

**THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF
LATERLIFE COMPUTER LEARNERS**

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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Candidate

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DEDICATION

To my daughter

Alex

who challenges me time after time

on matters light and dark

shady and jagged

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ABSTRACT

Older adults of the 21st century have not grown up with information and communication technology and may not have used computers in their working lives. However, they have experienced the many technological changes of the 20th century. Some changes have fundamentally altered communication, entertainment, and the kinds of knowledge and skills that are sought and valued. These changes are difficult to ignore because of their pervasiveness. In order to actively participate in their lifeworlds older adults face an imperative to adapt and meet new challenges.

The purpose of this research was to investigate and interpret the lived experience of laterlife computer learners in non-formal learning environments. The research focused on the interpretation and understanding of the learning experience from the perspective of participants. Hence there is an ontological thread that is grounded in the lifeworld of older adults in Sydney, Australia. A hermeneutic phenomenological methodology was considered suitable because of its emphasis on understanding the lived experience of humans. A qualitative method was used in this study because it enabled existential insights into the learning experience from the perspective of learners and privileged their voices.

Fourteen older adults volunteered to participate and were interviewed. Participants identified themselves as laterlife beginning computer learners. Interviews were audio-taped and analysed using an interpretative case study approach. Other analytic tools used were grounded theory, thematic analysis and narrative inquiry. Existential themes were identified and interpreted within a framework of wellbeing.

The research found that participants engaged in learning optimistically and that they believed in their abilities and also in the worth of the learning they were undertaking. The learners believed the outcomes from learning would lead to greater opportunity for participation in their lifeworld. Without computer skills and knowledge they believed they would be ignored and relegated to a

peripheral position as observers in their lifeworld. By undertaking learning they believed they were taking control of their current and future lives, acting in defiance of developmental theories that suggested ageing was a stage of life and not a process. However, the sense of agency and purpose was not without its pressures and hurdles and learning was perceived to be difficult, dynamic, frustrating and immensely satisfying. Their purposes and expectations were situated in the changing nature of the world and a desire to continue to live their lives authentically, as participants and not spectators. Laterlife computer learners in this study were seen to be learning and growing their lives into a future of their making.