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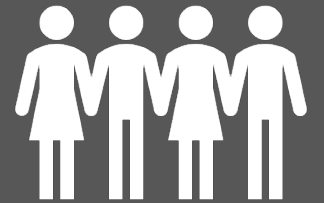
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Is the pandemic medium really the message?

Communication



Organization of this talk

Our focus is on the place of communication.

We will start from the abstract and as the talk progresses it will get increasingly concrete.

What emerges (we anticipate) is a sense that the pandemic revealed, rather than created, some of the fundamental communication challenges we face.

“The medium is
the message.”

Marshall McLuhan was describing the onset a wider variety of media. A modern interpretation is that recording a video gives consideration to how one looks, or Facebook gives consideration of how many “likes” one has.



Bill Gates (MicroSoft)

In the late 1990s, Bill Gates spoke of convergence of technology. That the distinction of telephone, computer, television, even digital pictures in one's house, would converge and become a single medium.

The (Yet another?) Pandemic

In many ways, virtual classes are the current pinnacle of technology convergence. Text, color, images, video, presence, animation, audio, etc.

Yet, we struggle to adjust to the medium to produce the message we want for our students ...

... and they struggle to convey the message they want to convey to us.




How did the COVID 19 pandemic impact your personal and professional life?

“I feel like I am disconnected from the teachers and the students from the class because there is no interaction. To be honest, I don’t even know how my classmates look like because usually nobody has their camera on half the time... Before COVID I’ve been told that students in this program would be together, they got connected and familiar with each other... But now we are all online, we don’t see each other, we don’t have random conversations before and after class. It’s like once the class is over, everyone just logs out and it is like no one is getting to know each other... From this point of view, we are definitely disconnected. There is no sense of community!”

How do we define Communication ?

One definition of communication is “*a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behaviour.*”

- It implies that all parties have a good mutual understanding of:
 - language
 - signs
 - symbols
 - semiotic conventions



Defines a medium and the process is messaging

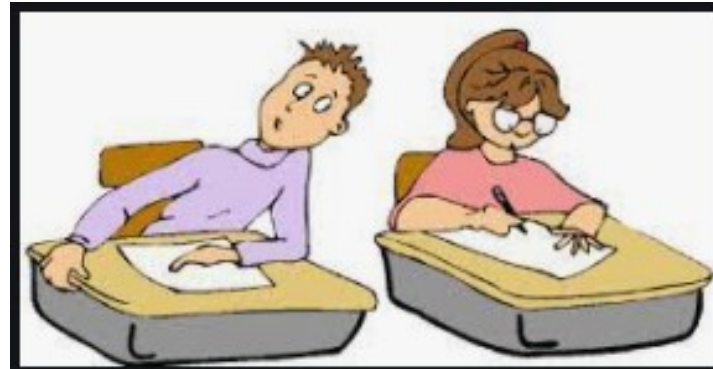
Consider two focal cases

Communication barriers and strategies used to minimize these barriers when working with:

- I) International Students (or students for which English is not their first language).
- II) Students in an virtual environment.

What instructors need to be aware when teaching International Students?

- **Different Epistemologies**
 - challenges with Constructivist approach to learning and teaching
 - power-distant cultures
 - informal approach to classes
 - silence – as communication
- **Language Barriers**
 - Faux amis
 - not-comprehending terminology
- **Plagiarism and Expectations of Intellectual Property**



<https://www.sheilds.org/nebosh-plagiarism/>

What are some strategies/recommendations that instructors need to adopt in order to lift some of the barriers that international students face?

- International students need help understanding the value of intellectual property and accurate documentation of resources and adopting an educational approach to plagiarism.
- Instructors should learn to be aware of the unique circumstances of international students as they may vary greatly in cultural understanding, language efficiency, and learning styles.
- Instructors should support students in developing critical thinking in an explicit manner.
- International students should be given clear course and assignments expectations and clear rubrics.
- Instructors should make an effort to explain (beyond the syllabus) these expectations to students not only in-class but also during office hours.

What are the challenges with communication in an online environment?

What can we do about it?



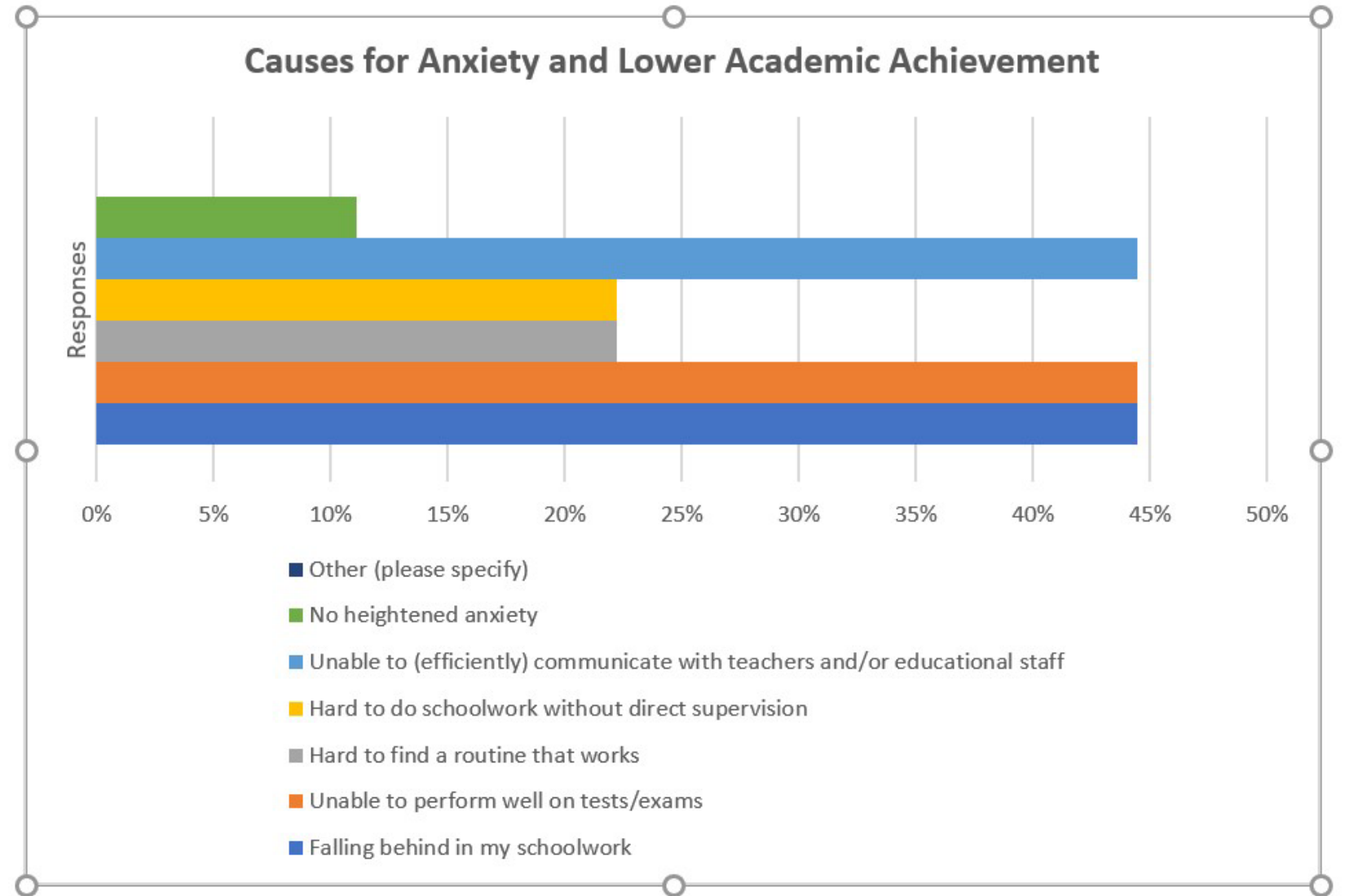
The Research

- Challenges with online learning
- Recommendations, strategies, and best practices for sustaining and improving online education

What are some causes for lower academic achievement in an online environment?

“successful online learners need to be highly visual, independent, [...] highly motivated, organized and have good time management tools (p.5)”.

Philpott, D., Sharpe, D., Neville, R. (2009)



Quality of instruction and communication between students and faculty

- Quality instruction refers to materials, activities, readings, clarity in expectations, ease of course navigation, learning outcomes and assessment, and instructor's presence.
- Communication refers to interaction between learners and instructors, between learners and support staff; and among learners. It creates learning opportunities and encourages dialogue among and between all the actors in an online learning environment.

Communication – Student Concerns

Lack of adaptation of teaching style for online environment

Lack of instructor presence and availability and/or timely and appropriate feedback

Unclear expectations about what is required in assignments, the availability of resources, and complex course navigation

Communication –Possible Instructor Actions

Inefficient email communication with instructors:

Offer an alternative way of contact with instructors such as a phone call.

Faster responses to students' emails by instructors.

Clearer instructions and requirements for students' assessments.

Better first contact with students during Orientation.

Presentations identifying resources that are available and can be accessed by students from their own educational institution and the institution's partners.

Communication
- Instructor concerns

“When I am sending an email that has more than one issue, I usually get an email back with the students answering to only the first question or point in the email. I am left to wonder if the students really read my email.”

○ Reading Between the Lines

- Language not always clear when communicating through emails.
- Not fully reading the email/ skimming over.
- Students need help with understanding assignment expectations and requirements from instructors

○ Inefficiencies

- Email is inefficient way of communication since there is need to follow up with a phone call.
- Unclear use of language.

○ Students' Disengagement

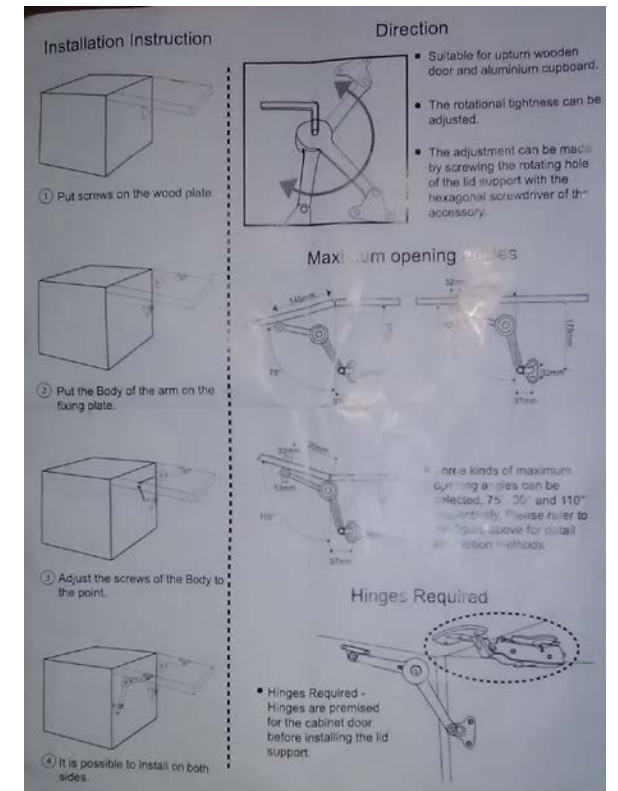
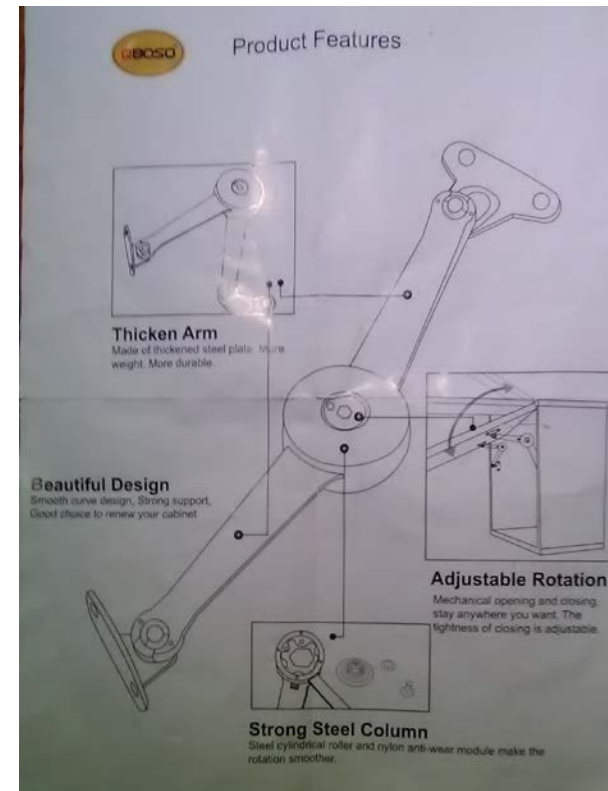
- Emails are easy to ignore.
- Students not turning their camera on and not participating.
- Low Attendance

What are some of the proposed recommendations for faculty/instructors to better communication in an online environment?

- Faculty need to establish a more personal humanized presence such that students feel connected and willing to reach out if they have a problem.
- Faculty need to provide clear guidelines for interaction between themselves and students.
- Faculty need to provide clear and constructive feedback.
- In order to be effective and efficient, instructors need to provide clear and detailed instructions on how to complete and submit a particular assessment.
- Faculty needs to provide course information and course instruction to guide students in finding relevant course content

However, students live in society

- Globalization has created more cross-language communication
- Many products have poor instructions and many communication flaws



Communication is key

Success requires better than what students have seen.



Conclusion



As we move forward and reflect on the extraordinary circumstances of the global pandemic and education pivots to adopt online learning in whatever way, all stakeholders need to realize that the use of technology as a medium may be different for the medium but in time we will find the best ways to produce messages for learning.

Technology is a critical factor in enabling growth and is a conduit for change, however it relies on a conducive culture, people and partnerships to provide a transformative experiences for students.

Questions? Comments?



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