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# Emerging Leadership Through Coloring: Stories of the Indiana Women of Achievement


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## Emerging Leadership Through Coloring: Stories of the Indiana Women of Achievement

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**Abstract:** Engaging adults in learning can occur through arts-based methods. Building on an oral-history project, we tell women's leadership stories through both narrative and images through an adult coloring book. The book is organized into the nine leadership qualities, based on Preskill and Brookfield's (2009), *Learning as a Way of Leading*. The roundtable session describes the process of developing this project and ways this type of educational tool could be used in supporting different ways of learning.

**Keywords:** arts-based learning, leadership, women

### Introduction

Have you ever wondered how to motivate student engagement in learning and enjoying their educational experience? Do you enjoy coloring as a way to relax or spark new ideas? How can stories be shared through both art and research? This roundtable discussion will share the development of an alternative method of instruction, specifically an adult coloring book that helps to highlight women's leadership.

Adult educators seek ways to engage their students in learning new ideas, evaluating established ones, and critically reflecting on assumptions that underpin our knowing. Caring educators consistently seek ways to engage their students in learning, as well as assist them in long-term information retention. Dirx (2006) espoused including emotional aspects in education because they enhance transformative learning is necessary. Arts-based methods can be utilized not only in art classes, but also in most other academic disciplines to engage other ways of knowing and learning about the world. When designing one's own drawing or deciding how to color a preset design, students use parts of their minds that are not engaged in traditional learning settings.

Adult coloring books of various topics have been very popular and sold throughout the world. According to the Washington Post, an estimated 12 million adult coloring books were sold in the United States in 2015 (Krug, 2016). Coloring is recognized as a mindfulness technique, such as yoga and meditation for some. By sharing both their stories through narrative and metaphorical images, our coloring book has an educational purpose, teaching others how "normal" everyday women become leaders.

As a culmination of a five-year oral-history project examining 44 women named Indiana Women of Achievement, we are telling their stories through both narrative and images. The book is organized into the nine leadership qualities, based on Preskill and Brookfield's (2009) *Learning as a Way of Leading*. The model characteristics include: 1) learning to be open to the contributions of others; 2) learning critical reflection; 3) learning to support the growth of others; 4) learning collective leadership; 5) learning to analyze experience; 6) learning to question; 7) learning democracy; 8) learning to sustain hope in the face of struggle; 9) learning to create community. We believe this model provides the opportunity for leadership in the real lives of every day people, not just those with formal titles or official positions.

The Indiana Women of Achievement Award was created in 1999 and has honored more than eighty women for their leadership in the community and support of other women. As part

of the oral history, we invited all living awardees to participate in this project (1999-2014). The 44 women who participated in this study are included in the coloring book. Fifteen of the women also had their stories symbolized through a creative quilt exhibit. Our working product is being displayed for free on our website: <https://www.women-of-achievement.com/>.

### **Research Questions and Project Description**

The following research questions shaped our qualitative study: How do IWA awardees describe their leadership and their life experience? How do they support policies and practices for women through their leadership? And, how do awardees develop a legacy for others who have similar interests and leadership aspirations/qualities?

Each woman was interviewed in person or by phone for 45-90 minutes. Recordings were made and transcribed before being analyzed for themes and symbols of their leadership. In order to develop the coloring book and quilt squares, the author and the artists (both graduate students) worked together to review all the interviews and develop themes that could be interpreted through images. We also asked the participants if they had preferences for imagery or metaphors, and when provided, we used those images as part of the artwork. At times, imagery and logos of organizations in which they were involved were included into the artwork. To accompany the coloring images, we wrote 500-word summaries of their interviews in order to better describe their personal stories and leadership lessons. We highlighted direct quotes that were powerful and meaningful from their stories.

As we develop this project, we continue to imagine ways this type of educational tool can support different ways of learning. Through the design of unique supplementary materials for leadership classes, we venture outside traditional methods of classroom instruction, reaching into the emotional, and perhaps childlike, state of learners. Coloring pages provide active engagement for learners to connect with the stories of leadership. The themes emerge from the coloring process reflecting lessons from these women's stories. As leadership is a buzzword, we provide visual images and stories of how does it look to be a leader.

The Washington Post quoted Craig Sawchuk from the Mayo Clinic who said that "Coloring has a grounding effect . . . almost like a volume knob to turn down the sympathetic nervous system, the stress response . . . Coloring can help slow down heart rate and respiration, loosen muscles and stimulate the brain" (Krug, 2016). We hope that this project will support the community through connecting youth to the stories and models of leaders through an engaging and interesting venue.

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