

Preparing Older Learners for the Information Age: Identifying and Overcoming the Barriers

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Abstract

Two significant phenomena facing society today are the rapid development of information technologies and the increasing age of the population. Research from both Australia and overseas, show that older adults are less likely than the overall population of accessing and adopting information technologies and are less adaptable to change in general. Applications of emerging technologies can play a significant part in improving the quality of life of our older citizens, but current lack of awareness by this population group of assistive applications of information technologies, technophobia, learning characteristics, and restricted opportunities can all play a part in minimising the advantages.

The Occupational Therapy Research Centre of Western Australia (OTRCWA) has been funded from two sources to undertake a number of research projects associated with barriers to access of information technology for older adults. In addition, the OTRCWA has been awarded this years Fulbright Education Foundation's *2000 Symposium: Implications for an Ageing Population*, which will bring prominent international experts to Australia to discuss the benefits of information technologies to the social, health, work, learning, and leisure aspects of life.

This paper will discuss in detail some of these emerging benefits of information technologies to older adults. It will emphasis the need for educators to be aware of older students learning needs and to assist them develop appropriate constructivist approaches to future learning situations. In addition, it will also emphasis the need to prepare all students in relevant disciplines to address associated issues with older clients in their professional career. The paper will focus on the design of an instrument, *Technology and Older People's Survey*, which has been developed at the OTRCWA to measure older peoples' technology experiences, health status, technology anxiety, technology awareness, and attitudes towards technology. Results of this instrument's application will be reported and recommendations made for action at both national and local level.