

NOT I, NOT NOT I: PERSONIFYING RESILIENCE  
THROUGH PERFORMANCE

by

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

“He who has a why to live can bear with almost any how”  
--Nietzsche (Moses, 1985, p. 333)

Rico

Rico was the fourth of five children. His father was a sexually abusive alcoholic and drug addict; his mother, manically depressed and silent. The family lived in a small house in an extremely poor neighborhood in a medium sized city. Additionally, the family lacked any type of internal bond; except Rico’s younger sister and himself, they were always close. At a very young age, Rico took on a parental role working and playing the role of parent to his siblings as well as his parents. Whereas Rico’s brothers and sisters were using drugs, dropping out of school, and finding temporarily lucrative methods of survival on the street, Rico remained focused on his future. He did well in school and was accepted to a reputable university. Although his family had no money or care to send him, Rico had managed to save enough money to pay for his first semester and then applied for financial aid to help him throughout.

Three days before Rico was to leave, his father died of a heroin overdose in the living room while sitting on the living room couch next to Rico. Whereas Rico was devastated by his father’s death, Rico recognized that his father had made poor choices and had learned from his father’s mistakes. Rico graduates this fall with honors and a near perfect grade point average. I am jealous of his intellect, but more than this, his

remarkable courage. He is currently narrowing down the seven out of seven graduate programs he has been accepted to. Equally as remarkable, Rico's younger sister entered college this year and attributes her life choice to him.

Growing up in the same neighborhood, Rico was an inspiration to me. In high school, I saw so many of my friends and classmates fall victim to environmental adversity. Growing up in a poverty stricken environment presents many complexities (Eckert, 2002). The majority of students at my high school would be the first in their families to graduate, and for many this was the ultimate goal. For others, however, surviving life's hardships took prescience. For example, I will share with you the story of Todd.

### Todd

Todd grew up a few blocks from me in a less than ideal situation. We became friends when walking home from school one day when he bought me a soda from the local convenience store with some food stamps he had stolen from his mom that morning. I liked Todd and held his friendship dear for many years after that.

I was always saddened when I would see Todd's life in a different light. Todd lived in a one bedroom house with his mom and her boyfriend. He had conveniently made the living room into his bedroom lined with the posters of his favorite baseball players. The house was always stale with the smell of marijuana smoke and Todd would always ignore this as if it did not exist. I did not see his mother or her boyfriend except on one rare occasion where I was told to leave and I heard yelling and screaming as I

walked quickly home. Todd often came to school with black eyes and bruises. Todd was passed off as simply a thug by the educational system and was guided toward failure.

As our lives grew apart, Todd started showing up for school less and less and dropped out our sophomore year. Over the next few years, he emerged as a prominent drug dealer and was making thousands of dollars a day. He bought his mom a new house and car. However, with the drug distribution and money came the drug use. Todd stared off with marijuana and progresses to cocaine and other hard drugs. With time however, his entrepreneurship became too high profile. Soon after, I read about his arrest on drug charges in the newspaper and was surprised to see an additional charge beyond distribution to murder with conspiracy. Todd currently faces capital murder charges. This news broke my heart. Additionally, it made me consider the factors that pushed Todd and so many other people to this lifestyle.

### Purpose of the Study

Like Rico and Todd, many have suffered though environmental factors that the majority of Americans could not possibly fathom. Rico emerged as a survivor, yet Todd did not. Todd's story is very sad and tragic. Rico's story is rare, yet inspirational. He survived a life that most would see no way out of. Rico exhibited an ability to move beyond his extreme environment, whereas Todd had fallen victim to it.

I have many personal investments in the following research. This is what Conquergood (2002) refers to as radical research. This is research that possesses the ability to change lives. The stories presented thus far are not uncommon and desperately

deserve attention from researchers in order to better understand similar situations but more importantly, how to overcome them. The character and resilient behavior of individuals like Rico raises a number of important questions.

Initially, the answers go beyond the traditional concerns of communication processes, theoretical, and statistical methods. In answering this question, the most valuable data comes from personal experience itself (Fine, 1991). Embodiment of resilient individual's experiences will possibly offer a deeper understanding into the factors that influence resilient response to adverse situations. Although narrative analysis has been conducted in many facets of previous research, this researcher will go one step further. Narratives will be collected chronicling the triumph of resilient individuals and then compiled into a performance script. The script will be performed by educators. It is the intent of this project to explore the communicative processes that resilient individuals utilize to overcome adversity by conducting analysis on performance as textual data.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

It is important to first explain that resilience has been chosen to represent an individual phenomenon for the purpose of this study. Thus, it is essentially a case study. The primary elements of analysis lie in performer feedback. Thus, it is important to analyze literature in four primary areas. First, scholarship on resilience will be reviewed for readers to gain a better understanding of the cultural beings being analyzed through performance. Second, literature on intercultural pedagogy will be explored to examine performance as a cultural training tool. It is the assumption of this researcher that this method will be most effective in an intercultural setting. Third, narrative and embodiment research will be reviewed to capture the importance of this monologic approach to performance. Finally, performance literature that is applicable to this study will be combined with the previous categories to argue for performance as a way of coming to now one's self by means of understanding others.

#### Overview of Resilience

It is important to begin by looking at some of the more classic research. Redl's (1969) groundbreaking research on those who overcome adversity coined the term resilience, which refers to the ability to overcome extremely challenging circumstances to maintain normal or above normal standards of achievement. Such resilience requires persistence that is complete with the skills and intelligence to assess situations and

problems and then exhibiting the flexibility to know when to use what skill in order to survive (Demos, 1989). Such resilience is operationalized as “cognitive and behavioral coping skills and the recruitment of social support” exhibited in order to transcend adversity (Fine, 1991, p. 49).

Resilience is often measured based on an individual’s competence and success fulfilling social expectations despite great adversity in meeting such expectations (Fine, 1991). In truly understanding resilient behavior, both the behavior and the emotional aspects of the individual are important and even necessary to examine. This is why I have chosen performance as a tool for understanding. Behavioral and emotional resiliency involves two aspects: a behavior response to the adverse situation at hand and an emotional evaluation as to how the individual feels about the situation (Fine, 1991).

Exhibiting behavioral and emotional strength in adverse situations is the essence of resilient individuals. They demonstrate hardiness through challenge, commitment, and control (Kobasa, 1979). Challenge is the belief that change is a normal part of life and serves as an incentive rather than a threat (Fine, 1991). Commitment involves an individual’s tendency to actively participate in situations instead of being alienated from adverse situations. This type of event allows individuals to find all events and people meaningful and worthwhile (Fine, 1991). Control is exemplified as a feeling of behavior enacted to influence one’s life instead of being hopeless to life’s forces.

The more contemporary research focuses on achievement motivation literature and quantitative analysis. However, the bridge to qualitative research and the importance of this method was captured by Eckert (2002) when she identified the gap between

methodologies as a focus on success as an ongoing process as opposed to outcomes. Where so many social scientists have focused on group ideas of success (such as standardized testing), resilient individuals often form their own survival as individualized (Eckert, 2002). Foci should not fixate the early life traumatic experiences of resilient individuals, but the later life achievements and the process of attaining this or working through (Schiff, Noy, & Cohler, 2001). The knowledge gap lies in what Eckert (2002) called ordinary success. For resilient individuals, the success he or she achieves is nothing more than their reality. Intrapersonal communication allows ones reality to be their perception. For this reason, it is imperative to understand how the perception of resilient individuals shapes his or her reality as well as the implications of the impacts on others reality.

The experience of adversity and the drive to rise above it are themes that characterize the human condition. The resilient individual is able to successfully meet the demands of society despite great obstacles through a positive attitude, a meaningful purpose in life, effective social skills, and ability to elicit social support, maintaining an internal locust of control, and surviving on hope even when all hope is gone enables resilient individuals to beat the odds and successfully overcome adversity (Fine 1991; Moses, 1985). In context of the proposed study, subjects must utilize these intellectual tools in extreme hardship where statistical evidence predicts failure.

Overcoming these forms of adversity is attributed to several factors. O'Connell Higgins (1994) asserts:

resilient individuals are above average or superior in IQ; possesses exceptional talents including creativity and inner resources (and have developed many of these); have obtained higher economic levels than their family of origin; demonstrate high levels of ego development, have sustained empathically attuned, close relational ties to childhood, adolescence, and adulthood (including those they formed with adult surrogates) frequently having highly psychologically compromised siblings, and maintain strong political and social activism. (p. 20)

Additionally and possibly most importantly, resilient individuals are self propelled; they operate with a firm belief that knowledge is power and their futures will advance if they are active change agents in their own lives (O'Connell Higgins, 1994).

The progression of this research related to communication relies on the ability of the researcher to understand the communicative elements of resilience. For this reason it is imperative to capture the essence of communicative factors of resilience. Ultimately one must consider that all persons are potentially vulnerable to personal distress at different times for different reasons. Additionally one must consider that resilience is a relative term, and that not all individuals see competency factors as a surface trait when dealing with adversity (Anthony & Cohler, 1987). It is important to point out that whereas resilient individuals often view their adversity as normative; the true challenges are confronted when these individuals are removed from their environment (Anthony & Cohler, 1987). This element of resilience research had not been addressed until Eckert (2002) studied high achieving minority adolescent girl's narratives of success. This narrative analysis brings resiliency research to the point where it currently needs

extension and development. Essentially, as researchers, we know what it is, but how can we fully understand it? This question will be addressed in the following section.

### Intercultural Training Methods

This study will hopefully transcend the current methods of intercultural understanding to accept and utilize the more abstract methods such as performance. Venues for cultural emersion exist within us and should be more utilized. Additionally, research should always be conducted in addition to any training that teaches culture to identify accuracy as well as follow-up research in order to learn more. The next step is to utilize the effective elements of each and combine them into educational paradigms for training.

The course of an intercultural encounter begins with the individual, as yet unaware of the cultural other (Harbeck, 2001). A number of studies have been examined with regard to issues such as stereotypes and ethnocentrism when dealing with inter-group encounters (Storner, 2002). However, the analysis of these fields will demand depth as well as understanding of a fully affective and effective method of intercultural research to truly understand the social construct and actions of a culture.

Scholars throughout academe are currently conducting research to combat stereotypes and abolish ethnocentric behaviors. Toale and McCrosky (2001) suggest that different communication behaviors are utilized by different ethnic backgrounds; therefore, we must understand through cultural studies what types of communication differences are evident within group membership. Pierce (2003) suggests that the

approach to simply become non-racist has resulted in a structural inequity within society. In fact, overcoming stereotypes has shaped many into simply a cool, ultra liberal, metaphorically colorblind individual (Gallagher, 1995). Whereas many claim to be aware of racial inequity and to act on the behalf of racism in society, this has created a one-world approach where absurd concepts such as reverse racism exist (Jacobson, 1998). bell hooks (1995) argued for honest disclosure in order to decrease the level of racism in our society (Chavez, 1998).

Additionally, current research has tapped into the area of sex verses gender. Gender identity has nothing to do with the biological sex of an individual or the issue of gay or lesbian (Wood, 1997). Instead it refers to communication styles of individuals. As Ting-Toomey (1999) suggests, the “us and them” and “male and female” style polarized terms where one can only exist as the absolute other. It is this idea that should be crucially and critically explored more deeply. The use of polarized terms will promote stereotypes beyond race and ethnicity. Polarized terms infringe upon personal identity within cultural communication styles (Stormer, 2002). However, the most current and interesting research in social identity studies how the suggested methods of overcoming stereotypes and ethnocentric behaviors has backlashed and been proven ineffective to a large degree (Pierce, 2003). This is a result of the current intercultural training tools being utilized to teach tolerance instead of understanding. Tolerance is a concept often used when referring to a person or group one appears to like. As Seiter, Brusckhe, and Bai (2002) suggest, the deceptive practice of teaching tolerance without understanding is not only ubiquitous, it has been conceptualized as a form of communication competence

within intercultural encounters. Tolerance elongated is a catalyst for apathy. Thus, a better term to teach may be embrace. Methodological dilemmas intercultural scholars may encounter could be lessened by viewing the concept of training in the light that Chen and Staraosta (1998) suggest as education. This would encourage knowledge and understanding instead of the deceptive idea of tolerance as an effective method. The transformative affects of this type of education can force a rethinking of fixed notions of cultural identity (Hedge & DiCicco-Bloom, 2002).

Due to this educational practice, outsiders often find themselves balancing competing identities and cultural scripts that pose very real challenges in their lives (Giddens, 2000). This idea links the importance to teach understanding along with tolerance in intercultural encounters. Concurrently, it is important to create what Williamson (2002) calls *framing devices* in order to link an understanding between two cultures while simultaneously allowing differences to exist.

For the purpose of this study, the framing device at hand will be performance. Artistic expression can be even more advantageous when the complexity between the two cultures is made coherent to members of both cultures (Hylom & Buzzanell, 2002). This can be a process by which educational competing models can combine to formulate a model in which constructive approaches can exist within intercultural encounters. Due to the previous research on teaching interculturalism and methods of training, a primary problem area should methodologically and phenomenologically explore the usage of performance as a framing device of complexity and a catalyst for understanding intercultural interaction.

## Narrative and Embodiment

In his essay, Fisher (1984) defines narrative as:

The theories of symbolic actions-words and or deeds- that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them. The narrative perspective, therefore, has relevance to real as well as fictive worlds, to stories of living and to stories of the imagination. (p. 14)

Fisher's words give narrative performance cohesion and credibility. Through performance, actors live, create, and interpret narratives, thus lives. Lawrence Geiger (2002) stresses the significance of the utilization of personal narrative by explaining, "Stories stimulate the imagination, and enable us to consider alternatives, reaching beyond ourselves to create new paradigms" (p. 16). Within cultural performance, this is imperative considering that individuals are performing individuals from the opposite sex, another culture, or a different ethnicity.

This idea is further developed when Kirkwood (2000) argues, "images and narratives can exemplify ways of feeling through life. Stories that present heroic characters who display inner calm can thus affirm the value of this state of mind." (p.18) In this project resilience is viewed as heroism, thus giving the resilient character the status of hero. The state of mind is gained from reaching outside of one's self to experience another. The storyteller conveys a message that teaches the listeners to interact with the environment in a positive way, through the story itself, or actions taken because of the story.

When Kirkwood (2000) expresses, "Stories may also model specific practices by

which characters...regain peace of mind...and show listeners how to bring peace to their minds in a direct way” (p.19), he is explaining the importance the storyteller to put forth specific behaviors to be used by listeners to regain their own peace of mind. An example of this may be a performer embodying a character and drawing parallels between her life and that of the performed character as a sense of connection to her reality, thus gaining peace of mind.

Scholars of narrative have also identified the intrapersonal role of narrative as internal rhetoric. Internal rhetoric must contain an emotional and psychological change, as well as physiological action to act upon that change (Neinkamp, 2001). Sarbin’s (2001) theoretical model directs us to the study of *emotional life* as opposed to the substantive term *emotion*. Actions traditionally subsumed under the term emotion, such as anger, fear, pride, joy, shame, and guilt are considered to be the names of narrative plots (Sarbin, 2001). The emotions themselves are embodied and the narrative is communicated to one’s self. Sarbin (2001) further details the idea of embodiment:

I use embodiment to refer to the bodily expressions arising from the actor’s placing of him or her self in a particular narrative. If the actor locates self in a story of sadness, embodiments such as tears and crying are likely to follow. If the actor locates self in a story in which she or he is the object of insult, aggressive embodiments are likely to follow. This may advance the identity of the engaged or fail as a rhetorical tactic. (p. 219)

In the past, the narrative scope has been limited to verbal stories communicated to others (Lucatias and Condit, 1985). However, Sarbin (2002) argues that narrative can occur intrapersonally, through emotion. He is essentially saying that the author of the narrative is not the person telling the story, but the person hearing the story or connecting to it.

Equally, it is important for the narrator to separate himself or herself from a narrative because, much like the experience of the intrapersonal narrative, the personal narrative of the storyteller *is* the storyteller (Brewer and Walton, 2002). Fisher (1984) argues that narrative is more than a subtle display of persuasion. Narrative has been used throughout history to create a moral order, transmitting values evaluations, or in creating or positioning to the self as a moral agent (Brewer and Walton, 2000). Ultimately this project seeks to embody the previous statement.

### Performance

Visual texts are designed to influence belief and action, as having objectives, and as having creators with motives and intentions who made design choices relevant to all audiences (Peterson, 2001). One must first, however understand how to view a visual dramatic text. It is essential to view performance as a multi faceted text. From the prospective of discourse, the text is composed of a referring discourse, originated by the writer and a referred discourse, spoken by the character (De Marinis, 1993). When viewing performance we must understand that we are experiencing a life's perspective on a life, and delineate the two from each other, as performers and as audience members. This is important to achieve the ultimate goal of this type of research; to become what you are not and to assess the difference. This is where the title of the script comes into play. Not I , not not I, refers to a person playing a role that is not them; yet, when performing, however, it is not not them either (Stern & Henderson, 1993).

This review of research addresses the performance angle of another (e.g., how does one embody a person that is not him or her self?) Essentially the progression here implies the link from the resilient trait or quality to the lived experience or practice of resilience. The following research addresses the value of personification or embodiment. As Conquergood (2002) conceptualized, “Dominant epistemologies that link knowing with seeing are not attuned to meanings that are masked, camouflaged, indirect, embedded or hidden in contact” (p. 146). Thus it is essential that cultural performance, or performance of another cultural being takes place. Following are two examples of research projects closely related to this study.

In the 1980s at the University of Southern Illinois, Ronald J. Pelias published an article likening perspective taking abilities (Pelias, 1984). Essentially, perspective taking ability is the ability of an individual to view an issue from another perspective. The application of this concept is assumed to strengthen the ability of an individual to see both sides. The beginnings of the scholarship were established to strengthen rational argument; Pelias applied other usage, such as oral interpretation performance. However, the performance studies field has attempted to move beyond oral interpretation due to its limitations (Stucky, 1996).

Nathan Stucky (1995) additionally found importance in establishing new perspectives with his oral histories work. Stucky, a professor of performance, instructed his students to travel into the community and interview others soliciting stories or oral histories. Stucky found it important to conduct the interviews face to face to incorporate

the emotions involved in the telling of the stories. Stucky then had his students perform the stories in order to gain a better understanding of the other.

A myriad of performance have been constructed to illustrate one's ability to see beyond her or him self. Yet the gap lies in the applied approach to this style of research. Performance is often a visual outlet for an academic to display his or her research, as in the case of Michael S. Bowman's (2000), *Killing Dillinger: a Mystory*. Bowman's use of pun in the title refers to the auto-ethnographic approach to research. Bowman chronicles the effects of Dillinger's death on his life. His life serves as the perspective where as the events serve as historical research. A similar method is applied within the script compiled for performance in this research project. Bowman's (2000) essay is summarized in only a few words, "I want to show you some pictures and tell you some stories..." (p. 342). This seemingly simplistic form of research is actually multi-faceted. Auto-research is an attempt to conceive and perform by the same person (Gingrich-Philbrook, 2000). There are many critics of this style of research, particularly because it adds to the already multifaceted construct of performance studies as an academic discipline (Gingrich-Philbrook, 2000).

However, one may view ethnographic performance with a similar bias. Through ethnographic observation, interviews, and existence; researchers take the words, ritual, or phenomenon and construct them into performance. It is important to note that performance ethnography does not always focus on the narrative element. In fact, if this were the case ethnography would be limited to the ethnographer and the subject's dialogue. Interestingly, this particular research project is not inherently ethnographic, yet

it is a product of interviews, lived experiences, narrative interpretation, and phenomenological research. Thus, a pluralistic research project is created. Obviously, this has its broad series of critics, yet the focus of this study is not the method in which the scripts were created. More importantly, I'm not sure that this element of the study can be reproduced. Yet the critical element, the data to be tested, falls into the later part of this project. Ultimately this section argues for the conception of data by the researcher, the performance of data by others. This results in the conception of data by the performer, and the interpretation of the data by the researcher. A similar approach is utilized in the performance of personae.

Patricia Smith (1992), a gifted poet and spoken word artist, utilizes personification as method in the writing and performance of her poem skinhead. This poem essentially portrays the feelings and political agenda of a white supremacist. Interestingly, Smith is an African-American female. Seeing Smith perform this poetry is powerful and compelling. Performance studies seeks to embrace the culture/performance matrix to occupy a unique understanding of the ways culture produces, maintains and transforms relations of identity and difference (Strine, 1998). Another example is illustrated in Smith's (1992) short story titled Persona Poem, the protagonist challenges her class of inner-city students to write in personification style in order to cope with and attempt to understand why their fifth grade classmate was shot. One student writes himself into the story as a bullet. Another writes a poem from the personae of a dead person, much like Bowman's (2000) aforementioned article. The lesson here is to

embody the other, much like the solo performance in the performance studies discipline.  
Essentially, the performers are using themselves as the performance text (Miller, 1998).

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

“One only has to read, to look, to listen to remember.”

--Virginia Woolf (Bogart, 2001, p. 21)

#### Theoretical Justification of Method

Rumi, the ancient Sufi poet, truly wrote from his soul. He viewed himself in contrast and harmony with his perception of the world and then translated those experiences into poetry. Rumi's poetry has been transcendent through time, translation, and culture. While dealing with a difficult time in my life, I was given a copy of Coleman Bark's translation of *The Essential Rumi* (1997). His writing gave me perspective and tranquility. Reading Rumi's words became my ritual; speaking Rumi's words became my performance. Schechner (1993) illustrates this idea when he describes performance as having the startling ability to act as a catalyst for creating self, to change and become-for better or worse-what you ordinarily are not. Through my experience with Rumi's work, I changed for the better. Yet reflecting back upon this gradual changing experience, I found myself asking; why? What was it about this experience that enlightened me? The simple answer is perspective. The academic answer comes from the study of hermeneutics and semiotic constructivism. However the theoretical method follows the lines of pluralism.

The method in which I have utilized for this project is an effort to measure and properly control the subject of interpretation (Anderson, 1996). What began as a broadly defined qualitative methodology quickly developed into a non-traditional yet theoretically justified version of research. I have utilized a hermeneutic approach complemented by a semiotic constructionism. Utilizing hermeneutics allows the researcher to create his or her data through interpretation, or the data become the interpretative act.

Ultimately, for the script production process, data in this project is the product of a myriad of perspectives. Each observation is analyzed and interpreted by an alternate perspective. As Anderson (1996) argues, interpretation is a human act, thus it rejects foundational empiricism (p. 25). The hermeneutic approach follows a four-part criterion that is the essence of this method. Anderson (1996) deems this concept the hermeneutic criterion of the real: (1) The real of social life transcends - but does not deny- the material and is the product of the human mind in the collective action. (2) The material practices of reality production center language and significance as well as communication and meaning as their primary devices. (3) The real is from some vantage point. (4) The revelators themselves are part of the reality production process (pp. 27-28). These ideas lead me into the semiotic constructivist camp.

Viewing this production calls for a semiotic style of critique. Semiotic constructivism likens reality construction as a system of encoding and decoding messages. The interpretation of each symbol at its given moment of perception becomes

reality. Yet, the basis of this concept is misleading. Constructivist semiotics does not assume reality is constructed in increments. It is presented to us in a continuous, albeit variable, stream of exchange (Anderson, 1996). This is significant when viewing performance (broadly defined; from a child playing to a staged production) on any level. One should view the performance as a whole entity, not separating actors from the script and design, but viewing all as one text. Only then can one recognize something as meaningful (Anderson, 1996).

Many communication theorists find it problematic for a person to simply claim to be a general hermeneutic because hermeneutic theories differ to the point of contradiction. One end of the spectrum (world language and genetics) claims interpretation is reality indistinguishable from realism imbedded in world- defined language whereas the other (polysemic) claims to be open to rhetorical interpretation. The polysemic end is what I believe to be the most pure to the idea of hermeneutics. I believe interpretation should be semiotic as well as analogical. I believe humans are essentially syntagmatically knowing creatures, thus we make sense of relationships and act upon the messages we interpret. Critics of polysemic hermeneutics find this problematic and claim that we should not use semiotics as a means, yet we should utilize rules for action and allow our research to become deterministic (Anderson, 1996). As a researcher I am looking to advance society in some form or fashion. Thus, it is necessary for me attempt to provide knowledge and information as a tool so humans can possibly make an informed decision as opposed to being captured under rule and determinism, as

the other side of hermeneutics might suggest. Hermeneutics claims that all scholarship holds ground within academe. This is so because within hermeneutics, facts are not simply facts, but only in their representation do they actually imply action (Anderson, 1996).

### Method

The methodology involved a four-step process. The researcher collected and studied the narratives of individuals who exhibited an ability to survive extreme hardships from a diverse range of literature as a case study. Secondly, narratives were openly coded (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to identify resiliency themes and then compiled to create a performance script. Third, four educators were cast into the role of each character. These educators performed the script written by the researcher focusing on the specified narrative of his or her primary subject. Finally, interviews were conducted with the performers to establish the credibility and effectiveness of narrative and character embodiment as a pedagogical tool. A more detailed method of each step of the research process follows.

### Script Creation

I began this project by researching two phenomena. First, resilience as a case study formulated into story, and secondly, resilience as a means of understanding and overcoming adversity. Experiences from my own life, the lives of those whom I

interacted with for the first 22 years of my life, and pre-existing compiled narratives of resilience were analyzed and interpreted to form scripts for performance. The scripts essentially become the first part of the data. Each script chronicles the story of a resilient individual containing the qualities of a resilient individual as defined by Fine (1991), Moses (1984), Kobasa (1979), Demos, (1989), O'Connell-Higgins (1997), and Anthony & Cohler (1984).

A preliminary list of a resilient candidate's circumstances for this study follows to more closely define hardship. The most valuable data according to Fine (1991) comes from those confronted with the following issues.

### Acceptable Candidate

Individuals facing the following forms of adversity may be the best candidates for this study:

Chronic or terminal illness

Physical or mental disabilities

Abuse or neglect (of any genre, this can be very broad)

Impoverishment

Holocaust survival

## Unacceptable Candidate

Individuals facing the adversity listed may not be the best candidates for this study:

Divorce (alone)

Graduate School (although this could be the outcome of resiliency)

Drug abuse dependency (overcoming)

Alcoholism (overcoming)

Raising a child as a single parent

Thus, each script is a fictional narrative, compiled from non-fictional lives, constructed from academic research. Each story paints a portrait of the life of a character that is essentially a compilation of the lives I have explored through the initial research process. The characters exhibit the specific qualities of a resilient individual while battling adversity within their own lifetime. For the purpose of this project, each of the characters can be described as students.

## Participants

For the second portion of this study, five educators were contacted who were attending the Texas Speech Communication Association Conference in October of 2003. Due to time constraints, one performer was cut from the performance which put the number at four. Individuals agreeing to participate in this panel were faxed scripts and assigned a narrative to perform. There were no limitations on the demographics of the educator for each role because performance for the purposes of this study was defined as

the embodiment of character through personification. Thus, sex and ethnicity were not specific to that of the performer. Participants received scripts one month in advance for memorization purposes.

### Data Collection

The performance venue was the Texas Speech Communication Association Conference Vice Presidents Spotlight Panel. This took place at 1:35 pm on Friday, October 10, 2003. The embodiment of character is the interpretive means of data collection happening here through the performance experience. Essentially the collection process depended on how the performer came to understand his or her character over the month process. The performer then internally collected the data through the process of embodiment, and then communicated it back to the researcher in the following step.

### Interview Design

The actors were given eight questions to answer about the process. The list of questions was distributed after the panel and the actors were encouraged to take the questions home and think through the answers before responding. The interview questions were distributed as follows:

### Interview Questions for Performers

The inherent value of the interview questions was established with learning experience and pedagogical value in mind. The basis, however, seeks to unveil the

effectiveness of character and narrative embodiment as a tool of emersion and educational understanding, e.g., can this method of performance be used as an educational tool. The response time for participant answer submission ranged from two weeks to one month.

1. Broadly describe the process that you went through when deciding how to understand your character.
2. Research suggests that the individual you performed was resilient (had a natural ability to overcome adversity). Some of the elements that these individuals possess include; a positive attitude, a strong internal locus of control, the ability to view dire circumstances as normal and accepting them as a challenge as opposed to defeat. There are also additional themes that have emerged through resiliency research. What themes emerged through you (if any) while performing and understanding these characters? E.g. what was it about the individual you performed that allowed him or her to overcome adversity?
3. Research suggests that a great number of students within the classroom experience circumstances of adversity similar to those within the life of the student you performed. How do you (as an educator) deal with the hardships you see reflected in the classroom as a result of similar issues?
4. Do you believe that after the performance you have different perspectives when viewing your students?

5. Do you believe that the embodiment of your character through performance can serve as an effective tool for student analysis in the classroom?
6. Do you feel that this was a valuable experience for your role as an educator?
7. Do you feel like this can be an affective project for others?
8. Will you attempt to use this process in your classroom?

### Production Plan

#### Mood

This performance can very easily become a sad experience. Therefore I encouraged the performers to seek the internal brilliance and beauty of their character. Each character is a part of the performer. I suggested to each participant that they not attempt to play their character in theatrical form. I asked that each attempt to experience the character as a part of an intimate story telling experience with their audience. Additionally, I ask that each remember that these are stories of hope and success, not tragedy and sadness.

#### Setting

This production was all audience centered, except the performance of Todd. Todd's experience was for the advanced performer. It was more difficult because it takes place in two places at once; in the performance space as well in his old neighborhood. However, props were eliminated to focus on the stories as opposed to the spectacle.

## Lighting

Lighting should be a reflection of the moods created by the performers. I suggest when this is staged; it is first performed in a raw performance space. If moved to a more technical arena notes on lighting set and props should be a compromise between the performers and the director. For the purpose of the original production, a raw performance space was utilized.

## Set Design

This performance was originally staged in a conference room. Two chairs were used as the entirety of the set. However the blocking extended into the audience making the audience part of the show, essentially students in the class. The set is an extension of the human condition. How humans interact with the humans around them essentially becomes the set. The audience seating can be viewed as crucial to the set design.

## Style

The characters within this performance are paradoxical yet it is important that the mood stay real. It is the job of the performer to see past the self he or she may exist within on a daily basis and embody the persona of the other. Makeup is forbidden! The experience here is internal. Performers should be encouraged to work from the inside out, starting with the soul and working toward the never ending physical self.

## CHAPTER IV

### ORIGINAL PRE-CUT VERSION OF NOT I, NOT NOT I

Original Cast of Characters:

John-O- 18yrs old – Melodie Graves

Ms. Garcia – 34 yrs old – Russell Lowery-Hart

Annette – 49 yrs old – Ann Shofner

Todd – 29 yrs old – Ron Dodson

#### John-o

John-O speaks with a stutter and has a slight head twitch due to his mother's drug addiction when she was pregnant. He is Smart, but doesn't trust his intelligence due to his father's constant "wisdom against it". His locus of hope is his teacher who encourages him to reach for the stars. His talk comes from his soul. John-O is a very internal character. He sees a much larger world than those who surround him. John-O is proud to be himself. When he talks about Mrs. Garcia, John-O lights up. The crowd symbolizes the life he earns to escape. He speaks he has trouble getting his first words out.

JOHN-O: My name is Juan Francisco Aguilar, but my friends call me John-O. I go to our lady of Guadalupe High. I'm a senior this year, and I'll be the first one in my family to graduate high school. I like school a lot, especially Biology. Science is really cool and I'm really good at it. I've already made 100's on my first two tests this semester and I have a 3.8 GPA. Mrs. Garcia told me that I'm the smartest student she has had in a long time. She said I have a natural gift, and that I better not waste it or she will kick my ass. I love Mrs. Garcia. She is always nice. She said I should be a doctor. And I think that would be cool. I think would like to be a pediatrician. So I could help babies and little kids.

I have problems with my speech because my mother smoked meth when she was pregnant with me. I was two and a half pounds when I was born and I almost didn't make it. But I just wanted to live too badly. After seeing me, my mother took her own life. She said she couldn't live with what she had done to her baby boy. I wish she could have seen what I am doing now.

So, it's just my dad and me.

We live in a pretty nice house for our neighborhood, but I've seen nicer when I go with my dad to run errands. I always have to stay in the car, but I can tell from the outside that those houses are really big. I wonder sometimes how those people get all their money. I bet they don't do what dad does. But dad says he can't flash because, "that's how you get busted john-o". "Quit going to school and work for me John-O!" "Or, you better not call the cops on me John-o, or you'll be really hungry mijo! But I'm glad we have money. Some people at school are poor though. This one dude has been wearin' the same shoes since seventh grade. His toe sticks out of one of 'em. When people make fun of him I kind of laugh. I really feel sorry for him though. If his feet weren't so damn big I'd give him a pair of mine. I know how it feels to be made fun of though. But people don't really make fun of me anymore because a couple of kids who dropped out when we were younger get their shit from my Dad and he tells them to watch my back.

Lately Dad has been acting weird. I think something went down because he has been gone a lot. I only saw him two days last week. I'm pretty sure he had been up for several days at this point because there were a lot of people over all night and the bass from the stereo was keeping me awake. When dad stays up for days at a time the house always smells like burning rubber and he gets really nervous. He makes me get up and watch the front yard at night to make sure no cops are coming. I hate doing this because I don't get any sleep for school and then I get in trouble by for falling asleep in class. Mrs. Garcia never says anything; she just lets me take a nap if I want to. If mom was alive I bet she would be like Mrs. Garcia.

Lately Mrs. Garcia has been helping me with my speech for graduation. She says I'm the perfect one to encourage other students to graduate high school considering all the stuff I've been through. Mrs. Garcia listens to me and keeps my secrets. She says I should even encourage them to go to college, like me. I got a full ride to the state university to study pre-med. I'm not sure how smart I'm going to be compared to all of the people who will be there. But If Mrs. Garcia is right, I'll breeze through.

My Dad tries to tell me about the rules of life. He says it's about surviving and making ends. I used to think that he knew everything. But as I grow older, I realize that he really knows nothing. We watched Menace to Society the other day. He told me that that movie is how it really is. He said only the strong survive in neighborhoods like ours. In the end of the movie the main character Cane decides he wants to get out of that life style and he ends up getting killed.

Dad says “this just shows that we weren’t meant to survive out there.” He says, “you ain’t never gonna be a doctor John-O”! That ain’t for us Mijo”.

I hate that movie. I don’t want to be controlled by something. I want to take control of it. I don’t want to have to watch outside all night to make sure I am safe. I want to be safe and make sure others are too. I don’t want to keep it real and live in this neighborhood for ever. I want more than this. This is just a place to get out of... away from. Mrs. Garcia agrees one hundred and ten percent.

So I’ve been thinking, Whenever Dad comes back I’m just going to tell him like this, “I don’t want to be complacent like everybody else around here dad, so I’m out”. I bet he doesn’t even know what complacent means. That will definitely get him.

Teacher:

Ms. Garcia stands by chair and reacts to the blank stares of the audience and interacts with the crowd as her class. She is determined to be a locus of hope for all of her students. She checks roll out of her black book. And then drifts into the past. Throughout this scene it should become real time. Not simply a story to the audience.

Teacher: My eight grade class greets me with blank stares. These kids are tough, little bad asses trying to survive in poorest part of the city. As I make direct eye contact with twenty seven pairs of eyes, I start to call roll,

Angelica Acosta?

Marcus Brown?

Each name presents a different face, and with each face, there is a different story. As the list continues, I start to wonder how these kids live outside of school.

Armando Castillo?

Jason Collier?

And it brings me back to a time when I was in their same position.

*Past*

My sister screams with cries of loneliness, abandonment, and hunger. My father struggles to get off of the couch to help but his body is no longer able. It's not that my father doesn't want to take care of us, he does. It's just that welfare benefits don't cure terminal disease. My mother muffles the cries of my baby sister with the sounds of Billie Holiday as she covers her head with a pillow and lies in a depressed state. I found out early that if my sister was going to survive, I was going to have to be her parent. But how does a seventh grader care for her three month old sister? With diligence, love, strength, and a little bit of money from selling my clothes, toys, and whatever else I can find. My seventh grade life was a balance between pleasing the school system that "saw my potential" and being a mother to a young and beautiful girl. My father died later that year, and I will always remember what he said, "You are a strong girl, and you don't deserve

this baby, I'm sorry". At his point I hadn't realized the impacts that my father's kindness, encouraging words, love, and most importantly, humility would have on my life, but now, it is him that drives me to be strong. At times I felt like I never knew him, but looking back, I know that it was his simple words that taught me how to love.

Taking care of a three-month-old baby when you are seventh grade is no easy task. Between the late nights making sure she was attended to when she cried, to the pure dread you feel when you are gone eight hours at school and you know that no one at home can or will take care of her. Sometimes I'm convinced that my mother wanted her to "mysteriously" die in her crib, but she was too strong for that. She was a survivor. Through it all, she never got really sick and somehow learned to sleep when I was gone. She had such joy and was so connected yet oblivious to what was going on.

As time passed and I entered eighth grade a woman who moved in to the house next door started to take notice to my sister and I. Her name was Ms. Perkins. She would sit on her porch and watch us play. Since she had never seen my mom so she asked me if Jackie (that's my sister's name) was mine. At his point I strangely wanted to say "yes," but I just told her the truth, that is was my baby sister. I remember her asking me if I lived alone and where my parents were. I had also remembered hearing at school about child protective services and how they would take children away from their parents, and it's not that I was afraid of being taken away from my mother, it's that back then I somehow thought it was Jackie that they were going to take away from me. See, I viewed myself as her parent, literally. I say all of this to tell you that I told the neighbor that my mom was inside, she was just really sick. This was big turning point for me. She offered

to watch Jackie while I went to school. She said that she heard Jackie screaming sometimes and that she heard my mom screaming at her. At first I was hesitant to say anything considering that I had just met this lady, but I quickly realized that anything would be better than what was happening.

I remember riding the bus home that day with a sense of peace that I had not felt in a long time. Yet, two things happened that day that will stick out in my mind forever. I got off at the bus stop and ran as fast I could home. When I got there I didn't see Jackie or Ms. Perkins on the porch, so I went into my house to put my books down. As I turned the corner to go down the hall I saw my mother through her cracked door, lying there with her eyes opened, and for the first time in a long time I felt a strange sorrow in the house. I slowly approached her, and I could tell that something wasn't right. She had died earlier that day. I found out later that she had starved to death. And looking back it makes sense. I had only been eating what my free lunch card would get me and I had been putting half of everything in my backpack to make sure Jackie was eating. I remember crying that day too, and looking back, it was really tragic that my father and mother suffered so horribly in their own ways. In fact, it still makes me cry sometimes thinking about it. I remember doing the only thing that I knew to do at this point. I went next door and told Ms. Perkins after knowing her one day that I needed to use her phone because I needed to call the police, my mom had died. Ms Perkins told me to sit down and relax and she would take care of it. This moment was so surreal for me. I remember being enamored at the thought of this, I felt a love that I had never felt. I remember looking down at Jackie and seeing her so happy. She was trying to pull the head off of a Barbie

doll and was frustrated at her lack of strength. She had no idea just how strong she was. She looked up at me, and with tears in my eyes I was laughing at her desperate attempt, she started laughing back. It was so pure.

Over the next few years we went through three state homes and a catholic orphanage. I was a junior in high school at his point and had been really focused on school. I liked history the most, because I enjoyed how history taught me that Jackie and I weren't alone. People throughout time had gone through things worse than us. It was always so interesting to me to link our experiences to events in history. And I remember hearing so many stories of people surrendering and giving up. And I thought to myself, how could you ever do that? Why would anyone ever give up?

You see to me life is like a game of cards. You may not start with a great hand, and sometimes you get nothing at all. But picture yourself as the ace, and remember, that eventually another ace is going to come out and your hand will be that much better. And if you play your cards right, you may end up with something unbeatable.

*present*

So as I look out over my class today, I imagine the hands they were dealt, some better than others, I'm sure.

And all those blank stares say so much. And I want to say I know what you are going through, and I want to say I care about you, and I want to say that it will all be O.K. But I don't. In fact I don't say any of this. I just smile in the face of all the adversity, stand tall, and find comfort in the fact that they will always have me.

And I know that I have a mission.

I'll be that other ace, anytime they need it.

And if these kids go down in history, it will be because they were victorious.

#### SCENE TRANSITION TO ANNETTE

ANNETTE: Mom had a strange way of telling me that she didn't know who my father was. I was eight. It was a game called, "who's your daddy." Mom gave me a list of four candidates: One rich, dark, extremely handsome; two, artistic, ego driven, eccentric; three, brainy, bland, and removed, and four; goofy, redheaded, and awkward. Of course I didn't answer this question. Because even when your mother is convinced that she is Stevie Nicks and the only person you know who wears a dream catcher as a necklace, still enjoys a good a spiritual viewing of Jeremiah Johnson, and has a tattoo of a Native American chief on her forearm with the words groovy across his head, this question still comes as sort of a shocker. After about a minute of silence, she tells me that the answer is none of the above. She said, "In fact, baby I have no Idea, and I'm sorry, but I love you and I have plenty to make up for him." I never looked down on my mother for this. I guess that she was just a loving person. Even through months of terminal cancer, hospice care, and hell, she never stopped loving me.

The last few years of my mother's life were excruciating. At the time my mother's boyfriend Stan was living with us. Stan was really good to Mom the last few years of her life. I was fourteen when she passed. So with certain benefits one might

receive when you lose your only parent and Stan determined to be my new parent, he advised me that the best thing to do with the money would be to allow him to adopt me. So I did, and he did indeed adopt me.

The next year of my life was hard adjusting to Stan's rules (which completely changed from the rules I was used to) and coping with loss. Looking back I'm pretty sure that Stan thought he was hiring a maid instead of adopting a daughter. Along with the extremely busy schedule I had going on at school with band, theatre, and student council, Stan required me to be home by four thirty (play rehearsal ended at four fifteen) and have dinner ready by five. And when Stan didn't get to eat immediately when he got home there was a lot of anger in the house which often resulted in bruises and sometimes blood. So my house slowly became a place that I hated to be. Living with the Gestapo in Stan form got old really quickly.

I guess the most difficult thing about this was that Stan never showed me any comfort or support. He refused to give me any help on my class projects or home work. But even more so, he never gave me a hug. I guess that at the time I just expected so much more out of an adopted father. I could find a way to excuse the bruises, but not the emotional distance.

You could probably say that my life hit rock bottom two days before my sixteenth birthday. I was running home from school to start dinner. I was making grilled chicken. (I always hated making that for Stan because he always complained about how my mother's was so much better). Since it wasn't on the table Stan was fuming. He started in on a series of complaints about my food, told me how my mother was a "hippie flake" (who

calls someone that?) and told me that I wasn't really what he was expecting for the whole adopted daughter thing. He then told me to leave. Considering that I had no family in a five hundred mile radius, I really started to freak out. Where was I going to go? I started to apologize to Stan at this point but he told me to pack up my stuff, and leave. It really hurt when he told me not to take any thing that belonged to my mother; he said that stuff was his. I filled up a duffel bag with some of my clothes, took the forty-seven dollars out of my drawer, and left. For the first few hours I walked around and cried and thought about possible reasons that my life turned out the way that it did. Then I thought about where I would sleep. I didn't dare go to any of my friend's house in fear of the embarrassment of my life. I hated it enough when I was referred to as the girl whose mom died. So about six hours later at midnight I walked into a bus station and laid down on a bench and slept. That was my home for the next few weeks. If you've never been homeless before, you should try it sometime.

During this time I did not miss one day of school, and I remember finding so much relief in not having to leave early to get home to be yelled at. So during our final dress rehearsal for A Midsummer Nights Dream I saw a lady in the audience that had never been there before. After strike she walked up and introduced herself to me as my mom's sister. She explained to me that my mother and she had a falling out a long time ago, before I was born. She said that she had tried to call me on my birthday to meet me, but a man answered and said that I had run away. After sorting through these issues she asked me where I was staying and invited me to stay with her as long as I needed.

She lived forty-five minutes away, but being the newfound expert that I was on bus routes, I recognized immediately that this was going to be feasible.

I slept on a couch for the next year of my life, and it was the most comfortable thing in the world. I wish I could tell you that it all got better from there, but It didn't. There were hard times. Starting over after graduation. Working for minimum wage until I could find another place to live. Saving for college starting at age twenty-five, and then doubting I had the ability to succeed. Marrying the wrong man when I had promised myself that I would never make that mistake. It has been hard work, emotional work, excruciating at times. But I think that it was all worth it. Because today, I think that I am a better person because of it. Life is going to present its hardships and sometimes you may feel like giving up, but you have to stay strong take it in stride, hold on to the loves that never leave you, and remember the old adage, if it doesn't kill you than it can only make you stronger.

### Todd

Todd is a PhD in his late Twenty's. He is determined to help people escape their environment and very intense about this issue. This performance is shared between him starring at a kid by a dumpster and a reflection of his past. Please feel free to take creative license with the dialogue as well as the scene blocking. I envision so many creative things for this character.

TODD: As he walks through the dark neighborhood on the way home from work he sees a young boy digging through a garbage can searching for something to eat. The dirt on his face is thick. As he gets closer, he notices that it is a boy from his old neighborhood.

He says hey buddy, “did you drop something in there”? He can tell that the kid, probably 12, is embarrassed that he has been caught scrounging for food. The kid walks away quickly and keeps his head down in disgrace. The man yells out, hey kid, want something to eat? The kid slows to a stop, slowly turns around and walks with the man down the block to a little Taqueria. The kid eats his food so fast you would think that he has never eaten before. But when the food is all gone this twelve-year-old boy starts to cry.

When I was twelve years old this happened to me, and today while visiting the old neighborhood I am staring at my little cousin in the same place I was. Mike is eight. He is out back of my aunt’s house looking through a garbage bag. And let me tell you like this, seeing an eight-year-old starving child in America digging through a trash bag because his mother won’t support him is the hardest reality for me to cope with.

At the moment, I see little Mike, two feelings consecutively overwhelm me. I’m empathetic because I remember doing the same thing when I was younger on several occasions. And secondly, I’m angry, because I know that his mom gets a check every month that could take away those tears, at least the tears from hunger. But I’m pretty sure that she feels like her luck ran out a long time ago, so she doesn’t really do much any more in the way of the kid.

Mike got caught stealing a sandwich from a convenience store last week. When the cops asked him where his mom was, Mike just shrugged. He knew they were staying with my mom because they were evicted from their apartment, but he didn’t know where she was in his life. And neither did she. Mike’s mom has probably bought the dealer on her old corner a Lexus by now.

When the cops finally brought Mike home, she told them to take him to jail. But if you ask me it's she that should be locked up.

Seeing Mike standing in the alley that I once stood is instant nostalgia. I begin to reflect on the situation that I'm seeing and remember what it was like to be in Mike's shoes.

I'm 9 years old and I'm absolutely enthralled by my dad's suggestion to go back and get a "perfectly good" couch that he saw out at the dump ground. When we get there I am in Heaven. I cannot believe that people would throw all of those perfectly good things away. This particular trip my family got a new couch and I got a GI Joe whose arm was partially melted off. This was excellent an excellent moment for me. New toy.

So that short memory was about the highlight of my childhood, because when you are as poor as we were living in the city, the good times are few and far between. And it is hard to realize that your life skills were never shaped to succeed. So you have to develop you own standards of survival.

I guess that is what Mike is going through about now. I think that this is a good thing. He is searching for means of survival beyond his Family, and for people like Mike, I'm not sure if there is much that is more important. I know for me there wasn't.

When I was about 12 years old, I remember a man coming to our house and taking my dad out in the street and beating him to a pulp. I found out later that is was some loan shark that my father had borrowed money from to buy us some food and fix my mom's habit. I remember asking repeatedly why this happened and my dad always gave me the same answer, "I didn't know when I was younger how this might turn out."

Back then I thought, how what would all turn out? I had thought everyone lived the way we did, I thought Mc Donald's was a once a year treat and deciding not to celebrate Christmas was normal. I wasn't aware that schools anywhere had air conditioning and asbestos free environments. I thought missing a meal was something everyone did from time to time. I thought this was just the way it was.

I bet this is Mike's reality as well.

I've spent the 18 years of my life searching for a reason that eight-year-old boys have to dig in the garbage for food. You see my parents are poor, and their parents were poor, and so on and so on. I could never figure out why I was the first person in my family who wanted to change this. But I remember *why* I wanted to.

Around the same time I saw this happen to my father, I figured out that library cards were free. That's when I met a woman named Rosalyn. She was a librarian at the south branch which was only about 12 blocks from my house. I loved going to the library to read, but even more so because I found comfort in the quiet voices Rosalyn and I would have conversations in. I think that the thing I liked most about my visits to the library is that Rosalyn would always keep a snack in there for me, usually Oreos. I didn't even like these very much at the particular time, but I found comfort in the fact that they were for me and I could always count on them. Rosalyn explained to me how she grew up like me. She also explained to me that not everyone lived this way. She would have me read books and explain the deeper meanings. I remember the one book in particular that Rosalyn was most compassionate about was *The Grapes of Wrath*. She explained to me how this older literature was related to community outreach and a life outside of my

neighborhood. She also explained to me that I didn't have to live this way forever. And she was right. She helped me through high school and college and was there for all four of my graduations.

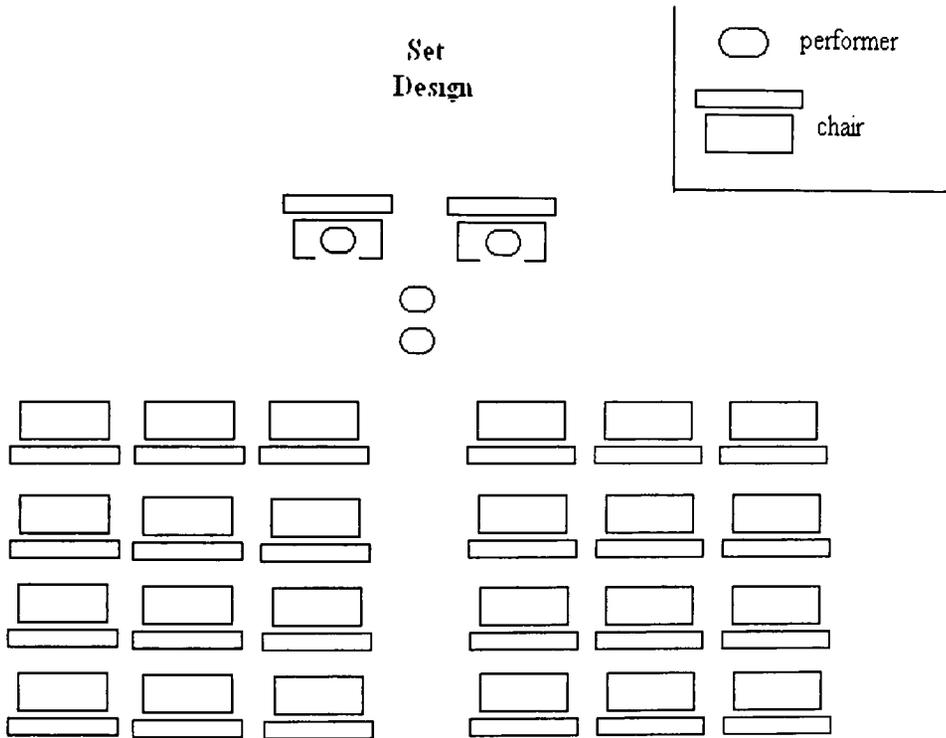
So as I stare at Mike in the alley I start to wonder if he will give me a chance to be there for high school graduation, or if he will graduate at all. I can see brilliance in his innocence. I can see potential in his pain. And I wonder if there will be a time when Mike comes to visit the old neighborhood and sees an eight year old boy digging for something to eat, He'll say hey kid want something to eat?

But today I'm going to do more for Mike, I m going to do what someone had the heart to do for me. I am going to be here for him to hold his hand and tell him that this doesn't have to be the way it is for ever.

# CHAPTER V

## Original Production

### Opening Scene



This scene is shared between Ms.Garcia and John-O. They are the two frontal figures in the scene. The final cutting inter-spliced scenes from each of the narratives.

The script was cut to read dialogically:

### Scene 1 cutting John-O's story of resilience

Ms. Garcia: My eight grade class greets me with blank stares. These kids are

tough, little bad asses trying to survive in poorest part of the city. As I make direct eye contact with twenty seven pairs of eyes, I start to call roll,

Angelica Acosta?

Marcus Brown?

Each name presents a different face, and with each face, there is a different story. As the list continues, I start to wonder how these kids live outside of school.

Armando Castillo?

Jason Collier?

And it brings me back to a time when I was in their same position.

John-O emerges from behind Ms. Garcia and stands in front of her staggered to the right.

When Ms. Garcia interacts with dialogue, she delivers the line over John-O's shoulder.

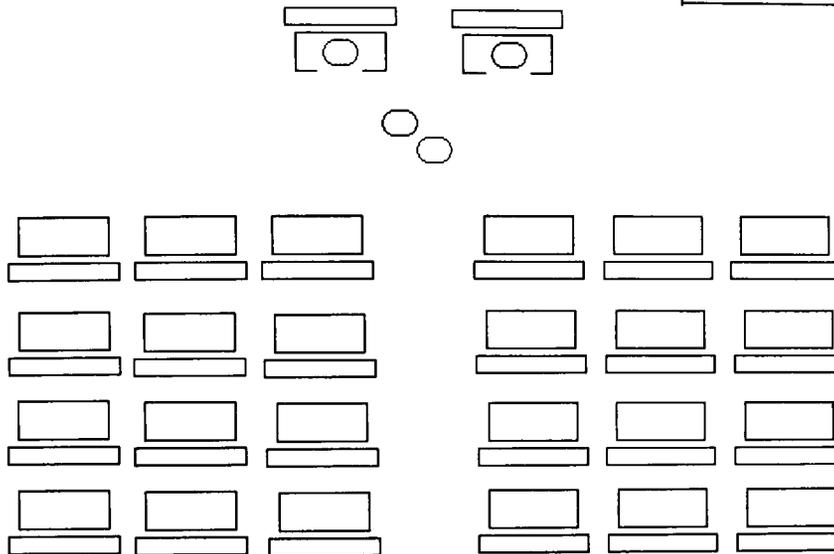
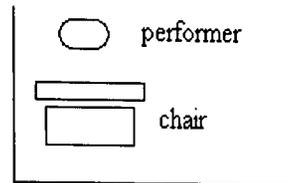
This should be depicted as the aura of Ms. Garcia as opposed to the physical person.

Additionally, the performers make reference to other characters in the show as an

example but not to infer that these individuals are the people they are referring to, merely

a representation.

Set  
Design



John-O: My name is Juan Francisco Aguilar, but my friends call me John-O. I go to our lady of Guadalupe High. I'm a senior this year, and I'll be the first one in my family to graduate high school. I like school a lot, especially Biology. Science is really cool and I'm really good at it. I've already made 100's on my first two tests this semester and I have a 3.8 GPA. Ms. Garcia told me

Ms. Garcia: You're the smartest student I've had in a long time.

John-O: She said,

Ms. Garcia You have a natural gift and you better not waist it or I'll kick your ass.

I love Ms. Garcia. She is always nice. She said

Ms. Garcia: You should be a doctor.

John-O: And I think that would be cool. I think would like to be a pediatician. So

I could help babies and little kids.

(beat)

I have problems with my speech because my mother smoked meth when she was pregnant with me. I was two and a half pounds when I was born and I almost didn't make it. But I just wanted to live too badly. After seeing me, my mother took her own life. She said she couldn't live with what she had done to her baby boy. I wish she could have seen what I am doing now.

So, it's just my dad and me.

We live in a pretty nice house for our neighborhood, but I've seen nicer when I go with my dad to run errands. I always have to stay in the car, but I can tell from the outside that those houses are really big. I wonder sometimes how those people get all their money. I bet they don't do what Dad does. But Dad says he can't flash because, "that's how you get busted John-O". "Quit going to school and work for me John-O!" "Or, you better not call the cops on me John-O, or you'll be really hungry mijo! But I'm glad we have money. Some people at school are poor though.

(refers to Todd sitting in the chair behind him)

This one dude has been wearin' the same shoes since seventh grade. His toe sticks out of one of 'em. When people make fun of him I kind of laugh. I really feel sorry for him though. If his feet weren't so damn big I'd give him a pair of mine. I know how it feels to be made fun of though. But people don't really make fun of me anymore because

a couple of kids who dropped out when we were younger get their shit from my Dad and he tells them to watch my back.

Lately Dad has been acting weird. I think something went down because he has been gone a lot. I only saw him two days last week. I'm pretty sure he had been up for several days at this point because there were a lot of people over all night and the bass from the stereo was keeping me awake. When dad stays up for days at a time the house always smells like burning rubber and he gets really nervous. He makes me get up and watch the front yard at night to make sure no cops are coming. I hate doing this because I don't get any sleep for school and then I get in trouble by for falling asleep in class. Ms. Garcia never says anything; she just lets me take a nap if I want to. If mom was alive I bet she would be like Ms. Garcia.

Lately Ms. Garcia has been helping me with my speech for graduation. She says:

Ms Garcia: You're the perfect one to encourage other students to graduate high school considering all the stuff I've been through.

John-O: Ms. Garcia listens to me and keeps my secrets. She says:

Ms Garcia: You should even encourage them to go to college, like you.

John-O: I got a full ride to the state university to study pre-med. I'm not sure how smart I'm going to be compared to all of the people who will be there. But If Ms. Garcia is right,

Ms. Garcia: You'll breeze through.

John-O: My Dad tries to tell me about the rules of life. He says it's about surviving and making ends. I used to think that he knew everything. But as I grow older,

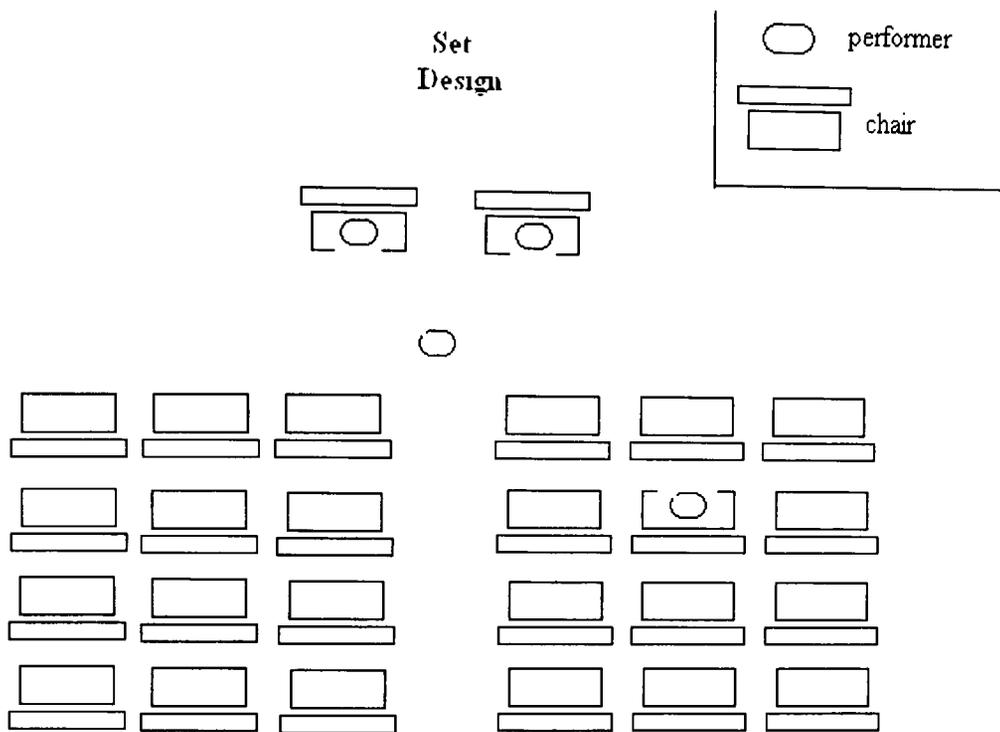
I realize that he really knows nothing. We watched Menace to Society the other day. He told me that that movie is how it really is. He said only the strong survive in neighborhoods like ours. In the end of the movie the main character Cane decides he wants to get out of that life style and he ends up getting killed. Dad says “this just shows that we weren’t meant to survive out there”. He says, “you ain’t never gonna be a doctor John-O”! That ain’t for us Mijo”.

I hate that movie. I don’t want to be controlled by something. I want to take control of it. I don’t want to have to watch outside all night to make sure I am safe. I want to be safe and make sure others are too. I don’t want to keep it real and live in this neighborhood for ever. I want more than this. This is just a place to get out of... away from. Mrs. Garcia agrees one hundred and ten percent.

So I’ve been thinking, Whenever Dad comes back I’m just going to tell him like this, “I don’t want to be complacent like everybody else around here dad, so I’m out”. I bet he doesn’t even know what complacent means. That will definitely get him.

(John-O exits to seat in audience)

## Scene 2: Ms. Garcia's story of resilience



Ms. Garcia: My sister screams with cries of loneliness, abandonment, and hunger. My father struggles to get off of the couch to help but his body is no longer able. It's not that my father doesn't want to take care of us, he does. It's just that welfare benefits don't cure terminal disease. My mother muffles the cries of my baby sister with the sounds of Billie Holiday as she covers her head with a pillow and lies in a depressed state. I found out early that if my sister was going to survive, I was going to have to be her parent. But how does a seventh grader care for her three-month-old sister? With diligence, love, strength, and a little bit of money from selling my clothes, toys, and whatever else I can find. My seventh grade life was a balance between pleasing the school system that "saw my potential" and being a mother to a young and beautiful girl. My father died later that

year, and I will always remember what he said, “You are a strong girl, and you don’t deserve this, I’m sorry.” At his point I hadn’t realized the impacts that my father’s kindness, encouraging words, love, and most importantly, humility would have on my life, but now, it is him that drives me to be strong. At times I felt like I never knew him, but looking back, I know that it was his simple words that taught me how to love.

Taking care of a three-month-old baby when you are seventh grade is no easy task. Between the late nights making sure she was attended to when she cried, to the pure dread you feel when you are gone eight hours at school and you know that no one at home can or will take care of her. Sometimes I’m convinced that my mother wanted her to “mysteriously” die in her crib, but she was too strong for that. She was a survivor. Through it all, she never got really sick and somehow learned to sleep when I was gone. She had such joy and was so connected yet oblivious to what was going on.

As time passed and I entered eighth grade a woman who moved in to the house next door started to take notice to my sister and I. Her name was Ms. Perkins. She would sit on her porch and watch us play. Since she had never seen my mom so she asked me if Jackie (that’s my sister’s name) was mine. At his point I strangely wanted to say “yes”, but I just told her the truth, that is was my baby sister. I remember her asking me if I lived alone and where my parents were. I had also remembered hearing at school about child protective services and how they would take children away from their parents, and it’s not that I was afraid of being taken away from my mother, it’s that back then I somehow thought it was Jackie that they were going to take away from me. See, I viewed myself as her parent, literally. I say all of this to tell you that I told the neighbor that my

mom was inside, she was just really sick. This was big turning point for me. She offered to watch Jackie while I went to school. She said that she heard Jackie screaming sometimes and that she heard my mom screaming at her. At first I was hesitant to say anything considering that I had just met this lady, but I quickly realized that anything would be better than what was happening.

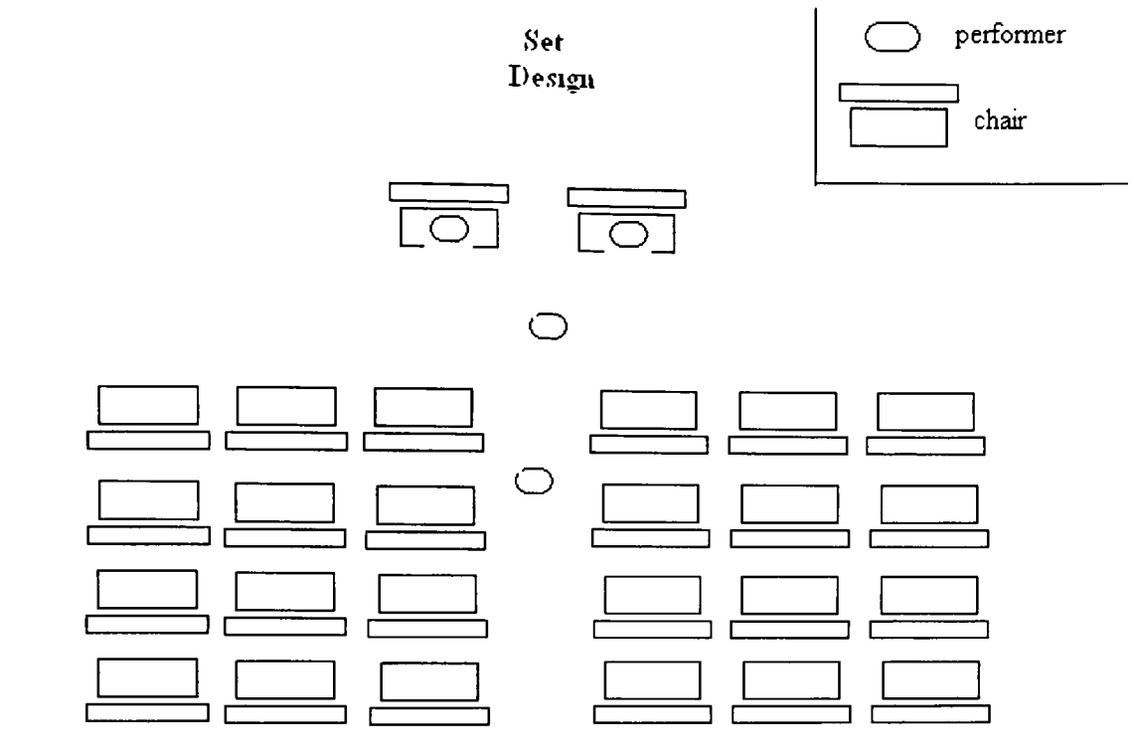
I remember riding the bus home that day with a sense of peace that I had not felt in a long time. Yet, two things happened that day that will stick out in my mind forever. I got off at the bus stop and ran as fast I could home. When I got there, I didn't see Jackie or Ms. Perkins on the porch, so I went into my house to put my books down. As I turned the corner to go down the hall I saw my mother through her cracked door lying there with her eyes opened, and for the first time in a long time I felt a strange sorrow in the house. I slowly approached her and I could tell that something wasn't right. She had died earlier that day. I found out later that she had starved to death. And looking back it makes sense. I had only been eating what my free lunch card would get me and I had been putting half of everything in my backpack to make sure Jackie was eating. I remember crying that day too, and looking back, it was really tragic that my father and mother suffered so horribly in their own ways. In fact it still makes me cry sometimes thinking about it. I remember doing the only thing that I knew to do at this point. I went next door and told Ms. Perkins after knowing her one day that I needed to use her phone because I needed to call the police, my mom had died. Ms Perkins told me to sit down and relax and she would take care of it. This moment was so surreal for me. I remember being enamored at the thought of this, I felt a love that I had never felt. I remember looking down at Jackie and seeing

her so happy. She was trying to pull the head off of a Barbie doll and was frustrated at her lack of strength. She had no idea just how strong she was. She looked up at me, and with tears in my eyes I was laughing at her desperate attempt, she started laughing back. It was so pure.

Over the next few years we went through three state homes and a catholic orphanage. I was a junior in high school at his point and had been really focused on school. I liked history the most, because I enjoyed how history taught me that Jackie and I weren't alone. People throughout time had gone through things worse than us. It was always so interesting to me to link our experiences to events in history. And I remember hearing so many stories of people surrendering and giving up. And I thought to myself, how could you ever do that? Why would anyone ever give up?

### Scene 3 Annette's story of resilience

Annette's Scene is a bit more complex since it involves audience interaction as well as two additional performers interacting. Todd serves as the father figure (Stan) and John-O serves as the mother. Although Stan has no lines in the scene, his non-verbal presence is crucial to the mood.



Annette: Mom had a strange way of telling me that she didn't know who my father was. I was eight. It was a game called, "who's your daddy". Mom gave me a list of four candidates.

John-O: One rich, dark, extremely handsome; (John-O points to a member of the audience with each suggestion, Annette reacts to each suggestion non-verbally)

John-O: Two, artistic, ego driven, eccentric;

John-O: Three, brainy, bland, and removed,

John-O: Four; goofy, redheaded, and awkward.

Annette: Of course I didn't answer this question. Because even when your mother is convinced that she is Stevie Nicks and the only person you know who wears a dream catcher as a necklace, still enjoys a good a spiritual viewing of Jeremiah Johnson, and has

a tattoo of a Native American chief on her forearm with the words groovy across his head, this question still comes as sort of a shocker. After about a minute of silence, she tells me that the answer is none of the above. She said,

John-O: “In fact baby I have no Idea, and I’m sorry, but I love you and I have plenty to make up for him.” John-O finds seat in audience

Annette: I never looked down on my mother for this. I guess that she was just a loving person. Even through months of terminal cancer, hospice care, and hell, she never stopped loving me.

The last few years of my mother’s life were excruciating. At the time my mother’s boyfriend Stan was living with us. Stan was really good to Mom the last few years of her life. I was fourteen when she passed. So with certain benefits one might receive when you loose your only parent and Stan determined to be my new parent, he advised me that the best thing to do with the money would be to allow him to adopt me. So I did, and he did indeed adopt me.

The next year of my life was hard adjusting to Stan’s rules (which completely changed from the rules I was used to) and coping with loss. Looking back I’m pretty sure that Stan thought he was hiring a maid instead of adopting a daughter. Along with the extremely busy schedule I had going on at school with band, theatre, and student council, Stan required me to be home by four thirty (play rehearsal ended at four fifteen) and have dinner ready by five. And when Stan didn’t get to eat immediately when he got home there was a lot of anger in the house which often resulted in bruises and sometimes blood. So my house slowly became a place that I hated to be. Living with the Gestapo in Stan

form got old really quickly.

(Stan's presence is needed here)

I guess the most difficult thing about this was that Stan never showed me any comfort or support. He refused to give me any help on my class projects or home work. But even more so, he never gave me a hug. I guess that at the time I just expected so much more out of an adopted father. I could find a way to excuse the bruises, but not the emotional distance.

You could probably say that my life hit rock bottom two days before my sixteenth birthday. I was running home from school to start dinner. I was making grilled chicken. (I always hated making that for Stan because he always complained about how my mother's was so much better). Since it wasn't on the table Stan was fuming. He started in on a series of complaints about my food, told me how my mother was a "hippie flake" (who calls someone that?) and told me that I wasn't really what he was expecting for the whole adopted daughter thing. He then told me to leave. Considering that I had no family in a five hundred mile radius, I really started to freak out. Where was I going to go? I started to apologize to Stan at this point but he told me to pack up my stuff, and leave. It really hurt when he told me not to take any thing that belonged to my mother; he said that stuff was his. I filled up a duffel bag with some of my clothes, took the forty-seven dollars out of my drawer, and left. For the first few hours I walked around and cried and thought about possible reasons that my life turned out the way that it did. Then I thought about where I would sleep. I didn't dare go to any of my friend's house in fear of the embarrassment of my life. I hated it enough when I was referred to as the girl whose

mom died. So about six hours later at midnight I walked into a bus station and laid down on a bench and slept. That was my home for the next few weeks. If you've never been homeless before, you should try it sometime.

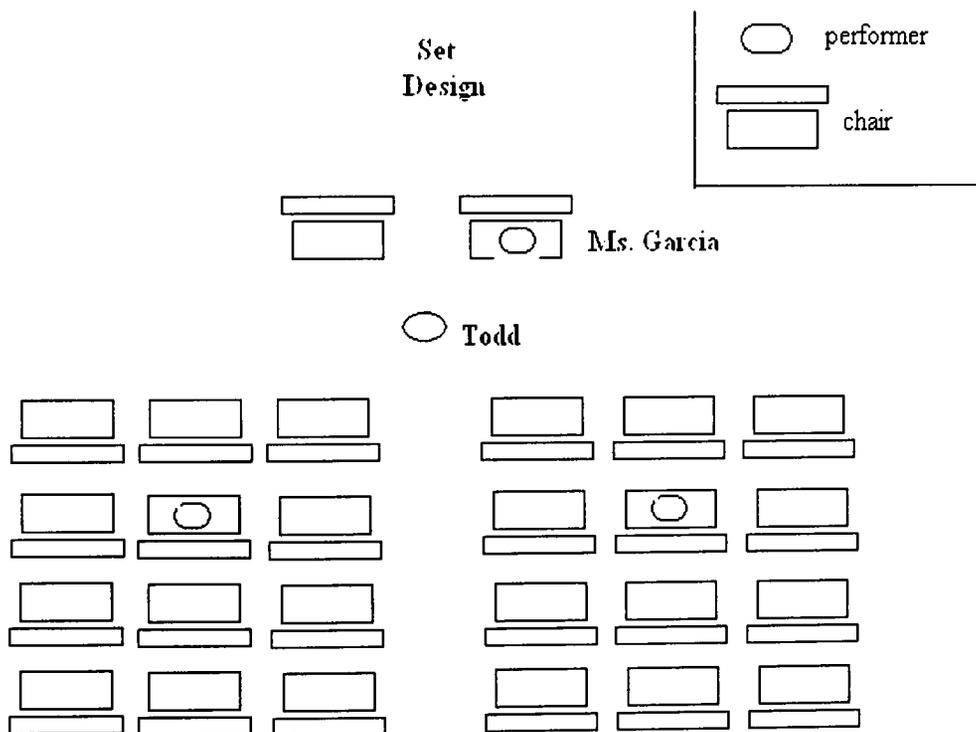
During this time I did not miss one day of school, and I remember finding so much relief in not having to leave early to get home to be yelled at. So during our final dress rehearsal for *A Midsummer Nights Dream* I saw a lady in the audience that had never been there before. After strike she walked up and introduced herself to me as my mom's sister. She explained to me that my mother and she had a falling out a long time ago, before I was born. She said that she had tried to call me on my birthday to meet me, but a man answered and said that I had run away. After sorting through these issues she asked me where I was staying and invited me to stay with her as long as I needed. She lived forty five minutes away, but being the newfound expert that I was on bus routes, I recognized immediately that this was going to be feasible.

I slept on a couch for the next year of my life, and it was the most comfortable thing in the world. I wish I could tell you that it all got better from there, but It didn't. There were hard times. Starting over after graduation. Working for minimum wage until I could find another place to live. Saving for college starting at age twenty-five, and then doubting I had the ability to succeed. Marrying the wrong man when I had promised myself that I would never make that mistake. It has been hard work, emotional work, excruciating at times. But I think that it was all worth it. Because today, I think that I am a better person because of it. Life is going to present its hardships and sometimes you may feel like giving up, but you have to stay strong take it in stride, hold on to the loves

that never leave you, and remember the old adage, if it doesn't kill you than it can only make you stronger.

Scene 4 Todd's story of resilience

Mike's focus is to the audience when talking to the audience and on a vision of Mike when talking to about or to Mike.



Todd: As he walks through the dark neighborhood on the way home from work he sees a young boy digging through a garbage can searching for something to eat. The dirt on his face is thick. As he gets closer, he notices that it is a boy from his old neighborhood. He says hey buddy, “did you drop something in there”? He can tell that

the kid, is embarrassed that he has been caught scrounging for food. The kid walks away quickly and keeps his head down in disgrace. The man yells out, hey kid, want something to eat? The kid slows to a stop, slowly turns around and walks with the man down the block to a little Taqueria. The kid eats his food so fast you would think that he has never eaten before. But when the food is all gone this twelve year old boy starts to cry.

When I was twelve-years-old this happened to me, and today while visiting the old neighborhood I am starring at my little cousin in the same place I was. Mike is eight. He is out back of my aunt's house looking through a garbage bag. And let me tell you like this, seeing an eight year old starving child in America digging through a trash bag because his mother won't support him is the hardest reality for me to cope with.

At the moment I see little Mike, two feelings consecutively overwhelm me. I'm empathetic because I remember doing the same thing when I was younger on several occasions. And secondly, I'm angry, because I know that his mom gets a check every month that could take away those tears, at least the tears from hunger. But I'm pretty sure that she feels like her luck ran out a long time ago, so she doesn't really do much any more in the way of the kid.

Mike got caught stealing a sandwich from a convenience store last week. When the cops asked him where his mom was, Mike just shrugged. He knew they were staying with my mom because they were evicted from their apartment, but he didn't know where she was in his life. And neither did she. Mike's mom has probably bought the dealer on her old corner a Lexus by now. When the cops finally brought Mike home, she told them to take him to jail. But if you ask me it's her that should be locked up.

Seeing Mike standing in the alley that I once stood is instant nostalgia. I begin to reflect on the situation that I'm seeing and remember what it was like to be in Mike's shoes.

I'm 9 years old and I'm absolutely enthralled by my dad's suggestion to go back and get a "perfectly good" couch that he saw out at the dump ground. When we get there I am in Heaven. I cannot believe that people would throw all of those perfectly good things away. This particular trip my family got a new couch and I got a GI Joe whose arm was partially melted off. This was excellent an excellent moment for me. New toy.

So that short memory was about the highlight of my childhood, because when you are as poor as we were living in the city, the good times are few and far between. And it is hard to realize that your life skills were never shaped to succeed. So you have to develop you own standards of survival.

I guess that is what Mike is going through about now. I think that this is a good thing. He is searching for means of survival beyond his Family, and for people like Mike, I'm not sure if there is much that is more important. I know for me there wasn't.

When I was about 12 years old, I remember a man coming to our house and taking my dad out in the street and beating him to a pulp. I found out later that is was some loan shark that my father had borrowed money from to buy us some food and fix my mom's habit. I remember asking repeatedly why this happened and my dad always gave me the same answer, "I didn't know when I was younger how this might turn out." Back then I thought, how what would all turn out? I had thought everyone lived the way we did, I thought Mc Donald's was a once a year treat and deciding not to celebrate

Christmas was normal. I wasn't aware that schools anywhere had air conditioning and asbestos free environments. I thought missing a meal was something everyone did from time to time. I thought this was just the way it was.

I bet this is Mike's reality as well.

I've spent the 18 years of my life searching for a reason that eight year old boys have to dig in the garbage for food. You see my parents are poor, and their parents were poor, and so on and so on. I could never figure out why I was the first person in my family who wanted to change this. But I remember *why* I wanted to.

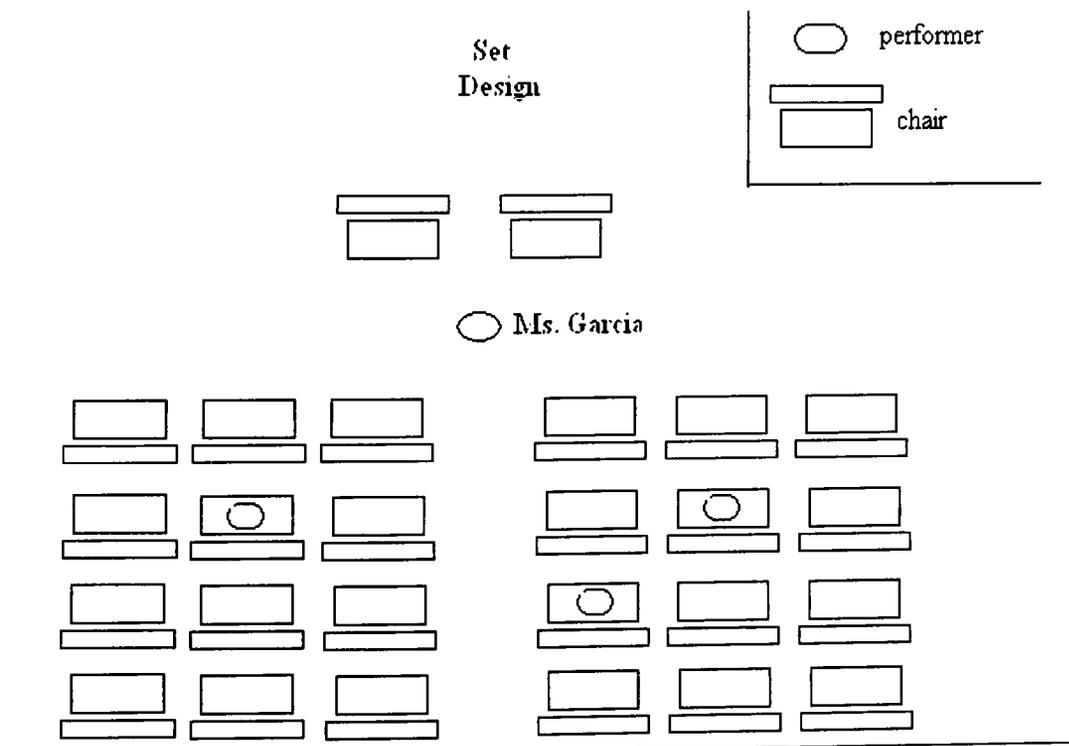
Around the same time I saw this happen to my father, I figured out that library cards were free. That's when I met a woman named Rosalyn. She was a librarian at the south branch which was only about 12 blocks from my house. I loved going to the library to read, but even more so because I found comfort in the quiet voices Rosalyn and I would have conversations in. I think that the thing I liked most about my visits to the library is that Rosalyn would always keep a snack in there for me, usually Oreos. I didn't even like these very much at the particular time, but I found comfort in the fact that they were for me and I could always count on them. Rosalyn explained to me how she grew up like me. She also explained to me that not everyone lived this way. She would have me read books and explain the deeper meanings. I remember the one book in particular that Rosalyn was most passionate about was *The Grapes of Wrath*. She explained to me how this older literature was related to community outreach and a life outside of my neighborhood. She also explained to me that I didn't have to live this way forever. And she was right. She helped me through high school and college and was there for all four

of my graduations.

So as I stare at Mike in the alley I start to wonder if he will give me a chance to be there for high school graduation, or if he will graduate at all. I can see brilliance in his innocence. I can see potential in his pain. And I wonder if there will be a time when Mike comes to visit the old neighborhood and sees an eight year old boy digging for something to eat, He'll say hey kid want something to eat?

But today I'm going to do more for Mike, I m going to do what someone had the heart to do for me. I am going to be here for him to hold his hand and tell him that this doesn't have to be the way it is for ever.

Scene 5: Ms. Garcia's closure and personal mission



Ms Garcia: You see to me life is like a game of cards. You may not start with a great hand, and sometimes you get nothing at all. But picture yourself as the ace, and remember, that eventually another ace is going to come out and your hand will be that much better. And if you play your cards right, you may end up with something unbeatable.

So as I look out over my class today, I imagine the hands they were dealt, some better than others, I'm sure.

And all those blank stares say so much. And I want to say I know what you are going through, and I want to say I care about you, and I want to say that it will all be O.K. But I don't. In fact I don't say any of this. I just smile in the face of all the adversity, stand tall, and find comfort in the fact that they will always have me.

And I know that I have a mission.

In the original production, the actor who played Ms. Garcia called the names of students he found resilient within his time as an educator.

I'll be that other ace, anytime they need it.

And if these kids go down in history, it will be because they were victorious.

CHAPTER VI  
RESPONSES FROM EDUCATORS

Question 1

Broadly describe the process that you went through when deciding how to understand your character.

Response from actor 1: Annette

The first step in the process for me was to read the interview several times. I attempted to decipher Annette's frame of mind and build empathy for her and the trials that she endured. I struggled with the idea that she had suffered so much and still managed to stay in school and stay involved with school activities. I then thought back to personal experiences I have had with my own students who struggled with adversity and later became successful. My first impulse was to take each obstacle in her life as a serious setback and each one became a bigger and bigger obstacle to confront. I thought that there was no possible way that an individual could tolerate so much and keep a positive attitude. Then after speaking with the director, I found out that Annette actually saw the humor in her trials (i.e. living in the bus station) and that is when I realized that her perseverance was stronger than I had imagined.

Actor 2: Ms. Garcia

I read through it and found ways that my own lived experiences were replicated in her lived experiences. I wanted to find that connection between my life and hers. There

were so many parallels. The difficulty was in those experiences that were not parallel. In those instances, I isolated the emotion(s) and found links to those same emotions I've experienced. Even if they were reactions to different situations, the honesty in the emotion honored her experiences by giving me access to her emotional reaction to them.

#### Response from actor 3 John-O

While trying to understand my character I initially had to try and understand the big obstacles that they had to go through in order to be considered survivors. Once I identified the obstacles I tried to apply them to my life and understand how I would deal with them. Once I had this understanding I had to create a character that was real, I had to tell their story and tell it right.

#### Response from actor 4 Todd

At first, I admit that I had a bit of trouble relating to this character, because I felt like I must relate to an individual that is going through two parts of his life at once. I grew up in a middle class home where we never worried about much. However, one evening while rehearsing this script it struck me. I had visual images of growing up on the Mexican border in El Paso. I remember seeing kids scrounging for food and living in the most horrible economic conditions. We were taught to ignore it back then. How sad it is. So I guess you could say that I related to Todd by taking experiences that I imagined living once before and put them into character.

## Question 2.

Research suggests that the individual you performed was resilient (had a natural ability to overcome adversity). Some of the elements that these individuals possess include; a positive attitude, a strong internal locus of control, the ability to view dire circumstances as normal and accepting them as a challenge as opposed to defeat. There are also additional themes that have emerged through resiliency research. What themes emerged through you (if any) while performing and understanding these characters? E.g. what was it about the individual you performed that allowed him or her to overcome adversity?

### Response from actor 1: Annette

I think that for Annette it was all about positive attitude. How could you be able to accomplish the things that she did without keeping a positive frame of mind. The death of her mother, her situation with her newly adopted “father”, sleeping in the bus station and still managing to keep a smile on her face and stay active in school could all be attributed to her resiliency and her attitude that she could survive and succeed.

Through the performance, I think that I felt her strength the most and then realized that it was due to her outlook on life. If an example is ever needed of the old adage “If life gives you lemons, make lemonade,” a person need look no further than Annette and what she was able to do. Even in her own words she admits that things didn’t get easier for her after finding a family member but she pushed on and kept her positive outlook.

### Response from actor 2: Ms. Garcia

For my “character,” her strength came in the love she had for others, she put others needs and well being before her own. She had a strong sense of the greater good. Life existed beyond her problems so her problems didn’t seem like such roadblocks to success, just things she had to move beyond. The bottom line for her is that she had love – for herself, for students, for people and that love enabled her to survive. Love gave her hope.

### Response from actor 3: John-O

For John-O I think his motivating factor was Mrs. Garcia who believed in him. She always encouraged him and let him know he could do anything it he just had a desire. Also I think he saw the world his dad had made him a part of and he knew he didn’t want to stay in that situation.

### Response from actor 4 Todd

Todd possessed a will that was very uncommon. I have so many questions about this individual’s life. However I think his primary inspirations were literature and his vision. They seemed to guide him.

### Question 3.

Research suggests that a great number of students within the classroom experience circumstances of adversity similar to those within the life of the student you performed. How do you (as an educator) deal with the hardships you see reflected in the classroom as a result of similar issues?

#### Response from actor 1: Annette

I think, in the classroom, that I deal with each student on a very individualized basis. You have to get into their hearts and minds to know what they are dealing with and what they want to accomplish. There are those kids who just want to give up and may need someone to “stay on their case” to graduate from school.

I remember one student in particular that I taught that exemplifies hardship to me. He was on my debate team and his sole purpose for being a member of the team was to improve himself. After our first tournament, I ended up taking him home because his father was too drunk to come pick him up and his mom was confined to a wheel chair due to a disability which had grown worse over the years. When I saw the condition that his house was in and heard about his parents, I cried all the way back to my house. For four years, this student became my project. I helped his mom when she needed to discipline him, counseled him when I saw that he was losing his focus, cheered for him when he qualified for the Texas Forensic Association State Meet in public speaking.

This young man later told me that he knew that he had to succeed in school, no matter what difficulties he faced. He also admitted that he had looked to me for security,

guidance and encouragement. He wanted a better life for his family than he had been given. He is now a certified public accountant with a wonderful wife and beautiful baby girl. He made it!

Response from actor 2: Ms. Garcia

I just have to love people. It is the only way I know how to deal with it. You have to allow students to dialogue and analyze their experiences, so a lot of my assignments teach course concepts through this self-exploration. But if a teacher probes those experiences, they have to be emotionally available to assist students in processing and dealing with them. I don't allow students to use their circumstances as excuses, but use their experiences as sources of strength. I HAVE to care about my students and be invested in them personally as well as educationally.

Response from actor 3: John-O

As an educator when I encounter hardships, I feel that it is important to LISTEN. Don't judge these kids because most don't have control over their situations. Also always be willing to encourage them to excel. Explain to them that excellence is required and when it is achieved no one cares your race, socio-economic level, or gender.

Response from actor 4: Todd

I am retired from teaching in the public school system and now I just teach private speech and theatre camps and coach individuals on performance. I often see student in these fields to be more emotional than other students and utilizing the need to seek

outreach through character development. I try to approach each individual with an educational purpose and attempt to create characters and roles for these students that they can learn from. Only then is this profession educational.

#### Question 4.

Do you believe that by you now have different perspectives when viewing your students?

#### Response from actor 1: Annette

I know that I have different perspectives on my students. As a seasoned teacher, I realize that each student is different and that each one of them brings “baggage” with them to school that I may have never dealt with in my life. I have learned that you have to consider each situation, all the circumstances and the student themselves before determining how to deal with them.

And there are those days that I bring my own baggage to school. Those are the tough days when I have to put aside my own trials to keep a positive approach with the students. Students in school today are more diversified than a few years ago. The pressures that they face increase every year and as teachers, we have to be prepared to help them deal with what they may face.

#### Response from actor 2: Ms. Garcia

I was reminded at how important and powerful love for students can be in their abilities to succeed. I was challenged to deepen my emotional connection to students.

### Response from actor 3: John-O

I do feel that I have different perspectives when looking at my students because every time I encounter a situation it allows me to grow and learn how to deal with different student experiences.

### Response from actor 4: Todd

This project served as a reminder to me how individualized people are and how my approach to educating these individuals is important. I call into case a student that I am taking to Julliard next year who was having a hard time playing someone who has dealt with loss. I actually gave her a part of this scrip and made her become Annette before she could move on. It really was awesome watching her transform.

### Question 5.

Do you believe that the embodiment of this person and their life through performance can be an effective student analysis in the classroom?

### Response from actor 1: Annette

Yes, it can be an effective student analysis forum. In fact, I have used these very interviews with my students for a performance they gave to a community organization. As we were rehearsing, my students talked about how much these students were like friends that they had or their classmates. One young man stated that he knew someone who was going through the same thing that one of these interviewees was. My students

agreed that these people were very much the typical high school student. They also realized that education is a way out of adversity.

Response from actor 2: Ms. Garcia

Yes. IT forces you to make connections between your life and the lives of others. You gain a deeper understanding of humanity - you judge less and appreciate more.

Response from actor 3: John-O

Yes because it forces the performer to take on the obstacles that this person has encountered as part of that they must understand their situation in order to effectively portray these characters through the performances.

Response from actor 4: Todd

Yes it does. For my line of work it is the only way. I have actually been asking my performers to embody and not perform. I feel as if I have a better understanding of the actor's struggles becoming someone else through this writing exercise.

Question 6.

Do you feel that this was a valuable experience for your own role as an educator?

Response from actor 1: Annette

This performance was a challenge for me because Annette is so far removed from my own personal life that I had to dig deep to understand her. How could she handle all

the “stuff” she was dealt. Then I simply looked at the words of the teacher who talked about life being a game of cards and you have to look for the other ace. On a yearly basis, I have students that cause me to re-think my attitude, my teaching goals and my analysis of them. I am looking for the chance to be an ace for them. Sometimes you can succeed in making an impact and sometimes the obstacles are too great. You have to look for those moments when you see a student overcome and succeed and be grateful that you were there to see it.

Response from actor 2: Ms. Garcia

It reminded me of the lives that touched me and the lives I have touched. I needed to be reminded of the importance of my work with students. It motivated me to re-dedicate my life to students and teaching. In some ways, it cured my burnout. It focused me on the power of love and the power of teaching and minimized the frustration with bureaucracy.

Response from actor 3: John-O

Yes.

Response from actor 4: Todd

Definitely so! In every aspect of my work.

Question 7.

Do you feel like this can be an effective role for others?

Response from actor 1: Annette

I think it can be an effective role but I do believe that some people can't see further than their own noses. In that case, this script and these people would have no impact. It is hard for me to hear these stories and not be moved. In fact, during the original performance, I found myself wiping away a tear when I reflected back on my students who had survived beyond my expectations.

Response from actor 2: Ms. Garcia

Yes. It will force them to internalize the lived experience of others, to put on someone else's skin. In doing so, course concepts, professional ethics, and life lessons are married in one activity.

Response from actor 3: John-O

Yes, everyone has an opportunity to become an educator and being able to recognize this opportunity can further facilitate a framework of how other educators should act when they are put in this situation.

Response from actor 4: Todd

Yes, it is an ideal character exercise.

### Question 8.

Will you attempt to use your experience in you classroom?

#### Response from actor 1: Annette

I have used this experience in class. In fact, after listening to our rehearsal of this script, one of my students came up to desk to tell me about things that were going on in his life. Of course, his obstacles weren't as great as those in the script but he opened up and related his obstacle. I empathized with him and reassured him that things would get better and that all setbacks could be considered temporary if you keep a positive frame of mind.

#### Response from actor 2: Ms Garcia

I already have. I have a group of students that were rather selfish and judgmental of those around them. I brought a brave woman living in a women's homeless shelter to share her story. After she left, instead of talking about what they learned, I had them write the element of her story that they most identified with. They had to write a conversation they might have with her about their experiences and their relationship to her experiences. They then performed themselves and this woman in conversation. They learned about themselves AND they gained a deeper understanding of this person's struggles. We had 18 conversations performed, conversations with the SAME woman, but each performance was so different and insightful and relevant. Grant it, not all performances shared the same depth and insight, but I strong feel that every student re-

evaluated their choices, their lives, and their relationships after “living” this woman for 5 minutes.

Response from actor 3: John-O

Yes, I plan to have my student introduce each other by performing each others stories.

Response from actor 4: Todd

I already do.

## CHAPTER VII

### DISCUSSION

Not I, Not Not I has been utilized in several different venues. In addition to it's Texas Speech Communication Association conference presentation performance; monologues from the script have been performed at the Los Barrios de Amarillo Festival, have become part of an acting methods workshop, and have been used as part of a teaching methods portion of a Communication in Higher Education course at Texas Tech University. With these diverse applications already in place, this method lends it's self to be highly flexible and interpretive.

The discussion following the completion of this project has been rich and insightful. The responses from the original cast suggest that the method relies on an individual's introspect, thus it is applicable to each person who takes on the project. If this is not new ground for educators to examine, it serves as a reminder of how important it is to avoid grouping and generalizing individuals in relational context. Analytical performance also seems to be a process that individuals that are not from a performance background can appreciate and utilize. Primarily, it seems that the performers identify with a real individual that he or she can draw from and relate to.

It is assumed that the educators will take this event seriously, however this may not always be the case. Performance styles and dedication will play into the purity of results in this study. The outcome, if positive, in this research may not be an affective educational tool for all educators. However, it may be the best for some. When depending

on outside participants to execute instead of simply inform, problems will inevitably be posed. Adjustment by the researcher is imperative to the execution of this study.

Adaptations have also been made from the original method. Educators have utilized monologues from their students in the intercultural classroom to serve as cultural framing devices that promote a level of understanding as opposed to tolerance. Thus, the future of this pedagogical method is bright.

An ideal execution of this project would be to utilize it in an intercultural workshop for organizations in order to promote cultural competence. Future additions of this research include an adaptation to this original form that could be effectively utilized as an intercultural training and development tool for organizations. By understanding the individual as well as his or her personal struggles, one may develop a more conscious awareness of how to effectively develop an understanding of another. The implications of this study suggest that it would be advantageous for analytical performance to become a staple in pedagogy.

## CHAPTER VIII

### PEDAGOGY IN PRACTICE

This section serves as a step by step process for individuals to carry out this activity. Multiple applications of this project are highlighted.

#### Purpose Statement

To serve as a catalyst for relational development between teachers and students;  
To serve as an intercultural framing device to dissolve the cultural barriers that separate teachers and students;  
To introduce personification/performance as an analytical relational tool.

#### Approximate time required

One in class session as well as two weeks of out of class preparation

#### Rationale

Communication in a culturally diverse classroom presents a number of challenges. However, these challenges can be more successfully overcome when there is a greater understanding between teachers and their students. It is equally as important to ensure that a positive classroom environment is created through student-student understanding. An effective method of accomplishing this goal is to facilitate and participate in Not I, Not Not I. Not I, Not Not I is a theater term referring to performers

portrayal of a character in the performance where they can describe themselves as not the character, yet not not the character. The same rational exists when taking on the identities and speaking the lines of students. Not I, Not Not I is an excellent method of creating a level of understanding one's self among others as well as understanding others among one's self. Ultimately, a more insightful relationship will be developed through this activity that will serve as a model for perspective taking.

### What to do before the performance

Instructor should obtain copy of the performance script Not I, Not Not I (Simmons, 2004). There are four monologues in this performance that contain about 15 minutes of dialogue. Each monologue is representative of a resilient student. Divide the classroom into groups of four. It is important to participate with your students. Give each group a copy of the full script and tell each student to choose a monologue. Each student should have a different monologue. Instruct each student to read her or his script and cut it down to about seven minutes keeping in only what she or he deems important. Allow students to take each script home and analyze each character through reading and memorization. Students should be given two weeks.

### What to do during the performance

Have each group of four find a performance space and deliver his or her monologue to the group.

There is no particular order of monologue deemed better than another.

When all performances are completed, students should regroup in the original area.

### What to do after the performance

Post performance discussion is possibly the most important element of analysis.

The instructor should facilitate this discussion as well as participate in it. Questions should follow three areas of analysis. First is the initial understanding phase or coming to know this character. Second is the performance phase or speaking the words to a group. Third is the reflection phase where performers reflect upon the activity and draw links to their own lives and the lives of others.

### Alternatives to executing this activity

If this time frame is not conducive to the class, a few crucial steps can be replaced.

Eliminate the usage of the performance script and have students write narratives about themselves. These should be about one page in length and should follow a basic plot curve; exposition; rising action; climax; falling action. Instruct participants to include a life changing or defining moment for their climax. Remind them that they all have a unique story.

Exchange the narratives and perform each other for the class or in small groups.

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