I'm going to focus on getting this PhD dissertation done, because I want it done before the end of the year." I told my mom I was going into my writing cave. And I did that. Three days in, I woke up, and I couldn't move my arm. I was in horrible pain. It turned out that I was in the beginning of septic shock. Within 48 hours, I was having heart failure. They never determined what the source of the infection was, but it attacked every organ in my body. The doctors told my children that there was a very good likelihood I would not survive. Someone told me that when the doctor told them, my daughter said, "You don't know my mom." They called my family, and my mom and my sister were on the next plane to Germany. I spent two weeks in the ICU [Intensive Care Unit], then got sepsis again while in hospital. They didn't think I would survive. But I came through it. After six weeks in hospital, I was out.

I had a lot of cognitive problems after that. I couldn't put sentences or words together. Before, I had been one of those people who could compose things in my head, like my IRRODL article. Gee, that thing was in my head for so long, and then I wrote it. And now it would take me hours to formulate a paragraph, because the words made no sense. For me, writing had always been like a puzzle, putting all the pieces together, and then you knew when it was the right fit. And here I was, having been able to do this my whole life, now not being able to do it. Stewart Hase was so supportive; Don Olcott was so supportive—both telling me keep writing, keep doing it, just keep moving forward, and that's what I did. I kept putting one foot in front of the other, and it was baby steps. Cognitively, as I said, it was challenging to put words and sentences together. I couldn't remember things. You know how you walk in the kitchen, and you can't remember things? I walked into my kitchen, and I couldn't remember where my silverware drawer was. It was ...oh, it was horrible. It was absolutely horrible. But then I kept telling myself, "You're alive, and that's all that matters." I kept pushing forward again, and again, and again, one baby step at a time.

Eight or nine months after this...it was in November of 2018, when I defended my dissertation. I wasn't euphoric. I was relieved when it was over because I had fought so

hard. To get there was such a long battle and then not knowing... I remember lying in my hospital bed, and there were two things I was worried about. One was, "What are my kids going to do without me? I can't leave my kids." The other was, "I got this far, and I didn't get my PhD." And so it was almost anticlimactic when I got the PhD because I'd worked so hard and when I finally got it, I wondered why I put so much effort into it. But I think it was because I'd set that goal for myself, and I really wanted to achieve it.

So, when we talk about challenges, we have challenges that are maybe not as important as we think they are. And then we have challenges that change our lives. For me, having sepsis changed my life, because it made me appreciate everything in my life. I wake up every day, thankful that I am still there, thankful that I can smell fresh bread in the morning when I walk past the bakery, that I can feel the wind on my face, that I can take one step, and two steps, and three steps, and continue to walk. Now it's 2023. I had sepsis in 2017-18. After five years, the research says that you...are not going to die from sepsis or from the the after effects of sepsis, whereas most people do die within the first year of septic shock. So, I'm very happy that I'm here and to have this interview with you.

Research Interests

What are some of the specific research interests that you've had and have they changed over the years?

My first research interest was collaborative online learning. I worked on research together with Jane Brindley and Christine Walti (Brindley, Blaschke, & Walti, 2009). We looked at how students learn within collaborative learning environments. Do we have to motivate them extrinsically? If we give them a grade, do they put forth as much effort as when we don't give them a grade? Interestingly enough, the research showed that there was no significant difference. In comparing the cohorts, students would work as hard when they were extrinsically motivated by a grade than when no grade was given. So that got me thinking more about intrinsic motivation and about what is it that drives us to learn.

Then, as I said, I worked on the reflective learning journal article with Jane (Blaschke & Brindley, 2011). That was when I started to get interested in heutagogy, which is partially true, but not entirely, because I was always... impressed by people who would come into that [SAP] environment that was quickly changing and complex, and they would hit the ground running. Then there would be other people who needed tremendous amounts of time and resources to be ramped into that work environment, and then struggled whenever they were confronted with change or complexity. So, what was it about that first set of people? And that second set? What was it that made some excel, while others did not? When I read about heutagogy, I thought, "This is the difference between the people who need to be told and who are passive employees, and those who are active and who come in and hit the ground running, start building their network from day one, and are able to excel within that work environment." So, when I read the articles that Stewart Hase and Chris Kenyon wrote, I thought, "This is it! This is exactly what we need within academia." And so right after that, I started to try to implement it within my courses, to try to get students to be more self-directed, to be more self-determined; to make decisions about their learning, and to take responsibility for those decisions, and to also assess whether or not they've learned and how they've learned. So, that has been the central part of my research for the last decade, if not longer – that is, looking at self-determined learning, and how can we realize it within learning environments, whether it is the K through 12 environment, which which I was able to experience at Learnlife, or whether it's the higher ed environment, which I was able to experience with University of Oldenburg and

University of Maryland. It isn't just, "How do we get them to succeed within the work environment?" but also, "How do we get them to succeed in life after that?" Dave Cormier (2022) gave a podcast a few months ago, where he talked about how we can't give solutions anymore as teachers, we can only help them [learners] to find the solutions. We are there to help them create solutions that may work or may not work, to be able to find solutions for themselves. And for me, heutagogy, self-determined learning empowers them and gives them the agency to be able to make those decisions [Figure 1]. So that is a specific area of research that I've been working on most recently. Stewart Hase and I've been working on the human agency aspect and how to empower learners to be agents of their own learning. And how do we empower teachers? How do we empower organizations to be agents and to create environments where human agency can thrive? And so, that's been the area that I've focused on most within my research, and of course, technology—using technology to support that agency within teaching and learning.

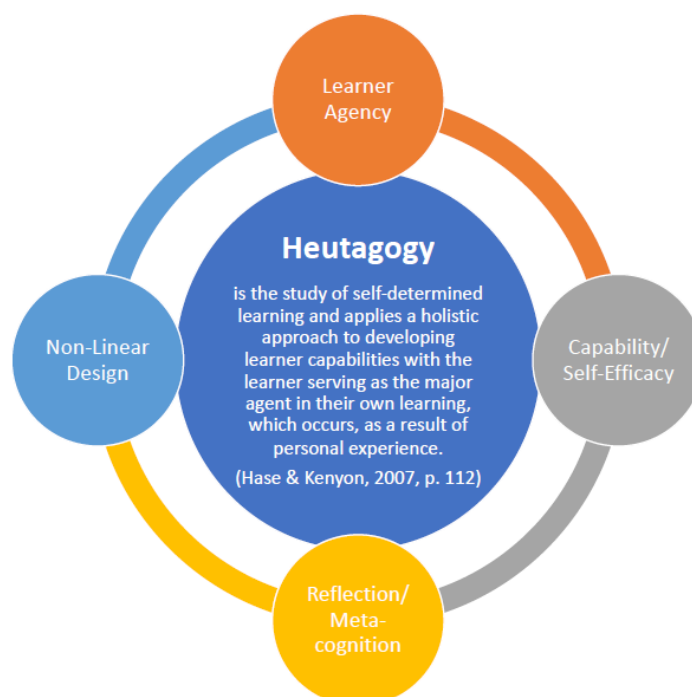


Figure 1. Definition and elements of heutagogy. Adapted from Hase & Kenyon (2001, 2007, 2013).

The past, present, and future of distance education

What was the state of distance education, or online learning when you entered the field as compared to the field today?

When I first started – it's funny because I think about people like Jane Brindley and Susan [Bainbridge], who you've worked with. When they talk about how it used to be, and I talk about how it used to be, they were just different worlds. As I said before, I didn't realize there was such a rich history of distance education, e-learning, until I really studied it and took a deeper dive into it. And even now, with the pandemic [COVID 19], you've got a number of people who think there was not any distance education, or e-learning, or online learning, until the pandemic. For me...back in the day, I remember I would turn assignments in on a floppy disk; it would be one of those floppy disks, the ones that were paper thin. You saved your assignment onto that, and then you'd put it in the mailbox and

send it to your professor, who would then review it and send it back with handwritten comments. The Internet was very new, very rudimentary, like email...and wikis, my God, that changed everything. When we got social media and Web 2.0, it changed the whole game. We had interaction, we had threads, we could post things, and we had asynchronous communication and some synchronous communication. But with Web 2.0, we could co-create things, we could do things together. I remember the first time when I opened up Google Docs, and we could collaborate together on something. It was so exciting, because all of this stuff we'd done before, it was mostly asynchronous. It sped everything up.

I talked a bit about the things that we did with technology, the work that Stella Porto, Gila Kurtz, and I did. I remember – it was probably around 2006 or 2007 – we pitched a book where we said, we'd like to have a living book. And at that time, there wasn't Wikipedia. We wanted to have a living, online, interactive book that would continue to grow, as technology changed within distance education and e-learning. At the time, the proposal was turned down, and we didn't have the energy (or resources) to pursue it further. But it would have been groundbreaking at the time. We were thinking a lot about different ways that we could use Web 2.0 to support us in creating these environments where students could create things, and could collaborate, and not have that one-on-one relationship with the instructor.

That was where I started to see all the opportunities for self-determined learning. Of course, Knowles has had a huge influence on distance education in terms of the self-directedness of the learner and how important that is in order for them to succeed in an online or distance environment. For me, moving them [the learners] along that PAH (pedagogy-andragogy-heutagogy) continuum is one of the most important areas of our research; moving them from this traditional pedagogy of chalk and talk, and getting them to self-directed learning or the andragogy from Knowles, then into the heutagogy. Moving them along that continuum, to get them to be more self-directed and self-determined in their learning has become, for me, one of the drivers of my teaching. The technology isn't so important unless it helps me to achieve my goal, which is to help learners become more independent and to become agents of their learning. If a technology helps me in doing that, then I use it. But if it doesn't, then I don't. I think that's a good ground rule to use: if a technology helps and supports you and your pedagogy, and it supports the learner in their learning, then use it. But if it detracts them and creates cognitive overload, don't even touch it. It's not helpful to learning.

What do you perceive the future of distance education, or online learning, to be in the coming decades?

Every Distance Education scholar that I have respected over the years, when they have been asked this question—whether it be, Otto Peters, whether it be Terry Anderson, whether it be Alan Tate or Börje Holmberg, any of those people—nobody would venture an answer to that question. They would say that the future is too difficult to predict. What I *can* say is what my *hope* for the future of distance education, and online and distance learning, because I think predicting the future can be dangerous.

I hope that distance education continues to evolve to become more open and inclusive. When we think about what Otto Peters said, his original ideas of distance education having a special humanitarian goal, I would love to see that continue to happen. Instead, I see the divide getting bigger. I see a lot of things happening where there are divides that aren't just digital divides; they're learning opportunity divides. I would like to see us decrease that divide, and when we use technology, we use it in a way that will be more inclusive.

I also hope that we will not use technology for policing and controlling students. From the work that I have done in the last two decades in distance education and e-learning, I have never found policing students to be a conducive learning experience. When learners are controlled, there's no trust, there's no respect, or little respect. I feel very strongly about the fact that we shouldn't be controlling our students and creating these policing environments, but rather we should be giving them opportunities to make decisions about their learning and to be empowered and have agency within their learning. But when we do things, like control them with ridiculous software like Proctorio (and I'm not going to digress and go into what Proctorio is doing to Ian Linkletter, which is a scandal the way that he's being treated)...we need to move away from technology as being a force that controls. It needs to be what enables us in our teaching or learning, and not what controls us.

If we can move to that place, where there's more agency for learners, where we try to come up with ways to use these technologies to enable and empower people...we've succeeded. I just saw today, and I'm going to read this quote; it's actually a retweet by George Siemens, where David Wiley, the OER [open educational resources] guy, talks about ChatGPT. He said, "By definition, our lack of imagination is the only limit on our ability to use these tools in novel ways." And to me, that isn't just for ChatGPT, or generative AI; that's for *any tool* that has influenced DE [distance education] in its history. We need to be creative. We need to recreate and to come up with new ways of doing things. This is why distance education will always be in a battle, in a way, with traditional higher education, because tech drives the evolution of distance education, and tech always translates to change. This doesn't work in higher ed, where education in general doesn't like change.

Interesting memories

Are there some interesting memories about the field of distance education? Now online learning that you would like to share?

Oh, wow. I was at the EDEN research workshop in Oldenburg where I was in the final year of my graduate studies. I'd only met my professors online, and here I was, with Otto Peters, Börje Holmberg, Desmond Keegan, Tony Bates, Terry Anderson; I think Karen Swan was there even, and Jane Brindley, Ross Paul. All of these people who were pioneers in distance education decades ago.

A couple of things I did while I was there were: I managed to spill wine on Jane Brindley because I was waving my hands around in an excited way, something that never happens when you're online. But we became fast friends after that, so thankfully, it didn't turn out badly for me. When I met Desmond Keegan, I was at a table with a bunch of my fellow graduate students. We had these name tags, where one side of the name tag said "lunch ticket" and the other side of the name tag said the name of the person and their affiliation. Well, Desmond Keegan was standing there with us, and we're animatedly talking about transactional distance and Michael Moore and what have you, and I turned to Desmond Keegan, and I said, "I'm sorry, I haven't met you before. What was your name again?" And I swear, I got kicked by all the graduate students under the table. They were like, "That's Desmond Keegan! How can you say that?" But he was so humble. He said, "These tickets are ridiculous." So, he turns the ticket around, and I, of course, nearly fell over from embarrassment. I wanted to crawl under the table, but as I said, he was so approachable, and so kind and supportive. That research workshop was hugely influential on me. Terry Anderson's final keynote is what created that drive in me to be a researcher. I got bit by the research bug while he was presenting, and I thought, "This, *this* is what I want to do.

I want to do research, and this is the area I want to do research in." In terms of interesting memories that would probably be the top, my most interesting memory.

Pearls of wisdom

Are there some pearls of wisdom that you would like to offer to others?

A couple of things. I'm teaching a course right now for the Inter-American Development Bank, and one of my students contacted me, saying, "What do I need to do to become an online instructor? I really love this. I'm really excited about online learning."

I basically told her, "Start by building your network and embrace the opportunity to reach out to people, contact people, get in touch with them. If there's people who are interested in a topic that you're interested in, connect with them on Twitter, connect with them on LinkedIn, find a way to meet them at conferences."

For me, the network has been my critical support throughout my academic career. These were the people who were there through all my trials and tribulations, people who were not just supportive, but critical. And I don't mean in a negative way, but who would provide feedback in a way that helped me grow, not in a way that held me back. Those are the kinds of people who I try to keep in my network: the people who I can trust, who support me, who are critical and help me to grow. There are a number of women in my network, but there are also a number of men who have been very supportive and have been fabulous promoters of women within distance education.

Another pearl: believe in yourself; keep going, keep working at it. If you set your mind to it, and you keep working toward your goals, you can achieve them. Remember when I told you about the book coming out and getting the rejection letter from University of Oldenburg on the same day? Later that day, I was folding laundry, and my head was spinning. I thought, "What *am* I going to do?" I was folding my daughter's t-shirt, and on the t-shirt was a quote, which was attributed to Einstein (I don't know if it's true). "Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving." So that's what I did. I picked myself up, and I kept moving. And that has helped me through. So, a pearl of wisdom is to build your network, make sure you have a strong network of people that you can trust, and that support you, and who not just support and nurture you, but challenge you. And to pick yourself up and keep moving.

Current activities

What are you currently engaged in?

Since I left Learnlife last year, I've been mostly doing educational consulting, talking about heutagogy and self-determined learning. I was at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore last year, and I've been doing a couple of lectures for different institutions within Europe. One of the more recent ones was with Mary Immaculate College in Ireland.

I'm leading workshops and designing courses. I'm also teaching online again, for the Inter-American Development Bank, helping not just teachers, but individuals, become online teachers. It's a six-week training course, which I've been really enjoying.

I've also been doing a bit of writing. I've recently finished a chapter on pursuing my PhD, motherhood, and the challenges. Also, I recently had an article published on Leadership 2030, together with Don Olcott and Deborah Arnold. That was another one of those great experiences where we challenged each other and built on each other's ideas to create that

work. Basically, the kind of work that I'm engaged in right now are things that I want to do and things where I feel I can make a contribution.

Future plans

What are your future plans?

I will keep talking about heutagogy and self-determined learning, learner agency, and how to empower learners. I am trying to get people to understand that it isn't just about getting them [learners] to consume information and knowledge, but to give them agency, empower them to make decisions about their learning, and building on those skills that they're going to need for lifelong learning. Because the world that our kids face now is very different than the one that I faced many years ago. It's much more complex, much more frightening. I've had conversations with my kids, where they've said, "We don't know what's going to happen. We are worried about climate change; we are worried about all these issues that are facing us. But you know, no one seems to take these issues seriously. So, our generation is going to have to." I think if we are going to give such complex and challenging problems to our kids, we have to also give them the skills to be able to solve them, too. And if we teach them that learning is what they are told, then I think we're doing them an injustice. So, I will continue to talk about learning agency, I will continue to talk about how important it is in building lifelong learning skills. I'm also talking with Stewart about writing a new book to follow up on *Unleashing the Power of Learner Agency* (2021). It would be more about how to implement it: how do we create holistic experiences for heutagogy, self-determined learning, to thrive? So that's one of the things that is on my list of things I want to do.

Final thoughts

Is there anything else that you would like to address?

There's a lot of topics that could and should be addressed, but I've taken a lot of your time already and I wouldn't know where to begin. I mentioned before the importance of support networks—networks that include not only women, but also men who support women. I think women are still at a disadvantage in the field, as we attempt to do and to be everything in the roles that we play within our homes and within our professions. So, we need to have a nurturing and supportive network and not just build a network where you are supported, but also where we support each other as well. There's been a huge assault on our civil liberties, particularly in the US in the last year. We need to band together to create these networks of support. This community, the network of women within the field, has been so instrumental in defining and shaping me and my ideas. I can't thank them enough because of the impact that they've had on my development. And I think the book that you and Susan [Bainbridge] have written will have, if it hasn't already, a major impact, primarily because it's given women a huge voice. Now, others can see the important role women have played within distance education, in the history of distance education. So, thank you for that, and thank you also for giving me an opportunity to share my voice today.

CONCLUSION

Upon reading Dr. Lisa Marie's candid interview, it is obvious that she is an extraordinary individual. Her contributions to the corporate and academic worlds are remarkable and inspiring. The educational approach that she promotes, heutagogy (Figure 1), encourages educators and learners in both worlds to return the power of learning to the learner, so

that individually and collectively, humankind can achieve its true potential.

Lisa Marie continues to champion her heutagogical beliefs and practices as she transitions into semi-retirement. She remains busy with teaching and international speaking engagements. She also plans to write more articles on self-determined learning and is currently engaged in co-authoring another book on the topic with Dr. Steward Hase. A list of her publications is included in the Appendix at the end of this article.

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BIODATA and CONTACT ADDRESS of the AUTHOR



Dr. Norine WARK is an award-winning scholar, educator, researcher, and writer, currently working as a free-lance educational consultant, researcher, and writer in the field of distance education. Norine's Doctor of Education in Distance Education (2018) and Master of Education in Distance Education (2005) were obtained from Athabasca University. Her Bachelor of Education (5 yr.; 1997) and teaching certificate (1991) came from Simon Fraser University. Norine's research focuses upon historic and emerging theory and practice in distance learning, as well as the technologies that enable such learning.

Wark, Norine (Dr.)

Address: RR 1, S6, C5, Dawson Creek BC Canada V1G 4E7

Phone: 1-250-843-7310

E-mail: norinewark@gmail.com

APPENDIX: DR. LISA MARIE BLASCHKE PUBLICATIONS

Note: Dr. Lisa Marie Blaschke's conference presentations and other activities are found in her portfolio: <http://lisamarieblaschke.pbworks.com/>

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Blaschke, L. M. (in press). Journeying the road less traveled. In O. Farrell & D. Hoven (Eds.), *(Grand)Motherhood and the doctoral journey*. Athabasca University Press.

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THE ONLY WOMAN IN THE ROOM: HOW ERA, CULTURE, AND SOCIAL NORMS INFLUENCED TWO VERY DIFFERENT WOMEN, HEDY LAMARR AND CAROLINE SEELIG

Glenda HOLLETT
ghollet1@learn.athabascau.ca
Athabasca University, Canada

Susan BAINBRIDGE
susanbainbridge@athabascau.ca
Athabasca University, Canada

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ABSTRACT

This is a reflection upon the life and contributions of two women who never met: Hedy Lamarr and Dr. Caroline Seelig. Born in different countries and generations, their combined life's work has coalesced into a system of innovation that has changed the landscape of communication technology and education, giving rise to positive global change; inevitably, bringing them together for this celebration. A candid sentiment of the influential factors of culture, era, and social norms influencing these women becomes apparent via this presentation of the milestones of each woman's life and career in parallel with the social and political influences of their geographical space and time. Reflecting on major equality timeline markers in both the United States and New Zealand, the two primary career locations influencing each woman, we witness how each woman's experience unfolded differently. Upon revisiting the unique social and cultural mores influencing two very similar, progressive, and brilliant women, we take special care in revering their accomplishments in their truest context as a reminder of the importance to our continued efforts to identify and remove barriers.

Keywords: Education, technology, communication, innovation, LMS, women, role models, Caroline Seelig, Hedy Lamarr

INTRODUCTION

To present the accomplishments of Hedy Lamarr and Dr. Caroline Seelig through my personal lens would be to evaluate with a different system of values, experiences and opportunities granted due to my personal upbringing in an era and place completely unrelated to either women. As such, there is a need to view both women's accomplishments from the time and place of which they existed to more fairly portray why their performances deserve recognition. Historical milestones for women and minority groups' rights become a hindsight representation of the cultural progress, or lack thereof, within a society. Laws, rights, value systems, and privileges influence social mobility and their passing into legislature comes about with the alignment of cumulative social and political values and attitudes. It is for this reason that a depiction of the political climate of these women's rights of their times will also be considered in parallel with their achievements, as understanding these influences will provide authenticity into the challenges and opportunities influencing the mobility of these and many other women in society.

A Review of Relevant Literature

The study of social mobility defined by Stephen Aldridge observes “the movement or opportunities for movement between different social groups, and the advantages and disadvantages that go with this in terms of income, security of employment, opportunities for advancement, etc.” (Aldridge, 2001, p. 4). The StudySmarter website discusses two main types of social mobility. The first is *absolute mobility*, which refers to the “total number of people moving from one social class to another” (StudySmarter, 2023), which can be seen when there is large change in mobility for everyone within the economy. The second type is *relative mobility*, which refers to the change in position of one individual as they move up or down in positions of power in society (StudySmarter, 2023). The site goes further to identify six generally agreed upon “factors that affect social mobility” (StudySmarter, 2023), including: “the economic structure of society, an individual’s occupation, their parents’ occupation, social class of origin, gender” and “ethnicity” (StudySmart, 2023). Out of these six barriers, it could be argued that only career choice is influenced by personality, while the other five are either assumed (like gender) or are a result of environmental influence.

To support an egalitarian society, the aim would be to remove all environmental barriers to social mobility, thus leaving only personal choice as a determinant of social mobility. The deduction of what impacts choice of occupation appears to boil down to two main influential factors: 1) genetics and 2) environment (Lim, 2023). Parsing out the differences between personalities is important in determining impact on life choices. However, one study by Weisberg et al. determined that, in alignment with other studies, the similar differences found “are small to moderate” (2011, p. 10), and though this information is important to know in relation to influencing personal choice, the same study was “optimistic” (2011, p. 10) that communication issues between men and women were more likely a result of an adjustable cultural value system than a fixed disposition (Weisberg et al., 2011).

Genetic factors influencing personality are not however, the focus of this article and are not disputed here as a contributor to a person’s mobility in society. Where this article detours is in its attempt to display how influential environmental factors of culture and social norms for the times impacted the social mobility of Hedy Lamarr and Caroline Seelig. Through a brief tour of historical landmarks, we will look at the cultural views of each country through their development of laws and legislation for women’s rights, and through a discussion of how the simultaneous events in the lives of both women gain increased knowledge and awareness of the past, in hopes for progress to reduce barriers for future generations.

A Brief Introduction to Two Pioneers

Upon first learning of Hedy Lamarr and Dr. Caroline Seelig’s contributions, the sheer determination and self-regulation with which they persevered through life to achieve their goals elucidated their extreme passion and deviation from the norm. Evidently both women demonstrated exemplary achievements, taking risks, pushing boundaries, and setting achievements, thus providing avant-garde role models for their times. Lamarr passed on January 19th, 2000, but the digital world is inundated with commentary on her life as an actress that moved from Austria to the United States and later becoming an inventor, presenting elements of Hollywoodized complexity mostly unknown to the everyday person (Pool, 2021). Developing a legacy firstly via her acting, it was one of her innovative ideas that initiated the revolution of how communication technology was designed, creating a positive impact for the lives of millions, or perhaps billions, of people. Tantamount to Lamarr is the life of Dr. Seelig, who devoted 30 years of her life to advancing innovation in online distance learning (ODL; Open Polytechnic Kuratini Tuwhera, 2022). Highlighting the

passion, challenges, and pursuit of innovation in the field of communication and online, distance, flexible learning (ODFL) by Lamarr and Seelig is a privilege and an honour.

THE TIMELINE OF HEDY LAMARR

Start at the Beginning

In 1914 Hedy Lamarr, née Hedwig Eva Maria Kielser, was born (Cheslak, 2018). This was the year that Great Britain declared war against the Germans and WWI had begun (Lindsay, 2014). Lamarr was the only child born to “a well-to-do Jewish family” (Cheslak, 2018) living in Austria at the time, where the influences of her father and mother seemingly ricocheted throughout the course of her life’s work. Her father was a bank director (Cheslak, 2018) and, as discussed in a documentary by Angela Dean, coached her curiosity with the discovery of the “inner workings of different machines” (2021). Conversely, her mother focused on developing her exposure to the arts with piano and ballet lessons at an early age (Cheslak, 2018). Wikipedia states that at this time in Austria, women’s suffrage was beginning and, after the war was over in 1919, permission was granted for women to vote. However, as there were concerns about how women’s votes would “affect the political landscape” (Wikipedia, 2023a) women and men voted using different colored envelopes until 1930 (Wikipedia, 2023a). Born in a time when women’s voting rights (hence, “opinions”) were still considered questionable, Hedy Lamarr maintained her independence of thought, and followed a career path of her own choosing.

The “Becoming” of Hedy Lamarr

In 1930, at 16 years of age, Lamarr’s acting talent was established as she took her first role in a “small German film called *Geld auf der Straße* (“Money on the Street”)” (Cheslak, 2018). Two years later, Lamarr took a provocative role in the film, *Ecstasy*, where her unorthodox performance of an orgasm gained controversial popularity, as this was likely the first time such acting was ever broadcasted (Dean, 2021). A comprehensive documentary done about the life of Hedy Lamarr by Angela Dean showed that Lamarr later reflected on her reaction to this early performance in her career, as she resolved to find redemption with a conclusive, “I’ll show them” (Dean, 2021). Her incitement to immediately absolve her name spawned her role in Fritz Kreisler’s musical *Elizabeth of Austria* (Dean, 2021), where her performance tempered her previous tendentious reputation and eventually introducing her to her first husband in 1933, popularly known as an “Austrian munitions dealer, Fritz Mandl” (Cheslak, 2018).

Already off to an exhilarating start at 19 years of age, Lamarr’s life snowballed on a Hollywood sized scale as her marriage to Mandl proved to be “unhappy” (Cheslak, 2018) and unstimulating (Dean, 2021), as her role of the happy hostess wife entertaining and learning details of business meetings (Cheslak, 2018) proved unfulfilling. Lamarr described her role as “a doll” or a “thing,” some object of art which had to be guarded and imprisoned—having no mind, no life of its own” (Cheslak, 2018). A fundamental shift in her life’s course corroborating her innovative potential was her escape from Mandl as she dressed as a look-alike housekeeper and fled on bicycle. This life turn took her to refuge in England with family friends (Dean, 2021) in 1937 (Cheslak, 2018), where she met the end of her life as she knew it.

Meanwhile, Attitudes across the Ocean

While in England, Lamarr met an American, Louis B. Mayer, who was the co-founder of MGM studios (Dean, 2021), and his nearly immediate intrigue with her decidedly cemented her

future in Hollywood. Granted, the Civil Rights Act prohibiting discriminatory behavior based on race, color, religion, national origin, or sex, would not be passed for almost another 30 years in the U.S. (National Women's History Alliance, 2023). Hence, Mayer's low-balled offer of \$125 weekly to act for him in Hollywood, one quarter of what she finally settled on, was not entirely surprising. Granted, she did agree to change her name to Hedy Lamarr. This was all done in a time when she "didn't speak a word of English" (Dean, 2021). Kudos to you, Hedy, for by-passing those barriers when you championed the art of salary negotiation as a non-English speaking, female immigrant in the 1930s.

To fathom Lamarr's struggle for mobility upon entering the United States, we must also consider her social and political environment to develop a more authentic depiction of her position. WWII saw further increase of women in the workforce, hence there was a demand to make laws more amenable to women's needs. In 1936, not long before Lamarr moved to the United States, one single type of birth control was legalized. However, it was not until 1965, that married couples would be allowed to use them and, in 1972, there would be a right to privacy in their use (National Women's History Alliance, 2023). While Hedy did have three children, she was "a single mom in the 40's" (Dean, 2021), yet still managed to meet the hectic demands of a Hollywood actress. Hedy's son, Anthony, was quoted in Dean's documentary as saying that his mother "worked like a racehorse" (Dean, 2021), and was given pills to stay awake and to sleep. The same documentary recounts where Betty Davis called it "the slave system," saying they, as actresses, "were owned" because extensive contracts bound them to the studios' demands (Dean, 2021). It was not until 1978 that the Pregnancy Discrimination Act prohibited discrimination against pregnant women (National Women's History Alliance, 2023) as there were very few concessions made for working and pregnant mothers at that time. Lamarr's work followed the natural ebb and flow of show business, but the 1940s may have been her busiest years when she starred in movies such as *Boomtown*, *Come Live with Me*, *Comrade X*, and *Ziegfeld Girl*, working six day weeks and many hours per day (Dean, 2021).

Actress by Day, Inventor by Night

Perhaps what truly separated Lamarr from others in her field was her love of invention that she engaged in during her limited spare time. A brief relationship with Howard Hughes, who sought to improve airplane designs, may have ignited her love of invention and he shared his researchers with her to support her inventions. Lamarr had an invention space at home and at work, too, where Howard made her a small setup to tinker in during breaks while on the film set. Hedy's creative mind combined ideas from fish and bird books that allowed her to invent a wing design to increase plane speed, since she thought that airplane wings should not be "square" (Dean, 2021). Hughes was later quoted to have called her "a genius" (Cheslak, 2018), but her genius did not end there. Her next design was for Coca-Cola, which was unavailable during the war, so she made a pill dissolve in water to replicate the drink. Lamarr later claimed laughingly in an interview that this was "one of" her "boo-boos" (Dean, 2021) as she recalled "every state has different strengths of water" (Dean, 2021). causing the tablet to sometimes dissolve on the bottom, middle, or top of the glass (Dean, 2021). A forgivable oversight for a hobbyist, untrained inventor, yet imagine her potential if she had formal engineering training. It would not be until 1972 that discrimination in educational programs receiving government supports would be prohibited, and again later, in 1974, where the Women's Educational Equity Act "fund[ed] the development of nonsexist teaching materials and model programs that encourage[d] full educational opportunities for girls and women" (National Women's History Alliance, 2023).

The Necessity of Lamarr's Innovation

In Dean's documentary, Lamarr's son, Anthony, reflected upon his mother's attitude, "In times of crisis most of us feel powerless, but few discover in themselves unexpected strength, and Hedy being Hedy, she said 'I'm gonna do something about that'" (Dean, 2021). In 1940 she met George Antheil whose distaste for Hitler and creative mind (Pool, 2021) aligned perfectly with her interests to "combat the axis powers" (Cheslak, 2018). A tragedy at that time, when a German U-boat sunk a passenger ship and killed 293 people, motivated Lamarr to work with Antheil where she wrote in her journal that she "tried to think of some way to even the balance for the British" (Dean, 2021) and she thought that "a radio controlled torpedo would do it" (Dean, 2021). The German U-boats continually evaded the allies' torpedoes because they were able to jam the single frequency guiding it. The genius of Lamarr truly came to light when she determined that the frequency must continually change, or hop, which would inevitably make the tracking of the signal more challenging (Pool, 2021). Antheil had a unique background in aligning pianos by synchronizing them using "punched tape" (Pool, 2021). They determined that the same idea should work to align radio frequencies with two perforated rolls managed with "calibrated clockwork motor drives to switch the signal between the transmitter and torpedo" (Pool, 2021). As a result, the drives would be set off at the same time when a pin released as the torpedo was fired (Pool, 2021). In this way, the communication from the transmitter to the torpedo was protected such that, even if one segment of the transmission was intercepted, the frequency would continually change and hop to the next frequency, continuing the communication with the torpedo (Dean, 2021). Through switching the frequency, the Germans would not be able to log onto a single frequency as before, allowing the British to increase their success rate with their torpedoes. Karl-Arne Markstrom, a Union Radio Scientific Internationale member and consultant for command and control systems stated that, "frequency agility" (Pool, 2021) was not a new idea but that he was not aware that "anyone had thought of using it to protect communications" (Pool, 2021). Lamarr's work in partnership with Antheil developed the idea to use frequency hopping technology for communication to thwart enemy torpedoes, but also laid the groundwork for today's Wi-Fi, GPS, and Bluetooth technology (Pool, 2021).

Lamarr's Achievements

Lamarr's richness of beauty impacted the global economy, and at a young age, her currency was strongly connected to it. Her contributions to the economy via her Hollywood movies and even before Hollywood, her films, and acting productions as a teen in Austria, already had great economic impact. People wanted to see Lamarr, yet her established value conflicted with her natural interests. Hedy expressed in an interview how she loved and was "good at" (Dean, 2021) chemistry, while Dean's documentary also acknowledged that "in a different era she might very well have become a scientist" (2021). Where today the aim is to grow into your desired choice of career, Hedy was unable to disconnect from her first assigned part in society and, as such, her environment was unable to comprehend her complex nature, confining her to a limited role in society.

It is a good testament of the times that the woman best known as the "mother of Wi-fi" (Cheslak, 2018), never received financial gain for her invention (Cheslak, 2018), yet her clever design will live on, deeply impacting information accessibility, and advanced communication methods on a global scale. Though it was her brilliant mind and perhaps her extraverted nature that contributed to her accomplishments, her environment definitely played a part in her inability to advance in her field.

To fairly address Lamarr's achievements, it is vital to highlight that she and Antheil did eventually get a design patent in 1942 and, while Antheil marveled at the compact size of its design, the U.S. Navy did not give it consideration, declaring that it was "too heavy"

(Pool, 2021). Pool noted that “the Navy wasn't willing to take the work of an actress and a pianist seriously” (2021). Due to her Austrian heritage, they documented it as “property of an enemy alien” (Pool, 2021). The dismissal of their shelved invention was not terminal, for it was later used in the 1950s for a sonobuoy invention that detected submarines and communicated with planes using sonar, and again in 1962, when US naval ships used frequency-hopping to guide their torpedoes in the Cuban Missile Crisis (Pool, 2021). Two awards were finally given to Lamarr, first “the American Electronic Frontier Foundation's Pioneer Award” (Pool, 2121) in 1997 and then, fourteen years after she died, Lamarr was “inducted into the National Inventors Hall of Fame for helping to create an early form of wireless communications” (Pool, 2021). When the world was ready to listen, her contributions were finally acknowledged.

A REFLECTION ON THE STRENGTH OF WOMEN – FOR THE TIME

People of today may not be able to easily relate to the nuances impacting the daily lives in a time when many rights were not yet granted to women. Back then, socialization of women favored proper comportment over academia, and “encouraged a polished young lady to hide her intellectual prowess for fear of frightening away suitors” (Wikipedia, 2023b). While Hedy did not share the rights of men, her acting and invention career highlighted how she used her natural skills to work within an environment that was not always aligned with the progressive ideas of a pioneering, inventive woman. Her high tolerance for risk and her economic privilege allowed her to pursue non-traditional roles when women were just beginning to work outside the home, while her disagreeable nature negotiated her four times her original salary offer with Mayer. Lamarr's life position evolved to a place of increased empowerment, despite mobility limitations. This, combined with her innovative mind and curiosity, encouraged her to push her inventions through social and political barriers of which many of us cannot fathom.

Upon facing the U.S. Navy with George Antle, she was quite aware of her limitations within society. The idea that a Hollywood movie actress could possibly contribute to the United States Navy military weapons defence system was alien, and challenged the ideals and power structure that existed at the time. Her audience, conditioned to watch her films, were not yet ready to listen, and responded to her invention by taking the invention and leaving her with the petty insult of calling her an “enemy alien” (Pool, 2021). The unconditioning of a society takes time, and generations of value systems do not change simply because new laws are passed.

Having strong female role models allows us to see our own potential, and it is perhaps something that Hedy did not have. We may all do better with a trail blazing mentor such as Liz Burge, another female pioneer interviewed by Bainbridge and Wark (2023), who understood the politics of navigating the system. Liz discussed the challenges faced in ODL as she described her method of dealing with “men who don't think that women are as clever as they are” (Bainbridge & Wark, 2023, p. 48). She stated that she learned fast that “it always paid off to talk to the boss, who has to say yes or no, and tell them how they will be positioned in the activity” (2023, p. 48). Liz made it clear that she was “always careful about that so they know that they've had a good slice of the pie, even though I did all of the work” (2023, p. 48). It was clear to Liz that, to minimize problems, she needed to “make sure that everybody who needs to be involved can get something out of it in the end” (2023, p. 48). It was perhaps the most insightful as she concluded, “And I make it very important if I'm standing out launching something or I'm telling people something new that's going on, I'm always very careful to make sure that the people sitting in the front row and the people in the very back are saying, “Yes, we did this!” (2023, p. 48). Born in a later time, the women of Liz Burge's and Caroline Seelig's era were navigating the system, a function that Lamarr's generation was just beginning to figuring out.

Fast Forward to the U.K.

Indeed, the remarkable life and achievements of Lamarr propelled her into an exclusive subset of the population. While her invention and acting career was coming to an end, across the globe in the United Kingdom, Caroline Seelig was beginning her professional career as a research biologist. Her growth in this field led her to branch into teaching secondary school and, in a later interview with Bainbridge and Wark (2023), she reflected on how a “wanderlust” gradually prompted her to move to New Zealand. Dr. Seelig adeptly began navigating her career path through various senior management roles throughout four of New Zealand’s polytechnique institutions. This style of educational institution originated in New Zealand during the 1880s, and was designed to deliver skilled trades and technical skills for learners joining the workforce immediately following grade school (Pollock, 2012). The New Zealand Ministry for Women published a timeline of women’s suffrage celebrating that, around this time in 1873, the Employment of Females Act secured standards for working conditions for women. Shortly thereafter in 1893, New Zealand’s women became the first in the world to receive voting rights in general elections in a self-governed country (Manitu Wahini: Ministry for Women, 2018) thus raising the bar for the suffrage movement across the globe. In comparison, it would be almost 30 years later that this right was granted to the women of the U.S. (National Women’s History Alliance, 2023).

Transition to ODL

Upon moving to New Zealand, Dr. Seelig entered an Academic Management position at Tai Poutini Polytechnique in Greymouth where her growing interest prompted her to obtain a Masters of Educational Administration. She later transitioned to the Eastern Institute of Technology in Hawke’s Bay and then the position of Deputy Chief Executive at Nelson Marlborough, which is a vocational training facility that mostly delivered traditional classroom style teaching. It was here that she started working with ODL as the organization started transitioning course materials and resources online using Moodle. This may have been the turning point where Dr. Seelig recognized herself “enjoying the flexibility and power of online learning” (Bainbridge & Wark, 2023, p. 332). In her interview with Bainbridge and Wark, she reflects back on her insights and the potential of ODFL, recognizing that learners want “flexibility...choice, and...personalization” (p. 334). She recognized that traditional classroom-based institutions were trying to become more flexible, but at the same time, were “going against the very culture” (p. 335) of its primary service (2023), which was traditional face-to-face learning in a classroom. This was a contradiction that she knew needed to be resolved to maximize resource utilization and learner potential.

After spending nine years at Nelson Marlborough (Stuff, 2009), Seelig moved to the Open Polytechnique of New Zealand, as Chief Executive (Bainbridge & Wark, 2023) where she spent 14 years before completing her tenure in 2022 (Open Polytechnic Kuratini Tuwhera, 2022). Cadwallader et al. reported that this Polytechnique differed in that it was a “specialist provider of ODFL” (p. 1), with over 70 years of experience delivering vocational educational training (VET; 2019). As was captured in the Marlborough Express, its national portfolio required the maintenance and building of effective global opportunities, alliances with polytechniques, and the industry training sector supporting almost 30,000 learners from over 40 countries. Dr. Seelig’s enthusiasm for the transition was evident and her culmination of experience, qualifications and disposition aligned her with what she recognized to be “the fastest-growing area of education in the world” (Stuff, 2009).

Rising to the Challenge

Dr. Seelig's transition to ODL came at a time when New Zealand was searching for solutions to the nationwide shortage of skilled workers and the financial struggle faced by the country's VET institutions and polytechniques. The Education Minister called for a transformation of the entire ODL structure in a way that optimized the use of technology to maximize opportunities for existing workers and those just beginning to enter the workforce (Cadwallader et al., 2019). This was a challenge that Dr. Seelig understood well, realizing that the transformation of the Open Polytechnique of New Zealand (OPNZ) ODL program was necessary to support the reform of the New Zealand's vocational education and training (VET) system.

Living the Transformation

The Open Polytechnique originated as a specialized institute delivering trade-based courses using primarily text-based delivery methods to returning war veterans (Bainbridge & Wark, 2023). Dr. Seelig was aware that advancements in technology allowed formerly non-ODL institutions to begin to offer ODL programs in an attempt to gain market share by appealing to part time adult learners, who were the primary staple customers for ODFL institutions, such as OPNZ. Dr. Seelig also recognized the broader influences impacting the problem for ODFL providers including, troublesome technologies, funding limitations, globalized education, and the changing needs for learners. This required a review of how ODFL was delivered to ensure that it was competitive in meeting the needs of learners and organizations within this changing environment (Seelig et al., 2019).

Design and Innovation at The Open Polytechnic

Upon first moving to the Open Polytechnic, Dr. Seelig promptly began the first part of the setup to convert libraries of print-based materials to a digital format for upload into the learning management system (LMS). This was a monumental task for an organization offering more than 100 programs, requiring volumes of content and data to be transferred. However, this was a small task in comparison to the second part of the institution's transition, which required transforming the models for teaching, learning, delivery, assessment, and practice to align with work areas to ensure support for the work culture and environment (Seelig et al., 2019). In addition, Dr. Seelig was making plans to develop a new LMS (iQualify) to align current learner needs with ODFL priorities. The organization set out to work with other partners, organizations, government groups, and other educational institutions, so that the context of vocational educational training (VET) could be customized by learners to maximize the community of learning (Bainbridge & Wark, 2023).

Data Analytics

In alignment with the aforementioned transformations, Dr. Seelig recognized the power of data analytics to provide necessary feedback to learners, trainers, partners, and organizations to enable them to better support learners' performance. While older ODFL models sometimes lost printed assignments in the mail or received them for grading with little knowledge of learners' performance issues, iQualify offered data analytics feedback immediately. This way, relevant stakeholders could identify data regarding advancement in a course, time spent in a content area, how some learners compare with other learners, if assignments or activities are completed or submitted, and how often learners log in. This immediate data access allows the organization to determine not only who is struggling, but also what they are struggling with—hence, allowing it to be proactive with support and augmenting learner chances of success. There is also a predictive feature that allows input

data to be compared with other demographic information to “help predict learner success based on data from previous learners’ results” (Seelig, 2018, p. 14). Dr. Seelig acknowledged that this potentially poses some ethical concerns and questions that need to be further discussed, and requires the implementation of policies to ensure adherence to consent and privacy laws on personal information (Seelig, 2018).

The Power Of ODFL

Dr. Caroline Seelig oversaw the redesign of ODFL at OPNZ to meet the varied needs of learners and organizations by seeking to understand and meet changing global demands (Seelig et al., 2019). Through the process, Dr. Seelig recognized that one of the biggest challenges for ODFL was how it was viewed and, as such, it was compared to traditional face-to-face learning using evaluation rubrics that conveyed success metrics used for traditional classroom-based learning. Despite this unfair system of measurement, in her interview with Bainbridge and Wark, Dr. Seelig shared that the ODFL program at OPNZ “tripled...qualification outcome” (p. 337) and increased completion rates by about ten percent, thus raising its statistics to meet those of traditional classrooms (2023). However, Dr. Seelig understood that the power of distance education was much broader than performance metrics. She recognized how other countries used ODL in powerful ways; for example, in cases where women cannot talk to male teachers, or where ODL is the only learning option in some war-torn countries. She also saw that ODL continues to shine in the case where education is given to students who may never otherwise receive it due to “religious persecution” (Bainbridge & Wark, 2023, p. 338). Dr. Seelig recognized that the power of ODFL lives in “the anytime, anyplace, anyone, any pace” (Bainbridge & Wark, 2023, p. 334) functionality, and that it challenges the barriers of traditional classroom-style teaching, opening doors for accessibility, opportunity and social mobility for all persons in society (Bainbridge & Wark, 2023).

Suffrage: U.S. versus N.Z.

In 1914, New Zealand’s Public Servants Association demanded “equal pay and privileges” (Manitu Wahini: Ministry for Women, 2018) for women in the workforce, almost 50 years before the U.S. (National Women’s History Alliance, 2023). The value of 50 years of progress is seen in Dr. Seelig’s innovative work in ODFL, which used distance education tools to increase access to education and improvement of numeracy and literacy for New Zealand’s inmate population (Seelig & Rate, 2014). Dr. Seelig’s work put forth the design and implementation of a customizable LMS for its learners and partners that was “intuitive” (p. 332) and fostered social education, while being versatile and able to report personalized data on its learners (Bainbridge & Wark, 2023). Cadwallader et al., in recognizing the need to meet global educational demands, funding constraints, and skilled trades shortages, noted that OPNZ was re-structured with the potential to support “radical reform of a national network of VET” (2019, p. 1), innovating optimal delivery strategies for learners, organizations and other partners at a national level.

Seelig’s Achievements

As a result of the transformative effect that Dr. Seelig’s vision has had, The Open Polytechnic was recognized for the Commonwealth of Learning Award of Excellence for institutional achievement in 2013 (Bainbridge & Wark, 2023). Dr. Caroline Seelig humbly acknowledged, that “The distinguished award is a wonderful recognition of the excellence in design and innovation that exists across the open polytechnic, that combined with the approach and expertise of staff, creates an environment focussed on learner success.” (Open Polytechnic, 2022).

In addition to that, Dr. Seelig worked with the New Zealand government to develop solutions within the Open Polytechnique to support prisoner rehabilitation to increase literacy and numeracy levels for inmates. The Open Polytechnique recognized the unique situation in providing education to the inmate population and worked to develop four qualifications to support successful rehabilitation into society that was recognized by the Department of Corrections. The programs were designed to build upon each other, and feedback reported from the educators within the penitentiary noted elevated levels of self-esteem among participants, who before “had never achieved success in education during their lives” (Seelig & Rate, 2014, p. 3).

The contributions made through the efforts of Dr. Seelig through the Open Polytechnique extend beyond New Zealand’s inmate population to society at large. For instance, Dr. Seelig oversaw the implementation of new designations for ākonga students, meeting industry requirements in such areas as “social work, teacher education, financial services, health and wellbeing, information and communication technology, and te reo Māori” (“Open Polytechnic Kuratini Tuwhera”, 2022). In addition, overseeing the implementing of the iQualify LMS, with tools that provided data analytics to monitor learner performance, offered a huge benefit. This added to the monumental feat of the Open Polytechnique performance levels “that [were] amongst the best in the world” (Open Polytechnic Kuratini Tuwhera, 2022) within ODL institutions. The achievements earned the Open Polytechnique the 2022 Excellence for Institutional Achievement from the intergovernmental organization, the Commonwealth of Learning (COL; Open Polytechnic Kuratini Tuwhera, 2022).

CONCLUSION

Hedy said it best, “the minds of people are far more interesting than the looks” (Dean, 2021). Her statement reflects her personal value system within which her environment enslaved her; an unrecognized genius, with potential to innovate and solve problems on a global scale. Yet the leadership of her time was not ready to give credence to the minds of women. A different time and place, and years of progress between their countries, Dr. Seelig was heard, and her country’s value system supported her vertical mobility, allowing her passion and innovation to flourish in alignment with the New Zealand Government’s priorities. She was able to support the transformation of the VET system in a way that leaves a global impact. Most women struggle to navigate the idiosyncrasies of vertical mobility within society. These two women clearly encountered different experiences, yet both had the strength to stand alone, the only woman in the room, speaking in their own voices, sharing the brilliance of their ideas, leaving behind their eternal legacy for the world to avail. Although Dr. Seelig’s innovations came almost 70 years after Lamarr’s, her achievements have elevated the caliber of ODFL for learners and organizations globally, through the optimization of design and customization of features integrating distance education into the work force, supporting the growth and development of skilled personnel in the trades.

Where nature and nurture influenced the life and success of Hedy Lamarr, we must pay homage to those among us with such impactful accomplishments. Lamarr’s and Dr. Seelig’s contributions benefit us all. Thus, we need to understand the context within which women exist, we need to revere, and to lift each other. There is also a need for women to learn to accept their accolades, to seek them when they are due, even if it is not women’s natural instinct, as women are doing an injustice to themselves by not doing so. Through this challenge, women and society, will grow.

Hedy Lamarr and Caroline Seelig are two women with similar ambitions, curiosity, and potential, yet completely different environmental influences and historical outcomes. It was not my intention to dispute the influence of personality upon social mobility, but rather

to convey how different eras, cultures, and mores influenced the social mobility of both women. Hundreds of years of conditioning and laws do impact a culture's value system; this value system influenced each of these women's mobility differently. Where Lamarr struggled to be heard, Dr. Seelig's voice transcended layers of positive influence on a global scale. This presentation aims to create awareness of the influences carried through the ages in hope of reducing social barriers for future generations.

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BIODATA and CONTACT ADDRESSES of the AUTHORS



Glenda HOLLETT is a student in the Masters of Open, Online, and Distance Education program at Athabasca University, with a BA and BEd from Memorial University of Newfoundland. She also has a diploma in Instructional Design from Athabasca University and a certificate in Occupational Health and Safety from the University of New Brunswick. Her background in safety and education supports her role at the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo as an Advisor in Equipment and Technical Training. This position allows her to support ODL and competency program development via management, implementation, creation and maintenance of courses, learner supports, and programs. Glenda pulls herself away from work and school to enjoy camping, fishing, and skiing with her daughter and husband.

Hollett, Glenda
9909 Franklin Avenue, Fort McMurray AB
Phone Office: 780-381-4963
E-mail: glendahollett@gmail.com



Dr. Susan BAINBRIDGE is an instructor and co-supervisor with the Centre for Distance Education graduate/postgraduate programs at Athabasca University in Canada. She holds a Doctor of Education in Distance Education obtained at Athabasca University in 2013. She earned her MA in applied linguistics at the University of Southern Queensland in Australia, and her BA in religious studies at Laurentian University in Canada. Her research interests include online learning in underdeveloped countries, leadership, online pedagogy and design, as well as gender issues in education.

Bainbridge, Susan (Dr.)
Athabasca University
Address: 1 University Drive, Athabasca, AB Canada T9S 3A3
Phone: 1-800-788-9041 ext. 6179
E-mail: susanbainbridge@athabascau.ca
URL: <https://cde.athabascau.ca/ourpeople/instructors/sbainbridge.php>

YOGA AS A CAREER CHOICE FOR WOMEN- A KKHSOU STUDY

Sukmaya LAMA
slama@kkhsou.in
KKHSOU, Assam, India

Juri HAZARIKA
Juri.hzrk@gmail.com
KKHSOU, Assam, India

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ABSTRACT

Yoga has been practiced for centuries and continues even in contemporary times. Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU) has been providing learning opportunities for those who are desirous of higher education but are not able to due to various reasons. The University offers both Diploma and PG Diploma programme in Yoga. While the increasing female enrolment trend reveals the growing interest in the programme, it is important to look into their aspirations when it comes to making a career in Yoga. The paper explores the prospects and challenges that Yoga offers as a career choice for women through the narratives of the learners.

Keywords: Yoga, Women Empowerment, ODL Institution, KKHSOU

INTRODUCTION

With globalization and its effect on health, 'wellness' has assumed new interest and attention. In India, A new dimension has been added to Yoga with its inclusion as sport. India declared Yoga as a competitive sport in 2015.

The work 'yoga' has been derived from the Sanskrit word 'yuj' meaning 'to join' or 'to unite'. It refers to the total integration of the physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual aspect of human personality. Patanjali defines yoga as complete suppression of all mental modes or processes. Health and wellbeing has always been an integral part of human life and human society has always strived to achieve mental and physical well-being. Various studies confirm that regular practice of yoga helps a person to overcome fear, anxiety, stress, etc to a large extent. Continuous practice also increases the body's physiological response to exercise. Yoga has increasingly been promoted by yoga educators as well the media as a method to address many health concerns or a way to enjoy a healthy mental and physical state. The four major Schools or Streams of yoga are – Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Jnana Yoga and Raja Yoga. Yama and Niyama are the fundamental practices of Yoga.

The popularity of Yoga among the youths is seen to have increased manifold. As Devi (2017) mentions that 'with yoga becoming part of corporate training and leisure holiday', there is a significant growth of Yoga instructors who aim to 'capitalizing on the emerging multi-billion market'. At the same time, the annual International Yoga Day celebrations on June 21st have helped to create an awareness and interest in Yoga.

Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU), is a leading Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institution in the Northeastern region of India, providing opportunities for those aspiring of higher education. Since the time of its establishment in 2006 and currently

offering higher education through more than 250 study centres spread across the state of Assam, KKHSOU aims to fulfill its motto- "Education Beyond Barriers".

OBJECTIVES

The study aims to explore the interest of women learners in Yoga programme under KKHSOU and their perspective on taking up Yoga as a profession. At the same time, the study also looks at the challenges that emerges with the vocational aspect of the programme.

METHODOLOGY

The study is qualitative in nature and based on both primary as well as secondary sources. Data from primary source comprises of the responses gathered through an online questionnaire. The questionnaire prepared for the survey focused on gathering information on the demography of the selected sample as well as on the socio-economic status by enquiring about the age, area of residence, relationship status and employment status and income group, as these tend to have an impact on the respondent's decision to take admission the Yoga programme and opting it as a career option. The researchers also tried to examine what benefits were reaped by the respondents after completing the said programme from KKHSOU. The women were enquired about their preferences on choosing Yoga as a career and what inspired them. They also responded on their willingness to practice Yoga as a sport. Departmental Reports from the University were also consulted. Secondary sources considered for the study were research papers and reports published in Government websites and newspapers.

SAMPLING METHOD

Purposive Sampling method was used for the study as the focus was on women learners. 10 female learners who successfully completed the PG Diploma and Diploma Programmes of KKHSOU were chosen for the study.

TOOLS FOR DATA COLLECTION

As the research is a case study (institutional case study), an online survey was conducted among the learners who successfully completed the Programme, to collect the data. Interviews over telephone were taken for a more intimate conversation.

YOGA IN ODL INSTITUTIONS: KKHSOU AS A CASE STUDY

KKHSOU, which is a premier ODL institute in the north east region, currently offers the two Semester PGDY programme in Yoga including Diploma in Yoga (Kayayogi), for those interested candidates who have a Graduate degree and are desirous of pursuing Yoga as a field of study. This programme aims to promote positive health and rehabilitation through Yoga. At the academic front, its focus lies in creating awareness, and at the same time it also emphasizes on imparting skills.

The programme consists of theoretical papers (prepared in the form of Self Learning Materials), where the fundamentals of Yoga are taught and for practical courses, learners are taught through audio-visual displays that are recorded. Learners can download the same from the University website. Face to face counseling sessions (both theoretical and practical) are regularly conducted at the Study Centres, including the University model Study Centre located at the City Campus of KKHSOU. Recognized Yoga instructors are

engaged in the counseling sessions for the practical instructions on the Yoga poses and other additional guidance.

The PG Dlpoma in Yoga programme was first launched in the University in 2015-16. The programme has a considerable number of learners. The enrolment trend is stated below-

Table 1: Enrolment Trend

Year	PGDY (Total enrolment)
2015	115
2016	346
2017	NA
2018	256
2019	397
2020	258
2021	122

If we look into the pattern of female enrolment (Table 2), it is evident that half of the learners are women. This enrolment trend indicates the growing interest of Yoga among women.

Table 2: Female enrolment trend (PGDY)

Year	PGDY (female enrolment)
2015	NA
2016	174
2017	NA
2018	156
2019	224
2020	157
2021	88

FINDINGS

Responses from pass out learners (females specifically) from the PGDY programmes have been analysed here to explore the opinion of the learners for taking up Yoga as a career choice. Their responses shed light on the importance of Yoga as well as its potentiality and challenges.

In the study conducted by Deka and Roy (2020), it was found that 43% of female passed out learners found employment opportunities as compared to men (57%). It was also found that major percentage of the employment was located in urban areas (73%).

The participants were all in the age group of 25 and above. They were all employed and their profession varied from Government job to working with private MNCs or self-employed. A few of the participants were Yoga practitioners and held workshop. Interestingly majority of the respondents were based in urban areas.

With regard to taking up Yoga as a career in the field of wellness, all the participants gave a positive response. In terms of potentiality, one of the respondents Pratiksha remarked, *'One can become a yoga teacher for different age groups. Yoga teacher in school is also very important'.*

As for taking up Yoga as sport, the opinions varied. One enthusiastic participant stated, *'Sure, if I ever get a chance to participate in any competition, I would happily participate. It will be a great opportunity for me'.*

However, the same participant also mentioned,

'But I think women would be more comfortable in learning yoga from a female practitioner. Women may feel free to ask questions related to women health to another woman'.

Laxmi is another respondent, who herself has been working as a Yoga practitioner for the last 15 years and was a Yoga judge. She stated that while Yoga offered many career prospects, she herself would not join any competitive sport as Yoga.

A few respondents also mentioned the struggle to keep a balance between their role as a working woman and a family person. One of the respondents, who is also a Yoga practitioner, mentions 'timing towards my child' as a challenging issue.

This brings into light the structural limitations to which a woman is bound through patriarchy when it comes to making career choices. For most of the respondents, choosing Yoga as a career, both in wellness or as sport, was demanding and hence beyond them. Participating in a competition offered a 'safe' opportunity than taking it up as a career in sports. The female bonding or sisterhood becomes the safety net for woman when it comes to building a career and the dearth of women practitioners makes it a less obvious choice for many.

Yogacharya Subhasish Kar, Founder and President of the Indian Yoga Culture & Yoga Therapy Centre, remarked on the wide possibilities of Yoga for women. In a telephonic interview, he was vocal of the new opportunities that would be created with the inclusion of Yoga as a sport and in general.

SUMMARY

The paper brings into light that a career in Yoga (wellness aspect) is desirous to majority of the respondents, but Yoga as a sport (vocational aspect) did not have many takers among the female respondents. Yoga as a sport is still an issue of debate, yet there is enough awareness among the female respondents regarding the same. Despite the challenges in this field, like pay parity, where female Yoga practitioners do not earn as much as their male counterparts (Deka & Roy, 2020) and competitiveness, the respondents were hopeful of the future prospects.

The respondents are aware of the demand for Yoga practitioners in the wellness sector and hence they chose the PGDY programme under KKHSOU. KKHSOU provides counselling sessions where the learners are imparted theoretical practical knowledge of *asanas* under the supervision of Yoga professionals. Counselling sessions (theoretical and practical) are held on Sundays for the learners.

Distance education has a large impact on women from the vocational point of view. The flexible nature of imparting education in the ODL system proves to be convenient for the

female learners to pursue any career related programmes of their choice at their own time and place. ODL offers a wide range of choices to the women learners in terms of programmes that are skill or industry based to boost their career aspirations.

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BIODATA and CONTACT ADDRESSES of the AUTHOR/S



Dr Sukmaya Lama is currently working as an Assistant (History) at Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University, Assam, India. She did her PhD on the history of Distance Education. Her research interest lies in- Gender and Education, Religion, and history of Distance Education.

Dr Sukmaya Lama (Assistant Professor)
KKHSOU, NH 37, Resham Nagar, Khanapara,
Near Bodoland Guest House
Guwahati-22

Phone Office: 8811016408, 8811016410

E-mail: slama@kkhsou.in



Dr. Juri Hazarika is an educator and a researcher in the fields of media studies and distance education. She received her PhD in New Media Technologies and Distance Education and completed her Masters in Mass Communication. Dr. Hazarika has an experience of over 10 years in research and teaching in both face-to-face and distance mode. Her research focuses on latest trends in distance education, gender and media studies.

Dr Juri Hazarika (Assistant Professor)
KKHSOU, NH 37, Resham Nagar, Khanapara,

Near Bodoland Guest House
Guwahati-22

Phone Office: 8811016408, 8811016410

E-mail: jurihazarika@kkhsou.in

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF FEMALE PIONEERS IN OPEN LEARNING

Written by
Susan BAINBRIDGE and Norine WARK

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Peggy Lynn MacIsaac
plm2030@gmail.com
Peggy Lynn MacIsaac Consulting, Canada

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As an academic librarian, I am interested in books that fill a gap in the literature. Yes, all of good academic research aims for that. But hear me out. My interest is piqued by publications that fit into a field of literature while simultaneously challenging that field's systemic bias. Bainbridge and Wark's (2023) *Encyclopedia of Female Pioneers in Online Learning* does just that. The title alone tells us where the authors are going to take us through their nearly 500-page tome. It presents what we would expect, information on female pioneers in this field. The first part of the book is devoted to individual interviews with 30 pioneers. The second part is a thematic analysis of those interviews. The authors conducted each interview with rigour and transparency, by asking consistent questions (with the slight differences being reported) and then by including the full transcripts in print and audio formats. The audio is a rich inclusion that breaks the silent rapport between the text and the reader. When the authors of the encyclopedia state, "the main goal of this book is to capture and share the voices and contributions of female pioneers in online learning" (p. 3) they deliver these as written transcripts, thematic analysis of data from those transcripts, and the literal recordings of women's voices. The recordings allow the "reader" to discern from the spoken tone of each woman what cannot be expressed in text. This is a meaningful approach to capturing and recording histories from within this field.

GLIMPSES IN TIME

The interviewed pioneers began their participation in open and distance education field between the years of 1970 and 2009. This gives the opportunity for readers to understand the information and communication technology changes over time, along with the breakthroughs, challenges, and successes of adapting them to open and distance education. While the book was published in 2023, it provides rich first-person historical accounts of landmark events in the provision of formal and informal education being delivered using print, radio, television, satellite, computer, and high-speed broadband Internet technologies over five decades.

THE LIST OF PIONEERS INTERVIEWED FOR THE ENCYCLOPEDIA

Belawati, Tian
Beukes-Amiss, Catherine Margaret (Maggy)
Brindley, Jane Elizabeth
Burge, Elizabeth June (Liz)
Chen, Li
Fainholc, Beatriz
Farley, Helen Sara
Gibson, Chere Campbell
Glennie, Jennifer (Jenny)
Gregory, Sue
Gunawardena, Chandra
Gunawardena, Charlotte Nirmalani (Lani)
Henri, France
Herring, Susan
Hiltz, Starr Roxanne

Jung, Insung
Kanwar, Asha
Keough, Erin M.
Koroivulaono, Theresa
Kurtz, Gila
Lamy, Thérèse
Meeks Gardner, Julia (Julie)
Moran, Louise
Murray, Denise
Roberts, Judy
Seelig, Caroline
Simmons-McDonald, Hazel
Spronk, Barbara
von Prümmer, Christine
Young, Arlene M. C.

INTERNATIONAL SCOPE

The authors admit a delimiter for the research was that they conducted the research in English. They acknowledge that there is an opportunity for future research to break that linguistic barrier (p. 448). The authors mitigated some of the impact of this delimiter by selecting a wide range of pioneers to interview. The thematic analysis comparing profiles of the pioneers showed, "not only did most individual profiles have 50% or less in common with the average profile, but the areas of commonality between individual profiles and the average profile also varied greatly" (p. 447). I will add to this that the authors' selected pioneers' whose careers were not geographically narrow. By this I mean, I counted each country that was named in the interview transcripts as places where the pioneers worked, while I did not count locations of attendance like presenting at a conference or studying at a university. These thirty women have directly impacted open and distance education policy, teaching, and learning in 92 countries. Hello. That got my attention. These pioneers certainly have the authority to speak to global experiences of the field.

COMPELLING READ

Encyclopedias are usually used as reference material to be flipped through alphabetically to find the single entry that is relevant to one's research. They usually are not read sequentially, in their entirety. This book may be the rare encyclopedia that one enjoys reading cover to cover. I will admit that as a kid I preferred reading through my family's set of encyclopedia rather than reading a novel. The depth of the entries in Bainbridge and Wark's encyclopedia makes this a compelling read.

RECOMMENDED AUDIENCES

I would be remiss in my review if I failed to discuss the audience for this book. The authors list an intended audience as, "policymakers, administrators, educators, historians, researchers, writers, and students who are interested in distance education (DE), online learning, educational technology, and gender issues topics" (p. 3). How the pioneers navigated the challenges (such as but not limited to funding, sector acceptance, technology change, innovation, and gender biases) echoes present day challenges in open

and distance education. Current day educational trailblazers can draw from these experiences as the field continues to evolve. One finding from the book's data analysis was that the leading reason these 30 women initially engaged in field of open and distance education was for social justice reasons (p. 401). Social justice was also the most prevalent sub-theme among the benefits of open and distance education that the pioneers named (p. 415).

An example from this intended audience would be researchers who wish to pursue any of the six research questions proposed in the Future Research section (p. 448). The first of these is continuing the pursuit of evidence of the Matilda Effect in the field of distance and online learning. The Matilda Effect refers to women's achievement being falsely attributed to their male colleagues. The century's old phenomenon was named by Margaret Rossiter (1993) in tribute to Matilda Joselyn Gage who, in 1870, documented cases of women's scientific invention being incorrectly credited to men.

As an academic librarian my work is connecting people to information that will be of use to them. I would say one accidental audience for this book would include non-DE researchers who want to interrogate their own field for evidence of the Matilda Effect. These researchers could adopt the authors' approaches to methodology, analysis, and transparency in sharing findings. This would have two upsides. One is using it like a recipe saves the researcher's time in designing the study. The other is that consistencies between Matilda Effect studies conducted in different fields increases the opportunity and strengthens the results of any cross-disciplinary meta-analysis studies on the Matilda Effect. Another accidental audience would be librarians wishing to expand their libraries' collections in the area of history of open and distance education. The bibliographies in this encyclopedia can be used to develop library collections in this field.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There was no conflict of interest in writing this review.

BIODATA and CONTACT of the REVIEWER

Dr. Peggy Lynn MacIsaac is an educator, artist, and librarian. Fostering academic agency in individuals to freely set and pursue their academic goals informs her research and practice. Peggy Lynn is an award-winning scholar earning a Doctor of Education in Distance Education from Athabasca University, a Master of Library and Information Studies from The University of British Columbia, and a Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies from Carleton University. Her subject areas of interest include higher education for refugee-background learners, cross-disciplinary multimodal (including arts-based) research design, the open movement, and social justice.

**Peggy Lynn MacIsaac, Ed.D.
Peggy Lynn MacIsaac Consulting
Canada
plm2030@gmail.com
<https://peggy-lynn-macisaac.ca/>**