

## Chapter 22

# Experience Using Information and Communication Technologies with Elderly People

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The elderly show very low rates of access to and use of the new technologies in comparison with their significant weight in the overall population. It is essential to establish alternatives which respond to their needs and promote the access to and use of ICTs among all citizens on equal conditions. This chapter describes an experiment conducted with new technologies in the Red Cross Elderly Day Care Centre in A Coruña, using the In-TIC software and a specific methodology for intervention with elderly individuals. Three different lines of action were followed: initial evaluation of the users participating in the project; intervention by means of digital literacy and therapeutic stimulation sessions with the ICT; and final re-evaluation and data collection. The results obtained provide proof of an improvement in the users' cognitive abilities, the acquisition of computer knowledge and skills, and the satisfaction of the elderly with regard to new technologies.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Information and Communication Technologies (hereinafter, ICTs) are increasingly pervasive in our society, and in the majority of our everyday activities. Access to and use of ICTs provides citizens with a broad range of possibilities in terms of leisure, access to information, interaction, communication, training, etc. (Villar, 2003; Grande, Pereira, Mato & Pazos, 2008), as well as an enormous quantity of resources, making it possible to improve or even increase individuals' level of participation in activities which are significant for them, thus enabling them to comply with the social demands of the community to which they belong, and attain suitable levels of occupational performance.

Taking into account the continuous developments in the field of new technologies in recent years, one could say that the society in which we live has progressed along the path towards the so-called Information Society (Villar, 2003; Grande, Pereira, Mato & Pazos, 2008), a new social scenario characterised by the massive diffusion of computing, telematics and audiovisual communication media (Pousada, Groba, Orozco, Martinez, 2008). Promoting and facilitating the access to and use of ICTs for as many people and in the most egalitarian way possible is essential if individuals are to be able to respond to both their own vital needs and to the requirements and demands of the environments in which they live.

Nonetheless, we constantly come across situations in which there is no real access to ICTs and, hence, to this new society which is taking shape before our very eyes. This is true of many handicapped or elderly individuals who, faced with this process of innovation and technological development, find themselves in a situation of exclusion. This phenomenon is referred to as the digital divide, a term which defines the inequality arising as a consequence of certain groups of citizens' lack of integration into the new technologies (Grande,

Pereira, Mato & Pazos, 2008), and consequently, into the so-called Information Society.

## The Elderly and New Technologies

As mentioned above, this affects a fairly significant proportion of the population, particularly, individuals with low educational, training or economic levels, the people with disabilities and the elderly.

More specifically, "the elderly appear among the groups with the lowest levels of knowledge of and access to the new resources supplied by the new technologies" (Villar, 2003). Nevertheless, the proportion of this population group within the population as a whole is increasing steadily in practically all countries, a phenomenon to which Spanish society is not immune (Miranda, 2004). In accordance with the figures from the National Statistics Institute of Spain, obtained from the municipal census published on 1 January 2008, individuals over 65 years of age account for 16.54% of the total population. At the current moment, it is estimated that this percentage has reached 16.7% (current population estimates, as of 1 April 2009, calculated on the basis of the 2001 Population and Housing Census) and it is believed that this will continue to increase, approaching 30% by 2060 (long-term population projections obtained on the basis of the 2001 Population and Housing Census). (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2008a; Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2001).

Evidently, the elderly represent a significant proportion of the population in our society; nonetheless, their access to and use of ICTs in general, and more specifically of computers and the Internet, is very low. In 2008, the percentage of individuals aged between 65 and 74 who at some time had used computer was 16.2%, while for the rest of the population (individuals between 16 and 74 years of age) the figure was 67.4%; the percentage for those who had access the Internet sometime during that year was 10.6%, while for the remainder of the population the figure was 61.7% (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2008b).

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