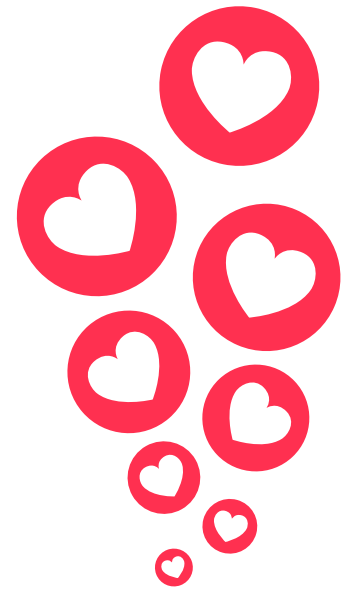# TikTok

Microlearning

THE WHY, THE HOW, THE LIMITS

What is TikTok?

TikTok is a social media platform that allows users to create, share, and view short videos on specific topics, ranging anywhere from three seconds to thirty minutes, though most typically are under sixty seconds. It is known for its engaging content and algorithm driven feed, which displays content based on user interests and interactions. For instance, if a user is searching up home decor videos, they can expect a slew of them to appear on their main feeds that they can continuously scroll through, save, "like," or comment on.

Users can also create their own videos that allow for audio narration, music integration, text, filters, and camera effects to make their content creative and visually engaging. While it is widely used for entertainment and social connection, it also has strong potential as a learning tool.
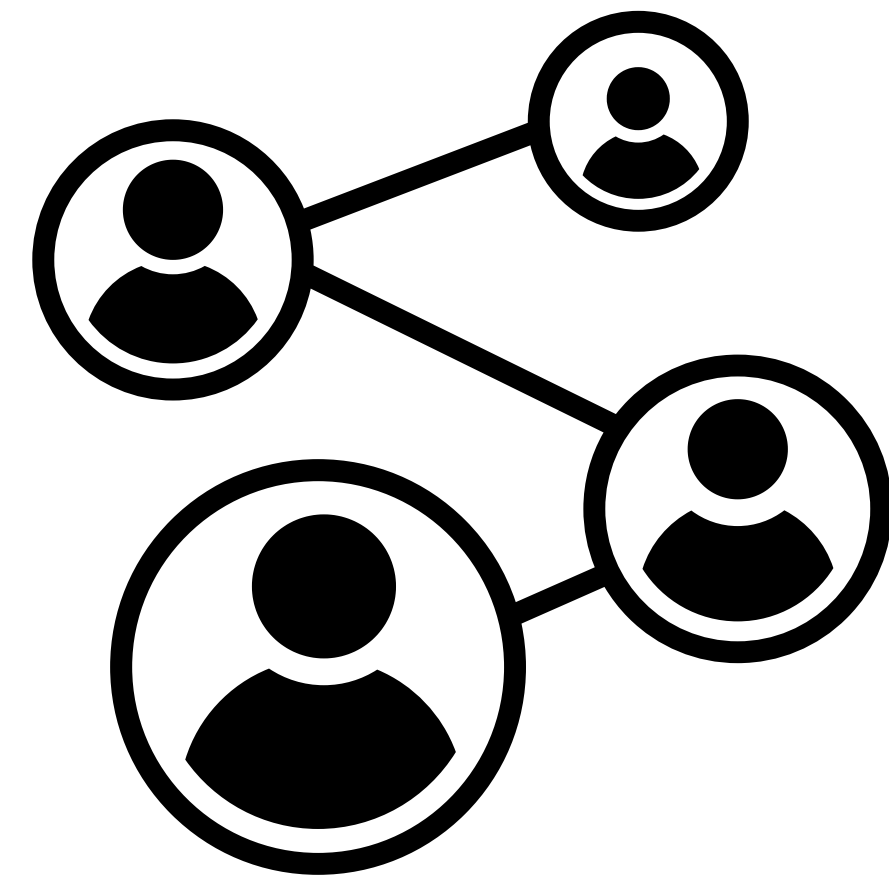
What is Microlearning?

Microlearning emphasizes the idea of dividing content into small, focused units and designing it for the small screen size of mobile devices (Lee, 2023, p. 4636). Unlike traditional lessons or lectures, it emphasizes conciseness and highlights the key parts of a concept, allowing learners to grasp the most important information quickly. Microlearning can take many forms, including short videos, audio clips, interactive games, GIFS, or images.

In many classrooms, teachers are already using microlearning whenever they show students a short YouTube video or a use a quick interactive game to teach a lesson. By breaking learning into manageable, smaller pieces, microlearning helps students stay engaged and retain important information.
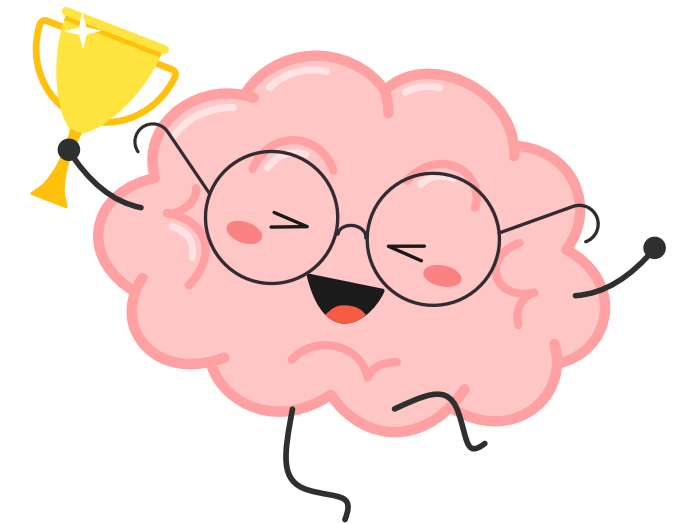
Connection

TikTok and microlearning naturally connect because they both rely on short, focused bits of content. TikTok users can create, share, watch, and interact with short videos (Carpenter, Morrison, Shelton, Clark, Patel, & Toma-Harrold, 2024, p. 1), which directly mirrors the ideas of microlearning, which is that learners absorb information best when its broken down into smaller pieces. Furthermore, TikTok videos are generally under a minute long, making this an ideal way for teachers to deliver quick lessons, highlight key concepts, provide demonstrations, and assess student work.

Benefits of TikTok

TikTok provides affinity spaces for users, which are defined as "spaces online, offline, or blended places where a common interest, goal, or need draws people together" (Carpenter et al., 2024, p. 2). Through the use of TikTok, students can participate in movements like "#FridaysForFuture", which protests climate change, or "#MentalHealth", and these spaces offer educational opportunities for them to learn from others about current events, community issues, and social causes, as well as share their own experiences and ideas for making a difference. As Hosie (2020) notes, "The platform has been highly effective in spreading information, with more than three-quarters of users saying that TikTok has helped them learn about social justice and politics (77%) and stay up to date on the news (75%)." This indicates that young people are already using the app to stay informed, and that it can provide the opportunity to create real-world connections to concepts learned in the classroom.
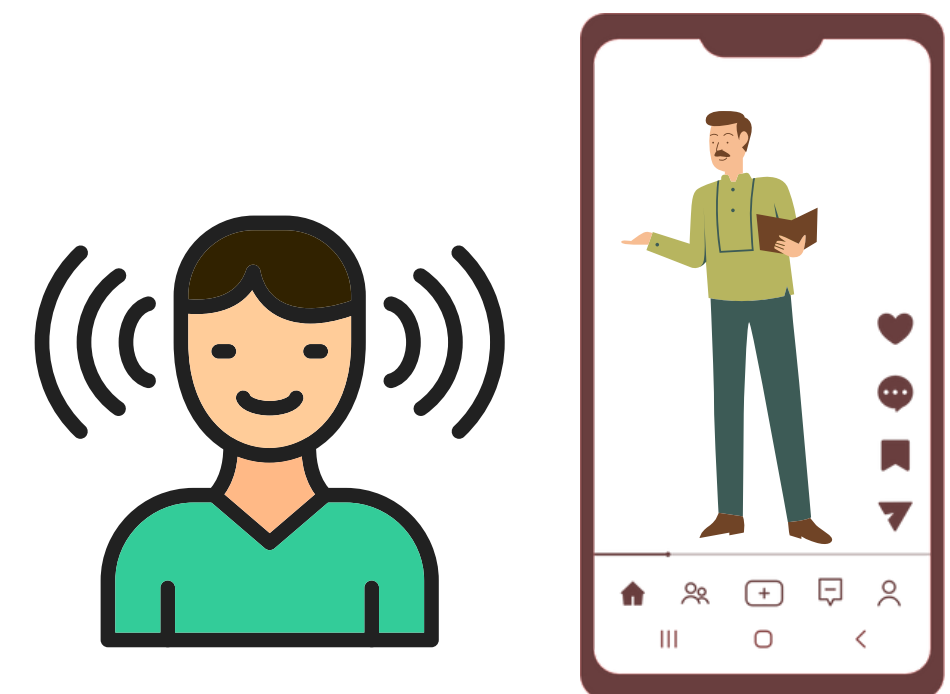
Independence, Distance, & Collaboration

With the use of its affinity spaces, TikTok can also support multiple modes of learning, including independent, distance, and collaborative. For independent learning contexts, students can explore short educational videos at their own pace, at anytime, from any place. They can scour through videos that explain concepts in a way that best makes sense to them, and understand the key points from complex topics that may have been discussed in class.

Independence, Distance, & Collaboration

In distance learning, TikTok allows students to access lessons and content from anywhere, making learning accessible and flexible beyond the constraints of the physical classroom. In virtual learning settings like Zoom or Google Meet, students may become disinterested in traditional lectures from their teachers, so, to ensure the students remain engaged and comprehend the subject matter, teachers can create videos using the TikTok platform to explain the material in a fun and interactive manner" (Widiya & Salmiah, 2024, p. 911). A teacher can post a short clip on TikTok about what was covered in class during the day, highlight key points from their lecture, or even assign students with exntension questions and thinking prompts. Furthermore, in the collaborative learning space, TikTok can provide students with opportunities to create videos in groups, respond to classmates posts', repost others' TikToks, and demonstrate their understanding in creative ways.

So...What does this look like?

Imagine you're midway through teaching Hamlet to your Grade 11 students, and you reach one of Shakespeare's most important monologues, one that you feel could be delivered with even more impact by another performer. Rather than simply presenting it in class, you could post the monologue to your class TikTok account, giving students the opportunity to watch and reflect on the delivery. From there, they could create their own videos performing the monologue, experiment with different interpretations or modern adaptations, or even respond with a "duet" that allows them to feature the original performance and overlay their interpretation. This approach allows students to engage with the text in a more personal and creative way and also encourages them to analyze, interpret, and communicate Shakespeare's language using a platform they already enjoy and understand.

Privacy Considerations

In order to implement it's use in the classroom, teachers can begin by creating a private class TikTok account that students can follow, but the public can't view. From there, teachers can post content, assignments, repost videos from other creators, and build a video library that students can refer to. Students can then engage with this content by watching, reflecting, and responding through comments or assigned activities.

Teachers can also encourage students to create their own videos, either individually or in groups, to demonstrate understanding, perform tasks, or share creative interpretations of lesson material. Students can create private accounts that they specifically use for class purposes only, and they can also repost videos, or comment on others'.

Through this approach, teachers can create a digitally engaging space for students to participate in for educational purposes, and promote creativity and microlearning opportunities. This can provide students with a sense of active agency within their learning, as they will be consumers and creators of content, and develop the digital literacy skills needed to operate in our digital world.

Limitations and Challenges

While TikTok can be a powerful educational tool, there are several limitations that teachers must consider. For instance, the quantity of content on many platforms can prove overwhelming, and the quality of education content shared on social media has proven inconsistent and thus requires vetting (Carpenter et al., 2024, p. 3). Furthermore, accessibility can be an issue, as not all students may have reliable internet access or mobile devices that support the use of apps like TikTok. Parental consent is also important, particularly for younger students, to ensure that parents are comfortable with their child's participation. Additionally, TikTok can contribute to increased screen time and potential distractions, as students may be tempted to scroll through unrelated content instead of focusing on learning tasks. Lastly, safety and privacy are also ongoing concerns, requiring teachers to carefully manage account settings, monitor interactions, and teach students about responsible digital behaviour.

Discussion

1. How could TikTok be successfully integrated into your subject area (English, Math, Science, Social Studies, Drama, Languages)?
2. What lessons can students learn about digital literacy and being responsible digital citizens through using TikTok?
3. What privacy or safety concerns might arise when using TikTok in the classroom?
4. What kind of supports could TikTok provide for educators? (ex, Google has Google Classroom, could there someday be "TikTok for education?"

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