Abstract

This study is based on focus groups with elderly “non-users” of computers recruited from senior citizens’ organizations in the North Island of New Zealand. Eighty-three participants participated in the focus groups. Findings suggest participants’ meanings for the computer were identifiable in relation to four major themes: (a) the useful tool, (b) the inter-generational connector, (c) the not-personally-necessary-device, and (d) the socially disruptive machine. In addition, partial explanations for participants’ meanings for computers were identifiable in relation to two other themes: (a) good servants, but poor masters; and (b) needs, not wants. Participants’ meanings for computers, as represented in the themes, were developed in relation to a repertoire of interpretive resources acquired over a lifetime. Drawing on this set of resources, participants critically evaluated the technology in terms of their own lives and in relation to their perceptions of technology’s place in society.

Dr Margaret Richardson is a Research Fellow with the Department of Management Communication. Over the past five years, while completing her doctorate, she has worked on a research project funded by the Foundation for Research Science and Technology looking at the impacts of information communication technologies (ICTs) on people in society. In conjunction with Professors Ted Zorn and Kay Weaver, Margaret has been involved in looking at the impacts of computers on several different ‘technologically-disadvantaged’ groups in the community, including rural people and older people, as well as doing some work on the use of computers in not-for-profit organisations. Her recently completed doctoral thesis, entitled Interruption Events and Sensemaking Processes: A Narrative Analysis of Older People’s Relationships with Computers, explored the ways that three different groups of older people, users, non-users, and members of SeniorNet organisations, made sense of this new technology. Currently, Margaret and Kay are investigating a community initiative to introduce broadband into Te Pahu, and Margaret, Ted and Professor Juliet Roper are investigating workplace wellbeing.

Presenter: Margaret Richardson
Email: Margie@waikato.ac.nz