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TIKTOK'S PEER PEDAGOGIES - LEARNING ABOUT BOOKS THROUGH #BOOKTOK VIDEOS

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Background

This paper eschews normative constructions of formalized 'online learning' to argue that learning with 'the internet' is mostly vernacular, ordinary, messy and constant. It uses the example of #booktok short videos to argue that individuals frequently learn from and with peers in online spaces, where 'peerness' is defined broadly. The paper draws on traditions within education, media and communications research such as theories of media pedagogies that refuse to see learning as pedagogically isolated within formal learning arrangements. I build on these foundations to conceptualize how Tik Tok viewers learn about books and reading via 'peer pedagogies'. 'Peer Pedagogies' recognizes that in digital contexts individuals often learn from other individuals, regardless of if the 'teacher' in the relationship is directly known to the learner, and regardless of if 'teaching' is intended or purposeful. For instance, peer pedagogies and learning are frequently central characteristics of the relationships that form between 'micro-celebrities' and their fans. The paper discusses findings from an ongoing nationally funded Australian study which is mapping the digital ecology of teen reading in Australia. The project argues that one avenue for teens to find out about books is on digital platforms via peer pedagogies. That is, teenagers may purposefully or casually learn about books and reading from everyday users and micro-celebrities on digital platforms. The TikTok #booktok hashtag is therefore being investigated to identify examples of how young people learn about books and reading via Tik Tok videos and associated communities.

Friere's 1970s work on the role of dialogue, praxis, lived experience, and 'conscientization' in informal learning inspired a movement in education scholarship. His attempts to liberate learners directly challenged formal educational structures to promote the idea of public and critical pedagogies (Friere, 1972). Giroux (1994) drew on Friere to argue that "pedagogy is about the creation of a public sphere, one that brings people together in a variety of sites to talk, exchange information, listen, feel their desires, and expand their capacities for joy, love, solidarity, and struggle". In similar ways, media scholars have explored how media offer informal learning opportunities.

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Eco argued that television is the “school book of modern adults, as much as it is the only authoritative school book for our children” (Eco, 1979). Hartley (1999) claimed that like the institutional church before it, television *is* teaching, particularly within the informality of the family home. With YouTube in mind, Hartley also argued that the internet ‘has rapidly evolved into a new ‘enabling social technology *for knowledge*’ (Hartley, 2011, original emphasis). Ellsworth (1997) explored the concept of the power of address to trace similarities between how cinema addresses its audience through plot, character, subtext, genre, causal links and point of view, and how teachers address students. In these ways, scholars have explored media pedagogies to understand the relationships between everyday media use and learning.

Peer Pedagogies

‘Peer Pedagogies’ (Dezuanni, 2020) recognizes that in digital contexts individuals often learn from other individuals, regardless of if the ‘teacher’ in the relationship is directly known to the learner, and regardless of if ‘teaching’ is intended or purposeful. For instance, peer pedagogies and learning are frequently central characteristics of the relationships that form between ‘micro-celebrities’ (Senft, 2008) and their fans. The concept draws on Ellsworth’s (1997) argument that ‘mode of address’ creates a volatile space between the intended addressee and the actual addressee of a pedagogical interaction that is performative and productive, which often results in new knowledge. Peer pedagogies function on digital platforms through the development and maintenance of friendships (real and imagined), trust, and emotional investment. Within these relationships, there is frequently an attempt on the part of the producer to reduce social distance between themselves and those they are addressing, which is frequently a form of ‘relational labour’ (Baym, 2018), and often an attempt to maintain authenticity (Abidin, 2018; Marwick, 2013).

Learning about books and reading with TikTok

To explore these concepts, the paper discusses findings from an ongoing nationally funded Australian study which is mapping the digital ecology of teen reading in Australia and is motivated by previous research showing that a key barrier to increasing long form reading by teens is the difficulty they experience in ‘finding a good book’ (Rutherford, Merga & Singleton, 2018). The project hypothesises that one avenue for teens to find out about books is on digital platforms via peer pedagogies. That is, teenagers may purposefully or casually learn about books and reading from everyday users and micro-celebrities on digital platforms. The TikTok #booktok hashtag is therefore being investigated to identify examples of how young people learn about books and reading via Tik Tok videos and associated communities.

The approach involves the dual process of 1) analysis of short video content and user comments across dozens of Tik Tok accounts that frequently or exclusively use the #booktok hashtag, and 2) close analysis of a selection videos and user comments on accounts that offer specific insights into the peer pedagogies of books and reading on the platform. The broader analysis identifies emergent codes and conventions, practices, modes of address and commenting practices; while the closer analysis

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reveals the specificity of the performative peer pedagogical practices used by Tik Tokkers to engage and inform their audience.

The paper shows how #booktok videos typically include practices such as ‘selfies’ and ‘shelfies’ featuring book stacks and book hauls, brief commentaries about books, micro-reviews, and explanations about book related practices such as shelving, and room design. Emerging findings suggest that on one level #booktok videos seem to function in a similar way to Marwick’s assessment of ‘luxury selfies’ on Instagram. She suggests “Instagram represents a convergence of cultural forces: a mania for digital documentation, the proliferation of celebrity and microcelebrity culture, and conspicuous consumption”. A significant number of #booktok videos promote the consumption of books and stylized versions of readers in ways that claim a particular habitus or form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1979). Peer pedagogies functioning on this level are less about reading culture, and as much about displaying books as status artefacts which may or may not be read. In contrast, other #booktok accounts and videos operate within particular esoteric subcultures and communities of users (Abidin, 2021) who are book savvy and that feature regular readers. Videos and associated comments in these communities offer fans an opportunity to discover new authors and books and to enter into conversations about books and reading that may otherwise be unavailable to them, and which invite them to take up identities as readers. The paper provides examples of indicative analysis of several accounts, videos and comments as illustrations of these claims.

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