

## **Online “iDentity” Formation and the High School Theatre Trip** **La formation « iDentitaire » en ligne et la sortie au théâtre de l'école secondaire**

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Résumé de l'article

Au fil des années où j'amenaient mes élèves du secondaire au théâtre, la révolution numérique a investi les écoles, les classes et même les salles de théâtre. Ceci a remis en question mon objectif de contribuer positivement à la formation identitaire des étudiants en les exposant à la dimension en direct des pièces. En réaction aux demandes d'étudier les manières dont les vies en et hors ligne des jeunes sont inter reliées, une étude de cas qualitative d'un an portant sur les étudiants qui fréquentent le théâtre a été réalisée. Celle-ci indique que les réalités en ligne imprègnent de façon notable la formation identitaire des étudiants et que les expériences scolaires non numériques, telles qu'assister à une pièce de théâtre, sont souvent consommées sous l'influence des vies numériques des étudiants. Des sorties traditionnelles comme une visite au théâtre sont influencées par et combinées au vécu en ligne, contribuant ainsi à une nouvelle formation « iDentitaire ».

# ONLINE “iDENTITY” FORMATION AND THE HIGH SCHOOL THEATRE TRIP

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**ABSTRACT.** Over the years that I have taken secondary school students to the theatre, the the digital revolution has moved through schools, classrooms, and even theatres, calling into question my goal of contributing positively to students’ identity formation through exposure to live plays. Responding to calls to examine the ways in which young people’s online and offline lives are interwoven, a one-year qualitative case study of student theatregoers suggests that online settings feature prominently in students’ identity formation and that non-digital school experiences such as the theatre trip are often experienced in light of students’ digital lives. Traditional events such as a trip to the theatre are influenced by and combined with online experiences to contribute to a new “iDentity” formation.

## LA FORMATION « iDENTITAIRE » EN LIGNE ET LA SORTIE AU THÉÂTRE DE L’ÉCOLE SECONDAIRE

**RÉSUMÉ.** Au fil des années où j’amenaient mes élèves du secondaire au théâtre, la révolution numérique a investi les écoles, les classes et même les salles de théâtre. Ceci a remis en question mon objectif de contribuer positivement à la formation identitaire des étudiants en les exposant à la dimension en direct des pièces. En réaction aux demandes d’étudier les manières dont les vies en et hors ligne des jeunes sont inter reliées, une étude de cas qualitative d’un an portant sur les étudiants qui fréquentent le théâtre a été réalisée. Celle-ci indique que les réalités en ligne imprègnent de façon notable la formation identitaire des étudiants et que les expériences scolaires non numériques, telles qu’assister à une pièce de théâtre, sont souvent consommées sous l’influence des vies numériques des étudiants. Des sorties traditionnelles comme une visite au théâtre sont influencées par et combinées au vécu en ligne, contribuant ainsi à une nouvelle formation « iDentitaire ».

I teach high school English in Canada and every year my colleagues and I take approximately 150 students to a series of four live plays. I started this program with just a few students over a decade ago; motivated by a general sense that what these theatre diehards and I were doing was good for a young person's identity formation, we expanded the program to include the entire graduating class.

Over the years of my theatregoing, the "radical reconfiguration and cultural re-articulation" (McCarthy, Giardina, Harewood, & Park, 2003, p. 462) wrought by the Internet revolution worked its way through my school. Smartboards appeared. Teacher laptops were introduced. Computer labs were developed and laptop carts purchased. Teachers were mandated to post course material on Moodle, and the number of students who brought laptops to class suddenly increased from a small minority to nearly everyone. Online marking with voice comments, discussion forums, book talk podcasts, video projects, and other Internet-enabled collaborative assignments have all become valuable aspects of my English program and my classroom would be a less interesting, less relevant place without them.

But the cultural re-articulation has not stopped at the school doors: it has also moved through the theatre. I have written about my surprise at being told by students about the blue glow in the back row caused by cellphone screens, and by the new mindsets that I noticed take hold in students raised in the Internet era. I began to wonder whether the identity formation that I hoped to foster was taking place at all, or whether the attention paid to life online was so pervasive that traditional educational activities such as a trip to the theatre were now eclipsed and rendered ineffective by the digital juggernaut.

This article responds to calls from scholars who ask how young people's experiences of online social networking sites is "interwoven with life offline" (Merchant, 2012, p. 112) and affects other aspects of culture (Burwell, 2010; Greenhow & Robelia, 2009; Kuksa, 2009), including live theatre (Barker, 2003; Reason, 2004; Tulloch, 2000). What is the nature of identity formation online, and can traditional educational activities such as a theatre trip contribute to it given the importance of digital culture to teenagers?

### DEFINING "IDENTITY"

The term *identity* "came into use as a popular social science term only in the 1950s" and is both "elusive and ubiquitous" (Gleason, 1983, p. 910), with Brubaker and Cooper (2000) asserting that tensions between constructivist and essentialist definitions of the term have rendered it largely meaningless. Particular care is needed, then, when working with it. I have chosen to define identity as "the combination of essential qualities that characterize and differentiate one person from another" (Jäkälä & Berki, 2013, p. 5).

Self and self-identity are defined as “an individual’s reflexive sense of her or his own particular identity, constituted vis-à-vis others in terms of similarity and difference” (Jenkins, 2004, p. 27), or the individual’s private experience of herself or himself. Digital identity is defined holistically as “the persona an individual presents across all the digital communities that he/she is represented in, and which encompasses the various roles they take on” (Williams, Lundquist, Fleming, & Parslow, 2013, p. 106). The ways in which individuals present identities in various contexts with multiple intentions and within different groups contribute to their social identification and self-development both online and offline (Code, 2013).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Erikson is a key foundational thinker around identity formation, who asserted that identity is a process shaped by biology, psychology, and culture, but emphasized, in ways that are now seen as too simplistic, its consistency over time (Erikson, 1968; The Government Office for Science, 2013). Goffman’s (1959) view that social interaction is composed of performances of identity is also influential: “All the world is not, of course, a stage, but the crucial ways in which it isn’t are not easy to specify” (p. 72). Developing the story-telling model for contemporary times, Elwell (2013) suggested that transmedia storytelling across multiple platforms, demonstrated by movie franchises such as *Pirates of the Caribbean*, is the best way to understand how identity formation takes place across sites both on- and offline. His (2013) notion of the “transmediated self” referred to “the identity experience emerging from the feedback loop between the digital and the analog whereby one domain informs the other in an ongoing dialectic of existential equivalence” (p. 243), and is the model best suited for understanding the nature of identity formation around the theatre trip.

Researchers working in the field support Elwell’s (2013) view of the identity feedback loop. Davies and Eynon (2013) found in their survey of UK youth that technology helps teens try out different identities. In the United States, danah boyd (2014) found that a young user will move “as seamlessly between these mediated environments as she does between online and offline settings, not because she’s cycling through identities – or creating a segmentation between the virtual and the real – but because she’s switching social contexts and acting accordingly” (p. 41). What unfolds is “a complex dance as teens quickly shift between – and often blur – different social contexts” (boyd, 2014, p. 41). Social networks become a “collaborator in the identity and content presented by the speaker” (Marwick & Boyd, 2010, p. 17), presenting students with the opportunity to create and present the self through the choices they make. The complexity of the identity negotiations can be daunting. As Turkle (2011) wrote, “whenever one has time to write, edit, and delete, there is room for performance. There are misunderstandings and recriminations. Facebook at fourteen can be a tearful place” (p. 181).

## METHODOLOGY

This article is based upon a one-year, qualitative case study project (Stake, 1995), approved by the University of Calgary Research Ethics Board. Case study research “involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (ie. a setting, a context)” (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). More specifically, this is a “single, instrumental case study” because it focuses on an issue with the context of one bounded case (Creswell, 2007, p. 74): a year in the life of my school’s theatregoing program. The case is comprised of the four plays that 150 members of the graduating class and I saw together, productions chosen to be varied and, hopefully, of interest to teenagers. *Proud*, by Michael Healey, was a contemporary Canadian political satire that attempted through humour to understand a man very few Canadians found funny – our then Prime Minister. *Goodnight Desdemona, Good Morning Juliet* by Ann-Marie Macdonald thrust a young academic into the world of Shakespeare’s plays with comic, gender-bending effect. *Kim’s Convenience* by Ins Choi revealed the struggles of a Korean-Canadian corner store owner, and *Enron*, by UK writer Lucy Prebble, was an aggressive exposé of the oil company scandal.

At the mid-point and at the conclusion of the series, I sent students anonymous, online surveys comprised of open-ended questions designed to elicit their responses to the plays, to theatre in general, to the ways in which their online lives intersected with live theatre, and to their online identity formation (see Appendices A and B). A weakness to open-ended survey questioning is that participants may not be inclined to type out their thoughts. However, the two surveys yielded a helpful quantity of data. The first survey was completed by 80 students. The second survey was completed by 70 students. In total, there was a total of 150 completed surveys, over 57,000 words, and responses ranging from single words or phrases to more detailed, paragraph responses. I also conducted six in-depth interviews with individual students. Surveys and interviews have a long history within audience studies research (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005; Morley, 2003; Saldana, 2013), and allowed me to take the broad range of student voices found in the surveys and then drill down in a more specific way with individual students. Focus group, interview, and online survey data was imported into NVivo software and, following Creswell (2007), Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2014), and Saldana (2013), I coded the data in cycles, beginning with broad themes, and then isolating more fine-grained responses. For example, I began to code for comments around the general node “identity.” Through re-coding, more specific responses began to emerge and ten sub-codes evolved under the parent node. These includes such nodes as “technology has little or no effect on identity,” “technology has a negative effect on identity,” and “technology allows for positive identity growth.” All of these grew out of the data. Thoughts and observations were captured in memos. Over time, the number of nodes stabilized, and it became possible to see the emergence of major ideas across nodes. These had to be triangulated

between the three data sources (survey one, survey two, and the six interviews) in order to stand, allowing for the “simultaneous display of multiple refracted realities” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 6). Once a theme was identified within a data source, and triangulated between the data sources, I used the memos to write two general findings that most accurately responded to my research questions. These findings were member-checked with students in order to assess and confirm their validity (Creswell, 2007).

My approach is in keeping with Awan and Gauntlett (2014), who wrote that “much of the fieldwork in media audience research is conducted through language-based events, in particular in focus groups and interviews, where participants are expected to be able to generate more of less immediate accounts of their feelings and experiences” (p. 360). It is also in keeping with Creswell (2007), who suggested the following questions amongst the criteria for assessing a good case study report: “Is the reader provided some vicarious experience?” “Were sufficient raw data presented?” “Were data sources well chosen and in sufficient number?” (p. 218). By drawing on the individual students’ responses, the “vicarious experience” and “raw data” are presented, while the triangulation provides the support for the findings.

The students were all in grade 12 and, like all of their classmates, were looking forward to attending university in the fall. Each owned a cellphone and a laptop at a minimum. Alex (all names are pseudonyms) was one of 15 school prefects and wore his specially-coloured blazer with pride. One parent was a professor and the other a government manager. One came from Europe, which Alex visited annually. Jimmy was one of the top students in the school, a highly articulate intellectual known for taking strong, right-wing views. One parent worked in the medical field and one was a home-maker, and they came to Canada from the Middle East. Mike was a conscientious, friendly, uncertain student who spoke with interest, thoughtfulness, and respect. One parent worked in medicine, the other in law. His family had roots in Canada. Saeed was an amiable student whose direct style of speech suggested a concrete and methodical approach to his studies. His parents worked in the tech sector and had come to Canada from the Middle East. Atash was a boarder from the Middle East. Exquisitely polite and charming, he wrote poetry outside of school and took a keen interest in the arts. His father was an academic and his mother worked in health care in his home country. Finally, Canadian-born Andy was an outgoing and well-rounded student happily engaged in class and sports. His parents were both public servants.

## FINDINGS

Two findings are discussed below.

### *Finding one: Identity formation online*

Social media sites offer a lively, contested, and significant venue for identity formation, with “number of ‘likes’” often spoken of by students as a validation of the persona presented. The discourse surrounding this and other online identity formation practices is characterized by skepticism, playfulness, and an evolving series of protocols.

Alex, like nearly all of the other study subjects, was a keen social media user. Also like his peers, he suggested that users manipulate their online personae in order to achieve certain goals:

It’s very easy to change your person or your identity and talk in a different way and maybe post pictures that you don’t necessarily believe in, but you just do it because you want your profile to fit in a certain idea of what a cool profile looks like, a profile other people would like.

Online respondents tended to agree. “Different social personae are a part of social media,” wrote one, echoing Goffman (1959), “because the computer acts as a mask, just like in a play.” Many saw manipulation of identity to be unhealthy, believing that a person has only one true identity, and that any variation is either strategic or inauthentic. Proffering different identities, wrote one student, “is not healthy, as you are presenting yourself as one person, but acting like two. I’m sure it’s confusing for the person, as it is certainly confusing for onlookers.” The social mores of online identity performance were often clearly drawn. “You would have to be in a pretty low place to create alternate identities on the internet,” one student wrote. “It is frowned upon in society.”

Other online respondents commented on the ways in which teenagers consciously perform identity in order to advance social goals, in ways that reflect the purposeful performances described by boyd (2014) and Davies and Eynon (2013). “Sometimes you see people over-editing photos to their liking because they want to be perceived a certain way,” wrote one student, “or oftentimes very provocative postings or photos are posted by someone in your class, then you walk into school the next day and that person acts like nothing has happened. It provides people to be the version of themselves they want to be but may not necessarily be at all.” The theme of “provocative postings” was recurring. “People use these sites to gain attention that they might be lacking from their family...” another student observed, “by showing parts of their body to attract people or doing things that they would never do in real life.” The reason behind such actions was clear to most. “Essentially, the more ‘likes’ you get, the more popular you are,” wrote one student. “If a profile picture has, say, 100 likes, you would assume that person is popular vs. someone who

has only 12.” “I think anyone who has posted a picture of themselves online has done it to get likes and comments,” another added. “Anyone who says they haven’t is lying.”

Resistance to the culture of “likes” was also strong. “I would rather decide on the person I want to be than let the way people respond to me be the determining factor, because the moral compass they have is not the same as mine,” a student wrote. Another reflected:

More likes don’t always mean you’re more popular or better. On Instagram, for instance, having 200+ followers shows one’s popularity. However, once a person exceeds 900 followers, one receives accusations of having “bought followers” as such companies do exist.

“Personally,” added another, “I don’t care what others think of me and if I get a like, I just shrug and continue scrolling.” In ways that pick up on the “transmediated self” (Elwell, 2013, p. 243), there can also be tensions between online experimentation and face-to-face encounters: “People you are in contact with on social media are people you already know. Trying out different personae online doesn’t work if people have already attached a certain set of qualities to you.”

The complications around online identity formation emerged in the interviews. Andy expressed exasperation at the world of Facebook, declaring that amongst his age group

people don’t even use Facebook for posting what they think. It’s really sharing things. I don’t think I’ve posted a status on Facebook in two years. I have nothing worth saying on Facebook. I feel embarrassed almost to post anything on Facebook.

The social media site, for him, had become a venue for watching “random videos.” It was only his parents who posted statuses. Jimmy expressed a similar ennui with the social media behemoth:

I’d say there’s a lot of drama on social media. There’s this one person...I’m just sick and tired because she’s always posting about stupid stuff that goes on in her life or which she perceives to be hardships, but, in reality, it’s a bunch of nonsense, to the extent that I just deleted her as a friend.

For Saeed, however, forays into social media were complicated, and the potential for personal upset written about by Turkle (2011) was evoked. He alluded to having posted a poem “about mother and son and how God has connected them together.” The text attracted five likes but also one very hostile, homophobic comment. “I wanted to delete that comment, but I couldn’t do it...I was being bullied by the guy who left that comment.” Knowing that some people like and accepted him online led to him having a “great feeling,” but “at the same time, the comments could be destructive.” Through his polite, circumstantial style of speaking, Saeed was clearly struggling with how to



interpret responses to his online identity work by the people he called “the haters.” Mike adopted a more cautious approach to online posting. Reflecting the self-conscious authoring of self described by Merchant (2006), he said that he worked to keep his identity the same in person, on Facebook, and on Twitter because “I want to keep it relatively clean in case of headhunters looking at it or teachers or parents.” He avoided posting anything too personal. Possibly looking to a career in politics, he evoked the example of disgraced US Congressman Anthony Weiner. “I’ve seen horrible things happen to people who did stupid stuff and it ended up on the web,” Mike said, “or they did stupid stuff on the web and it ended up in public.”

The identity formation online is in many ways similar to and an extension of identity formation in the flesh. It is active, messy, and complicated. The virtual nature of the identity work may serve to heighten or exaggerate the kinds of role play that people do face-to-face, giving them an additional freedom to try, adopt, and shed identities. It can also give people the opportunity to detract from the identity work of others, mean-spirited comments such as those experienced by Saeed not only causing confusion and upset amongst social media users but also contributing to whatever identity the “hater” is attempting to establish.

#### *Finding two: Analog teaching in a digital world*

A live theatre trip is often experienced and understood by young people in ways that are shaped by their online lives. Engaging productions can nevertheless make a meaningful contribution to identity formation by providing teenagers with the opportunity to experience an alternative means of artistic expression and self-development.

Like many of the online respondents, Alex enjoyed the year’s theatre series, in part because it was *not* digital. Tying into questions raised by Kuksa (2009) about the nature of the “recent marriage” (p. 83) between culture and technology, he took particular pleasure in the interactive, face-to-face relationship between audience members and performers, something that he found lacking when connecting with others through a screen. “I like it because the emotions are much more tangible if it’s done well,” he said. “I’m seeing the raw emotions of the characters.” The lack of digital special effects also made the experience of seeing a live play memorable. “Everything is there,” he said. Unlike digital content, “everything’s tangible.” Although students around him did use their phones during the performance, simultaneously occupying a networked audience and the theatre audience, he kept his turned off because “I like to get emotionally invested in whatever I’m seeing, so I don’t like to get distracted.” Along those lines, Atash spoke about how watching on demand TV at home can be a lonely activity, while in the theatre “even though you don’t know any of those people, you still feel the warmth, you still feel that there is some human being beside you, you’re not alone.” He decided to turn his phone in

to the teacher when going to the theatre because “from the first play that we watched, there were so many people being distracted with phones, afterwards we got so many blame [sic] from the theatre.”

While Alex enjoyed the play in part because of the break it gave him from being digital, he felt that the experience of theatregoing took place within the context of expectations engendered by the screen. More accustomed to watching movies than plays, “people expect action or non-stop sensory experiences.” Suggesting responses to audience studies scholars curious about the role of live theatre during digital times (Barker, 2003; Reason, 2004; Tulloch, 2000), he described how instant online access has made the lack of control that comes with sitting in a theatre seem foreign: “Going to a play at 7:00 on a Wednesday night, that’s a burden...people like to be much more in control of their lives and see things whenever they want to.”

Like Alex, online respondents reported that they enjoyed the live plays because they provided a welcome change from the digital. But there was often a caveat: “If I am watching a live theatre performance and I am bored, then yes, I will indulge in using technology because I will want to be entertained in some way,” wrote one student. An escape from boredom is only ever a swipe away. Shortened attention spans due to the quick hits of the digital life were cited by many as a distraction to enjoying the play, as was a general dependency on technology to check the time, message, update Facebook or Twitter, check out Instagram, etc. Echoing others, one writer noted that his digital lifestyle had a “profound effect” on his watching live theatre:

The digital lifestyle shortens my attention span and patience and I don’t think that a play is geared to this mindset at all. The play encourages me to slow down my thinking and ultimately ponder what’s happening on stage, because meaning and food for thought don’t scream at me from a play like they do on a website.

Amongst the students who felt that their digital lives had little or no effect on their enjoyment of live theatre, many described themselves as seasoned theatregoers already accustomed to the particular behaviours associated with theatre. While they often noticed classmates having difficulty watching a play unplugged, they felt able to disconnect. A typical comment was, “I have always enjoyed live theatre and watch it very often since I was young, so when I started my digital lifestyle it did not affect my attendance nor did it affect my enjoyment as I still thoroughly enjoyed the play.” This suggests the importance of schools maintaining a full range of activities such as trips to the theatre to allow students the opportunity to build their understanding and appreciation of alternate forms of expression. Mike went a little further in articulating the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1997) that he said theatre allowed him to accrue: “It makes us more sophisticated,” he said. “It makes us seem more cultured, and it makes me sound better when I talk to people who regularly go to theatre shows.”

Probing Alex for a sense of how theatre may have impacted his identity formation in the ways anticipated by Greenhow, Robelia, and Hughes (2009), I asked him “which play changed you the most or shaped who you are the most or changed your thinking the most?” Like most of his classmates, Alex opted for the story of Korean immigrants who run a Toronto corner store, *Kim’s Convenience*:

It illustrated to me the difficulties between generations and how...I mean, I run into this with my family because my family are also immigrants to this country – the expectations of the older generation and the perceived ineptitude of the younger generation, or what the older generation wants the younger generation to become, and so I personally related the most to the characters in *Kim’s Convenience*. On the other hand, they taught me a lot about relationships with your parents and your family, and you’re not alone in these things...I saw trying to make my parents proud of me, or *trying* to make my parents happy with the career I’ve chosen.

The recognition of his own experiences and what the play taught him suggests that the encounter with the play was rich with identity formation: Alex left the theatre with a new perspective on himself, the immigrant experience, and the way in which he related to his parents. Jimmy similarly saw connections between *Kim’s Convenience* and the “huge divide and conflict” he felt with his parents over the “cultural gap” between “first generation, second generation Canadians,” while Saeed drew from the play that “immigrant families do hold onto the values from where they come from” while living in North America, similar to his own parents and their “conservatism.”

In the online survey, *Kim’s Convenience* also emerged as a student favourite, with the vast majority of respondents able to articulate the ways in which they found the play meaningful. A typical response was:

My view on the immigrant experience is a lot different after seeing the play. This is because before I saw the play I knew that immigrants had to work hard to make a living, but after, I felt almost connected to these characters who I found funny and kind. I felt myself rooting for the characters and wishing they didn’t have to work as hard. The play did a very good job of entertaining the audience with funny lines while still getting across a relatively serious message.

A couple of students found the play’s message a little too heavy-handed, or found the play’s humour too obvious, with one student writing, “the play focused more on the funny stereotypes about the immigrant experience rather than the struggles of it. Other than being briefly amused I didn’t enjoy this play very much.” The overwhelming reaction to the play, however, was that students found it entertaining and personally meaningful, and that cellphones could, for the most part, remain stowed.

## CONCLUSION: A ROLE FOR EDUCATORS

Online social media sites are a lively and contested location for student identity formation, presentation, and experimentation. Given the vibrancy of the evolving and contested modes of behaviour, and the importance of digital technology in general to both students and schools, it would be easy to assume that traditional activities such as the school theatre trip were rendered meaningless for students more apt to turn to their handhelds for identity work than a darkened stage. My research suggests, however, that while identity formation takes place online through new, contested, and still evolving practices, relevant, well-presented theatre retains the capacity to move minds and to keep the smartphones tucked out of sight. This is not to say that a successful production that engages the hearts and minds of young audience members can succeed on its own terms. Identity formation in the theatre takes place within the context of students’ deep involvement with the online world. The theatre may exhort audience members to turn off their phones, but they remain in the theatre space, pulsing, flashing, vibrating in bags and in pockets, in hands, and on laps. Even when the student’s attention is captivated by the production, a return to the online world is never far away. An uninteresting production can lead students to go online; a production may be of interest because it is not digital and represents a change from the usual. Live theatre is like an eddy in the digital stream: the students move into the theatre with their cellphones in their hands, the blue screens light up the theatre space, and when the students depart, the phones are out again, their owners eager to reconnect with the digital conversation.

My research supports the view that identity formation is itself intrinsically theatrical (boyd, 2014; Goffman, 1959). Social media websites provide teenagers with spaces, or “stages,” to perform, experiment with different identities, play roles, try out voices, and play to different audiences. Without the bricks and mortar edifice of a theatre, however, the theatrical experimentation and fluidity takes place rapidly, seamlessly across multiple virtual venues and then off the screens and into the classroom, street, and home. A trip to the theatre can therefore provide teachers with a helpful means of working with students to understand the nature of the identity work they carry out online. It makes the nature of their performances overt.

There can also be significant value in the theatre experience itself – plays, that in a deliberate, planned, and artistic manner often absent from the online hurly-burly, inspire thought and provide students with new perspectives. There is a safety to identify formation in the theatre that can be missing online. Students cited the need that peers felt to expose their bodies online in an effort to generate likes, or to experiment with different voices and identities. Watching a play allows for a different kind of bodily exposure and role experimentation, as students step out into the world of adult culture and watch deliberately embodied presentations onstage. Key to the success of such

non-pixelated educational activities is repeated exposure so that students can learn ways of thinking about artistic expression aside from the digital and can become accustomed to a pace, focus, and tradition that is less familiar to them. Also important are teachers who “build bridges” (Hosenfeld, 1999) between students’ digital experiences and activities that are less familiar.

Due in part to the theatre series, Alex intended to continue to see plays in the future, and, as his English teacher, my hope is that the “essential qualities” (Jäkälä & Berki, 2013, p. 5) that constitute his personal identity will be more richly informed as a result. His words about the play *Enron*, his least favourite production, are helpful in understanding the challenges faced by other teachers wishing to expose students to non-digital experiences during digital times:

I thought it was tired. I thought it was overacted. I didn’t like the acting style. I thought there was unnecessary yelling. There was overacting. There were some scenes that were over-sexualized when they really didn’t need to be. There were some ideas that were presented in ways that could have been presented otherwise, or the jokes were off-key. I really think there was no connection with the audience. I mean, they weren’t able to break the barrier.

Understanding “the barrier” between a traditional school event like a play and the expectations and experiences of students raised in the digital era – learning to work around it, go over it, break it, smash it, or maybe just learn to live with it – is one of the tasks faced by educators eager to provide a meaningful contributions to their students’ hybrid, online / offline iDentity formation.

## APPENDIX A: SURVEY ONE

### *Proud*

1. Why do you think your teachers took you to see *Proud*? What do you think they hoped you would get out of it?
2. What did you actually get out of seeing *Proud*? Please comment on the effects the play had on you, however small. Think specifically about the following:
  - a. How you think about Canadian politics:
  - b. How you think about live theatre:
  - c. Who you are as a person, your outlook, thoughts, and feelings:
  - d. What else did you get out of seeing the play?
3. Did you access your cellphone during the performance? Did having your cellphone with you affect your experience of watching the play? Please explain.

**Goodnight Desdemona, Good Morning Juliet**

1. Why do you think your teachers took you to see *Goodnight Desdemona, Good Morning Juliet*? What do you think they hoped you would get out of it?
2. What did you actually get out of seeing *Goodnight Desdemona, Good Morning Juliet*? Please comment on the effects the play had on you, however small. Think specifically about the following:
  - a. How you think about Shakespeare’s play:
  - b. How you think about live theatre:
  - c. How you think about same sex relationships:
  - d. Who you are as a person, your outlook, thoughts, and feelings:
  - e. What else did you get out of seeing the play?
3. How did it feel to watch the play without your cellphone? Did it change how you experienced the play?
4. What is it like for you to attend a live play? Describe the experience.
5. Compare your role as an audience member for a live play to your role as an audience member at a movie theatre.
6. Compare the experience of an evening at the theatre to an evening of online activities.

“Online activities” can include social media sites, web surfing, and playing games.

7. Describe how your daily, digital lifestyle may affect how you experience live theatre.

“Digital lifestyle” refers to your use of social media and other web sites, email, texting, and other cellphone or laptop-based activities.

**APPENDIX B: SURVEY TWO**

***Kim’s Convenience***

1. Why do you think your teachers took you to see *Kim’s Convenience*? What do you think they hoped you would get out of it?
2. What did you actually get out of seeing *Kim’s Convenience*? Please comment on the effects the play had on you, however small. Think specifically about the following:
  - a. How you think about the immigrant experience:
  - b. How you think about live theatre:
  - c. Who you are as a person, your outlook, thoughts, and feelings:
  - d. What else did you get out of seeing the play?

## Enron

1. Why do you think your teachers took you to see *Enron*? What do you think they hoped you would get out of it?
2. What did you actually get out of seeing *Enron*? Please comment on the effects the play had on you, however small. Think specifically about the following:
  - a. How you think about the oil industry:
  - b. How you think about live theatre:
  - c. Who you are as a person, your outlook, thoughts, and feelings:
  - d. What else did you get out of seeing the play?
3. Describe the factors that shape who you are and the kind of person you are becoming.

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