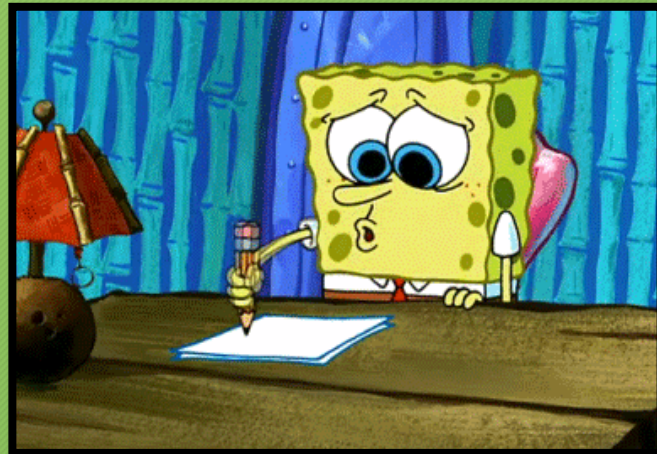


The Medium Matters

An evidence-based critique of the communication, interaction, and collaboration in writing center tutoring sessions

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“Technologies are not merely aids to human activity, but also powerful forces acting to reshape that activity and its meaning” (Winner, 1986).



My research study

- 2009: mid-sized northeastern American university writing center
- Videoed tutoring sessions between peer tutors and non-native English speakers (NNES)
- Analyzed transcripts and videos for communication, interaction, and collaboration as well as use of tools (mouse, keyboard, etc.)
- Analyzed in conjunction with broad-ranging literature review of writing center books, journal articles, and best practices to form a critical perspective on the use of computers in writing center tutoring sessions with NNES



Word processors begin to dominate the conversation in Writing Centers (Susser, 1998)



Writing Centers begin to adopt computers more widely

1980s

2000s

1970s

Writing Centers enter universities primarily as a means of remediation for underprepared students (Grimm, 1996)



1990s

Internet growth instigates the exploration of online writing resources (Buck, 2008)



One-on-one tutoring with a PAPER draft

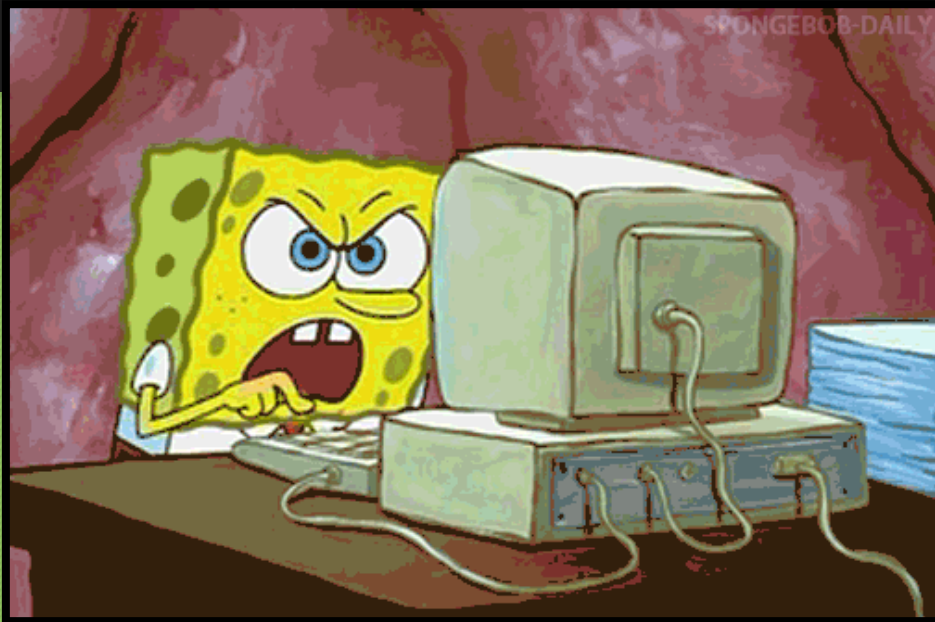
- Traditional methodology applies:
 - Student holds pen and does any writing
 - Tutor only points to text
 - Focus: student's voice, ownership, authorship, or emotional and intellectual connection to the writing and how it was composed (Severino, 2004)
- Allows direct interaction with text on page
- Equally available to anyone with basic literacy (where language is the only relevant cultural construct)
- No special skill set required to process changes to text

One-on-one tutoring with an ELECTRONIC draft

- Problems applying traditional methodology:
 - Power struggle for mouse, keyboard
 - Early focus on minutiae of the paper instead of global writing issues
 - Text manipulation may be limited by computer skills
- Computer-mediated (computer-limited) interaction with text
- Deeply connected to Western culture (Takayoshi, 1996)
- Requires knowledge and manipulation of word processing software (Susser, 1998)



“Computers do not automatically create ideal learning situations”
(Hawisher & Selfe, 1991).



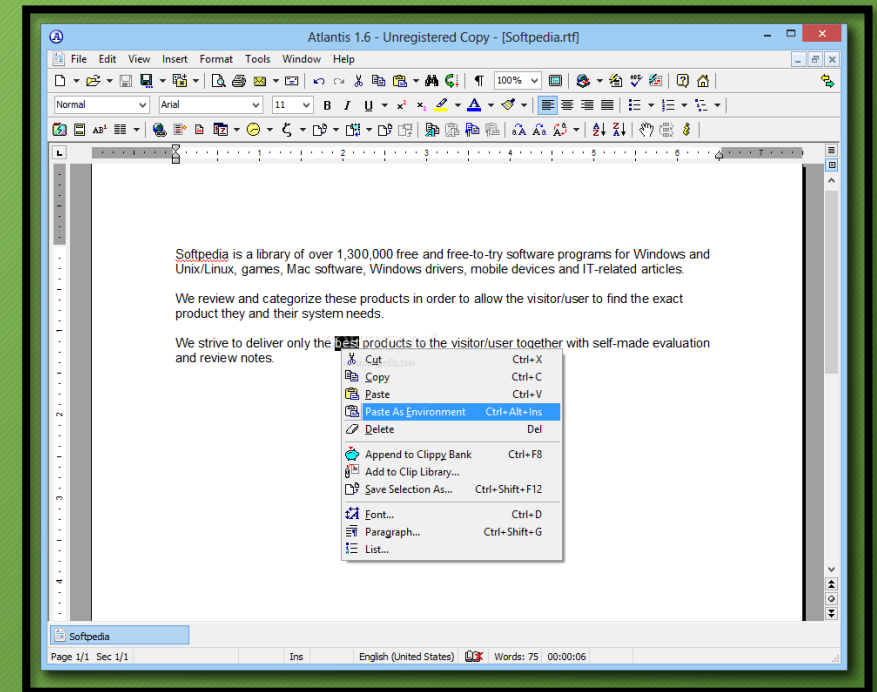
How communication changes

- Greater possibility for misunderstanding of location in text (problems with scrolling, movement of fluid text, etc.)
- Limits on how to draw student's attention to a portion of text because of tool-generated barrier



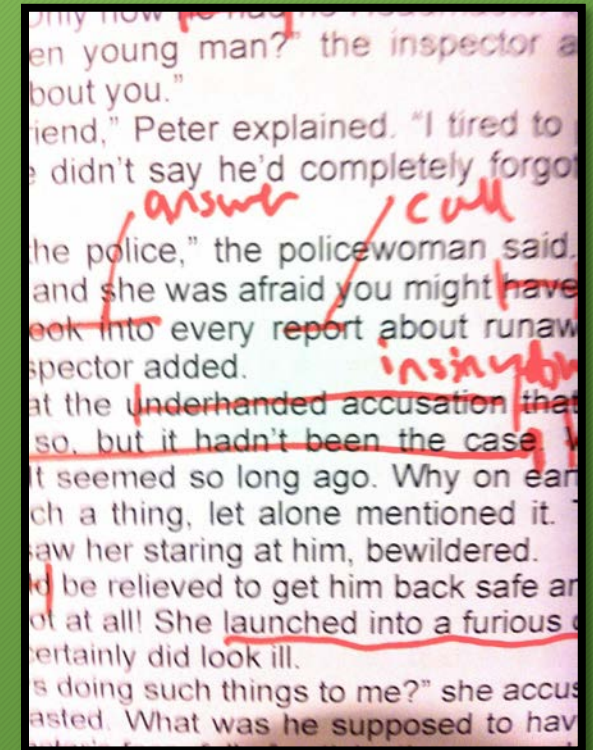
How interaction changes

- Less eye contact
- More time interacting with computer than with each other
- More time spent on details of word processing software than writing



How collaboration changes

- Sudden changes like complete sentence deletion
- Greater possibility for appropriation/assimilation
- No record of changes made (unless using change tracking software)



What can we do differently? (And why?)

- Use paper drafts for feedback and/or tutorials
 - Encourages students to recognize and articulate steps of revisions
- Use comment tracking feature of software
 - May help students identify problems in their writing
- Suggest turning off grammar and spelling checkers
 - Focus on global writing challenges BEFORE focusing on local/sentence-level and/or grammar problems

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