

MITIGATING THE MATILDA EFFECT ON HELEN FARLEY: A PROFILE OF AN EARLY ONLINE RESEARCHER AND HER ONGOING DEDICATION TO SOCIAL JUSTICE

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ABSTRACT

The Matilda effect (Rossiter, 1993) is the term used to describe “the systematic under-recognition of women’s accomplishments in scientific fields” (Schmidt et al., 2021, p. 1), which has been suggested as relevant in fields within academia often viewed as male dominated, such as educational technology and distance education (Schmidt et al., 2021). In this current paper, we hope to counterbalance that bias and help to reverse the Matilda effect by overviewing the research and achievements of Helen Farley. Her work with incarcerated individuals and her attempts to bring higher education into prisons in Australia and New Zealand demonstrates her dedication to social justice within the context of her own culture. In this article, we provide an overview Farley’s biographical background and highlight some of her research to offer insight into the value and innovation of her work. Her focus on information and communication technology (ICT) has produced innovative ways to create platforms and learning management systems that offer online learning to prison populations. We hope this paper will assist in continuing to mitigate the Matilda effect within the field of distance and online education.

Keywords: Matilda effect, women researchers, distance education, online education, gender differences, gender equity, feminist researchers, social justice

INTRODUCTION

Helen Farley is a significant female researcher. She is from Australia and her career focus has been on information and communications technology (ICT), such as Learning Management Systems (LMS), as well as aiding the educational needs of the incarcerated (Bainbridge & Wark, 2022). She currently works as the Practice Manager of Education and Training for the Southern Region of the Department of Corrections Ara Poutama Aotearoa in New Zealand and is also an Adjunct Associate Professor at the University of Southern Queensland. She has been teaching and creating works in various forms for over eighteen years (LinkedIn, 2022).

Farley has worked extensively throughout her career in partnership with correctional jurisdictions across Australia to introduce digital technologies into prisons to provide access to secure digital education. She was the lead for the creation of a government-funded \$AUD 4.4 million project called *Making the Connection* that developed in-cell technologies to allow prisoners to participate in higher education. It was used throughout many states in Australia and by its end over one thousand, seven hundred prisoners had been enrolled in university programs with retention rates higher than non-incarcerated university students and with slightly higher examination results (LinkedIn, 2022). Farley's career-to-date publications are vast (Bainbridge & Wark, 2022; University of Southern Queensland, 2021). This profile provides her research interests, education, work experience and significant contributions to modern learning. In addition, three papers written by or about Farley will be reviewed and discussed.

A relevant connection to Farley's research in her work with incarcerated learners is the connection to equity issues as many of the prisoners were Indigenous. Farley notes this as significant and speaks to existing inequities at systemic levels in Australia. Similar data from Canadian prisons show that the same inequities exist there. More than thirty percent of prison populations in Canada are of Indigenous ancestry even though they only constitute five percent of the general Canadian population (Government of Canada, 2020). This paper will highlight relevant, relatable information to the Canadian context in connection with Indigenous peoples.

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Farley has spent considerable time in her academic career working with digital literacies in education, digital equity in higher education, corrections education, mobile learning frameworks, and evaluation. Special interests include the educational use of virtual world environments, authentic 3D movement in virtual environments, haptic interfaces, immersion in virtual environments, and educational technology (University of Southern Queensland, 2015). Early on in her research she contributed to the *Second Life* platform to create virtual environments for students to enhance their learning and worked in mLearning (Bainbridge & Wark, 2022). Current work involves "supporting education and training in its broadest sense across Te Waipounamu preparing prisoners for a productive and happy life upon release. Current research involves discovering what works and why, and the broader benefits of education and its impacts on prison culture" (LinkedIn, 2022).

In contrast to the punitive approach to unfavourable behaviours such as incarceration, Farley also has an interest in the benefits of restorative justice. Restorative justice is a response that "seeks to repair harm by providing an opportunity for those harmed and those who take responsibility for the harm to communicate about, and address their needs, in the aftermath of a crime" (Government of Canada, 2021). Many Indigenous peoples around the world follow a restorative justice response to adverse behaviours among their community members.

ACADEMIC BACKGROUND

From 1988 to 2002, Farley attained her first two degrees. They were a Bachelor of Veterinary Science, which was followed by a Master of Arts in Studies of Religion. She attained her PhD in 2007 and then followed that up in 2009 with a second master's degree, this time a Master of Education in ICT in Higher Education (LinkedIn, 2022). In the interim she completed master's coursework and certificate work in areas of interest to her.

ARTICLE 1. THE PRISON IS ANOTHER COUNTRY: INCARCERATED STUDENTS AND (IM)MOBILITY IN AUSTRALIAN PRISONS

Authors Farley and Hopkins (2017) identify multiple barriers experienced by incarcerated students in relation to critical mobility theories and the physical constraints of a prison. Data collected for conclusive findings came from student prisoner interviews and therefore, align with students' perceptions of studying digitized tertiary and pre-tertiary courses (post-secondary education received at universities) through the framework of mobility issues (Farley & Hopkins, 2017, pp. 151-153). Their conclusion suggests that prisons need to find other ways of approaching education for prisoners that better align with their institutional process and practices in ways that benefit the educational success of the incarcerated.

Using critical mobility theory as a lens, this article notes that Australia's most marginalized and isolated students remain disconnected from the advantages and disadvantages of mobility. In addition to the barrier that prisoners do not have access to the Internet, which is problematic for distance learning, other barriers include the spatial and temporal constraints of a prison. One of two notable challenges to completing higher education in prison is the lack of priority placed on education in comparison to other institutional priorities and practices. Also, physically getting to the place where the computers are set up involves a multitude of challenges as movement is restricted within a prison environment, and when and where people move are often left to prison guards.

The funding for this research was a part of the aforementioned *Making the Connection* project, which established an LMS system that was a version of Moodle called *StudyDesk* that could be used offline. This allowed students to engage with electronic learning while not accessing the Internet, which allowed students to develop their digital literacy skills, engage with multimedia course materials, and be relieved of the burden of carrying around heavy, hard copy books and printed educational materials.

The authors address inequity by discussing how (im)mobility is implicated in keeping marginalized students 'stuck' in an unequal system reproduced by isolationist and punitive policies. They state the (im)mobility issues present within the prison system work negatively towards the educational success of a group of prisoners who are marginalized and under-privileged and were before they were sent to prison. They state the premise of the Australian prison system is to isolate and immobilize criminals in order to keep the larger community safe. This creates a competing interest between security and rehabilitation with security concerns prevailing.

The percentage of incarcerated individuals in Australian prison systems that were Aboriginal, and Torres Strait Islanders was one to six in 2015. Some parts of Australia host more than forty percent of their prison population as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Farley and Hopkins state that "Indigenous women are the fastest growing subgroup of Australian prisoners, with the number incarcerated nearly doubling over the past decade" (p. 156). They go on to say the dominant population in Australia's prisons also come from minority and low socio-economic groups, showing inequities based on race, gender, and class and that the criminal justice system only "serves the political interests of the dominant social class" (p. 156).

This is relatable to the Canadian context where more than thirty percent of prison populations are of Indigenous ancestry, even though they only constitute five percent of the general Canadian population (Government of Canada, 2020). Indigenous people in Canada are also the most impoverished demographic in the country. For example, data from the 2010 census found that the average child poverty rate for all children in Canada was seventeen percent while for Indigenous children it was thirty-eight percent nationally with

some provinces hosting as large as sixty-four percent of status First Nations children living below the poverty line (Macdonald & Wilson, 2016, p. 11).

ARTICLE 2. USING 3D WORLDS IN PRISON: DRIVING, LEARNING AND ESCAPE

This article by Helen Farley (2018) looks at the constraints experienced by prisoners by lack of movement and engagement with the world outside of the prison along with the technical limitations of the prison environment. As a solution, Farley poses the implementation of virtual reality. In connection to the restriction of movement, Farley discusses how the overcrowding of prisons equates to longer time spent in cells for prisoners, with an average of fourteen hours per day according to 2018 data. Virtual reality is a way for the incarcerated to virtually locate themselves somewhere else. The benefits of virtual reality are large.

Examples that Farley uses for the purpose of education are field trips to historic sites, museums, and science related activities, etc. Virtual reality can be used for psychological rehabilitation, driver training, job seeking, and job training. She states that successfully educating and rehabilitating prisoners will “decrease recidivism rates and ultimately provide significant cost savings while integrating prisoners back into society” (Farley, 2018, p. 3). This form of education can be used for driving and driving offences, programs and behaviour modification, vocational education, language, and culture. Virtual reality usage has been proven to cost less than traditional modes of instruction and the cost of the hardware is low.

Limitations of virtual reality in prisons include streaming media challenges and synchronous action with other participants due to lack of Internet access. Social interaction simulations are performed by ‘bots’ in virtual reality and driven by artificial intelligence (AI) so their responses are limited. There could also be unintended consequences associated with the interactions. Another limitation lies in the limited haptic feedback that most virtual reality provides to truly simulate real-life experiences such as driving. Excellent haptic feedback is expensive, which would be a barrier for prisons.

Regarding systemic inequity, it is known that most prisoners in Australia come from disadvantaged backgrounds and vulnerable populations such as the Aboriginal population and Torres Strait Islanders who may have English as a second, third, or even fourth language. These prisoners are incarcerated away from their homes and country, which has a significant impact on their well-being, given the enormous importance of land in their cultures. Virtual reality allows for immersive virtual environments that connect both language and culture to inmates, as well as offer up culture such as Aboriginal activities and games that would go a long way to alleviating the isolation and pain felt by these prisoners (Farley, 2018, pp. 5-6). Implementation of these activities via virtual reality has the potential to help prisoners overcome the multiple layers of existing disadvantage.

BOOK 1 (CHAPTER). FARLEY, HELEN SARA

Helen Sara Farley is a chapter of a book entitled *The Encyclopedia of the Female Pioneers of Online Learning* by Susan Bainbridge and Norine Wark (2022). This chapter on Farley offers a short biography and an in-depth interview with Farley, discussing her career experiences and contributions to online distance learning (ODL). Regarding Farley, Bainbridge and Wark state “her unique contribution to modern learning is her pioneering work with incarcerated learners and working to develop offline programs to allow this particular group of learners to study under the constraints of prison rules” (Bainbridge & Wark, 2022, p. 71). The interview includes a look into the history and achievements of this remarkable researcher through her own words and is a very inspirational read. Indigenous readers will feel connected to Farley through her frequent references to Indigenous peoples

when discussing their uniqueness, as well as her depth of awareness to existing inequities in prisons for this group along with her response to that.

Farley discusses pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning that align with Indigenous ways of knowing such as experiential learning, the importance of building strong relationships, and differentiated teaching and assessment practices. Farley suggests the concepts of connecting with Aboriginal Elders to capture Indigenous knowledge and engaging in student-centred approaches to teaching. She also offers up a story about a student who was part of the "Stolen Generations" where the Australian government removed Aboriginal children from their homes and placed them in foster care or orphanages.

Relatedly, Canada did this, too. It is called "The Sixties Scoop" where Canadian provincial governments scooped over twenty thousand Indigenous children from their families and adopted them out to non-Indigenous homes or placed them in the foster care system. Many children were farmed or sold internationally to organizations or families around the world, including countries such as the United States, Australia, and New Zealand (The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2022).

CONCLUSION

Helen Sara Farley is a researcher of significance. Her work with online distance learning, virtual reality, LMS systems, and mLearning have been impactful for many. Her contribution to the landscape of distance learning is notable and progressive. Her acknowledgment, understanding, and work towards a more equitable education system for the incarcerated is both admirable and encouraging. She has researched virtual reality among other educational technologies around the world and used this knowledge to make advancements in Australia and New Zealand. Our hope is that researchers in online distance education in Canada are aware of her research and considering similar ways to address educational inequities for Canada's disadvantaged groups, most notably Indigenous peoples. For example, could we implement offline Moodle programs into Canadian prisons to enhance student learning? Would this help address existing inequities in prisons here as their populations, like Australia and New Zealand, are also disproportionately Indigenous?

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