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## **Examining Educators' Social Media Use to Support Digital, Civically Engaged English Teaching**

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This study examined the understudied phenomenon at the intersection of teachers' social media (SM) use, civic engagement, and English disciplinary instruction. The authors invited 18 in-person preservice teachers and nine online in-service teachers enrolled in their Teaching Multiliteracies courses to engage in a think-aloud protocol (Carpenter, 2024) while reading/viewing SM and considering applications for civically engaged ELA teaching. Data generated included artifacts participants produced during the think-aloud exercise. The authors collected digital and hardcopy visual maps of students' SM use, video recordings, and peer partner notes. Data were analyzed using open (Maxwell, 2013) and in-vivo coding (Miles, et al., 2014) and content analysis (Neuendorf, 2016; Saldaña, 2015). Findings are presented in three themes that emerged from the data. Teachers navigated their SM in ways that disrupted a personal-professional dichotomy associated with teachers' SM use; teachers negotiated and reconciled their conceptualizations of "the local" across SM and their classrooms; and they effectively connected politics across scales in their imaginings of civically engaged ELA instruction. The paper concludes with implications and instructional recommendations for English teacher education to offer teachers necessary support for learning to teach with SM's digital, networked texts.

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The uptick in teachers turning to social media (SM) has garnered news and popular culture attention, with *EdWeek* recently asking, “Teachers Spend 2 Hours a Day on TikTok. What Do They Get Out of it?” (Klein, 2024). Although teachers spend more time on SM than ever connecting with resources and colleagues near and far, researchers have paid comparatively less attention to how teachers engage in and with SM as instructional tools and content. Scholars prioritized studying digital media as a tool for youth civic engagement (Graham & Weingarten, 2018; Kahne & Middaugh, 2012; McDaniel, 2024; Mirra & Garcia, 2020, 2022), but as the realms of SM, politics, and activism become further intertwined, research is needed that examines how teachers use SM instructionally to support their own and students’ civic engagement.

In each of our concurrent multiliteracies courses with pre- and in-service teachers, we recognized a similar pattern in our syllabi. Course readings emphasized teachers’ facilitating multiliterate learning for secondary students, including around digital civic engagement (Mirra, Coffey et al., 2018; Seglem & Garcia, 2018), but we had not created spaces for teachers to examine their own digital civic engagement.

In response, we revised our courses to intentionally wonder along with our teacher education students about the potential functions of SM in their instructional lives. Together, we examined whether and how SM as digital, connected texts might support their and students’ civic engagement in English language arts (ELA) classes and with what strategies teachers approached SM as a digital-text tool for thinking about English instruction.

We studied the ways teachers engaged in a structured coursework task for which they were asked to treat SM as instructional tools and content to support ELA students’ civic engagement. As English teacher education pedagogy, the instructional task invited participants to read-view personal SM texts through two lenses: critical digital literacies and civic engagement. Framed by our conceptualizations of *the local* (Brandt & Clinton, 2002; Stornaiuolo & LeBlanc, 2014) and orientations toward politics that recognize its varied scales of impact and forms of engagement (e.g., Janks, 2012), we approached the interactions and data in this study with an exploratory spirit through our research questions:

- How do teachers use SM as a tool for civic engagement in secondary ELA teaching and learning?
- What civically engaged ELA learning and instructional possibilities do teachers imagine during prompted SM use?

Participants identified and critically analyzed SM digital texts, evaluated them, and became cognizant of their decision-making and movements within and across platforms to read their personal feeds in new ways as educators. Doing so helped them become more aware of the opportunities that their SM afforded them for thinking and engaging in civically minded

ways and for instructional opportunities for their students. Our study examined ELA teachers engaged in digital boundary crossing that was unfamiliar to them and that has been little studied.

Our data yielded detailed accounts of ways teachers do and might use SM beyond connection and community for professional development (Carpenter et al., 2020b) to imagine civically oriented ELA pedagogy. From these accounts we have developed a set of instructional recommendations to point ELA teacher educators toward new ways of thinking pedagogically and empirically.

Teachers' uses of SM are ubiquitous, and this is a generative space to continue to explore to maximize teachers' critical digital literacies and extend their opportunities to engage themselves and ELA students civically. This work also points to a need to further examine ways algorithmically and AI-produced texts might influence teachers' perceptions of themselves, their students, and their sociopolitical contexts.

## **Literature Review**

We situated our study among research on teachers' SM use and secondary English teachers' civically engaged instruction. Teachers' predominant uses of SM are connected to professional development, community building, and idea sharing; less is known about their use of SM texts for instructional content. While researchers have examined civic engagement in ELA, few have positioned SM as the digital, connected site of that engagement. Our study contributes to this body of knowledge because it focuses specifically on teachers' uses of SM as instructional content to support civic engagement in ELA.

### **SM in Teaching and Teacher Education**

#### ***Teachers' Uses of SM for Professional Growth***

The predominance of teachers' use of SM to support their professional learning, networking, and teaching across multiple platforms is clear (Carpenter et al., 2020a, b; Marcelo-Martinez et al., 2024; Mercado & Shin, 2025; Staudt Willet, 2024). They tap into a "collective intelligence" through SM that grants them access to a large, quickly responsive community that helps them learn more efficiently than traditional professional development (Macia & Garcia, 2016, p. 292).

Teachers also mix their professional and personal uses of SM (Carpenter et al., 2020b; Carpenter et al., 2024; Greenhow & Chapman, 2020; Shelton et al., 2020, 2022) in ways that differ from prior personal-professional SM boundary-drawing (Carpenter et al., 2019; Kimmons & Veletsianos, 2014; Thunman & Persson, 2018). The professional and personal have become entangled and layered among multiple "local" contexts so that teachers' "personal motivations are often important to their sustained engagement with their work" (Carpenter et al., 2024, p 8).

The mixing of the professional and the personal is, then, both heightened and shaped by SM algorithms that respond to the engagement, as

“algorithms seek to identify and respond to user affinity, regardless of the personal and/or professional nature of those affinities” (Carpenter et al., 2024, p. 8). Our dual emphasis on teachers’ engagement with SM personally and professionally attempts to answer the “call from the field to resist problematic dichotomies” (Garg et al., 2024, para. 1), namely personal and professional contexts (Low & Rapp, 2021).

Like in-service teachers, teacher candidates use SM to seek, create, and participate in professional community-building, collaboration, content and strategy sharing, skill development, and reflective practice (Iredale et al., 2020; Saini & Abraham, 2019). These overlapping trends in SM use suggest that teachers at all experience levels use SM to support their work. However, in teacher education contexts, researchers offered important critiques of SM’s use.

### ***Limits of Critical Digital Literacy Teacher Education***

Teacher candidates have positive attitudes toward SM as a support to their learning, but they struggle or are hesitant to imagine applications in their future classrooms (Baltaci-Goktalay & Ozdilek, 2010; Krutka et al., 2017; Lei, 2009; Sadaf et al., 2012). Saini and Abraham (2019) found in their study of 408 preservice teachers that their perception of SM platforms’ usefulness, ease of use, and social influence predicted whether or not PSTs would incorporate SM into their future teaching. Consequently, without purposeful instruction, SM may be an added burden for teachers rather than a meaningful pedagogical tool (Lei, 2009; Valtonen et al., 2013). This is an important area to which our study contributes; we describe and examine intentional instruction with SM for content teaching in ELA.

Further, teacher education does not typically adopt a critical SM literacy approach that explicitly teaches that SM are nonneutral spaces that shape discourse, ideology, identity, and power relationships, particularly in relation to civically engaged teaching (Mercado & Shin, 2025; Nagel et al., 2018). International critiques of teacher preparation systems echo this concern. In a global review of 24 Teacher Competence Frameworks, only 25% of the frameworks included competencies that engage educators in critical uses of digital tools (Villar-Onrubia et al., 2022). In a study of over 300 Spanish teacher education students, a small fraction demonstrated mastery in evaluating the credibility, bias, and political agendas of the texts (Castellvi et al., 2020).

Findings that teachers who use SM for professional development and idea sharing apply SM to disciplinary content instruction without sufficient attention to critical digital literacy skills point to an exigent need in ELA teacher education. English teacher educators should prepare English teachers with the know-how, confidence, and intention to offer instruction on and with SM as digital, connected content in ELA.

### ***Instructional Models to Support Critical SM Pedagogy***

Teachers at all experience levels need critical-digital-civically-framed learning experiences to become educators who both use and teach their students to use SM critically and effectively (Saini & Abraham, 2019). Empirical support to guide this instruction, however, is minimal.

Schroeder and Curcio (2022) developed one such protocol, in which they examined the ways explicit 21st-century critical curriculum literacy (CCL) instruction influenced 44 preservice teachers' reading and use of Pinterest, Instagram, and TeachersPayTeachers.com. They found explicit instruction applying the CCL lens to SM helped teacher candidates become more skeptical and evaluative of texts on SM; better able to assess the relevance of information to learning standards and students' academic needs; aware of the need for culturally relevant and diverse materials; and more confident in their abilities to adapt resources from SM rather than using them as is.

This body of literature demonstrates a need for a differently targeted use of SM in English teacher education that foregrounds teachers' critical awareness of SM and its potential application in learning and civic participation (Mercado & Shin, 2025). To that end, Demir's (2024) reconceptualization of Bloom's Taxonomy to guide instructors' integration of SM offers a useful tool. Demir's (2024) revised taxonomy of increasingly complex engagement with SM moves students to higher orders of use from viewing and posting to interacting, analyzing, evaluating, and curating SM content. With such a tool, English teacher educators may support teachers learning to be critical users of SM as digital texts (Nichols & Stornaiuolo, 2019; Mirra, Morrell et al., 2018) in an instructional paradigm that includes learning with and about SM in ELA classrooms.

### **Fostering Civic Engagement in Teacher Education**

To conceptualize *civic engagement*, we followed Mirra's (2018, 2022) lead to define *civics* as "the study and practice of negotiating values in order to determine how to live productively and compassionately in relation to each other" (Mirra & Garcia, 2023, p. 6). Mirra (2022) centered the *civic* in ELA teaching by examining multiple voices through diverse literature; thinking critically about the multimedia tools that shape production, consumption, and dialog about important issues; and participating in democratic dialog in and out of ELA classrooms.

However, teacher education researchers have used *civic* to modify several states of mind and action. For example, *critical civic empathy* (Mirra, 2018); *civic dreaming*, *sociocritical civic literacy*, and *civically oriented learning* (Mirra, Coffey et al., 2018); *speculative civic literacies* (Mirra & Garcia, 2020, 2022); *civic efficacy* (Karraker, 2017); *civic identities* (Enright & Toledo, 2023); and *civic teaching* and *civic awareness* (White, 2024). Importantly, even with varied conceptualizations, teacher education researchers have demonstrated that teachers can learn to view literacy as necessary for students' democratic engagement in real-world issues (Karraker, 2017).

The degree to which teachers engage students in civics is related to teachers' identities. Those who have greater civic awareness, less trust in traditional civic institutions, commitment to social issues, and better interpersonal skills may have stronger intentions to teach about politics and community engagement (White, 2024). Teachers' willingness to teach civically is fluid and varies in relation to specific issues, perceived personal relevance, and the knowledge they have of the topic (Enright & Toledo, 2023).

We contribute to this body of work by examining an instructional strategy that positions secondary English teacher education students to use SM to consider their intentions, abilities, and willingness to frame ELA as civic engagement. We used the term civic engagement to refer to the ways teachers and students incorporated three elements in ELA classrooms: critical digital literacies with multimodal SM texts; willingness and intention to negotiate political values across political contexts in and out of ELA classrooms; and participation in dialog or action related to those negotiations.

## **Theoretical Framework**

We position SM as digital text and social practice, as “new ways of participating as a citizen in public spaces” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 167). Textually mediated social participation is the purview of English teaching. SM, civic engagement, and English teachers intertwine issues of personal and communal political concern for citizens and educators. In addition to the political, in the following we outline ways SM use also may support English teachers’ expanding instructional and civic imaginations in ways that compel rethinking what it means to engage civically across scales of locality.

### **“Big *P*” and “Little *p*” Politics at the Intersection of SM and ELA**

Janks (2012) introduced the concepts of “big *P*” and “little *p*” politics to distinguish between different scales and types of political engagement that critical literacy must address. Big *P* politics refers to large-scale, institutionalized power structures, such as government decisions, international relations, economic systems, environmental policy, war, and global capitalism. Little *p* politics refers to the micropolitics of everyday life and compels people to consider the daily choices and interactions that shape their identities and relationships. These include how people treat others, how people respond to cultural differences, and how people position themselves in relation to issues of gender, race, class, language, and sexuality. Janks highlighted the notion that personal actions are political in nature because they are tied to broader systems of power.

Individuals’ personal and social choices (little *p*) are shaped by and shape the broader global and historical contexts (big *P*). Critical literacy, Janks (2012) argued, involves understanding and challenging both the structural power of big *P* politics and the everyday power dynamics of little *p* politics. SM and civic engagement are entangled when teachers interact and navigate digital content related to big *P* and little *p* politics. As teachers traverse the scales of politics, they also navigate scales of the “local.”

### **Complicating the Local With SM**

Our study productively complicates the notion of local contexts. Teachers in our courses simultaneously participated in the local of their SM feeds and the local of their classroom, coursework, and geographical contexts. Within SM platforms, teachers can experience each and all of these locals simultaneously. Whether they experience local through a digital text or as they consider a digital text in relation to their personal or professional

lives, this exemplifies Brandt and Clinton's (2002) theorizing work in their foundational piece on the "limits of the local." Brandt and Clinton emphasized both the "transcontextualized and transcontextualizing potentials of literacy – particularly its ability to travel, integrate, and endure" (p. 337).

The local has perhaps never been more expansive, mobile, and layered than it has become via SM participation. It is, however, as Brandt and Clinton (2002) cautioned over 20 years ago, as important as ever to attend to "what people are doing with literacy in a setting" as it is to understand "what literacy is doing with people in a setting" (p. 337). Our think-aloud protocol (cf. Carpenter et al., 2024) was an optimal tool for exploring the overlapping ways in which teachers both tended to their local contexts but were also invited, challenged, and introduced to more expansive understandings of the local.

Stornaiuolo and LeBlanc (2014) theorized that teachers shift the local contexts of their classrooms into SM's global, digitally networked spaces of texts and users through a process they call "scaling." Scaling attunes to how global and local literacies shape and are defined interdependently through "dynamic activity"—like SM scrolling and searching. In this framework, what counts as local is shaped both by individual teachers' goals, constraints, and needs and by how these interact with digital texts encountered via SM. Importantly, the interplay between user actions and platform algorithms means that content may be drawn from anywhere in the world, complicating the boundaries between local and global.

Our study asked teachers to consider the digital texts they encountered in their selected SM platforms as potential classroom resources for civically engaged ELA. In observing teachers' movements across SM and into their classrooms, we found that Stornaiuolo and LeBlanc's (2014) delineation of scales—"higher scale" resources as global and context-free, "lower scale" as local and specific—is also further complicated.

In particular, this study problematized the assumption that SM texts can be "context free" regardless of their origination or scope (i.e., global or local). As teachers use SM with their ELA students and classrooms in mind, perceived boundaries or scales that separate the global from the local may begin to collapse in users' experiences. A resource that appears global on a platform takes on local significance when adapted by teachers for classroom use, again in relation to their own constraints and goals, illustrating the fluid, emergent, and negotiated nature of scaling (Stornaiuolo & LeBlanc, 2014, pp. 193–194).

Attending to ways teachers scale across contexts, particularly within SM, provides insight not just into the resources they select, but into the underlying discourses shaping their civic and pedagogical decision-making. Both human and nonhuman actors — including platform algorithms — mediate these processes, yet teachers' awareness of algorithmic influence can be limited. For example, Carpenter et al. (2024) found that only 38% of a sample of 415 teachers reported minimal awareness of how TikTok's algorithm functions, with some describing the texts they encountered as "happy accidents" or "seemingly random" (p. 5). While our study involved a smaller sample and did not focus directly on algorithmic literacy, our close look at teachers' experiences highlighted

how they navigate platform affordances and constraints in pursuit of civically relevant ELA materials.

## Digital and Civic Imaginaries

Polizzi (2023) offered a two-stage theoretical framework to guide researchers' examinations of SM use in teacher education. In the first stage, *constructing imaginaries*, users develop visions of a relationship between civic life and the Internet. Imaginaries may suggest users' hopefulness (e.g., the Internet supports justice and democratic participation) or critiques (e.g., the Internet enables surveillance and polarization). Users' imaginaries allow them to form nuanced understandings of how digital tools can support or hinder civic action.

In the second stage, *deploying imaginaries*, users engage civically online and offline through their understandings of the Internet's affordances and limitations. Effective civic engagement depends on user integration of functional digital skills, the ability to evaluate online content, knowledge of corporate structures behind platforms, and a disposition toward using digital tools critically. In our study, English teacher education students constructed imaginaries of civic engagement for themselves and their students at the intersection of SM and ELA.

## Methods

### Research Participants and Context

We completed this research at a large, public, predominantly white institution (PWI) in the southeastern US. We each teach a section (Emily online; Blake face-to-face) of a graduate English education Teaching Multiliteracies course, and research participants were eight in-service secondary English teachers (ISTs) in the online course and 18 preservice secondary English teachers (PSTs) in the face-to-face course. The courses thematically centered the intersection of digital media, critical literacies, and civically engaged ELA teaching. Figure 1 represents the texts, in-class, and out-of-class instructional activities we used during the 3-week period teachers completed the SM think-aloud exercise we studied. In the context of our courses, we posed the following research questions:

- How do teachers use SM as a tool for civic engagement in secondary ELA teaching and learning?
- What civically engaged ELA learning and instructional possibilities do teachers imagine during prompted SM use?

The empirical questions we asked in this study may support English teacher educators' thinking about teachers' SM use beyond or in addition to professional community connection and idea sharing (Carpenter et al., 2020b). In the following section, we describe the think-aloud exercise we used to access participants' real-time analysis, decision-making, and imaginings while they interacted with their SM and considered civically engaged ELA teaching.

**Figure 1**  
*In-Person and Online Teaching Multiliteracies Course Readings and Assignments* (click on image to go to online page with full size image)



**SM-Civic Engagement Think-Aloud Protocol**

We designed the SM-civic engagement think-aloud protocol to support teachers’ critical analyses and reflections, while using their personal SM to support their civically engaged ELA teaching. [Appendix A](#) represents the exact protocol we presented to teachers in each class. First, teachers self-selected one of two prompted classroom situations to address using their choice of personal SM platforms. Prompt A directed participants to use SM to support secondary students’ digital inquiries; Prompt B directed teachers to use their SM to help secondary students learn more about current policy issues that may affect them.

Online participants engaged with self-selected SM for 10-15 minutes and video-recorded themselves thinking aloud while they navigated their SM. In-person participants engaged aloud with partners who took notes to capture the content and themes of each other’s SM use. In both classes, we instructed participants to rationalize orally their digital choices and

articulate how they imagined using SM for civically engaged ELA instruction.

While thinking aloud, each participant created a visual representation of their SM navigation and instructional imaginings. The PSTs in the in-person course hand-wrote their maps; the ISTs in the online course used a variety of modes from handwritten to Canva-generated (see [Appendix B](#)). All participants reflected on follow-up prompts about the think-aloud process, their civic engagement, and their takeaways as educators. The online participants video-recorded their reflections through Flip, a video-sharing discussion platform at the time of this study, and the in-person participants participated in whole-class discussion.

Thinking aloud met two instructional ends. First, we compelled teachers' out-loud talk to create the opportunity for them to explicitly articulate (to us, themselves, their partners, and their course community) their experiences completing the SM tasks and helped them conceptualize their SM activity (Vygotsky, 1978). Second, thinking and reflecting aloud created opportunities for dialog with course instructors and peers, which pushed each participant to conceptualize and articulate their SM work more fully.

### **Think-Aloud in Teachers' SM Research**

Using think-alouds is a method that Carpenter et al. (2024) specifically called for in considering the limitations of their study of teachers' use of TikTok. Think-aloud addresses the increased need for "experimentation with and study of" (p. 10) multiple platforms and offers researchers access to teachers' articulations of which platforms they prefer, how they use them, and why. Carpenter et al. also pointed to the related "need for better understanding of differences in users' ... experiences depending on if they actively search for content or depend on algorithms to find that information" (p. 10).

Our study aligned with these aims, as teachers self-selected and rationalized the platforms and how they navigated them in relation to ELA instruction during their SM think aloud. Overall, our study is an example of increased attention to teachers' SM use in teacher education courses, an overarching goal that our study embodied and that would certainly "benefit the field" as Carpenter et al. (2024) indicated.

We use the term think-aloud aligned with Carpenter et al. (2024) to describe participants' talk as a representation of their decision-making during our protocol (Davis et al., 2022). However, we distinguish our use of the term from its use in research that associates think-aloud with a method to access or evaluate participants' thinking from an information processing perspective of cognition (Cowan, 2019; Ericsson & Simon, 1980; Flower & Hayes, 1981). In our study, we make no claims that participants' out loud talk provided a window into cognition or mechanisms of knowing.

## **Data Sources**

Our data sources were artifacts from the SM think-aloud exercise and reflect the theoretical framing of big *P* and little *p* politics (Janks, 2012) and scales of locality (Stornaiuolo & LeBlanc, 2014). Teachers' orientations to "the political" and conceptions of "the local" changed in relation to each personal SM digital text they encountered (cf., Enright & Toledo, 2023). Participants' talking, mapping, note taking, and reflecting provided ongoing, real-time multimodal data representing their movement across and through their shifting orientations and thinking.

The artifacts, or data, generated from the think-aloud exercise that were analyzed in this study included teacher-created maps in both courses, partner notes from the in-person course, and video reflection transcriptions from the online course. From the online participants, we collected video recordings of their think-aloud protocols, which were submitted as an assignment in the course Canvas open-source learning management system site, and responses to video reflection prompts, and transcribed them using the Rev online services platform. From the online and face-to-face participants, we collected the teacher-created maps of their SM interactions ([Appendix B](#)), and from each face-to-face participant, we collected notes on their partners' think-alouds.

## **Data Analysis**

The survey responses, teacher-created maps of their engagement, and video responses to follow-up reflection prompts in the online course were analyzed using content analysis (Neuendorf, 2016; Saldaña, 2015). We turned to the SM think-aloud transcripts as means of contextualizing information and emergent findings and themes from these data sources. Answering a call put forth by Carpenter et al. (2024), we also determined which and how many SM platforms each participant used and whether they used specific search terms or scrolled through the platform-presented feed. Given our emphasis on teachers' experiences and perceptions — of the digital texts they encountered, of SM as an instructional tool, and of civically engaged ELA instruction — we emphasized the artifacts created from the think-aloud rather than the protocol itself.

Individually, we read and viewed the data sources from our own courses and used open coding (Maxwell, 2013) and in-vivo coding to "prioritize and honor the participants' voices" (as recommended by Miles et al., 2014, p. 74) and experiences in their own words. We each established an initial set of codes and then collaborated to refine the codes and identify emerging themes. The process of working first individually and then collaboratively allowed for different readings and patterns, themes, and relationships to emerge in the data.

While we remained sensitive to additional concepts that surfaced, we particularly focused on understanding how participants constructed and deployed imaginaries (Polizzi, 2023) at the intersection of their and students' SM use and engagement in big *P* and little *p* politics (Janks, 2012) in ELA. The concept of scaling shaped our coding to attend to participants' movements across scales of the local — from classroom to community to global contexts — as they navigated SM. In relation to

notions of the political, we keyed in on evidence, too, that suggested ways teachers used SM to construct the local (Stornaiuolo & LeBlanc, 2014) on various scales. For example, one of our codes related to the local included “local to students,” or discussion of a post about content geographically local to their town.

Throughout coding, we drew on notions of scaling (Stornaiuolo & LeBlanc, 2014) and big *P* and little *P* politics (Janks, 2012) to examine not only what with participants engaged, but how their engagements shifted across scales. These frameworks provided a critical lens for interpreting the civic and instructional imaginaries teachers envisioned through their SM navigation.

### **Researcher Positionality**

We are each former high school English teachers committed to educating critical, civically minded English teachers who strive to create equitable, accessible, critically conscious learning opportunities for all students. Our racial identities as white scholars and our primary use of English as our academic and professional language inform both our access to and interpretation of participants’ experiences. Our gendered and institutional identities — Emily as a female tenure-earning research faculty member, Blake as a male clinical professor at the same institution — shaped the power dynamics in our interactions, the ways participants may have positioned themselves with us, and the interpretive lenses we brought to the analysis.

We recognize that as professional class instructors our socioeconomic statuses afford us privileged access and experience with digital tools. Embedded in our research and teaching are assumptions about teachers’ prior experiences, knowledge, and skills with SM that may not be universal. Our positionalities grant us certain privileges in educational spaces and require us to be reflexive about whose voices and perspectives are amplified or overlooked in our work.

Our identities and professional status also inform our approach to the instruction and research described here. We position English teachers as “political actors” (Reid et al., 1998), “democratic professionals” (Zeichner, 2020), and “society-involved ‘organic intellectuals’” (Yogev & Michaeli, 2011). This understanding embeds a need to better equip English teachers with a framework of education as inherently and necessarily political (e.g., Picower, 2013), “especially at times when definitions of literacy are alarmingly being narrowed down by politicized legislations” (Barabas, 2024, p. 2). Further, we understand teachers’ political knowledge and engagement as key pedagogical resources (Gutiérrez, 2013; Myers, 2009) for themselves, their students, and their communities.

### **Findings**

Several themes emerged from teachers’ use of SM to imagine civically engaged ELA teaching. In general, teachers rapidly disrupted their perception of a binary relationship between personal and professional SM use. They engaged deeply and critically with the digital, connected texts in ways that complicated conceptions of the local. They imagined their and

students' civic engagement across sites of big *P* and little *p* politics. They imagined a remarkable amount of instructional applications and implications for their and students' SM use. The following themes are examined more closely in the next section, with illustrative examples from the data:

- Navigating SM to Disrupt a Personal-Professional Dichotomy
- Scaling the Local
- Connecting Big *P* and Little *p* Politics in Teachers' Civically Engaged ELA Instructional Imaginations

In the subsequent sections our findings are discussed, along with their contributions to the study of SM uses in teacher education. Ultimately, specific recommendations are offered based on the findings for English teacher education instructional practice.

### **Navigating SM to Disrupt a Personal-Professional Dichotomy**

At the start of their think-alouds, teachers expressed digital dichotomies. They separated their SM and professional lives and wondered whether and how their SM engagement was also civic engagement. One participant commented that their feed was “all sorority and college football stuff.” Another described their SM as only “for keeping in touch with friends and family and defragging and zoning out after work.” These perceptions presented challenges in responding to the think-aloud protocol prompts (see [Appendix A](#)), both of which required them to turn to their SM feeds as sources of pedagogical content related to civic engagement. Participants quickly overcame this binary, however, and every teacher demonstrated the willingness and ability to use SM to inform their civically engaged ELA instruction. Histories of personal use appeared to influence the ways participants used the platforms they selected.

We identified four patterns among teachers' SM use that may be connected to residual habits of personal use. While our data compelled us to resist perceived dichotomies among teachers' SM use and we identified no hard boundaries among user types, the four patterns that emerged distinguish usage styles: some teachers preferred to scroll their SM feeds, while others used explicit searches for useful content. Some teachers selected and remained using a single SM platform, while others navigated several to complete the task.

#### ***Navigating by Scrolling or Searching SM***

**Teachers Opened and Scrolled SM.** In their personal uses, some teachers were in the habit of logging into a preferred SM app, scrolling, and reading what came to them. As described in [Appendix C](#), 13 of the 26 participants initiated the activity by scrolling rather than searching.

For example, Teresa chose Facebook out of comfort or routine — “it’s the SM that I’m on the most” — and then explored what the site had to offer in relation to the prompt she chose, based on typical personal engagement

moves. For Teresa, that meant, “I’m just going to start scrolling and see what I get for [prompt] A.” Seeing what she got implied that Teresa spent her think-aloud critically evaluating texts and assessing whether or not what she scrolled across constituted a social issue that might create a civically engaged learning opportunity for her students. On her school board’s Facebook page, for instance, she learned that it was literacy week and that the district would be exploring “the impact of reading,” to which she offered, “I don’t know if that would be a social issue,” and moved to her specific school’s Facebook page to see how it was being framed there.

Like Teresa, Tracy primarily scrolled her Instagram pages without a search. Unlike Teresa, her personal feeds immediately presented posts related to civic engagement: negative environmental impacts of industrialization; ways SM negatively impacts users’ self-perception; American society’s obsession with 24/7 productivity; critique of gendered child rearing practices that aim for “perfect” girls but allow “boys to be boys”; and a “Save the Manatee” post. Tracy identified ample fodder in her unsearched feed to spark her imagining ways to support students’ inquiries and civic engagement. Similarly, while Brittany even articulated that “the algorithm targeted [her] interests,” her unsearched Instagram feed offered a series of national, state, and local political posts that created opportunities for her to imagine ways to engage her secondary ELA students.

Teresa, Tracy, and Brittany illustrated the ways participants experienced disruptions of the personal-professional SM dichotomy. Each of them began the exercise with a routine that mirrored their personal uses of SM and relied on scrolling to access texts. Prompted by the instructional protocol, each was able to reframe and reorient to their SM, transitioning from scrolling for personal interest to critically examining their feeds through a lens of instructional civic engagement.

**Teachers Used Targeted Searches for Content.** Understandably, initial, habit-driven scrolling as an orientation to SM may not yield obvious instructional applications for all users. Most participants experimented with targeted search terms that demonstrated a transition from personal use to instructional use differently than did their peers who only scrolled one or more platforms. Ultimately, 18 of the 26 participants used targeted search terms or a combination of searching and scrolling in response to the prompts. Using specific search terms helped teachers orient instructionally (either immediately or eventually) to frame the problem they were trying to solve (i.e., identify posts as content or inspiration for civically engaged ELA instruction), and they critically evaluated digital texts/posts for relevance, importance, and usefulness to their instructional imaginations.

Tom’s data illustrated ways teachers used targeted searching to navigate their SM. Tom navigated across multiple digital platforms and text types with multiple searches. He began his Prompt B inquiry into local and state politics using X and searched “[state]DOE” first and read through the associated hashtags. Finding nothing useful in the hashtags, he navigated directly to the [state] Department of Education X account and then to the state governor’s X feed. Finding nothing he perceived as relevant to his goals in response to Prompt B, Tom navigated to Google and searched “[State] House Bills” and finally returned to X and searched the local

newspaper's feed where he found an article that described the state's top legislative priorities as culture war issues. Having navigated across multiple sites using several search terms, Tom found a suitable text he associated with the task in Prompt B (i.e., legislative culture wars) and stopped his navigation to read the newspaper article and imagined possible instructional opportunities for a secondary ELA class.

### **Navigating Single or Multiple SM Platforms**

Another important pattern of users' navigation that emerged from the data highlighted that all but four participants (22/26) completed the instructional protocol using a single SM platform. While they are a majority, the reasons for participants' commitment to single applications (e.g., using only Instagram) went largely without oral description — they did not make a decision that compelled action (rather, inaction), so it is reasonable that they did not think it aloud. However, some reasoned conjectures are possible.

**Single-Platform Users: Why Did They Stay?** Fifteen of 22 participants who used a single platform used the search functions rather than scrolling their feeds. Teachers' persistence with a single app is an indication of their confidence in the affordances of and their abilities to successfully navigate the app's digital terrain, as in Teresa's selection of Facebook out of comfort and routine (see also Tom's use of X). Further, our data indicated that teachers who only scrolled a single platform may have done so because they immediately identified texts relevant to the prompts in their home page/algorithmically produced feeds (see Tracy's and Brittany's examples that follow).

Mina is another example of a single-platform user; she selected Instagram. She began by searching for the broad term "social issues." Although this was an expansive search, Mina tied her process directly to her students:

I'm going to start my SM think-aloud on Instagram, just looking at social issues that could be affecting my students. I teach eighth graders in a lower socioeconomic demographic, mostly minority students. They face many issues. So a lot of these we could talk about and see relevance for them. So I'm just going to go ahead and click on the first one and kind of scroll from there and see what I look at.

In addition to the conjectures we made, Mina's quotation suggests that her imaginaries (Polizzi, 2023) of her students, "social issues," and Instagram may have influenced her single-app use. Mina began with a broad search term, in part, because she assumed that her students "face many issues" and she would come across *something* of relevance. This confidence suggests that Mina came to this exercise without well-defined evaluative criteria to use to select topics or texts for use in her ELA classes. She was confident that Instagram would meet her broadly defined needs; thus, there was no reason to change platforms.

**Multiple-Platform Users: Why Did They Go?** Four teachers started on one platform and then decided to change to another. For two, the shifts across platforms involved YouTube, with one starting in Facebook and

following a link from there to YouTube, and another starting in YouTube before moving to Instagram. Layla directly discussed her reasons for initially choosing YouTube and how she saw it as a different sort of space for engaging with digital texts than her second choice of Instagram, which she termed, “my actual SM platform.”

While thinking aloud, Layla surfaced what she experienced as the affordances of YouTube, the space she said she often visits “to educate myself on topics that I may not be super familiar with prior to teaching my students.” Layla highlighted how YouTube simultaneously offers instructional content to use with students and pedagogical advice she can learn from as a newer teacher.

Like many teachers, Layla’s initial approach to this exercise was to seek out information to grow her content knowledge and pedagogical repertoire (Mercado & Shin, 2025). For this purpose, YouTube was a reasonable choice with a large body of teacher-centered video content from which to choose. However, in relation to the prompted task, her actual students, and her established instructional approach and goals, the generalized content on YouTube did not help meet her needs. She changed to Instagram.

Once on Instagram, Layla targeted sources traditionally tied to the nondigital, like school boards or state representatives, but via the digital texts these sources share through their SM accounts. Arguably, Instagram was a better choice for Layla’s needs, since school boards and politicians are more likely to keep current information at the forefront of their Instagram than on YouTube, a more taxing, production-oriented media. In her think-aloud, Layla described these digital texts as a purposeful and frequent way that she engages with politics: “Now, the first thing that I do when I get to Instagram, anytime that I’m curious about local politics, is I pull up my personal representative.” She goes on to describe the political content in Instagram as highly accessible, particularly for someone like herself:

And that is the one thing that I consider myself to be is not highly educated on political terms or current events. I’m a busy mom of three. I teach full time. I don’t even have regular TV, and therefore, sometimes it’s difficult to keep up to date with current events, especially *local*[emphasis added] legislation.

Layla’s navigation is also an example of a teacher who changed platforms as her orientation to the task shifted from her habits of personal-professional development to instructional use in her ELA classroom.

Overall, platform selection and usage styles may speak more to teachers’ personal identifications than indicate how they perceive affordances or limitations of any single platform. Our data suggest that teachers’ identifications, interests, and prior knowledge and SM use may strongly inform how they orient and how they imagine using SM to inform English instruction (as also in Enright & Toledo, 2023). For example, PSTs approached the task and platform use/selection differently from a self-described “busy mom of three” who teaches full-time, like Layla.

While identifications matter, an alternative conjecture related to teachers' platform selections is that they were not thinking critically about platforms as institutional products informed economically, socially, and/or politically by their corporate ownership (Garcia & de Roock, 2023). For instance, while Layla used Instagram as her news source, she did not represent any critical thinking about how Instagram selects the news she sees. Our findings suggest a need in teacher education to support teachers' development of critical platform awareness (Nichols & Garcia, 2022) to inform their SM use.

In contrast, teachers' targeted searching suggested they were critically examining individual texts they perceived. Teachers' willingness and facility to engage in targeted searches in all platforms suggests an authoritative orientation to the digital text. They were not passive consumers of algorithmically selected media and content; rather, they oriented to the SM as tool users, and with varying but mostly high acuity, they successfully sought and directed their own pathways to and from texts and read-viewed critically with clear purposes that reflected their conceptualizations of civically engaged ELA and the role SM may play in imagining it.

### **Scaling The Local**

Greenhow and Chapman (2020) found that the ways teachers perceived their local contexts influenced the ways they conceptualized citizenship or civic engagement and the ways they observed geographic or racial barriers for students' civic participation. In this study, however, we identified ways the SM platforms teachers navigated helped them expand, blur, and encourage recursive digital pathways of textuality that crossed in and out of scales of locality (Stornaiuolo & LeBlanc, 2014).

SM indexes the world near and far from students' material experiences and creates accessibility that transcends boundaries traditionally associated with geography, socioeconomic status, or race. However, while SM may disrupt prior understandings of the boundaries of the local for students' civic engagement, teachers who wish to point their students toward local activity must reconceptualize what a digital local context means in the absence of historical material boundaries.

### ***Defining the Local for Self and Students***

Teresa, despite being one of the few teachers who did not search for a particular topic relevant to her classroom context, reflected directly on the potential connections and disconnections between her Facebook feed as she perceived it and what she was looking for instructionally. Teresa first described how she mostly used Facebook to keep in touch with friends and family. That, in addition to the fact that Teresa has "lived all over," made her question whether what is local to her Facebook would also be local for her students.

Her goals for the think-aloud were to find potential topic options for her ninth grade ELA students "related to standards that focus on students conducting research...about a community or broader social issue, and using digital tools to find and share information." She continued to ponder

on what constitutes a social issue across contexts: in her personal life and SM feed, in her professional teaching context, and for her students. She reflected on these layers as follows:

So, actually, a vast majority of my friends on Facebook are from the Illinois, Chicago area, not ... where I live. So, some of the issues that might be brought up might not be local. So, just kind of thinking aloud, thinking through some of the issues that I think might arise within this or some struggles or some sort of differentiation that I might need to do as I'm looking through these.

Similar to the way Teresa grappled with what a social issue is in literacy teaching and learning, she wrestled with whether and how the varied local contexts of her personal life might have relevance for the local issues, interests, and needs of her students and in her teaching. Teresa pointed to ways that purposefully and reflexively engaging with the digital texts in one's own SM feeds can productively complicate what counts as local and how the local surfaces in different ways: the local of relational circles in SM, of classroom planning, of community and political issues, of broader state contexts, and beyond.

### ***Emphasizing Local Issues***

Participants operationalized the local in distinct ways. For some, their concept of local tied their thinking and SM use to the immediate context of the classrooms in which they taught. Others defined local as having to do with city, state, or home community matters. A common finding was that upon reading and viewing digital texts on national (US) topics, teachers thought about how issues or policies might be applicable to their communities or how the content may be taken up in their classrooms for instruction.

**The Local as Classroom Sites of Participation.** Brittany appeared to navigate concepts of local effortfully through big *P* and little *p* politics in her Instagram feed. On her map, she specifically included sections headed “Local Politics,” “National Politics,” and “International Issues.” Even as she chunked her SM feed into categories, she demonstrated a concerted effort to imagine ELA classroom learning opportunities for her students to engage in, each at their local level. She identified opportunities for students to use SM for “learning about local businesses and the effect of different political decisions on small businesses” and “learning about national politics through smaller [local] party affiliates.” Finally, she imagined her students as critical producers on SM who might create “alliance posts” modeled after texts she viewed on Instagram in support of “International Day of Women and Girls in Science.”

Brittany's work is another example of the ways teachers used SM to blur and complicate lines of locality with her students' learning in mind. Additionally, the speed and efficiency with which Brittany accessed all of these topics and instructional imaginings through her SM cannot be ignored.

Another IST, Shawna, stated aims for her think-aloud that were at once hyperlocal, focused on her family, and more global, wrapped up in big *P*

politics (Janks, 2012). She described a recent “routine school visit” from an administrator who commented on the pride trans flag displayed in her classroom, as well as on a book-fair-purchased book a student was reading that involved LGBTQ+ relationships. Students heard the administrator’s remarks and began asking Shawna if she was allowed to have the flag in their classroom. Her response in the think-aloud was that “it would seem that perhaps that is now up for question.”

Shawna further offered a deeply personal connection to this increasingly controversial topic of LGBTQ+ rights — particularly with the US president’s January 2025 Executive Order to restore “biological truth to the federal government” (The White House, 2025): “My daughter is the president of the Pride Club at school, and I wonder how this will impact their service.”

With these crosscontextual, heavily layered local goals and wonderings in mind, Shawna first played a TikTok video that offered what she indicated as “new information to me”: that a legislative proposal, a bill, is in her state legislature to ban displays of pride flags in classrooms. Her immediate response was to ask — and to note it in her map as well — “What about inclusion?” In connection to her students and her ELA teaching, Shawna first recognized that TikTok cannot be used in her middle grades classroom, given its ban in her home state on school-owned devices and in state universities. However, she persisted and conceptualized ways her students could engage with this issue not only as text consumers but in activism against the bill, in particular: by using “the regular internet” to research legislators involved in this bill and then writing letters to them.

In these ways and others, participants demonstrated specific and uniquely local connections to big *P* and little *p* politics, with intentionality toward engaging students in thinking about civic and social justice issues and culturally relevant lesson plan ideas. Their inquiries demonstrated the ways teachers may use SM to identify and understand the layers of local and how what may initially seem to be an issue of either big *P* or little *p* politics, has connections across both. Further, examples like Brittany’s demonstrate the speed and efficiency with which SM can help teachers collapse far-away topics into local relevance for themselves and students.

**The Local as Geographical.** Other teachers oriented to and conceptualized the local as geographical, for example, relating to a county, community, or state. They situated the local — and themselves in relationship to it — in one of three ways: They specifically searched the platform for issues or topics related to their city, county, or neighboring counties where they have worked in schools; they searched and identified national issues and then executed targeted searches for related stories of local relevance; or they identified stories and topics regardless of their geographic origin and imagined instructional ways to link local students to important ideas.

Reese approached thinking about her local for Prompt B in a recursive way that blurred boundaries of scale. She began with a concern about books being removed from classrooms, at once hyperlocal, classroom-focused and connected to countrywide book banning efforts and public and political discourse around it. Her initial search began on Instagram for posts on recent state legislation that led to book bans and book removals

from classrooms (state level). This search then led her to the [State] Freedom to Read Project Instagram account where she identified ways legislation might directly impact her classroom teaching (state→classroom). Finally, she navigated to the Instagram page of a queer bookstore in her city where she perused book lists featuring queer and Black authors that might be useful for exciting her students' (city→classroom) engagement in issues related to what they were allowed or not to read in school. Reese's inquiry demonstrated the ways teachers (may) use SM to identify and understand the scales of local and how what initiates as an issue of either "big *P*" or "little *p*" politics, may have connections to both, particularly as digital text resources move across scales.

Overall, teachers, despite starting in different spaces with different approaches and goals, ultimately filtered the content of the digital texts they encountered down to their classroom local, either through purposeful searching of a social issue or imagining what a topic might look like in their classrooms.

### **Connecting Big *P* and Little *p* Politics**

A final theme that emerged was that teachers envisioned critical literacy and civically engaged ELA instruction *with* their SM platforms. Participants used SM to inspire instructional planning that connected big *P* politics in the world to little *p* political activity in their classrooms. Janks (2012) argued that little *p* politics of individual action and big *P* politics of institutions and systems shape and are shaped by each other, and this relationship played out clearly in teachers' processes of identifying SM texts to inform the instruction they imagined enacting with their students.

As they imagined instruction that helped students connect and traverse big *P* and little *p* politics, teachers exemplified civic dreaming (Mirra, Coffey et al., 2018). Mirra, Coffey et al. originally conceptualized civic dreaming with secondary ELA students in mind to describe learning that helped them imagine their flawed world as a better, more democratic, and just place. Here, we reposition the concept to teacher education classrooms to describe the civic dreaming in which PSTs and ISTs imagined their future English classrooms as sites of civic engagement and more critical, just ELA practice.

Teachers began to *construct imaginaries* of instruction, which Polizzi (2023) posited as a necessary stage in which teachers envision a relationship between civic engagement and the Internet. Some participants initially balked at the idea of using their personal SM platforms to inform their ELA teaching beyond searching for other people's teaching strategies. However, our protocol prompted them to view their personal SM with a new, civic-minded lens, and teachers saw relationships and promising possibilities at the convergence of their SM and ELA teaching. The examples in the next section illustrate some of the ways teachers' civic dreaming connected big *P* political content in the SM texts with little *p*-oriented instruction that supports students as civic actors.

### ***SM-Inspired Civic Dreaming in ELA***

Teachers used SM as sites of possible inspiration for disciplinary instruction. For example, Mandy responded to an Instagram post that promoted “sustainable development goals.” Sustainability is a big *P* political topic and perspective that is entangled institutionally in national and global policy-making and conflicting ideologies and orientations to environmentalism. Mandy’s instructional imagination ranged from the big *P* political topic of sustainability to little *p* political action embedded in her vision for disciplinary ELA instruction.

She imagined instruction that began with her students critically engaging sustainability on a big *P* scale: First, they would research principles of and obstacles to sustainable living globally. Then, students would engage in local inquiries about sustainability efforts and challenges in their community. Finally, in little *p* political activity that examined how individuals relate to one another (and in this case, the planet), students would design and distribute their ideas for addressing sustainable living locally.

Mary, too, was inspired by a TikTok post about migrant labor (big *P*) in her home state. She outlined ELA instruction to help students draw on their community funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) to research and critically examine policies and texts related to immigration and migrant workers. The lessons would culminate in students’ little *p* political action by composing community-based counternarratives to dominant discourses of immigration and migrant labor.

Throughout the data, teachers used SM to connect their instructional thinking from big *P* political topics relevant to their students’ local lives to their imagined critical literacy instruction that engaged students in little *p* political activity. Whereas Mandy and Mary were inspired by SM posts, other teachers, equally politically engaged, selected digital texts from SM as digital, multimodal content in their civically engaged instructional thinking. In these cases, too, teachers used SM to bring big *P* political issues into their classrooms and promote little *p* activity among students.

### ***The Content of ELA Civic Dreaming***

Ivan imagined addressing the big *P* topic of (anti)racism when he identified Ziwe Funudoh’s TikTok video. The content creator edited video clips to satire recognizable public figures to make them appear to use racist language. Ivan planned for students to analyze the TikTok post as digital text and described instruction to help students use critical multimodal analysis to identify the multimodal grammar of Funudoh’s post and interpret and evaluate the effectiveness of satire in political activism. Then, with Funudoh’s post as a digital mentor text and available design (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009), Ivan imagined students would compose their own redesigned satirical content to address politicized topics for potential distribution on SM.

Similarly, Mary envisioned capitalizing on a popular TikTok trend in which creators identified themselves as participants in a community and completed the phrase, “I/we am/are [identification]. Of course I/we

[am/believe/want].” Often the identifications used in this TikTok trend connect users to sociopolitical identifications negotiated on big *P* political stages. With the trend as a model, Mary outlined a lesson in which students would respond to state legislation that impacts students, teachers, and schools, for example, book removals. She imagined students making their own videos using the prompt, “We’re [state] students. *Of course* we [care/are angry about/want a voice in] what goes on in our schools, libraries, and communities.” Mary used the TikTok trend as a mentor text for productive critical literacies that engaged her students in little *p* political action.

The teachers in these examples exemplified the facility, speed, and excitement with which participants turned SM platforms into tools of justice-oriented and civically engaged ELA to connect students across scales of locality through little *p* political action to big *P* political issues. TikTok and other SM platforms supported opportunities for ELA teachers to position potentially distant global concerns, such as racism and government censorship, into opportunities for lower scale local action that forwarded students as civically engaged inquirers, readers, and writers.

While some teachers imagined instructional uses in their English classrooms for the digital, connected texts mined from SM, others’ imaginations were inspired by them. For all participants, our instructional protocol created a generative opportunity that sparked teachers’ civic dreaming (Mirra, Coffey et al., 2018) about their ELA students and instruction. Our findings illuminate some of the teachers’ particular orientations, strategies, and rationales and illustrate the influence SM can have on their instructional decisions and methods. Teachers clearly recognized SM as a valuable resource for finding digital texts to use in classrooms and a generative source of inspiration and imagination for social justice and civically engaged English teaching. What is less clear from our data — and an area in need of additional research — is whether and how teachers operationalized the civically engaged instruction their reading-viewing of SM initiated.

## **Discussion and Implications for Teacher Education**

The findings of this qualitative study of teacher’s engagement in our SM think-aloud exercise underscored several critical instructional implications for teachers and teacher educators, particularly concerning the integration of SM as digital text into civically oriented pedagogical practices.

### **Reconciling Professional and Personal Digital Engagement**

Leveraging SM as a digital, civic pedagogical resource requires teachers to navigate the blurring lines between their personal online identities and their professional roles. Teacher education should support teachers in understanding how their personal SM consumption and engagement can and already does shape their instructional choices and the types of content they consider to be civically oriented and deem appropriate and valuable for students. Such instruction involves fostering a self-reflective practice that helps teachers discern and manage the impact of their own digital habits on their pedagogical approach (Catena, 2025).

Teachers' personal digital habits, platform choices, and navigating styles are significant, and ELA teacher education should support their critical understandings of each. Teacher education has a role in helping teachers develop critical awareness that the ways they use SM may have consequences for the ways they orient to big *P* and little *p* politics; the ways they conceive of the the local; and the ways they identify, select, and imagine instruction for students.

Teachers' uses of SM platforms may inform the kinds of texts and the content they and their students have access, opportunity, and potential to engage. Teacher education can help teachers develop critical awareness of, for example, how algorithms shape and are shaped by their SM use (Burriss & Leander, 2024) and the ways in which powerful economic and corporate interests are served by the choices they make (or believe they are making) with SM (Garcia & de Roock, 2021).

### **Redefining Local in a Digitally Connected World**

The concept of local demands redefinition within contemporary instruction. Our findings suggest teacher education must address how educators define and conceptualize local, not only for themselves but also with — not for — their students, recognizing that what constitutes local varies greatly in scope and scale across different individuals. As Stornaiuolo and LeBlanc (2014) argued, teachers' literacies are shaped by dynamic processes of *scaling*, in which local contexts move into and are reshaped within the global, digitally networked spaces of SM.

Framing prompts for a SM think-aloud exercise similar to ours could invite teachers first to reflect on what they consider their local and then to analyze whether and how their SM feeds do or do not represent, expand, reform, or otherwise interact with their initial conceptualizations. Such exercises highlight how what may seem global or big *P* political (Janks, 2012) on a platform can take on new, situated meaning when adapted to specific classroom contexts, underscoring the fluidity of scales and the ways boundaries between local and global collapse in practice (Stornaiuolo & LeBlanc, 2014).

Secondary students could similarly be supported in critically unpacking and responding to the local in their lives, both online and digital — and the ways they overlap. Teresa's grappling with whether and how the local contexts of her life that show up in her Facebook feed connect to her current local contexts, in particular her classroom, speaks to this need for teacher educators to support the development and use of evaluative criteria to define local as they plan standards-based instruction.

### **Cultivating Critical Digital Literacy**

Teachers' SM use in this research exemplified Burriss and Leander's (2024) declaration that "readers and writers are no longer uniquely human, nor necessarily individual, but a tangle of processes involving human non-human matter" (p. 561). Participants expressed tacit and explicit awareness of their entanglement with the nonhuman, AI-produced texts, images, and proprietary algorithms that are agentive,

invisible, unknowable, corporate, and ever-present (Gillespie, 2018; Jerasa & Burriss, 2024; Low et al., 2023; Tufekci, 2015).

As such, this study highlights an imperative need for educators to develop a critical awareness of digital tools, including the underlying algorithms, economic interests, and power dynamics that shape online content (Nichols & Garcia, 2022). This awareness extends to understanding how personal identifications and consumption patterns on SM platforms influence the content teachers encounter and, consequently, what they might bring into their classrooms. Conscious and critical reflection, as facilitated through structured exercises like our think-aloud, can serve as an instructional tool to compel teachers to think critically about SM and the digital texts they encounter. For instance, in future versions of our SM think aloud, we plan to ask participants more targeted prompts related to algorithmic literacy, including, “To what degree were you aware of or thinking about how the platform's algorithm influenced the content you read-viewed?”

Teacher education should equip preservice and in-service educators to actively consider the corporate interests and civic values embedded within the platforms they might use for instruction, particularly how algorithms may impact students' opportunities to learn. As Mirra, Coffey et al. (2018) asserted, “Of course this does not mean that all teachers across every subject area are not transmitting messages about democratic life to their students — only that they have not been encouraged to actively consider the civic values and practices they are enacting in their classrooms” (p. 424).

### **SM as a Resource for ELA and Civic Instruction**

While there is much to learn, the teachers in our study demonstrated SM can be a generative space for ELA and civic engagement. It offers an immediate and relevant source of contemporary multimodal texts that teachers may traditionally overlook due to preconceived relationships to and notions about SM and its instructional value. By encouraging teachers to critically mine SM feeds, this approach can inspire English teachers' civic dreaming, leading to a collection of civically engaged ELA teaching resources. It moves toward cultivating critical algorithmic literacy, as conceptualized by Burriss and Leander (2024), by preparing teachers to critically evaluate where and how civics manifests in their feeds and how their own experiences and orientations influence their perception of civic engagement.

### **Conclusion**

Ultimately, this study's instructional implications highlight a significant need for teacher education programs to explicitly integrate the development of critical SM literacy skills. Future educators must be prepared to conceptualize and address nuanced definitions of local and entanglements of big *P* and little *p* politics; reconcile the entanglement of their professional and personal uses of digital platforms; and strategically leverage SM as a legitimate, text-rich, and civically engaging instructional tool. Providing explicit education in these areas will empower teachers to

navigate the complexities of the digital landscape, fostering a generation of critically aware and civically engaged students.

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## **Appendix A**

### **SM Think-Aloud Protocols**

#### **Instructions Given to In-Person PSTs**

1. You will be given a prompt (A or B) and a partner (who has the opposite prompt)
2. You will spend ~10 minutes in SM engaging with the prompt
3. You should “think aloud” while you are engaging
4. You will “map” your movements as well; write instructional ideas on the right and topically related digital connections on the left
5. Your partner will take notes on your thoughts and process
  - Your partner will prompt you to think aloud if/as needed: “What are you thinking now?”
  - You will then switch roles with your partner and repeat
  - You will participate in a whole class debrief on your experiences

#### **Instructions Given to Online ISTs**

1. You will self-select a prompt (A or B)
2. You will screen record yourself spending ~10 minutes in SM engaging with the prompt
3. You should “think aloud” while you are engaging
4. You will “map” your movements as well; write instructional ideas on the right and topically-related digital connections on the left
5. You will then upload your video and map to a designated Canvas assignment
6. You will reflect on your experience in a Flip topic, posting your own video response and replying to two others’ videos

**Prompt A:** Imagine you are working to plan instruction for your \_\_\_\_ - grade students related to standards that focus on students conducting research about a community or broader social issue and using digital tools to find and share information. To help you conceptualize and frame the nature and goals of the inquiries your students will begin, you turn to your SM feeds to help you generate ideas and learn of contemporary topics that may be compelling to your students. Please select the SM platform(s) that you are most likely to use and read/view your feed as you would given the above context. As you read/view your feed, please stop often to talk aloud and map about your thinking, reactions, ideas, plans, other resources,

connections to practice, and relationships to your ideas of civic engagement for your students.

**Prompt B:** Imagine your \_\_\_\_ - grade students have been asking you a lot lately about local/state politics. They have seen headlines and heard adults talk of possible legislation and policy changes that may have direct impacts on what they can study, how they can speak, and how they can behave in school. You want to plan some in-class learning experiences for your students that will help them know the issues that concern them more deeply and encourage them to take action in some form to participate in their local democratic processes. Please select the SM platform(s) that you are most likely to use and read/view your feed as you would given the above context. As you read/view your feed, please stop often to talk aloud and map about your thinking, reactions, ideas, plans, other resources, connections to practice, and relationships to your ideas of civic engagement for your students.

**Post-Think-Aloud Reflection Prompts:**

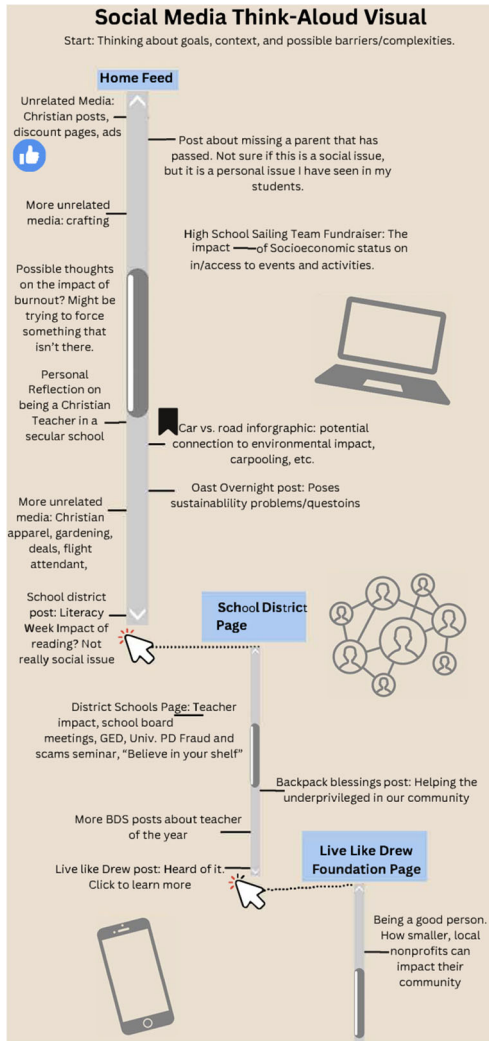
- How did you find yourself connecting with other educators across online and school settings?
- How are you conceptualizing digital civic engagement as a result of/in relation to this exercise today? How do our digital practices and perceptions impact our teaching?
- What are next steps with our maps around the question of what it means to be a civically engaged educator, especially in the current political climate?
- How did this think-aloud experience make you feel about being a teacher? Why? Will it impact your classroom practices; how and why or why not?
- How do you believe that your SM engagement contributes to how you understand and practice civic engagement both in and out of the classroom?
- How was the process a useful scaffold for thinking about SM, civic engagement, and teaching multiliteracies? What about the experience may be improved or revised?
- What value do you see in this exercise for your ELA teacher preparation and/or professional development? How might you revise it?

**Data Sources:** Video recordings of individual online ISTs' and whole class in-person PSTs' think-alouds with SM, each individual participant's SM engagement maps (e.g., see Appendix B) with in-person partners' notes for PSTs during the in-person think-aloud, and Flip video responses to the reflection prompts for IST who completed the activity fully online.

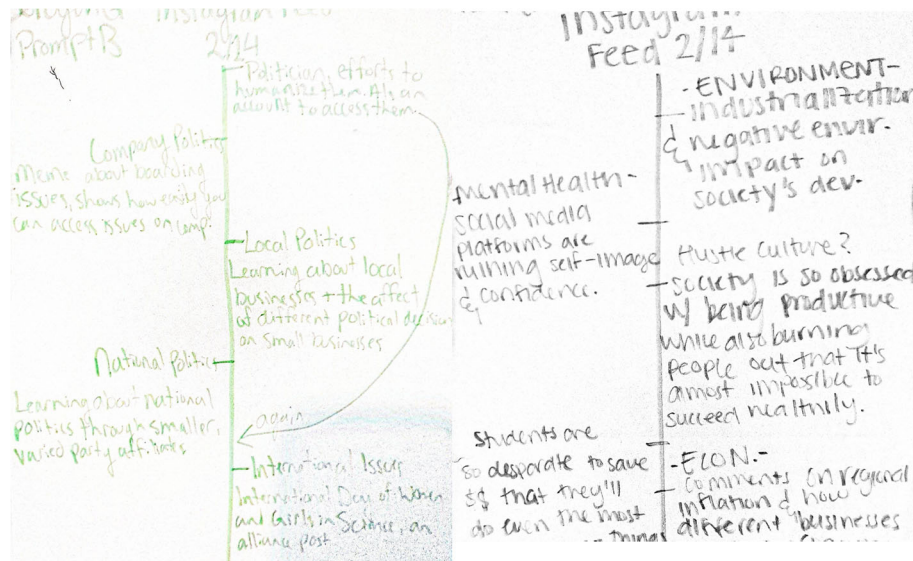
# Appendix B

## PSTs' Think-Aloud Maps and Partner Notes and ISTs' Think-Aloud Maps

### *Teresa's Think Aloud Map*



Tracy and Brittany's Think Aloud Maps and Partner's Notes



- 1st post Joe Biden
  - National politics, can comment on it and interact with POTUS while seeing an inside of their life and who they are, harped on the personal aspect of the social account, effort to humanize them
- State politics and capitalism
  - Communicating with an airline over seating issues and how passengers are divided, how easily accessible issues with different corporations are in an online sphere
- Lots of marketing based posts, animal posts
- Local politics
  - Local restraint's post engaging the community in local economics and organizations, providing audience with a way to boost the city's economy and support small businesses, teaching them the impact of different political decisions on small and privately owned businesses
- National politics, valentines from politicians made by a small organization
  - Engages the audience in a creative and funny way, promotes learning about national politics through a smaller political organization, hooks the scroller in with colors and funny tag lines, targeting Gen Z
- Posts target Gen Z interests more than bigger societal issues = likely bc of algorithm
- Obama valentines day post for Michelle
  - Circles back to national politics while involving voters and followers in their everyday lives
  - From there, Michelle's page promotes International Day of Women and Girls in Science and Girls in STEM to show efforts to better society and get involved in national organizations

Saw a meme about industrialization. Could use this for a meme activity or lesson on industrialization and the negative effects of it on earth.

Social media ruining self-perception, even sites that are supposed to be used for professional gain like LinkedIn.

Procrastination/society's need to be productive 24/7 meme, burnout in the classroom.

Not a lot of social action posts. Mainly about restaurants, friends, and peers posting.

FSU student community, student desperation for doing something for free.

"How much does Chex Mix cost at every airport?" learning about inflation, tracking data, etc

Casual misogyny everywhere, mocking powerful women in a normalized way.

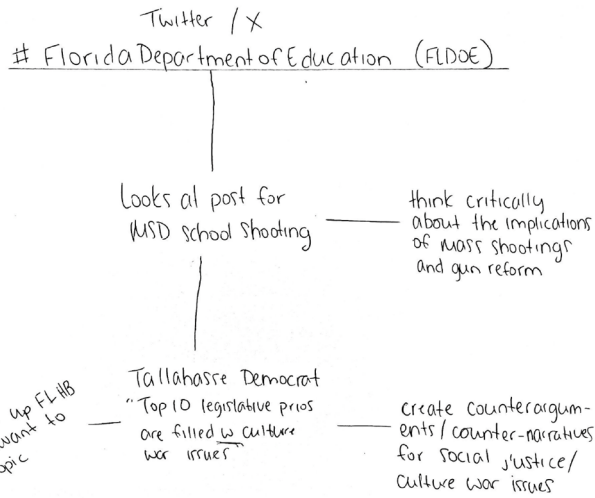
More feminism, how men are raised allowed to misbehave with excuses given, women are raised to be perfect but not "above" men. "Boys will be boys."

Environmental issues ad, "save the manatee." Environmentalism issues.

Capitalism and how workers feel overwhelmed/overworked and have no desire to pour into their company that mistreats them.

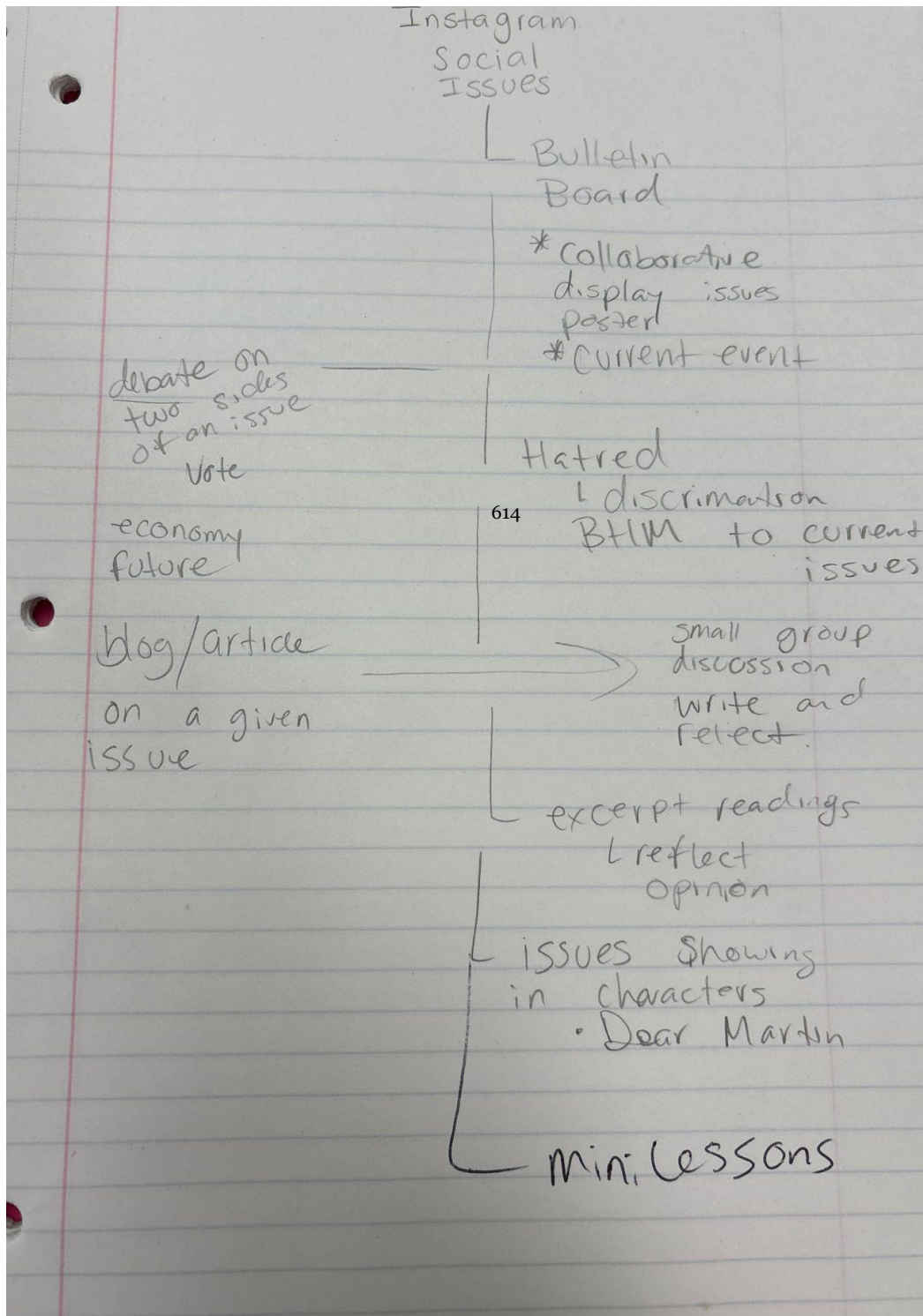
# Tom's Think Aloud Map and Partner Notes

## Think Aloud Prompt B



- making notes for PROMPT B
- He opened up X (Twitter) and searched #FLDOE and clicked on the hashtags
    - ◆ scrolling, scrolling, no politics yet, still scrolling...
    - ◆ ...still scrolling....
  - He does not find anything relevant and leaves the hashtag to go specifically to the FLDOE X account
    - ◆ Finds a post about mourning the MSD shooting, but he decided it was not relevant to local/state politics because no action was taken
  - Scrolling, scrolling... nothing relevant...
  - The FLDOE reposted a Ron Desantis tweet about honoring the Jewish deaths from the Holocaust and antisemitism
    - ◆ He starts reading the thread... finding opposing perspectives... nothing is relevant to local/state politics (only relevant if legislation is being enacted actively)
  - Goes back to searching → Googles FL House Bills → Goes back to X
  - Scrolling the home feed... goes back to searching for the Tallahassee Democrat page
  - He is seeing post about the top 10 legislative priorities being filled with "culture war" issues

Mina's Think Aloud Map



*Layla's Think Aloud Map*

Annotation of connections to a non-classical part of the "real" or virtual world	Annotation of classroom instructional connections
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**Start on Youtube**







Introduce state government structure and representatives	Students can fill out a graphic organizer as they learn about the North Carolina government structure and personnel
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**Instagram**

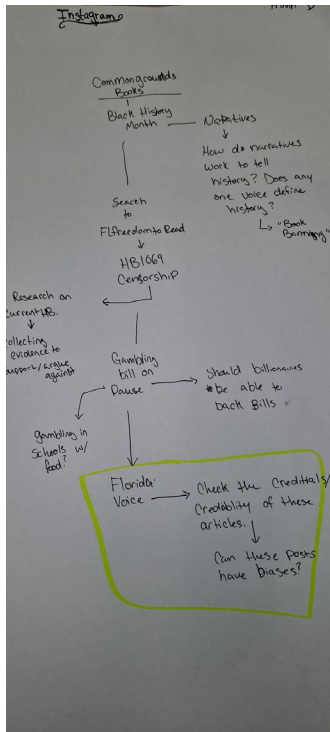
State Representative SM Pages  School District SM Page	<p>Researching a state representative. Many local politicians have SM platforms where they discuss local/state politics in real time. I could provide students with various representatives that serve in different sectors of the government and provide varying political affiliations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Students can write letters to local representatives, including the school board.</li></ul> <p>Next, I opened our school district's Instagram page. On this page was a post from January 11, where the Vice President of the United States visited our school district to discuss recent gun violence with student government. This connection to their school district would make the lesson meaningful and impactful.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Our classroom can model our own student government where students address concerns they have with school policies and provide suggestions for change.</li></ul>
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Shawna's Think Aloud Map

Classroom	Personal
<p>Start at TikTok</p>	
<p>Start with the purpose of looking for information about displaying the Pride Flag in my classroom and to find out about the Civics standard about slave benefiting from slavery</p> <p style="text-align: center;"></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Scroll</p>	
<p>Open to Brandt Robinson Video</p> <p>*New information to me- a bill is on the floor to ban the display of the Pride flag in the classroom (What about inclusion? )</p> <p>*Tie to classroom- write letters to our local legislators and look up the bill</p> <p style="text-align: center;"></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Scroll</p>	<p>*Personal tie- my daughter is the president of the Pride Club at school and I wonder how this will impact their service. These kids deal with suicidal ideation at an alarming rate and just want to have belonging.</p>
	<p>Scroll to feed but don't want to get distracted so I leave feed to saved videos to find more information</p> <p style="text-align: center;"></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Scroll</p>
<p></p> <p>Stop on the video about the standard that slavery benefits slaves</p> <p>*Tie to classroom- students could research slavery at the time and how it coincides with the writing of the constitution which we are reading about</p>	<p>* Personal thoughts: we are living in a dystopian society and it is scary</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Scroll</p> <p>Scroll to CNN video about slavery standard</p>	

<p>*Tie to classroom- could tie in with bills and amendments that increase or decrease inclusion  Rhetoric/diction/syntax/connotation- the words we use matter, comparing and contrasting the actual standard to what the governor said</p>	
	 <p>Scroll  Leave video to scroll  Video about Florida bills- most are not applicable to the task but interesting to me personally</p>
 <p>Scroll  Scroll to find more- (What I said was inaudible- they seem to have adapted to the name rule and have filled out the parental permission slips.)</p>	
  <p>Scroll and  Scroll to Civic Engagement video- go to the page and find they don't have much- Could we use YouTube to find more?</p>	
  <p>Scroll and  Scroll to another civic discourse video  *Tie to classroom- speaking, writing letters</p>	

Reese's Think Aloud Map and Partner's Notes



Prompt B  
 Instagram

BookGram

- Teaching info
- Books
- State Laws

NCTEGram

- Frederick douglas
- Birthday
- Not use

Commonground books

- Queen book store in tallahassee
- Go to page
- Looking at pictures in zoomed out mode to see if theres anything that sticks out
- Black History Month Post
  - State politics in florida
  - books by Black authors are being banned in FL
  - Looking at the book list
    - Narratives & history & voices
    - Book banning

Into Search bar  
 Looking for "Florida Freedom to Read Project" (account)

- HB1069 Censorship
  - Research on current house bills
    - Collecting evidence to support or go against the bill
    - How will it impact their everyday life

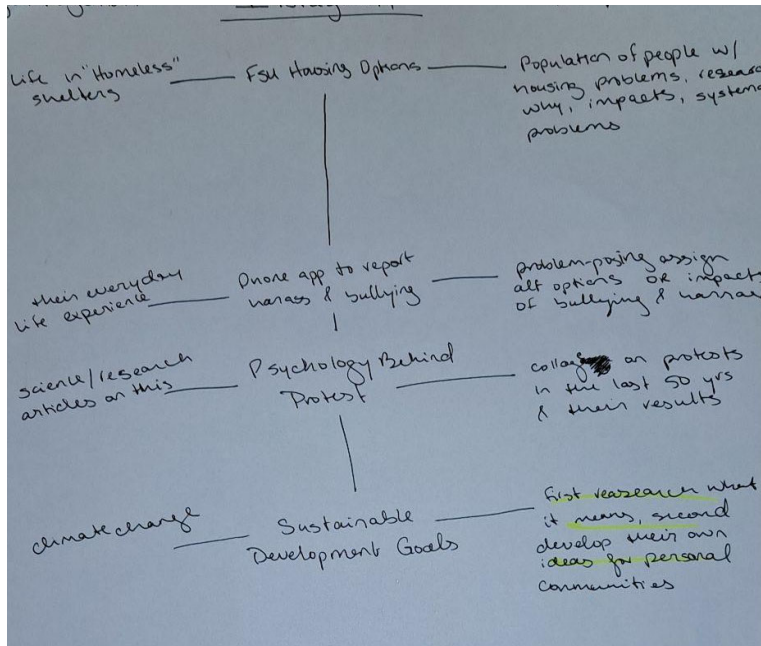
Into Search bar  
 "Florida House Bills"

- FL gambling legislature put gambling legislature on pause thanks to billionaire-led pushback
  - Conversation on billionaire influence on bills
  - Gambling with food

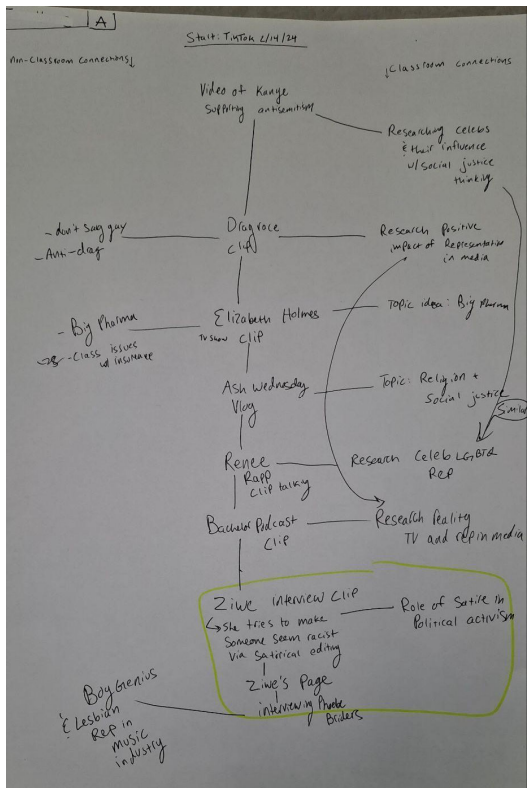
Into search bar  
 "Florida legislation"

- FL Voice News (account) sticks out as having a lot of different articles
  - Students would pick an article on the instagram site and have to check it's credibility through research

Mandy's Think Aloud Map

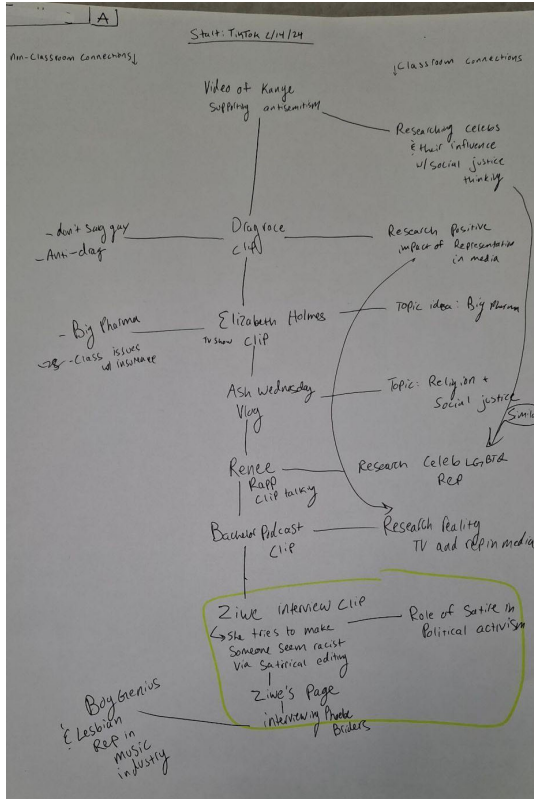


# Mary's Think Aloud Map and Partner Notes



- TikTok**  
 - Scrolling to find political stuff
- st - Abbott Elementary vid**  
 • Title I, talks about civil issues, creating dialogues  
 ↳ Show to students
- Search "legislation change"  
**st - Democrat "We're democrats"**  
 • Have students emulate the format to talk about Florida  
 - Banned books
- st - UK Immigration change**  
 • Convo about policies  
 • Relating to other countries  
 • Expectations vs. Reality
- st - Driving legislation for Neurodivergent ppl (Australia)**  
 • brother is autistic and can drive  
 ↳ talk about student experiences
- st - workers rights Labor Union (Minnesota)**  
 • "opposite of Florida"

Ivan's Think Aloud Map and Partner's Notes



Social media - Think Aloud

IAN TITOK - PROMPT

- ↳ open app
- ↳ 1st post Kanye West supporting antisemitism
  - ↳ thinks out loud about celeb influence and role/opinion w/ social justice
- ↳ skip post that are unrelated
- ↳ drag race post of interest
  - ↳ could prompt discussion of anti-LGBTQ vs. positive LGBTQ representative media
  - ↳ "don't say gay" "anti drag"
- ↳ more scrolling/unrelated
- ↳ more drag
- ↳ sees clip from show about meranos
  - ↳ checks comments for her name
  - ↳ finds Elizabeth Holmes
  - ↳ thinks about big pharma and classism in medical situations
- ↳ more unrelated scrolling
- ↳ valentines/ash wednesday post
  - ↳ listens to brief religious message
- ↳ more scrolling
- ↳ Renee Rap celeb post
  - ↳ thinks about how she's a public LGBTQ rep, relates this to previous posts
- ↳ scrolling unrelated to broad issues
- ↳ bachelorette post
  - ↳ talks about how reality TV ignores social justice

- ↳ more scrolling
- ↳ Ziwe Political Satire - what's the influence?
  - ↳ tries to make queers look conceivable
  - ↳ is this activism
  - ↳ go to ziwe page, scroll
  - ↳ meobe bridger intv
  - ↳ byzantines → Lesb rep

### Appendix C Teachers' Navigation of SM Spaces in Response to Their Chosen Think-Aloud Prompt

Name[a]	IST or PST	Platforms Used	Movements Y/N	Search or Scroll
Shawna	IST	TikTok	N	Search: pride trans flag banning; civic standard about slaves benefiting from slavery
Julianna	IST	Facebook	N	Search: "podcast"
Isaac	IST	Non-SM (Teachers Pay Teachers)	N	Search: Fahrenheit 451
Rita	IST	Facebook and YouTube	Y	Search: "vaccinations"
Teresa	IST	Facebook	N	Scroll
Fiona	IST	Instagram	N	Search: "community leaders in [home city]"
Mina	IST	Instagram	N	Search "social issues" then scroll
Layla	IST	YouTube and Instagram	Y	Search: name of state representative
Mary	PST	Tik Tok	N	Scroll; Search: "Legislation changes"
Jessica	PST	Pinterest	N	Scroll
Erica	PST	Tik Tok	N	Scroll
Amy	PST	Facebook	N	Search: "[City] Teachers FB group; Scroll
Elizabeth	PST	Tik Tok	N	Scroll then search for additional posts about girls using makeup for "blackface"; Search "news"
Andrea	PST	Instagram	N	Search: "school legislation [state]"
Raquel	PST	Tik Tok	N	Search: "[state] bills students"
Helen	PST	Tik Tok	N	Scroll then search: "consumerism" and "overconsumption"
Jamie	PST	Tik Tok	N	Scroll

<b>Name[a]</b>	<b>IST or PST</b>	<b>Platforms Used</b>	<b>Movements Y/N</b>	<b>Search or Scroll</b>
Lan	PST	Twitter/X, Facebook	Yes	Scroll
Tracy	PST	Instagram	N	Scroll
Lisa	PST	Instagram	N	Search: “[state]”, “[state]government”, “[Governor’s name]” then scrolls; “[City name]”,
Ivan	PST	Tik Tok	N	Scroll “For You” page
Brittany	PST	Instagram	N	Scroll
Reese	PST	Instagram	N	Scroll then search “[State] House Bills” and “[State] legislation”
Tom	PST	Twitter/X; Google; Internet	Y	Search #[state]DOE; Search “[state]DOE; “[state]House bills”; Search “[City Newspaper]”
Arianna	PST	Instagram	N	Scroll Explore page; Search “social issues” then scrolled
Mandy	PST	Instagram	N	Search: “social issues in [city],” “community”; scroll following searches
[a] All teachers’ names are pseudonyms				