

A JOURNEY IN PURSUIT OF THE BRASS TACKS: ADA LOVELACE AND SUSAN HERRING, COMPUTER SCIENCE VISIONARIES

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ABSTRACT

The mainspring of this comparative inquiry was to examine two female pioneers who significantly impacted the agency of distance learning as it advanced within computer delivery: Susan Herring and Ada Lovelace. Ada Lovelace was a younger peer of the 19th century inventor, Charles Babbage. An aristocrat and amateur mathematician, she is often credited with writing the first computer program. Susan Herring is a contemporary linguist, and is considered the primary architect of the field of Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis. She describes herself as “best known for my research on discourse and language use in online communication. Some people say that I am the founder . . . maybe even the leading person in the world in that area” (Bainbridge & Wark, 2023, p. 173). My prescription for this examination was to explore the field of study of each woman, their unique contributions, their shared commonalities and characteristics, and finally, their contemporary relevance to computer facilitated distance education. The journey was not straightforward.

Keywords: Computers, computer program, linguistics, mathematics, Sketch of the Analytical Engine, Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis, online communication, gender