**RESEARCH METHODS FOR THE LEARNING SCIENCES, 2010 TERM C**

**INSTRUCTOR: RYAN S.J.d. BAKER**

**ASSIGNMENT THREE**

**THINK-ALOUD**

**HANDED OUT:** Sunday, February 7

**DUE:** Monday, February 15, 11:59am by email to instructor  
(if your submission is over 10.0MB, please email me a web link)

In this assignment, you will conduct a think-aloud study. You should carry out this assignment individually.

**STEP ONE:** Choose your subject

You should find a colleague, friend, family member, or acquaintance, and assign them to complete a cognitive process or task. You should choose a process or task which is verbalizable (e.g. pure motor tasks are undesirable) and which will not be seriously disrupted or dangerous by thinking aloud. Your process/task should be one that is of educational importance (it does not necessarily need to be a task you are researching, although you are welcome to use such a task). A task almost certainly has educational importance if it is taught in a significant number of schools or universities (or in trade schools, professional training, etc.). Your subject should be a valid subject to perform that process or task, and you should justify why the subject is an appropriate example for performing this think-aloud.

**STEP TWO:** Plan your method

Either regular or retrospective think-aloud can be used. Create a script for the think-aloud and include it in your hand-in.

**STEP THREE:** Conduct a think-aloud

You should follow (more or less) the procedure discussed in van Sommeren and in the course lecture slides. You are recommended (but not required) to use a tape recorder or other voice recording mechanism to help you obtain quotes for your write-up.

**Writeup:** Please submit a writeup where you discuss, explain, and justify your think-aloud, including the results of your think-aloud.

* First, describe your procedure – including your script for the think-aloud study, how you followed recommendations in vS and from the class lecture, and how you deviated from the ideal procedure discussed in van Sommeren. Give specific examples of how you followed recommendations, and how you deviated from recommendations. Detail your choice of subject and justify why this subject was appropriate for this task.
* Second, describe your findings. Give a model of the subject’s process for completing the task.
* Third, give your thoughts on the think-aloud method. Was it useful for understanding the subject’s method within this task? Do you feel like you understand the participant’s process better? Was the method more effective or less effective than contextual inquiry for this task? Do you think that think aloud or contextual inquiry would have been more effective for the task you used in assignment 2?

**Grading Rubric:** Hand-ins will be graded on the basis of:

1. Choice of appropriate educational task and subject
2. Evidence of correct execution of the think-aloud method, or appropriate justification of deviations from the procedure
3. Quality of model describing findings
4. Thoughtful comparison between think-aloud method and contextual inquiry