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

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

**ASSIGNMENT TWO**

**CONTEXTUAL INQUIRY**

**HANDED OUT:** Saturday, January 30

**DUE:** Monday, February 8, 11:59am by email to instructor  
(if your submission is over 10.0MB, please email me a web link)

**NOTE: IF YOU HAVE RECEIVED AN EXTENSION FOR ASSIGNMENT ONE,   
YOU DO NOT AUTOMATICALLY HAVE AN EXTENSION FOR ASSIGNMENT TWO**

In this assignment, you will conduct either a contextual inquiry. You should carry out this assignment individually.

**STEP ONE:** Choose your subject

You should find a colleague, friend, family member, or acquaintance who is about to perform, or who has just completed, an educational task. “Educational task” can be defined broadly – they might be about to prepare for a test, complete an assignment for a class, or learn something on their own (you cannot study a classmate completing this assignment, though). A participant of any age can be chosen, though participants under 2 years old are not recommended.

**STEP TWO:** Plan your method

Either regular or retrospective contextual inquiry can be used.

**STEP THREE:** Conduct a contextual inquiry

You should follow (more or less) the procedure discussed in Beyer & Holtzblatt, 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 contextual inquiry.

* First, describe your procedure – how you deviated from the ideal procedure discussed in Beyer & Holtzblatt, and how you followed recommendations in B&H and from the class lecture. Give specific examples; in particular, give quotations from at least 3 cases where you presented an interpretation to the subject. Discuss exactly what they said and did before you gave your interpretation, how you presented your interpretation, exactly how they responded to your interpretation, and how (and whether) your final interpretation differed from your initial interpretation.
* Second, describe your findings. Describe the text, and give a model of the participant’s process for completing the task, explicitly indicating steps that were particularly challenging or difficult for the participant. Make recommendations for how the participant could have been facilitated in *learning* those steps (give a recommendation that promotes learning rather than a recommendation that avoids learning by over-scaffolding!)
* Third, give your thoughts on contextual inquiry as a method. Was it applicable for understanding this task? Do you feel like you understand the participant’s process better? Do you feel like you gained phenomenological understanding?
* Fourth, identify one thing you learned about the process of conducting a contextual inquiry, in the form of an aphorism like the aphorisms in Beyer & Holtzblatt (or a fortune cookie)

“To learn my teachings, I must first teach you how to learn.” – The Sphinx

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

1. Choice of appropriate educational task
2. Evidence of correct execution of contextual inquiry, or appropriate justification of deviations from the procedure
3. Quality of examples of interpretation
4. Quality of model describing findings; identification of challenge points
5. Recommendations that are congruent to your findings and reasonable
6. Quality of thoughts on contextual inquiry
7. Thought-provoking or funny (and related) aphorism