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Equity issues in ICT in higher education: the experience of mature-age rural women

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree

Master of Education: Research

from

University of Wollongong

by

Wendy Meyers
B.A, Dip. Ed. (NEW)

Faculty of Education
2006

Certification

I, Wendy Meyers, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master of Education, in the Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Wendy Meyers

June 2006

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Abstract

Recent research has acknowledged equity problems in higher education associated with the use of online learning technologies. In the past, some factors inherent within traditional learning environments were shown to inhibit the experience of women. However, the incorporation of ICT (information and communication technologies) into the learning environment was initially thought to offer an equitable alternative for women. This research explores these issues, investigating the experience of women in an online learning environment.

The study focused on a group of mature-age women in a rural Australian community. Through the use of qualitative techniques, including semi-structured interviews, face-to-face and online focus groups, the researcher asked women to reflect on and reveal their experience in online learning. The study identified a range of issues that impacted on the educational experience of this group including student readiness, access, support, isolation, increased flexibility, gender, and negative online behaviours.

The findings contribute to the knowledge base about ICT in higher education from the perspective of gender and equity issues in asynchronous communication. The study makes a unique contribution through its focus on the learning experience of students in higher education, with its emphasis on the perspectives of women who are mature-age students based in rural Australia.

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