TikTok to #BookTok: Preservice Teachers Navigating, Situating, and Transferring Their Digital Literacy Practices for Teacher Preparation

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Today's teacher education programs (TEPs) are tasked with teaching essential English language arts (ELA) methods while also including the digital tools that shape reading and writing instruction in K-12 classrooms. To stay atop the swiftly moving digital pendulum, TEPs look to popular digital platforms, such as social media apps, as powerful ELA learning tools for preservice teachers (PSTs). Platforms such as TikTok significantly impact cultural trends and provide avenues for students to engage, manipulate, and construct meaning. This places PSTs in a distinctive position where their digital lives can be situated as critical learning sites and transferred to classroom environments. This study delved into the intricacies of one specific digital platform, #BookTok, the TikTok reading subcommunity, to explore how PSTs navigate and confront the multifaceted design and multimodal composition considerations to create a #BookTok video. The inquiry shed light on the challenges, issues, and tensions associated with using these digital spaces for ELA instruction within TEPs. Findings suggest that PSTs drew upon previous applications as TikTok consumers as they transitioned into producers to create a #BookTok video. PSTs took on distinctive roles as prosumers, using their viewing patterns as mentor texts informing how they might remix for their video construction.

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In 2023, TikTok was named the leading video-based social media app, with 1.5 billion active monthly users (Curry, 2024). TikTok is only one of many social media applications to choose from. What sets TikTok apart from the rest, however, is that its viral trends shape communities, identities, and culture, powered by its sensitive algorithm (Boffone, 2022).

TikTok is no longer only a digital space for mindless scrolling or entertainment. It has become the de facto hub for Gen Z and young adults (Zeng et al., 2021) to form communities (Jerasa & Boffone, 2021) and search for information (Aten, 2021). To this end, TikTok is an impactful platform that has the potential to serve as a learning tool or instructional space for teachers and schools of education. As teacher educators and teacher education programs (TEP) consider how preservice teacher (PST) courses currently exist, they must also include digital platforms like TikTok in their course assignments to support K-12 digital consumption, production, and critical analysis.

Social media platforms (e.g., X/Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat) share significant common traits since they are all public, app-based, and multimodal, and they possess community-building properties. However, TikTok is distinctive simply because of its unique and sensitive algorithm that curates a highly personalized experience by mirroring users' interests. This means that, as the algorithm aims to reflect a user's preferences, it simultaneously delivers an endless feed of videos reflective of individual viewing patterns and content consumption.

The TikTok algorithm is not without critique. The platform has garnered substantial attention in the United States with the recent legislative ban on the app due to the undisclosed platform systems related to data security and how the platform delivers vastly different types of content depending on a user's global location (Maheshwari & Holpuch, 2024). This discourse has raised questions about how TikTok's algorithm truly functions and its influential role in the ways people convene, obtain information, and shape their worldviews (Sanger, 2024).

While many fears associated with TikTok are grounded in Chinese propaganda and are mainly hypothetical, the tendrils of the platform's networks highlight how actions and content are not neutral (Pangrazio et al., 2022) but rather represent problematic systems. Although significant affordances are possible with algorithmic platforms, it is also a space for caution and to question the ways data forms are used, applied, and tracked to influence a user's platform experience (Eubanks, 2018; LeBlanc et al., 2023). Specific to TikTok are underlying preferences for Whiteness and heteronormativity through its algorithm's distribution of "racist, gendered, ableist ideological content already present in the platform" (Jerasa & Burriss, 2024, p. 120; see also Nash et al., 2023; Robinson, 2023). Exploring TikTok as a potential learning space means recognizing its affordances while critically examining its suppressive nature to skew content distribution and misinformed reality.

TikTok's algorithm connects and segregates viewers into distinctive categories and communities based on perceived interests and user behavior patterns. As such, the communities and subcommunities that have developed reflect diverse individual interests, identities, and experiences of TikTok users, including #CatTok, #QueerTok, #TeacherTok, and #BookTok (to name a few). On the surface, TikTok's communities appear holistic and organic, bringing together like-minded ideas, interests, or identities. However, community formation can also develop based on the racist, gendered, and ableist bias that exists within TikTok's algorithm and other social media platforms (Noble, 2018).

Whether known or disclosed, TikTok's algorithm serves as a carrier and gatekeeper through policing and moderating particular discourses. For example, TikTok has shut down, removed, or "red flagged" content that may be deemed violent or "inappropriate," including discussions around #BlackLivesMatter, COVID-19 vaccinations, LGBTQIA+ issues, and even the 2024 election (Hearn, 2020).

In contrast, TikTok content creators have circumvented some of these platform censorship tactics by applying intentional misspellings (e.g., "seggs" for "sex"), text symbols (e.g., "raci$m" for "racism") or using emojis as a visual representation for terms (e.g., 🌈 for LGBTQ+ content or 🍉 to symbolize Palestinian solidarity; Devlin, 2022; Jerasa & Burriss, 2024). While there is evidence of these new attempts to use memes, emojis, audio, or other multimodal tools to navigate the algorithm, it is largely unknown how this space shapes individuals' experiences and how educators include these platforms as learning spaces.

Today's education landscape is at a critical point to determine the degree of digital platform integration for K-12 classrooms. The particular ways today's youth and college-age students use social media digital platforms to conduct their daily lives is well-documented (Chayko, 2020; Katz et al., 2022). However, in K-12 classrooms, there is a distinctive discrepancy where the everyday digital spaces for multimodal literacies are limited and noticeably absent. Simply said, today's K-12 classrooms often reject many of the digital platforms and spaces that thrive in everyday practices. This rejection has created a divide between what counts as a classroom learning space and an entertainment space in teacher education.

This divide impacts how PSTs view and value digital spaces like TikTok and recognize their affordances as a learning space with their future students. What also muddies the waters is how social media platforms often serve as influencer-laden spaces promoting materials or products to sell or advertise. This commercial aspect ultimately diminishes the ways PSTs view these platforms as imagined learning spaces rather than a digital marketplace for viral content. Overall, studying the intersections of digital literacy, teacher education, and digital spaces is essential to prepare educators to navigate the digital landscape effectively and meet the diverse needs of K-12 learners. Educators may be otherwise overlooking a useful and informative learning tool that students already use to demonstrate fluency and proficiency in using.

In this study, we examined the following research questions through the lens of the subcommunity of #BookTok:

1. How do PSTs navigate and confront the multifaceted considerations of design and multimodal composition to create a #BookTok video?

2. How do their experiences in TikTok contribute to their future imagined instruction as an in-service teacher?

Theoretical Framework

We grounded this study with situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and learning for transfer theories (Bransford & Schwartz, 1999), where PSTs applied their previous TikTok experiences to complete a TEP assignment and consider their future applications with elementary students. Situated learning highlights how learning experiences are similar or within sociocultural purposes. Situated learning highlights the learning within a community of practice, which is socially positioned, emphasizes on the individual, and the internalization of knowledge. In this way, learning takes place *within* the social contexts of a community or place with the transfer of specific skills or competencies.

TikTok's design intentionally serves as a digital common space for users to share and receive content while engaging in community discourse. Therefore, ongoing participation in TikTok allows users to participate in a way that places them directly into their preferred communities or situated learning spaces.

As individuals engage in literacy practices or learning experiences in one situated context, they then also consider the existing discourses, social languages, and communities of practice present. However, when transferring and applying learning to a new context, individuals must consider how purpose, intention, and approach also shift.

Learning to transfer theories, as described by Thorndike and Woodworth (1901), highlight how learning in one context is applied to a new situation. Bransford and Schwartz (1999) also extended this theory by including external individuals' perspectives, input, and knowledge as aids toward successful learning transfers. However, applying learning to a new context is not just a simple transfer of space. Instead, it requires, as Bransford et al. (2007) contended, "cognitive flexibility when they can evaluate problems and other types of cases in their fields of expertise from many conceptual points of view, seeing multiple interpretations and perspectives" (p. 61).

Within teacher education, there are often ample opportunities for PSTs to learn in one context and apply that learning in a new one, such as learning through course assignments or class meeting activities and then enacting that knowledge with students through field placements, student teaching, or their future classrooms. While often these TEP learning contexts take place within educational spaces (e.g., classrooms, higher education institutions, and K-12 schools), the digital spaces that PSTs use outside of school can then be situated and applied as in-school learning spaces for deep and meaningful instruction with K-12 students. PSTs are already fluent in consuming and producing TikTok content. In this way, we see the

platform as a potential tool that teacher educators can leverage to create a powerful and critical learning space for PSTs to support K-12 students.

Literature Review

We align our definition of literacy as a socioculturally constructed practice, where experiences, backgrounds, language, and culture reflect the communicative and social acts of meaning making (based on New London Group, 1996; Street, 1984). As such, literacy practices do not only exist within school or academic settings but rather coexist within everyday engagements, as individuals use their literacies to interpret, construct, and analyze meaning. In this way, literacy is not just a set of discrete skills associated with reading and writing, but instead are largely linked to identities, politics, power, and culture (Street).

Literacy practices have long been pedagogicalized (Hull & Shultz, 2012) and defined within the confines of school spaces. Constructing and interpreting meaning happens within an academic discourse. Outside of school spaces, literacy practices of reading and writing within digital or analog spaces often do not "count" or are less valued than what happens in schools. As such, social media spaces like TikTok, Twitter/X, Instagram, or Facebook are often left out of the conversation as valuable literacy production sites, despite research findings that suggest literacies in out-of-school spaces are often more inclusive, particularly for culturally and racially diverse students (Greenhow & Lewin, 2019; Hull & Schultz, 2012).

Cole (1995) posited that contextualizing space as binary constructs (e.g., in or out of school) can be limiting or restrictive. Instead, it is essential to examine the overlapping aspects of spaces and the literacy practices that occur primarily in everyday or out-of-school landscapes that can support in-school learning. In other words, how can everyday literacy practices and engagements also serve as powerful literacy tools for reading and writing within educational spaces?

Everyday literacy practices, including those within digital spaces (e.g., TikTok), are often viewed as only entertainment (Kales, 2020; Roose, 2018); however, much of the ways individuals interact with TikTok content encompasses rich and dynamic reading and writing practices across multiple modes. Considering the varied ways digital texts are interpreted and constructed also means identifying how these literacy products serve as meaningful "social objects" (Kress, 1982, p. 221).

The way meaning is constructed or interpreted depends on the identities, experiences, and backgrounds of the reader and the writer. Within digital texts, there are many choices and decisions, including manipulations with audio, visual, video, text, and gestures for semiotic meaning. These utilized modes are not simply an artistic add-on. Rather, they are intentional multimodal choices that leverage meaning (Aleo et al., 2024; Hull & Nelson, 2005; Smith, 2018). When individuals select a particular audio track or text placement, they deliberately reflect the sociocultural practices for the intended meaning. In examining multimodal composition, it is crucial to identify not only the specific modes applied but also the tensions afforded by mediated actions or, as Smith posited, "the complex

interaction of a composer's multiple goals achieved through the communicative possibilities of specific tools and modes'' (p. 185-186).

Multimodal composition includes a wide array of semiotic tools to construct meaning. However, another significant agent is at play — the ways preexisting genres and texts serve as inspirational tools for construction. Often used to describe this reinterpretation or recreating is the term *remixing*, the lifting and changing of aspects from a primary source to construct an entirely new product (Jewitt, 2008; Rowsell et al., 2019).

Within spaces like TikTok and other social media platforms, remixing is quintessential, where content creators utilize common audio or sound to remix into a new context, generating an entirely new meaning (Aleo et al., 2024). Content creators are not simply consumers of multimodal content but also are curators and evaluators of semiotic design. As Cope and Kalantzis (2020) argued, "Every act and artifact of meaning, no matter what its form or patterns of multimodal combination, always expresses meaning simultaneously in five ways: reference, agency, structure, context, and interest" (p. 12). As such, TikTok users view content for their consumption and evaluate the communicative forms across these systems, which ultimately informs their considerations for meaning construction.

TikTokers often hover between the participatory roles of consumer and producer or are otherwise described as *prosumers* (Duncum, 2011; Lim & Toh, 2020; Navio-Marco et al., 2024; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). Lim and Toh highlighted a key factor of prosumers as individuals who consume multimodal texts while simultaneously reproducing design elements, structures, or contexts as literacies. Although the concept of prosumers has also included forms of capitalistic negotiation, mediation, and navigation of their content (Bird, 2011; Garcia-Ruiz et al., 2014; Ritzer, 2015), we center our definition of prosumer in the ways that highlight the multimodal compositional practices of individuals within potential educational contexts, namely to consume video based social media content in order to later facilitate their own production (Lim & Toh). As trends and other multimodal attributes are applied within TikTok, content creators use their viewing patterns as inspiration and guidance on ways to remix or repurpose other creators' choices for their compositions (Smith, 2018).

In addition to the multimodal components found in social media spaces like TikTok, complex networked ecosystems exist, many of which are often unwitting to the typical social media user. Spaces like TikTok, Twitter/X, Google, and Facebook are not merely social media apps but platforms that exist as digital spaces where economic, social, or political exchanges occur (Garcia & Nichols, 2021; Gillespie, 2010). While some view platforms as simply digital tools, Nichols and Garcia (2022) suggested that these digital spaces are "dynamic environments that materialize a range of competing interests and imperatives" (p. 211).

Current platforms integrate language practices, social interactions, economic values, and political views as a society. Platforms, including social media spaces, exist as an interconnected web where intentions, goals, or outcomes are not always transparent to the user. Nichols and Garcia (2022) suggested that "even seemingly mundane activities – using a search engine, 'liking' a post, entering grades in a learning management

system – are guided by the interrelations of each platform dimension" (p. 214).

Adding to the complexities of digital platforms include the entanglement of artificial intelligence (AI) or algorithmic-driven spaces. To this end, we cannot simply frame a platform using a singular function but rather must understand the networked tendrils that connect algorithmic codes, data collection, interface design, social interactions, user experience, and algorithms that are central to a platform's function (Garcia & Nichols, 2021). Acknowledging or knowing the underlying systems is only one part of the process, since most platforms are driven (and funded) by a corporate entity. As such, the moderating or censoring within a platform directly reflects the "company's values and interests" (Gillespie, 2018, p. 11). Platforms do not serve as simply a service or free entertainment operation. Instead, these apps are driven by influential economic gains, profiting from users' time, personal data, and consumer activities. As active consumers and producers within these spaces, it is crucial to understand that actions, access, and applications are all intertwined with social, design, and economic-political dimensions often not apparent nor visible at first glance (Nichols & LeBlanc, 2020).

#BookTok: A Community for Readers

Like analog communities, subcommunities within TikTok have distinct situated purposes and membership boundaries. #BookTok is the definitive TikTok community for readers and all bookish reading-related things (Jerasa & Boffone, 2021; Merga, 2021). #BookTok has become one of the most notable subcommunities in TikTok, garnering not only massively high viewership (over 230 billion views as of February 2024), but it also has received public attention outside of the platform for its impact on the book publishing industry (Harris, 2021).

Scholarship within and about #BookTok has revealed ways reading communities have formed to support individual readers (Boffone & Jerasa, 2021; Jerasa & Boffone, 2021) and served as peer pedagogies learning sites (Dezuanni, 2021), as well as the perceived algorithmic imaginaries for video construction in #BookTok (Low et al., 2023).

#BookTok includes a vast array of reading-related content, such as book reviews, recommendations, curated listicles, reenactments of favorite book scenes, and overall commentaries about the act of reading. BookTokers, or individuals who identify as part of #BookTok, recognize their harnessed power, and their content often quickly goes viral, impacting which books are best-sellers or considered "must-reads" (Querini, 2023). Unlike stagnant five-paragraph essays on literary critique, content in #BookTok becomes a dialogue and evolving entity as viewers write comments, create stitched videos, or remix content for entirely new conversations. As such, #BookTok is not only a site for book recommendations (Merga, 2021) but has become a crucial site for community formation (Jerasa & Boffone, 2021) and multimodal composition (Aleo et al., 2024), reshaping how reading is perceived outside of schools.

To date, scholarship on #BookTok is relatively scant, particularly in exploring the ways it might be used in English language arts (ELA) classrooms (see Dera et al., 2023). There is potential for the ways aspects of this digital space support K-12 students, teacher education, and literacy instruction.

Methodology

This article describes research from a more extensive ongoing longitudinal study examining how PSTs in a university TEP children's literature course shifted their perceptions or anticipated usage of #BookTok and digital literacies in their future classrooms. The study aimed to understand how PSTs engaged in their situated practice of TikTok and transferred their experienced knowledge to their imagined professional lives as future teachers.

Author Positionality

We are a team of four interdisciplinary education researchers, who are all former classroom teachers and currently serve as teacher educators at various universities. Sarah identifies as a White cis-gender female faculty member at a southeastern university who studies digital literacy practices within social media spaces and equitable literacy access for K -12 students.

Morgan is a Black female postdoctoral researcher at a New Zealand university. In her New Zealand based research, she works with a team to examine indigenous students' math experiences and identity through a culturally responsive lens. Within her United States based research, her area of scholarship examines undergraduate minority students' STEM identity formation and research methodologies for identity and community development.

Rosa is a Black, cisgender female currently teaching secondary ELA courses as a faculty member. Her research focuses on the reading proficiency of low socioeconomic status Black secondary students and the learning trajectories that occur within analog and online learning environments.

Jordan identifies as a White, cisgender female doctoral student. Her work focuses on early childhood teacher education and the ways children's literature sustains and disrupts foundations of racial bias. Each author has a different relationship with the TikTok platform, and each comes to this research as a consumer of social media and a critical education scholar interested in current cultural trends for teacher education and K-12 classrooms.

Recruitment and Participants

This study recruited participants from Sarah's undergraduate TEP course at a United States southwestern university. Twenty-one students were sent a recruitment form after the course ended to participate in interviews about their experience with the #BookTok course assignment and possible implementations for classroom instruction. Ten PSTs agreed to be

interviewed; however, only five participants committed and were scheduled (see Table 1). Morgan, Rosa, and Jordan interviewed PST participants before their year-long student teaching field placements in area schools.

Table 1
Interviewed Participants for Study

Participant Name (Pseudonym)	Gender	Race or Ethnicity	University Year	Spoken Languages
Celia	Female	Asian or Pacific Islander	Junior	English only
Brianna	Female	Hispanic or Latinx	Junior	Spanish English
Ava	Female	Hispanic or Latinx	Junior	Spanish English
Elias	Male	Hispanic or Latinx	Junior	Spanish English
Dana	Female	White or Caucasian	Junior	English only

Data Collection

Five in-depth, semistructured interviews (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) were conducted by Morgan, Rosa, and Jordan. Participant interviews took place the summer after their TEP course, and Sarah did not conduct any interviews to create distance for the PSTs and avoid biased responses (as recommended by Garrels et al., 2022). Interviews ranged from 18-50 minutes and were conducted virtually through one-on-one sessions on the Zoom app.

As a part of their coursework, the PSTs created and posted a #BookTok video, where they reviewed and described a children's book they read in class. In addition to interview transcript data, video elicitation (Banks & Zeitlyn, 2015) was also used, where participants viewed their constructed #BookToks and discussed their multimodal choices, audience considerations, positionality, design, and application in future classrooms (see Appendix for examples and links to #BookTok videos by PSTs).

The interview protocol was segmented into three domains: experience as a reader, construction of #BookTok videos, and prediction for instructional use. The interview protocol was structured so that the data collected would paint a holistic picture of PSTs during data analysis and provide insight into their personal reading lives and TikTok experiences. As part of the semistructured interview protocol, each interviewer began with the leading question from each domain. We curated a list of follow-up questions to use depending on how the participant answered, but ultimately left space for open and emerging conversations to take place.

Data Analysis

The research team used open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and iterative coding (Miles & Huberman, 2020) to analyze the interview data. Our team conducted a purposeful analysis using three phases: (a) open coding to sieve focal themes and patterns from the data, (b) drawing connections across discovered themes with PSTs' multimodal choices, audience considerations, positionality, design, and application in future classrooms, and lastly (3) applying the Design Analysis Framework (DAF; Aleo et al., 2024; Cope & Kalantzis, 2020) to develop child codes associated with #BookTok assignment design discussions.

To begin this analysis process, we randomly selected one interview transcript to open code collaboratively with the entire research team, noting ways PSTs discussed their reading lives and attitudes and how they considered the TikTok space as a potential learning tool. We constructed six parent codes: anticipated classroom application, #BookTok construction factors, reading identities & attitudes, multimodal tools, TikTok considerations, and other considerations. Emergent themes (Maxwell, 2013) also included their reflections as readers and producers of #BookTok content.

From our initial collaborative coding, we split the remaining participant interviews, so each transcript was double coded with varying partner teams (see Table 2). This step allowed for several forms of triangulation: first, we did not code any participant interview transcript that they had conducted to prevent bias and inferential interpretation; second, each double coding team was variegated to ensure coding was reflective of multiple perspectives while still adhering to agreement across individuals.

Table 2
Breakdown of Double Coding for Interview Transcripts

Participant	Double Coding Teams
Ava	Morgan & Rosa
Brianna	Jordan & Morgan
Celia	All Authors
Dana	Rosa & Sarah
Elias	Sarah & Jordan

After confirming agreement in parent and child codes for multimodal choices, audience considerations, positionality, design, and application in future classrooms, we narrowed our codes to focus on the design aspects of the PSTs' #BookTok assignments during the video elicitation (Banks & Zeitlyn, 2015). Due to wide variance of PST descriptions for assignment designs we determined the Design Analysis Framework (DAF; Aleo et al., 2024; Cope & Kalantzis, 2020) (see Figure 1) would help draw more distinctive connections and identify outliers from the data. The DAF

includes design constructs such as structure, design elements, content, purpose, and agency and allowed us to examine our participants' evaluations of their content, structural patterns, and design elements in their #BookTok videos.

We aligned child codes with DAF to construct our coding scheme (see Table 3), which considered purpose, audience, self-reflection, and future classroom applications. For this coding, Sarah, Rosa, and Jordan rewatched the video elicitation portion of each recorded participant interview. Using the text-transcript of the interviews, they collaboratively coded using the DAF and supporting child codes. In all, we engaged in three rounds of varying forms of analysis which led to our initial findings and confirmation of any discrepancies.

Figure 1
Design Analysis Framework, modified from Cope & Kalantzis (2020) and Aleo et al., (2024)

Design Analysis Framework	
Content	What is the text about? What topics or themes emerged from the text? What possible messages/meanings are present? What ideas are being considered or explored?
Structure	How is the text organized? What is its layout? How does it begin and/or end? What's the order or sequence of its content? Why is it structured that way? Do the structures reflect any genres?
Design Elements	Which semiotic modes and related design elements are used? How are those modes (spatial visual, gestural, print, aural) used by the designer? How do they individually/collectively convey a meaning?
Content	When/where is the text connected? What was happening socially/culturally/historically when it was published that might be relevant? What site or platform was it published on? How might that impact the meaning?
Purpose	Why was the text produced? Is the designer trying to entertain? Persuade? Inform? Participate? What interests or goals might be motivating the designer?
Agency	Who is the text connected to? What communities are they part of? Who's it designed for? How might the identity of the producer/consumer shape the intent of its message?

Table 3
*Coding Scheme Aligned With Design Analysis Framework (Aleo et al.,
2024; Cope & Kalantzis, 2020)*

Supporting Code	Data Example
Agency *Who is the text connected to?*	
Self as Audience	*"Let's say a new teacher or a teacher to scrolling on TikTok, oh, do I have first year of school jitters? ... I'm really big on diversity. I'm Hispanic, I want that"*
Audience Receptivity	*I was just kind of aiming for the right audience and if they're willing to finish the video.*
Content *What is the text about?*	
Audience receptivity	*"I was looking towards a younger age group"*
Assignment expectations	*"Content wise [I included] anything that I could easily tie into a lesson."*
Self as Audience	*"I honestly really like that book. It just teaches people how to make friends with every[one]."*
Design Elements *Which semiotic modes and related design elements are used?*	
Aesthetic Literacy	*"I knew I wanted natural lighting for it to make it bright and stuff. So I went ahead and took it outside and put it out on my grass, and I was like, oh, this looks aesthetic."*
Mentor Text	*"I want to do a...picture book one. So I started to look at elementary BookTok versus those romance [book videos] even though they look so cool, but that's not what I was aiming for, so I just kind of went over elementary book talks books."*
Anticipating future audience	*"[Viewer might say] Let me actually watch this. Maybe I can implement this in my classroom."*
Emotional Considerations	*"I thought I had to show my face in it. I thought I had to speak. I was nervous because oh my gosh, so many people are going to see this."*
Purpose *Why was the text produced?*	
Envisioning of product	*"I didn't want to do anything crazy, fancy, elaborate, really wanted the book to speak for itself."*
Self-Representation / Self-Connection	*"After going through it, I felt great because it was something I was able to share."*
Structure *How is the text structured?*	

Supporting Code	Data Example
Anticipating future application	*Showing [elementary students] that it can be used in school and it can be used to learn as well…It's taking something they're already familiar with and maybe just showing them how to use it in a new way.*
Construction influence	*I had read the book probably five times, just trying to understand, well, how I wanted to make this video and how much of the book I wanted to share without oversharing it and spoiling all of it.*
Context *When and where is the text connected?*	
Self-Representation / Self-Connection	*I picked a book that will kind of resonate to me when I would how I felt the first day of school*

Findings

This study's findings highlighted the many considerations and design applications PSTs included in their #BookTok assignment. Through this examination, we found that PSTs took on various roles, namely prosumers (Lim & Toh, 2020), by selecting #BookTok videos to view and apply as mentor texts and inform their #BookTok construction. Additionally, PSTs participated by creating a #BookTok and engaging within the space to extend their interests and identities. Last, PSTs constructed their #BookTok videos using the platform's multimodal tools while navigating the TikTok algorithm's hidden or nuanced aspects. This way, PSTs engaged in this situated digital space for their interactions. They also considered how their actions and course assignments might transfer into future ELA classrooms as instructional imaginaries.

PSTs as Prosumers

Part of the preliminary assignment work PSTs completed included exploring TikTok using the hashtag #BookTok to build an understanding of the space's community, genre, and discourse. In addition to this in-class exploration, PSTs described watching and viewing other #BookTok videos independently to serve as their inspiration or mentor for what their pieces could include. For example, Ava described her approach, which included viewing videos and noting aspects that inspired her when she said,

> I had seen some #BookToks online where people had [filmed] them in their rooms and stuff, but I knew I wanted natural lighting for it to make it bright and stuff. So I went ahead and took it outside and put it out on my grass, and I was like, "Oh, this looks aesthetic. We'll just do this."

Ava used the videos she watched to support her imagined vision for her content. She noted aspects other creators included and considered her

experience as a viewer and determined what *she* wanted to include or exclude from her design.

Although most PSTs described knowing that they wanted their videos mostly to promote a children's book they read from the class, there were also wide conversations around their process for design elements. Some participants described wanting to keep aspects of their designs focused on the book and did not want to include too many tools or effects to distract their viewer. Dana described this sentiment when she said,

> I picked a book that I enjoyed. … I didn't want to do anything crazy, fancy, elaborate, [I] really wanted the book to speak for itself. So I just chose the book, and then I just voiced over it. I showed some of the illustrations, and then I just found some music to put on top of it to tie everything together. So I just kind of picked the component separately, I guess, and then just put them together until it looked okay.

Dana's approach included designing her #BookTok video to closely connect to the book, which she felt mirrored what she saw in other #BookTok videos she viewed. However, Ava thought a lot about her vision for her #BookTok video and considered which tools could create the effect she was imagining when she said,

> There was [sic] a lot of transitions that were on [#BookTok] that I couldn't do myself. I don't know how [other BookTokers] did it, so I kind of just played around and did my own basic transition, but I really wish I was able to understand how all the BookTokers did their own transitions.

Ava's quotation highlights some of the design factors PSTs needed to consider when viewing their #BookTok mentor texts. Ava said she saw videos that applied interesting transitions or effects that she wanted to try in her own #BookTok. She did not have the same skill set to create complex transition effects. It was also not clear based on solely viewing which tools the mentor BookTokers used to make those transitions work. Although Ava felt uncertain and unable to mirror transition effects she viewed, Elias, in contrast, drew upon outside resources to attain his desired design when he said, "I asked for help from my sister because she's always doing TikToks. So she helped me edit the video, edit the text on it, and just have like the different pop ups that came up"

In this way, Elias outsourced his design to more knowledgeable mentors to help scaffold his process. Although both Elias and Ava used other #BookTok videos as mentor text for inspiration, Elias was able to fulfill his vision by finding others (e.g., younger sibling) to teach the skill set necessary to complete his envisioned design.

From Assignment to Personal Interests and Imagined Futures

Across the interviews, participants described the ways they engaged with #BookTok beyond the course assignment. Many students discussed using TikTok for personal purposes, including viewing videos for ideas related to teaching, classroom management, or classroom decor. Fewer students

described previously viewing #BookToks, although they admitted they were mostly familiar with the subcommunity due to its popularity outside of the social media space. Interviewed participants described that their participation and viewing patterns for the assignment opened the door for them to view and use #BookTok to support their reading. Brianna, a self-proclaimed "Swiftie," or fan of singer-songwriter Taylor Swift, explained how her viewing patterns reflected her interests when she said,

> I usually go for … the #BookToks that include music or something that I already have knowledge on. So I love Taylor Swift, so if [a #BookTok] includes Taylor Swift in there, it makes it easier for me to make a reference and be like, "Oh, okay, this is what I might be reading, or this is what the book might be about."

Brianna naturally gravitated toward #BookTok videos that included aspects related to either music, trends, text, or content that was reminiscent or familiar to her. She described that it was easier for her to reference, suggesting that by watching a #BookTok with music she already loved, she could understand the video's message better. Brianna's quotation highlights the ways that #BookTok videos often provided snippets or references to a text, and having schema allowed Brianna to participate in the context and meaning making whether or not she had read the book being discussed.

Other participants described how they continued using #BookTok beyond the course assignment to support their interests and developing identities. Many participants described watching specific TikTok videos or searching hashtags specific to their interests as future teachers. Elias described the teaching areas he wanted to continue to grow or learn more about, such as phonics, phonological awareness, or classroom management saying, "I have been using [TikTok to] just to find different ideas for my classroom to incorporate. Whether it be classroom management, phonological skills, math skills that I can use with my students."

We identified several ways PSTs were only beginning to draw connections between their TikTok video designs and how they used the platform to gather information or construct their imagined classrooms and future teaching experiences. Ava explained that she used #BookTok videos to find additional book titles to include for her classroom or read aloud instruction when she said, "Looking at the #BookToks gave me a little [sic] suggestions that I could put in my Amazon wishlist that I would want to read to my future students." In this way Ava described how she used this tool to access or gain knowledge about texts that she otherwise might not know about. She saw potential benefits of the space and how #BookTok videos introduced viewers to texts by summarizing, describing, or recommending books for elementary-aged children.

Participants described reimagining the TikTok platform beyond a social media or entertainment space by participating in this course assignment. Several participants acknowledged how they used TikTok for their interests but noted that they did not know that #BookTok was such a robust community for readers. Dana explained that although she described herself as a frequent reader, she did not realize that reading communities existed on TikTok until this course assignment.

> I didn't know that books on TikTok were really a thing. You see stuff on TikTok, it's like, "Oh, people like dancing and doing whatever." But this whole community of books was interesting. Like I said, I even went and looked at authors that I like, and there were lots of videos about them, which I thought was cool.

When Dana engaged in #BookTok, she realized its affordances by finding authors or adult books she was familiar with and began to understand some of the appeal of the multimodal content made available for viewers. Additionally, some participants described using #BookTok to further encourage their reading by finding recommended or reviewed texts. Celia described this by saying, "But it did make me look more, be more on #BookTok so I can find out what books might interest me and that I want to get in the future." Across interviews, participants described ways they engaged in #BookTok outside their class assignment, finding connections and purposes that serve their interests, identities, and future classroom plans.

Creating TikTok Content With the Algorithm in Mind

PSTs' discussion of TikToks included an awareness of the algorithm's impact and effect to power and deliver content to users. PSTs alluded to applications of algorithmic features or ways the algorithm impacted their compositional choices. The participants described how this #BookTok assignment differed from other TEP course assignments, primarily due to the larger and more public audience present in TikTok. Participants' imagined visions for their #BookTok video impacted their multimodal choices, knowing that an unknown audience would likely view their posting or that the algorithm might misinterpret their content, which justified some PSTs' apprehension to show their face or speak in their videos.

For example, Elias described his initial fears of recording and constructing his #BookTok video saying, "I was thinking, 'Oh people are going to have to see my face!' I thought it would have to review [a book] like that."

Elias was not the only PST to describe apprehension related to the #BookTok video assignment. Brianna also discussed some of her navigations in making a TikTok that would not require interacting with other people when she said, "I'm scared to talk to people online sometimes. I don't know who's on the other side." This admission suggests awareness that an "anonymous audience" may be critical or reject their posted content. Between Brianna and Elias, it was compelling to consider how they manifested their "viewer" or "audience" as they imagined responses that might be harsh or critical. Elias and Brianna were aware of their video construction choices and were not sure what degree of display they were comfortable with.

Elias noted ways that his #BookTok video garnered a lot of public attention beyond his classmates and instructor when he said, "I had many [likes]. I feel like all my classmates liked it, which was like 30 of them, but my TikTok got around 500 likes. So it was [a] way different public." Elias acknowledged how he framed his thinking about his potential and actual #BookTok construction and how it might be viewed in the TikTok platform

and by the algorithm. He suggested how thinking about his potential audience impacted how he wanted to construct his content.

Dana also noted her surprise that people watched and liked her #BookTok video, noting the wide distribution by the algorithm when she said,

> [My instructor] emailed me about it [saying], "Your [video] has 200 some views." I didn't even know that anyone cared about it. … I got maybe a couple random comments on it. … I would say it got more views than I thought it would.

Dana's response to the high number of views suggests a level of surprise at how the algorithm delivered her content and that it resonated with others. Even though she created this #BookTok for a class assignment, it reached viewers beyond her university class and instructor.

Part of the assignment requirements included PSTs adding the #BookTok hashtag to their posted video to be a part of the #BookTok community and conversation taking place in TikTok. Although this inclusion criteria likely aided the algorithm to distribute their #BookTok content to other viewers' feeds, other participants noted ways that they considered trends or popular tools on TikTok to generate viral traction and attention from the algorithm. Ava described how she intentionally included specific effects and audio that would trigger the algorithm, saying, "I also added a popular song that was trending around that time. I didn't even know the song but I knew it was popular [on TikTok]…so that's what I added on there too." Ava, who described herself as a frequent user of TikTok in her spare time, knew that adding trending effects or popular songs to a video would align with the algorithm that could result in viral distribution in the For You Page.

Discussion

Across these findings, PSTs positioned themselves as engaged learners where their learning about #BookTok, TikTok algorithm, and multimodal composition transitioned into viewing TikTok as a learning space for their future classrooms and literacy instruction. This study's findings highlight the varying ways that PSTs navigated multimodal composition in making a #BookTok video as well as PSTs' considerations of using TikTok as a learning space for future classroom instruction.

#BookTok Design as Situated Learning

In creating a #BookTok, PSTs engaged within an entanglement of situated learning positions. Namely, PSTs took up their own experiences using TikTok as a space for their everyday or out-of-school literacies and repositioned their practices into a university context. Our findings highlight how PSTs negotiated their design choices to meet course assignment criteria while also responding to the larger TikTok audience, fueled by the algorithm.

PSTs took up an interplay of balancing between liminal spaces: the digital platform of TikTok and their academic university course. Their

multimodal compositional choices reflected much of the mentor texts they selected to inspire their #BookTok designs. Some PSTs decided between multimodalities (e.g., audio, video, effects, and gestures), trending or aesthetic tools (e.g. top TikTok audio clips or format), or rhetorical moves that would speak directly to their perceived audience or algorithm. Although this assignment was part of a digital space that often is not included in school or academic settings, our findings suggest that PSTs relied on their situated practices to inform their new contexts and complete the #BookTok assignment.

Our findings also highlight the many ways participants reflected on their own or personal TikTok participation habits to inspire their #BookTok assignment designs. As such, PSTs positioned themselves as consumers of their own produced content. While PSTs immersed themselves in #BookTok during a class meeting, many spent time beyond class to explore and selected other #BookTok videos to inspire their own designed work. We recognize ways that their video construction, as a graded assignment, was also indicative of the academic and assignment guidelines, rather than a truly autonomous product.

This point highlights a tension of PSTs composing to reflect their interests while meeting the course assignment expectations. Almost all students explained that they used similar aesthetics, trends, and effects viewed in consumed content that spoke to them as inspiration for what they could potentially construct in their #BookTok. In this way, participants took up a prosumer role (Lim & Toh, 2020) by not simply reproducing or mimicking of multimodal construction for remixing (Jewitt, 2008; Rowsell et al., 2019). Rather, we see evidence of PSTs having an imagined composition inspired by what they previously viewed, framed as a class assignment, where students focused on design that would ultimately satisfy their own consumption.

Across participants, our findings suggest that PSTs applied and extended their prior situated knowledge about TikTok and its algorithmic influence toward their design choices and considerations. The ways PSTs described their fears or apprehension to show their face or having their #BookToks publicly viewed were part of their design choices and multimodal compositions. PSTs knew that by including #BookTok hashtag, their constructed content could be picked up by the algorithm and delivered to other viewers in a very public way. The possibility of going "viral" or having high viewership had real meaning and impact on the PSTs, as they made intentional choices about the ways they wanted to be present in the video.

In reality, PSTs commented that viewers and the TikTok algorithm responded well to their #BookTok videos, since they received more views than anticipated. As such, their response highlighted the impactful role of an authentic audience outside of a school setting to push and make their design choices intentional and responsive to their idealized vision for their content.

Transitioning TikTok for Learning

Although study participants held many community memberships or identities, their role as PST became a dominant identity for their

#BookTok assignment. PSTs engaged in this assignment as both a student and a future teacher. As such, findings suggest that PSTs considered their contributions to the #BookTok space not only simply meeting assignment criteria but also fulfilling their own goals as emerging teachers. Participants described viewing #BookTok to support their reading interests as well as developing a curated list of possible children's books to add to their future classroom library. TikTok functions not only as an entertainment source or a platform for mindless scrolling, but also as an algorithmic tool that caters to users' interests by channeling their content accordingly.

The imagined futures of PSTs as classroom teachers were largely shaped by their ideals and perceptions of what they believed they would need or have to do as teachers. Since all of the PSTs in the course had not yet engaged in any classroom field experiences, PSTs mostly drew upon limited teacher-identity constructs for their imagined futures. As such, when thinking about TikTok, PSTs were more comfortable to include aspects of what knowledge gaps they might have (e.g., classroom management, phonological awareness, and book selections) rather than direct applications for TikTok as a learning tool for their K-12 students.

Although PSTs described using digital spaces like TikTok frequently for their own consumption, the #BookTok assignment revealed some ways participants wanted to engage in their multimodal inquiry. Particularly as PSTs used their mentor texts to inspire and envision their design, they also recognized the limitations of their skills in this space. PSTs experimented with tools they felt could come close enough to their mentor text while also highlighting what they wanted to learn how to do in this space.

PSTs transitioned their previous knowledge set into a new context to stretch their skills and apply to their construction. We see evidence of PSTs still emerging in their understanding of authentically applying design skills within their teaching practice rather than seeing a space like TikTok as more than just a fun add-on for student engagement.

In our study, while PSTs did not directly question or consider their compositional choices within the context of a biased algorithmic platform, they did acknowledge the far-reaching potential of their video productions to reach other viewers. PSTs noted how they wanted to use the space of TikTok to support their reading interests or future teaching goals by following content on classroom management or lesson plan ideas. While PSTs could acknowledge the affordances of the space through imagined future usage, findings did not fully capture how these particular spaces shape and privilege particular ways of thinking. These findings further highlight the need for *more* critical attention to teacher education spaces to provide PSTs opportunities to examine, critique, and consider the digital spaces they use and ways these can be applied to learning spaces *while also* attending to the platform systems that skew access, information, and bias.

Within the preliminary introduction to #BookTok, PSTs engaged as consumers, drawing primarily on their connections of analog spaces to discuss, review, and recommend books. In this way, their interviews reflected a limited viewpoint of the affordances of the space and its application beyond an entertainment or pop culture hub.

Part of situating TikTok as a learning space also included identifying ways that personal interests and related background experiences connected to PSTs as both viewers and learners. The nature of the platform's algorithm intends to assume and project a user's interests based on platform behavior patterns. As such, PSTs acknowledged that, beyond finding books they like or searching #BookTok to complete their assignment, the engagement of connecting with content that was relevant to their passions, identities, or interests ultimately shifted the ways they made meaning as a viewer. The ways PSTs, like Brianna, noted connections and deeper meaning-making when curated content included favorite music or topics of interest highlights the effectiveness of the algorithm at work: finding and curating content specifically to meet their perceived interests and needs to keep users engaged and logged in. In turn, this algorithmic influence impacted PSTs' multimodal compositional choices, as the algorithm selected content and types of videos that might align the most with their specific interests.

Implications

In the same ways schooling systems are fraught with hierarchical knowledge systems through the homogenization of curricular content, we see how algorithm platforms mimic analog systems. Getting caught up in a binary system of good vs. evil through a technoskepticism lens is easy. However, we can engage in critical sociotechnical dialogues around spaces for teacher educators to not only support PSTs' application of digital spaces and platforms but to critique the affordances and suppressive systems at play.

While this study focused on the most popular platform to date, TikTok, these design considerations and transition to learning tools can exist within other platforms currently available. TikTok will not always be the de facto app it is today. As such, we see that understanding algorithmic platforms like TikTok can be an important starting point for TEPs to consider as part of the methods and instructional strategies used for K-12 students.

Today's culture in schools with digital tools has become messy through binary framings (e.g., good or bad). We highlight the need for TEPs to become fertile landscapes in providing teacher candidates opportunities to go from a "social media scroll culture" toward a more critical media learning lens. Opening a more critical and analytic door with such platforms allows for participation in social media spaces to count as forms of learning and literacy practices. We see this as a vital opportunity for teacher educators and PSTs to take up and engage in more critical work and question the "why" and "how" in addition to the content they prosume.

Limitations and Future Research

We identify two limitations in this study: the small participant size and the use of indirect questioning to discuss participants' experiences with the TikTok algorithm in their personal lives. Regarding sample size, the benefit of interviewing only five participants allowed our research team to conduct multiple analytic phases to deepen our understanding of PSTs' interactions with #BookTok; however, the small sample limits the

generalizability of our findings. As such, more studies should be conducted with PSTs at other universities to confirm our findings or provide new or different insights for K-12 classrooms to use TikTok spaces. Additionally, future research could replicate this study by emphasizing the ways PSTs negotiate and manage their content consumption to influence their production of video-based content.

About the limitations of indirect questioning, we used learning for transfer theories (Bransford & Schwartz, 1999) to better understand how the PST participants transferred their understanding of TikTok from personal experience into creating a TikTok for academic purposes. In our interview protocol we did not dedicate questions to explicitly inquire about the PSTs' personal experiences with TikTok. Rather, we allowed space for this to arise naturally throughout the interview. However, had we directly asked PSTs to discuss their experience with TikTok and algorithmic influences, it may have presented a more extensive detail to connect their knowledge transfer. Future studies might include asking PSTs about their understanding of the algorithm within academic subject-specific content in the platform (e.g. ELA, science, classroom management, etc.).

Conclusion

Evaluating PSTs' multimodal compositional choices for a #BookTok TEP course assignment was the focus of our investigation. This resulted in highlighting PSTs as designers and prosumers, while also considering their future classroom instruction. The findings reveal how everyday digital spaces, like TikTok, can be reimagined as learning spaces that support nuanced aspects of multimodal composition, audience rhetoric, and remixing as a prosumer. By including familiar digital spaces like TikTok in TEP coursework, PSTs can more easily see how their everyday literacy practices can inform and transfer into classroom and literacy instruction.

As such, moving toward a model where teacher education spaces draw deeper connections to transfer PSTs' situated learning into school-based contexts can enhance the future classroom application for in-service teachers and provide a more substantial shift to what counts as reading and writing within and outside of schools. Although many might argue that TikTok and social media platforms have no business in K-12 classrooms, the multimodal design choices, authentic audience, and algorithmic considerations are all important and critical components that today's learners need, particularly as society continues to move toward digital platform integration.

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Appendix
#BookTok Videos Constructed by PSTs for Course Assignment

Ava BookTok Video:

https://youtu.be/_uDRKb1U1is

Brianna BookTok Video:

https://youtu.be/HVMZmc8eWz8

Celia BookTok:

https://youtu.be/3q-OUUCRHns

Dana BookTok Video:

https://youtu.be/uhIX2Gwtjtg

Elias BookTok Video:

https://youtu.be/G8815-bZFio?si=HsfJZHdnXJdrrvU6