

## The TikTok Performances of Secondary ELA Teachers

Lauren May<sup>1</sup> |  | [laurenapmay@gmail.com](mailto:laurenapmay@gmail.com)

Longwood University, Department of English and Modern Languages, Farmville, Virginia, USA

Heather Wright |  | [necem@gazi.edu.tr](mailto:necem@gazi.edu.tr)

Gardner-Webb University, Department of English Language and Literature, Boiling Springs, North Carolina, USA

### Abstract

This paper describes a study on popular TikTok video content generated by secondary English Language Arts (ELA) teachers. The purpose of this study was to determine what TikTok content is out there and potentially influencing aspiring teachers. Thus, the research question asks: What information is being dispersed through TikTok, specifically from secondary ELA teachers? We examined the TikTok videos through the framework of Goffman's (1956) performances. The top 20 most-liked videos on 50 public secondary ELA teacher TikTok accounts were collected via three approaches and examined through a platform content analysis. A total of 1,000 videos were coded into one of six categories: re-enactments, teacher tips, non-teacher related, trends, responding to comments/audience, and school-related health. The findings show that re-enactments were the largest category of videos (n=369) while school-related health videos were the smallest category (n=74). After analysis, it was clear that TikToks serve as performances that provide fronts, dramatic realizations, and idealizations for viewers and their understanding of the ELA teaching profession. A limitation of this study was that this was a public and variable data set. Since specific videos were chosen through a process of like counts, many potentially rich videos were not included in the study due to varying like counts or time of being posted. In response to the research question, the content of secondary ELA TikTok teacher videos is detailed within this study. If used by teacher educators, these TikToks could support the education of teacher candidates as aspiring ELA teachers.

**Keywords:** TikTok, Secondary ELA teacher, Performances, Re-enactment

### Citation

May, L. & Wright, H. (2025). The TikTok performances of secondary ELA teachers. *International Journal of Contemporary Educational Research*, 12(4), 327-337. <https://doi.org/10.52380/ijcer.2025.12.4.874>

Received	22.09.2025
Accepted	12.12.2025
Publication	24.12.2025
Peer-Review	Double anonymized - Double Blind
Ethical Statement	This article is the revised and developed version of the unpublished conference presentation entitled "Trending in the classroom", orally delivered at the American Reading Forum Annual Conference. This study is IRB approved and exempt under 45 CFR 46.104(d)(2)(ii). Only publicly available data was used in this study. To minimize harm, all accounts were given pseudonyms.
Plagiarism Checks	Yes - iThenticate
Conflicts of Interest	The author(s) has no conflict of interest to declare.
Complaints	<a href="mailto:editor@ijcer.net">editor@ijcer.net</a>
Grant Support	The author(s) acknowledge that they received no external funding in support of this research.
Copyright & License	Authors publishing with the journal retain the copyright to their work licensed under the CC BY-NC 4.0.

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding Author

## Introduction

The field of education retains an apprenticeship model, where aspiring teachers model their pedagogy and practices in response to the teachers they experienced as students (Lortie, 1975). However, a social media platform has added to this tradition by allowing anyone to view and consider thousands of teacher voices, perspectives, classrooms, and scenarios. TikTok is an increasingly popular social media platform that gained prominence during the Covid-19 pandemic (Feldcamp, 2021). Established by ByteDance as Douyin in 2016, the app's usage, now known as TikTok, grew rapidly in the following years (Feldcamp, 2021; Lorenz, 2020). In March 2019, the application boasted 1 billion downloads and 500 million users (Herman, 2019). In April 2020, the application's profile rose to two billion downloads, helped by its algorithmic "For You" model and "addictive" quality (Feldcamp, 2021; Herman, 2019; Lorenz, 2020). Consequently, numerous individuals utilizing the TikTok platform have "gone viral" or risen to fame due to their video content being available to other profiles worldwide (Herman, 2019). For teachers who moved to online learning as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, TikTok was one way to stay connected with peers, students, and the larger education community. Today, the "Teacher Tok" community continues to thrive by posting videos that address various topics of interest, humor, and concern. As of November 2025, TikTok has 1.59 billion monthly active users worldwide (Singh, 2025) and is the second most downloaded app in the world (Slotta, 2025).

With the continual increase in users and downloads, many researchers have studied different aspects of the platform and its influence. One study used critical inquiry to examine TikTok performances as they related to gender identity (Alvermann et al., 2024) while another study looked at TikTok trends by students as a way to understand institutional discourses of schooling (Wright, 2021). Evans and Hays (2025) examined undergraduate and graduate students' (n=75) feelings about TikTok, with the majority claiming that they liked having assignments utilizing TikTok(s) in their coursework. In thinking specifically about teachers and TikTok, there has been a growing number of studies. Vizcaíno-Verdú and Abidin (2023) analyzed the content of twelve TikTok teacher profiles through audio-visual observations over the course of one month, and their findings suggested that teacher behaviors on TikTok were characteristic of micro-celebrities. Meanwhile, Jerasa and Ura (2025) examined what could be learned from 100 TikTok videos concerning classroom management and found that most profiles opted to create short bursts of helpful content related to management in some form. More research continues to be developed, and not all existing studies are expounded upon here. However, we do know there is a gap in the literature on TikTok content across a large sample size.

Across the TikTok platform, the affordances and constraints of the current reality of education are accessible and nuanced. As teacher educators, we were intrigued when several teacher candidates brought TikTok videos and topics into teacher education course discussions. As researchers, we were driven to conduct this study that could help us better understand the content being dispersed for secondary English Language Arts (ELA) teachers on this social media platform. With TikTok having over one billion monthly active users worldwide (Singh, 2025; Slotta, 2025), it is important for us, as teacher educators, to be aware of the TeacherTok content out for public display. Specifically, as ELA teacher educators, we sought to contribute to the literature by using the specific ELA subject area to focus the research and determine what content was out there for aspiring ELA teachers. Thus, our research question asked: What information is being dispersed through TikTok, specifically from secondary ELA teachers?

## Framework

When considering each TikTok and TikTok profile, we were drawn to Goffman (1956). "Performance," in Goffman's (1956) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, refers to "all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers" (p. 13). We used this lens while examining each TikTok to view it as a performance by the individual with potential influential power. For this reason, we only examined secondary ELA teacher TikTok profiles with more than 10,000 followers. Regarding TikToks as performances, we considered how they could foster various impressions and bridge appearances of the teaching profession with reality.

Goffman (1956) explains how performances involve "fronts" (p. 13), which are expressive conditions used by the performer. There are different aspects of what a front can involve; for TikToks, we focused on the setting and the personal front. The setting involves "furniture, decor, physical lay-out, and other background items which supply the scenery and stage props for the space" (Goffman, 1956, p. 13). For TikTok performances, this was often the classroom background where the individual was creating content. The personal front involves "what we most

intimately identify with the performer himself and that we naturally expect will follow the performer wherever he goes” (Goffman, 1956, p. 14). The personal front involves physical characteristics of appearance as well as manner, such as the voice, tone, or emotion.

Goffman (1956) also discusses “dramatic realizations” within performances: “While in the presence of others, the individual typically infuses his activity with signs which dramatically highlight and portray confirmatory facts that might otherwise remain unapparent or obscure” (p. 20). Often this will involve somehow “making invisible costs visible” (Goffman, 1956, p. 21) so that the true worth and value of something can be known. Dramatic realizations are performed with the purpose of showing viewers the significance of the activity or understanding. Thus, in performances, certain aspects can be highlighted to reinforce an idea, truth, or belief.

Performances can also be idealized views of situations (Goffman, 1956). Performances can reinforce societal values or the need for societal change. The idealization of performances can also include six characteristics (Goffman, 1956): (1) there is often some hidden element of the performance that is incompatible with outsider viewers understandings; (2) the impression of infallibility is powerful so mistakes are typically concealed; (3) oftentimes only the end product is revealed, concealing the amount of time needed for completion whether minuscule or significant; (4) any dirty work involved with a performance tends to be hidden in order to highlight the pleasant aspects of a performance; (5) invisible ideals are often sacrificed for the betterment of the visible ideals; and (6) performers are qualified and accurately performing their role within the activity. One or more of these idealization characteristics may be present within a performance, and individuals may address them directly or indirectly.

## Method

### Methodology & Data Sources

To complete the content analysis, we reviewed 50 public secondary ELA teacher TikTok profiles to determine if they met our criteria: (1) secondary teacher, (2) ELA teacher, and (3) at least 10,000 followers. The 10,000 plus followers was part of our inclusion criteria because we wanted to explore teachers and content with the potential for a wide range of influence over viewers. Additionally, the TikTok platform included the option to search and filter results by the number of followers of a user’s profile. Another reason we chose 10,000 as a threshold was because one of the filter options was “10K-100K.” We did not include profiles of individuals who: used TikTok for the purposes of teaching grammar to viewers, taught specifically for English Learners, left the field of teaching more than two years ago, or had a generic profile with no ELA evidence.

We began examining the TikTok platform in the Fall of 2023 to determine what videos existed, what teacher creators were out there, and what types of videos were being put on the platform. During this time, we considered the parameters of our study and what inclusion and exclusion criteria would best shape our study. To do this, we both created new TikTok profiles specifically for the purpose of conducting the study. In this way, algorithms from any previous accounts could not contribute to videos presented on the (FYP). We officially collected and finalized the 1,000 videos between the dates of December 2023 and February 2024. All videos analyzed in this study were posted on or before December 31, 2023.

Our methods included three approaches of sorting and organizing teacher profiles (Table 1). In the first approach, we used search terms related to secondary ELA teachers, searched under TikTok’s “Users,” then filtered based on number of followers; examples of approach one include: English teacher, middle school English teacher, ELA teacher, literature teacher, and high school English teacher. Using these search terms, 12 profiles met our criteria. In the second approach, we sorted profiles using hashtags such as: #teachersoftiktok, #secondaryelateacher, #englishteachersoftiktok, #teachertok, and #teacher. Using these hashtags, 23 profiles met our criteria. The third approach was a general search based on exploring profiles we might have missed in the first two approaches. Using our individualized FYPs that serve as the TikTok home screen and use an algorithm to show videos it thinks the user will enjoy, 15 profiles met our criteria. Together, approaches one and two provided the most profiles to examine and serve as reproducible data; the third approach provided profiles that may have been missed based on search terms and hashtags but these may not be reproducible due to TikTok algorithms for FYPs.

To determine if a profile met our criteria, we initially read the account biography information to see if any inclusion criteria was easily visible. Then, we viewed multiple videos on the account to see if ELA teacher content was displayed or consistent. There were several accounts that had ELA content, but the creators never definitively said

they were secondary ELA teachers; we did not use those profiles. Definitive criteria was required for inclusion within this study.

Table 1. Approaches to searching and organizing TikTok videos

<b>Approach 1</b>		
Search Terms	>100k followers that meet criteria	10k-100k followers that meet criteria
“English Teacher” → Users	1/43	2/103
“ELA Teacher” → Users	0/7	1/25
“Literature Teacher” → Users	2/9	0/8
“High school English teacher” → Users	2/35	3/114
“Middle school English teacher” → Users	1/35	1/109
<b>Total profiles found</b>	<b>6/129</b>	<b>7/359</b>
<b>Approach 2</b>		
Search Terms	>100k followers that meet criteria	10k-100k followers that meet criteria
#englishteachersoftiktok	0	3
#TeachersOfTikTok	7	7
#teachertok	0	2
#teacher	0	1
#secondaryelateacher	0	2
<b>Total profiles found</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Approach 3</b>		
Search Terms	>100k followers that meet criteria	10k-100k followers that meet criteria
FYP - For You Page	5	10
<b>Total profiles found</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Total profiles found across three veins</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>32</b>

To begin the analysis phase, we sorted each profile by “Popular” videos, which is based on a video’s like count. This organized every video on a profile in order from most-liked to least-liked. We sorted each profile’s top 20 most-liked videos into categories: re-enactments, trends, teacher tips, school-related health, responding to comments/audience, and non-teacher-related (Table2). The re-enactment category included videos that showed the teacher re-creating educational exchanges and interactions. The teacher tips category included any advice the teacher provided and often involved tips for classroom décor or management. The trend category encompassed videos that used popular sounds or subject matter within a specific time period on TikTok. The school-related health category included videos that addressed the physical or mental health of teachers or students. The responding to comments/audience category was used when the video directly responded to a comment or individual question from a previous video. Lastly, the non-teacher-related topic category included videos that had nothing to do with teachers, students, or education but were still in the top 20 most-liked videos. Sometimes boundaries between categories were discussed in that some videos could have fit into more than one category. When this occurred, the researchers looked at the assumed purpose of the video for categorical organization. Organizing 50 ELA teacher profiles’ top 20 most-liked videos resulted in a public data set of 1,000 TikTok videos.

Table 2. Codebook

Category	Definition
Re-enactments	Videos that showed a re-creation of a school or an educational exchange or interaction.
Teacher tips	Videos that provided advice related to teaching or educational experiences.
Non-teacher related	Videos on teacher profiles that had nothing to do with teaching or educational experiences.

Trends	Videos about teaching or educational experiences that used popular sounds or subject matter within a specific time period where those things were popularized.
Responding to comments/audience	Videos about teaching or educational experiences that directly responded to a comment or question from a previous video or message.
School-related health	Videos that addressed the physical or mental health of teachers or students.

Striving for objective reliability and validity (Kirk & Miller, 1986) with a variable public data set, we each coded and analyzed 50% of the profiles. Upon completion, we each reviewed the other 50% to check for discrepancies and ensure coding categories were agreed upon. 100% of individual coding was completed prior to any discussion. Of the 1,000 videos to code, there were only fifty-two discrepancies between the two researchers, resulting in Krippendorff's  $\alpha = .933$ . A discrepancy constituted when one coded a video as one category and the other coded it as another. Nuances between the six categories sometimes overlapped; for example, a trend video could also involve a re-enactment. Each discrepancy was verbally discussed to determine which category was overall best represented in that video. To maintain the simplicity and validity of the dataset, one video was never double coded. Thus, 1,000 videos across 50 public secondary ELA teacher TikTok profiles were analyzed for content to examine what information is being disseminated through TikTok. After coding and analyzing all profiles and videos, we wrote a brief biography of each teacher and the connotations presented across the profile in consideration of how TikTok users might feel or be influenced by the information presented. These writings were bridled (Vagle, 2009) as we considered how our lived experiences may have influenced these understood biographies and connotations.

All research was conducted in accordance with legal and ethical standards and falls under the category of studies for which ethics approval is not required.

## Results and Discussion

Of the 1,000 TikToks analyzed, 369 were coded as re-enactments (36.9%), 177 were coded as teacher tips (17.7%), 126 were coded as trends (12.6%), 74 were coded as health (7.4%), 112 were coded as responding to comments/audience (11.2%), and 142 were coded as non-teacher-related topics (14.2%) (Table 3). This information directly responds to the research question: What information is being dispersed through TikTok, specifically from secondary ELA teachers? Various perspectives of the secondary ELA teaching profession were displayed through these videos. While this is public data, we also understand that the “public/private divide online is blurred” (Barber & Fecho, 2024, p. 6). Additionally, we acknowledge that limiting each teacher’s profile to their twenty most-liked videos has the potential to decontextualize that teacher and impact how others perceive them; therefore, we have used pseudonyms to protect the TikTok teachers’ identities. In the following subsections, the categories are described in more detail, and specific examples are analyzed.

Table 3. Categories of TikToks

Category	N	Percentage
Re-enactments	369	36.9
Teacher tips	177	17.7
Non-teacher related	142	14.2
Trends	126	12.6
Responding to comments/audience	112	11.2
School-related health	74	7.4
Total	1000	100

### Re-enactments

The re-enactment videos were the most common category published by ELA teachers of TikTok making up 36.9% of the 1,000 TikTok videos analyzed in this study. The category included videos that showed the teacher re-enacting specific exchanges and interactions within educational situations. These videos often depicted humor but could also demonstrate frustration, sympathy, relief, or other emotions. For example, TeacherA on TikTok acted like he took a student’s toy away in class. TeacherA demonstrated nonchalant facial features while the student (not shown on camera) asked for it back. Sometimes, students’ faces or voices were included in these videos to

contribute to the re-enactment. Most teachers, however, chose to act as both the teacher and the student(s), presumably to avoid publicly displaying students on social media.

We examined the re-enactment videos and analyzed them based on the performances (Goffman, 1956) they depicted. In TeacherB's ninth most liked TikTok, the teacher is "performing" as both a teacher and an administrator. The text on the screen says, "What if teachers only worked their contracted hours?" The video includes a conversation where an administrator is asking why the teacher has not submitted lesson plans. TeacherB responds, "because I had to cover a class every day during my planning period, so I didn't have time." The conversation continues while the teacher attempts to explain that she didn't have time and, therefore, did not complete the work. To presumably ensure viewers are not scared away from the profession or encouraged to comment on their displeasure, TeacherB included a note on the video that says, "this is purely satire." Regarding the performance's front, TeacherB provides a classroom setting behind both the teacher and the administrator. Physically, TeacherB wears glasses when she is performing as the administrator, but removes the glasses when performing as the teacher. This TikTok is providing a dramatic realization of the teaching career that most teachers work more than their contracted hours. The TikTok highlights an aspect of the teaching profession that may often "remain unapparent or obscure" (Goffman, 1956, p. 20) to individuals outside the education field. At the same time, it represents the false idealization that one could just work contracted hours, seemingly promoting the need for change with contract hours, expectations, or administration. This information may not be known or understood by individuals not knowledgeable about the teaching profession; so, TeacherB is seemingly attempting to demonstrate this need for change in a non-hostile manner.

The re-enactment videos provided mostly dramatic realizations with classroom focused fronts that provide viewers with information and examples related to the field of education. These types of videos were often positive or humorous in their depictions. Re-enactment videos would be an interesting choice for teacher educators to implement within their classrooms to provide discussion points for how teachers, students, and administrators act in various situations.

### **Teacher tips**

The second most common category was teacher tips, which made up 17.7% of the 1,000 TikToks analyzed. An example of this category is when TeacherC provided numerous videos on "Things I do with my seniors that most people wouldn't think of." These videos involved her talking to the camera and offering ideas for activities that engage 12<sup>th</sup> grade English students. She described how she still gives them candy for answering questions, plays Simon Says when they feel sleepy, and draws hangman when they learn new vocabulary. Videos in the Teacher Tips category showed thoughts, ideas, and suggestions for improving the teaching experience; often, this involved current teachers offering advice to new or aspiring teachers.

In TeacherD's second most-liked TikTok, she silently points out "Things I refuse to do as a teacher." The video uses a dancing sound bit while she points to the things she refuses to do. Each thing is displayed as text on the screen when she points in that direction. The things TeacherD lists are: "Not accept work that is late, ban food in class, demand respect and not give it, raise my voice (just not my style), and assign projects over a break." The video ends after TeacherD points to the middle block text which reads, "Students are humans too and deserve the same amount of grace/respect we as adults still need." The front of this video involves a classroom setting in front of which TeacherD stands. She wears a teacher outfit during the performance while standing and dancing in a confident manner while listing the things she refuses to do. In this way, she is providing a dramatic realization that highlights her specific beliefs regarding things that should not be done in the classroom. Goffman (1956) describes how performances can either be seen as reinforcing societal values or calling for societal change. In this TikTok, TeacherD is highlighting her understanding that students are humans too and should be treated as such. Thus, this TikTok is seemingly calling for awareness and even change in how students are viewed within the classroom. The fact that this is her second most-liked video across her entire profile demonstrates how this need for change may also be felt by other teachers, students, and individuals.

Teacher tip videos often included information on why the advice or tip was correct or beneficial to implement. Often, these reasons involved societal values or beliefs focused on putting students first. These videos were sometimes humorous but also sometimes serious in their detailing of what was useful in an educational context. Teacher tip videos would be a useful choice for teacher educators to include within their coursework since they

focus on recommendations for things to be included in educational classrooms. Discussions could be had that focus on whether the suggestion would be beneficial or not.

### Non-teacher related

The third most common category, non-teacher-related topics, made up 14.2% of the 1,000 TikTok videos analyzed in this study. These videos had nothing to do with teachers, students, or education but were still in the top 20 most-liked videos.

One example of a non-teacher related TikTok was TeacherE's first most-liked video involving the painting of her own cabinets. TeacherE's video contains text that says, "Painting my own cabinets." The video continues with her saying, "Girl, don't do it, it's not worth it." Then she replies to herself saying, "I'm not going to do it, girl. I was just thinking about it, I'm not going to do it." Then the video shows her with a paintbrush, dipping it in paint, and putting the first stroke on the cabinet. The video ends with TeacherE saying, "I did it." Considering performances, this is a non-teacher related topic that contains a different front than most other videos analyzed since the front is a kitchen cabinet instead of a classroom. The dramatic realization of this video could involve TeacherE's belief that home projects can be good even if they are a lot of work. It could also serve as an idealization as the video does not show the significant amount of work that goes into painting cabinets. It simply highlights the beginning of the process. However, the fact that this is her number one most-liked video, even though most of her profile's content relates to teaching, is noteworthy.

Non-teacher related videos were well-liked on teacher TikTok profiles. One could assume that this is because dedicated viewers are interested in the teacher's personal and home life in addition to their teacher identity. Non-teacher related videos often did provide in-depth information on the teacher's personality or hobbies. This made non-teacher related videos provide a kind of break or relief in the algorithm of teacher related videos.

### Trends

The trend category included 12.6% of the 1,000 videos analyzed in this study. A trend usually involved using an extract from a popular song or other form of media superimposed with something the TikTok user was doing or seeing. For example, TeacherF used the "We Don't Talk About Bruno" sound bite, from the popular movie, *Encanto* (Bush & Howard, 2021), to describe how students were feeling lost until she offered extra tutoring sessions. First, she acted like a student frustrated with school, then, as the music changed, she walked into the room as a confident teacher ready to help. Videos in the trend category were often depicted in humorous ways. Creating videos with trending content could be seen as a way for the TikTok user's performance to remain relevant and knowledgeable.

In TeacherG's second most-liked video, the sound bite of "It's a Hard Knock Life" from the movie, *Annie* (Huston, 1982), plays in the background. The text, "Being a teacher in your 20's" appears over her head at the beginning of the video. Then, TeacherG moves to the side of the screen but gets pushed back at specific intervals of the song as four text boxes appear at different times on the screen. The four texts say: (1) "Where's the teacher?" (2) "Parents don't take you seriously." (3) "Are you old enough to teach?" and (4) "All students should be in class." After getting pushed back four times, the video ends with TeacherG crossing her arms in frustration. The caption of TeacherG's video states, "The struggle is real." The front of this video involves the setting of her classroom while she wears a teacher outfit and lanyard. TeacherG provides a dramatic realization for how young teachers may feel in the workplace based on the comments and criticism of others. Her performance serves as a way to shine a light on the "invisible costs" (Goffman, 1956, p. 21) of being a young teacher that viewers from outside the profession may not know or understand. TeacherG also goes against the idea of idealizing the teaching profession by revealing some unpleasant aspects of being a young teacher. Rather than concealing the struggles she must navigate, she highlights them in a meaningful way.

Trends occur within specific periods of time; they will remain relevant for a time before something new comes along. One could assume that teachers who utilize trends are attempting to keep up with other current TikTok videos and are conscious of what viewers are expecting to see within a certain timeframe. In this way, educational content can be presented in a relevant and timely way.

### Responding to comments/audience

The responding to comments/audience category made up 11.2% of the 1,000 TikTok videos analyzed. TikTok users would post or send questions to the teacher and, sometimes, the teacher would respond with another video. For example, one user posted a comment asking the teacher to give more details about a section of her classroom library. TeacherH responded with another video detailing romance books she includes in her library and their importance in a middle school ELA classroom. In this way, the TikTok platform serves as a communication tool between current ELA teachers posting content and the individuals watching these performances.

In TeacherI's sixth most-liked video, he replied to a user who commented asking if he could post a classroom tour. The video begins with him walking into his 10th grade English classroom. Throughout the video, he explains student seating options, daily standards and agenda placement, as well as miscellaneous things such as books, toys, and coffee. Unlike the previous videos described, this TikTok provides a performance of the space rather than of himself as an individual. The front's setting is still the classroom, but the setting shifts as the camera pans to different sections of the classroom. The performer's physical traits are never identified because the individual is never seen. The viewer does, however, hear TeacherI's voice, which serves as the performance's manner in this video. His voice and speech are calm and thoughtful as he explains why he created this specific classroom environment. Regarding dramatic realizations, TeacherI uses this video to highlight his ideas on what a positive classroom environment may include or look like. Lastly, this could be construed as an idealized performance in that the significant work involved with creating this kind of comfortable classroom environment is not revealed; rather, the video only shows the final product of significant amounts of work.

Responding to comments/audience videos seemed to create more of a community on the teacher's TikTok profile. By responding to viewers' questions, the teacher was engaging with individual viewers on a more personal level. TeacherI, for example, could have simply created the video of his classroom tour without addressing the comment given by a viewer. However, by including the fact that this video was made in response to a viewer, the relationship between TikTok teacher and viewer appears real and strong.

### **School-related health**

The least common category, school-related health, made up 7.4% of the 1,000 TikTok videos. Often, videos in this category were related to COVID-19 regulations, mental health ramifications, or physical maturity. For example, TeacherJ described how she monitored and refilled bins of menstrual hygiene products in the school restrooms. These videos often touched on difficult topics that showed the TikTok creator performing in a way that differed from their normal content.

In TeacherK's second most-liked video, she describes why teachers are exhausted. She begins the video by stating, "I really feel like unless you're a teacher, you don't really know how exhausting it is to be in the classroom..." She goes on to describe how teachers often make roughly 200 decisions an hour, leading to the idea of decision fatigue within the profession. She ends the video by saying, "So just know you're not alone." The majority of TeacherK's TikTok videos provide advice to new or aspiring teachers; many of these videos involve ideas for beginning-of-the-year activities, how to be successful with student teaching, and similar topics. So, while this TikTok is still addressing teachers, it does deviate from her normal content in that it is specifically addressing mental health concerns. In this performance, the front she presents is herself sitting at her teacher's desk with a textbook open. The use of the open textbook in front of her contributes to her manner as someone knowledgeable about the content. This TikTok serves as a dramatic realization for any viewers not familiar with the daily life of a teacher by "making invisible costs visible" (Goffman, 1956, p. 20) regarding the number of decisions a teacher makes each day. The idealization of this performance stems from the notion that the individual is extremely knowledgeable about their role, especially with the presence of the textbook within the TikTok's front. However, it also goes against the idealization of teaching in that TeacherK is revealing more unpleasant aspects of the profession. In this way, multiple idealization characteristics are addressed.

School-related health videos were full of dramatic realizations focused on aspects of teaching that may not be obvious to those outside of the profession. While the physical health videos typically focused on the importance of helping and being there for students, the mental health videos often focused on the teacher. These types of videos shine a light on a sensitive subject for many individuals. The creators of these videos often put themselves under vulnerable spotlights when discussing these topics. In this way, spaces were created on the TikTok platform where viewers could see potential vulnerabilities associated with the profession.

## Implications

Many professional conversations regarding teaching practices occur in informal spaces (Barber & Fecho, 2024) as opposed to professional development seminars or school meetings. The TikTok platform is one informal space in which teacher creators are engaging in dialogue with their viewers through the information they disseminate. Teacher tips, the re-enactment of positive and negative educational experiences, conversations about health, and other topics are all being discussed and illuminated on this platform. This study showcased the wide range of ELA teacher-related content available. Re-enactments, teacher tips, trends, responding to comments/audience, and school-related health frequently implemented dramatic realizations to draw attention to various aspects of the profession such as a need for a change, humorous content, a hidden attribute of the career, etc. Similarly, many of the categories, including non-teacher related videos, often used idealizations that attempted to display more positive aspects of the teacher or profession. This was often done by attempting to bring in teachers lives from outside of the classroom. These forms of idealization contributed to each teacher's personality development across their profile. Fronts were also used across categories; performing a video within the physical space of one's classroom seemingly contributed to the content being construed as accurate.

TikTok users have the ability to witness various teachers and aspects of the ELA teaching profession with or without any background knowledge. This has serious implications for teacher educators who are tasked with ensuring students are prepared for ELA classrooms in 2025 and beyond. Contextualized and intentional conversations must take place within teacher education coursework or classrooms that focus on the information being presented on TikTok. Students and teacher candidates watching these videos may have questions arise after watching a video about teacher contract hours, a video on how to arrange a classroom, or a video on whether to ban food in the classroom. Bringing this platform and these videos into teacher education does not have to look like a TikTok assignment, it could simply look like a space in which students can bring content they have witnessed into the conversation. Teacher educators choosing to ignore and not engage in TikTok teacher content could do a disservice to students who utilize the platform and formulate opinions based on internalized content. Just as with Lortie (1975), TeacherTok, when contextualized and used with intentionality and discernment by teacher educators, can be an extension of the apprenticeship model. Students and teacher candidates within teacher education programs are viewing what a teacher is like, what their day, habits, and practices are like in the classroom. Those depictions might be curated, for aesthetics, exaggerated for comic appeal, etc. However, the videos on ELA TeacherTok can still be utilized to support students and teacher candidates who are looking for answers to questions.

## Limitations

As part of our limitations, we acknowledge that it is probable that viable and potentially rich videos were not used in the data set because that particular video, though of potential and valuable content, did not have as high of a "like rate" during the time frame in which we were compiling videos for the study. There is also the limitation of the timeframe in which we gathered the most liked videos from the most popular ELA content creators on TikTok. Numbers quickly shift and change within this public data set due to additional likes (and the removal of likes), removal of videos by the creator, and new videos being added that get popular quickly (i.e., they go viral).

We acknowledge that there is an inherent bias in attributing the importance of an account to follower counts on social media platforms. We established the 10,000+ follower threshold because of the connection to being deemed a popular or influential account on the platform. In terms of bias for the top 50 accounts and the top 20 most-liked videos for each creator, our data collection was limited by the timeframe in which we were initially collecting data, when numbers were checked, and when numbers were updated. An account could potentially have grown or dropped in followers outside of that range. Additionally, the limitations of the authors' two accounts on the TikTok platform must be acknowledged. Two accounts and their FYPs were being used to search for participants. Having additional accounts or additional researchers looking for participants could have yielded further results.

Additionally, many school districts and schools have specific guidelines regarding social media usage, which may have influenced the content being disseminated in teacher videos. For teacher educators and those in the classroom, it is imperative to remember that, as useful and engaging as social media platforms can be, caution must remain regarding professionalism in education (Carpenter et al., 2020; Won Hur & Brush, 2014). A final limitation of this study is that the data collection process only included content in the English language due to it being the primary language of the researchers.

## Conclusion

The power and influence of TikTok can best be summarized by an October 2022 piece in *The Washington Post*: “Once written off as a silly dance-video fad, [TikTok] has become one of the most prominent, discussed, distrusted, technically sophisticated and geopolitically complicated juggernauts on the internet — a phenomenon that has secured an unrivaled grasp on culture and everyday life” (Harwell, 2022). We know that teacher candidates are consuming TikTok content due to its popularity. Not only have our students brought teacher TikToks into our ELA education course discussions, but also, two-thirds of adolescents use TikTok regularly and a reported one in six adolescents use the application almost constantly (Klein, 2023). Aspiring teachers pursuing careers in education could be formulating their understanding of the profession by consuming secondary ELA TikTok content. Thus, the fronts, dramatic realizations, and idealizations related to various perceptions of the classroom, views of policy, and curriculum ideas could influence viewers. These videos, already familiar to many students, can be used to spark discussions and serve as a common text to engage with topics stemming from each video or performance.

Secondary ELA teacher-created TikToks are serving as performances for the consumption of viewers. Re-enactments were the most common category of TikTok published and distributed by secondary ELA teachers making up 369 of the 1,000 analyzed TikToks. Teacher tips accounted for 177 videos, non-teacher related accounted for 142, trends accounted for 126, responding to comments/audience accounted for 112, and school-related health accounted for 74. These findings directly responded to our research question: What information is being dispersed through TikTok specifically from secondary ELA teachers? While this study used each profile's number of followers to consider influence, another study could further examine the direct influence on current teacher candidates. These TikToks are public performances that can be utilized to begin discussions with current and aspiring secondary ELA teachers. The videos present various ideas, beliefs, and truths while providing realizations for current teachers, aspiring teachers, and even individuals unfamiliar with the teaching profession. Examining the videos in this way can assist with understanding the power and influence of the secondary ELA teachers of TikTok.

## Authors Contribution Rate

The first author contributed (Lauren May) 60%, the second author (Heather Wright) 40%.

## Ethical Approval

All research was conducted in accordance with legal and ethical standards and falls under the category of studies for which ethics approval is not required

## References

- Alvermann, D., Wright, W., & Wynne, E. (2024). Researching media literacy practices using both critical and posthuman inquiry. In P. Fastrez & N. Landry (Eds.), *Media literacy and media education research methods*. (pp. 97-115). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003045366-7>
- Barber, C. & Fecho, B. (2024). Possibilities and missed opportunities for generative dialogue: professional networking, online platforms and the English classroom. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, 23(4), 428-441. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ETPC-04-2024-0054>
- Bush, J. & Howard, B. (Directors). (2021). *Encanto*. [Film]. Walt Disney Pictures.
- Carpenter, J. P., Morrison, S., Craft, M., & Lee, M. (2020). How and why are educators using Instagram?, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 96(2020), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2020.103149>
- Evans, S. & Hays, L. (2025). The student perceptions of the use of TikTok in education. *Journal for Research and Practice in College Teaching*, 10(1), 1-23.
- Feldcamp, J. (2021). The rise of TikTok: The evolution of a social media platform during COVID-19. In C. Hovestadt, J. Recker, J. Richter, & K. Werder (Eds.), *Digital responses to COVID-19: Digital innovation, transformation, and entrepreneurship during pandemic outbreaks*. (pp. 73-85). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-66611-8\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-66611-8_6)
- Goffman, E. (1956). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. University of Edinburgh Social Sciences Research Center.
- Harwell, D. (2022, October 14). How TikTok ate the internet. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/interactive/2022/tiktok-popularity/>
- Herman, J. (2019, March 19). How TikTok is rewriting the world: TikTok will change the way your social media works — even if you're avoiding it. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/10/style/what-is-tik-tok.html>
- Huston, J. (Director). (1982). *Annie* [Film]. Columbia Pictures.
- Jerasa, S. & Ura, S. (2025). Learning from TikTok: Quality and reach of #TeacherTok as a classroom management tool for teacher education. *TechTrends*, 69, 1084-1093. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11528-025-01098-6>
- Kirk, J., & Miller, M. L. (1986). *Reliability and validity in qualitative research*. Sage.
- Klein, A. (2023, March 22). TikTok is raising national security, privacy concerns. Should educators steer clear? *Education Week*. <https://www.edweek.org/technology/tiktok-is-raising-national-security-privacy-concerns-should-educators-steer-clear/2023/03>
- Lorenz, T. (2020, December 31). This is why you heard about TikTok so much in 2020. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/31/style/tiktok-trends-2020.html>
- Lortie, D. (1975). *Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study*. London: University of Chicago Press.
- Singh, S. (2025, November 12). How many people use TikTok in 2025. *Demandsage*. <https://www.demandsage.com/tiktok-user-statistics/>
- Slotta, D. (2025, December 17). TikTok - statistics and facts. *Statista*. [https://www.statista.com/topics/6077/tiktok/?srsltid=AfmBOoqWilyEBRCmvZMq\\_aN5RRckNZlrmQ\\_OschYxn50d7K7GVuxwtFsS#topicOverview](https://www.statista.com/topics/6077/tiktok/?srsltid=AfmBOoqWilyEBRCmvZMq_aN5RRckNZlrmQ_OschYxn50d7K7GVuxwtFsS#topicOverview)
- Vagle, M. D. (2009). Validity as intended: 'bursting forth toward' bridling in phenomenological research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 22(5), 585-605. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390903048784>
- Vizcaíno-Verdú, A. & Abidin, C. (2023). TeachTok: Teachers of TikTok, micro-celebrification, and fun learning communities. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 123(2023), 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2022.103978>
- Won Hur, J., & Brush, T. A. (2014). Teacher participation in online communities: Why do teachers want to participate in self-generated online communities of K12 teachers?, *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 41(3), 279-303. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15391523.2009.10782532>
- Wright, W. T. (2021). Reality check: How adolescents use TikTok as a digital backchanneling medium to speak back against institutional discourses of school(ing). *Radical Teacher*, 119(2021), 61-67. <https://doi.org/10.5195/rt.2021.777>