

Wales Academy of Voice and Dramatic Arts

**Acts of Sacrifice: Theatre as a lens on Filipino Mothers
Supporting Education in Poverty**

By

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

WAVDA
RA
NEDA
MIA

Wales Academy of Voice and Dramatic Arts
Republic Act
National Economic and Development Authority
Mercy in Action

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.2 Project Overview

This dissertation was presented alongside an original short theatre piece called *'The Garden They Couldn't Grow'*. The independent project explores the lived experiences of low-income families in the Philippines, focusing on the financial, social, and emotional sacrifices made to support their children's education. It also highlights inequalities in access to cultural opportunities and educational opportunities.

The practical part of this project is a 15-minute performance held at the Studio Theatre in WAVDA. Influenced by naturalism and realism and the piece pursues authentic human experiences and relationships, allowing the audience to engage in the harsh realities of poverty in a shocking, truthful, and emotional manner.

1.3 Research Aims & Creative Aims

As an Individual who has lived in a large, multicultural family, I have grown up to understand the social and emotional sacrifices low-income families must go through to support their children's education. Through volunteering and working at *Mercy in Action*, a UK-registered charity committed to tackling *poverty, injustice and inequality through housing, food, education and healthcare, both in the Philippines and UK* (Mercy in Action, 2003). I witness inequality and the harsh realities of poverty and inequality corruption. My aim is to create a theatre piece that is Inspired by real life events that showcased real stories and the grim reality of hardship faced in marginalized communities we live in. I hope to provoke, inspire, and ignite a movement to assist the given problems through real-world solutions and charitable impact. I aim to educate viewers about this ongoing

problem and to stress this crisis is not only happening in the Philippines, but across the world.

1.3.1 Why Theatre?

What is theatre?

According to Britannica, Theatre is an art form centered on live performances, where actions are intentionally planned to convey a coherent and significant dramatic effect. While theatre originates from the Greek, “to see,” performances are experienced through both watching and listening. (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2026)

Elements of Theatre,

In *Poetics*, Aristotle establishes outlines six fundamentals elements that form the foundation of dramatic structure and analysis. These being:

- Plot, which serves the backbone through the story’s progression.
- Characters, for audience connection; themes that convey the underlying messages.
- Language encompasses the words, rhythm, tone, and style of dialogue.
- Music, which sets the mood, underscore emotions and proves narrative information.
- Spectacle creates the play’s physical world through visual elements.

(Fiveable, 2018)

Personal Connection,

I chose theatre as my Platform because it is a form that exists fully in the moment. It is human, and it’s right in front of you. There’s no screen, no edits, just real people sharing a story in real time. An energy, you can feel, whether you’re acting or watching.

As an Individual who has been studying and watching theatre for a couple of years, I recognized the adrenaline that comes from experiencing live performance. It is difficult to replicate; there's always room for interpretation.

Theatre is also an intensely collaborative art form. It allows me to build something that I am passionate about alongside others, including actors and crew members. This shared creative process is a key part of its appeal. Additionally, theatre has been a part of human culture for thousands of years, yet it keeps evolving and changing.

1.4 Research Method

This dissertation takes on a qualitative research approach that brings together primary, secondary, and practical-based research through the development of an original play. This method was chosen to explore personal involvements and social issues in depth, (McLeod, 2025), especially those related to poverty, education, and family relationships, which are key to this study.

I also gained a lot from my own observations while volunteering with Mercy in Action in the Philippines. I gathered detailed insight an online survey of Filipino parents and an interview with MiA's social worker, Kay Uymasuy.

1.5 Structure of Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter One introduces the topic, outlining its aims, context, and rationale. Chapter Two presents a literature review, examining poverty, dignity and the experience of Filipino mothers through theoretical and contextual framework. Chapter Three explores the practical artistic development of the theatre piece, including the creative process. Chapter Four evaluates the final performance, reflecting successes and limitations and audience responses. Lastly, Chapter Five concludes both the study and creative project.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review examines how poverty impacts the daily lives and the dignity of Filipino mothers as they strive to raise and support their children. I will draw on academic studies and local sources in the Philippines to explain the social, economic, and cultural factors that influence this. The review is divided into main themes: the structure of poverty, the roles and sacrifices of mothers, access to education, and how mothers maintain dignity despite difficult situations.

Themes: Poverty, Dignity, Lived Experience, Filipino Mothers

2.2 Theoretical and Contextual Framework

2.2.1 Theoretical Framework

We will begin by examining how poverty impacts dignity and humanity by drawing on several key ideas. Dignity refers to the *quality of a person that makes him or her deserving of respect, sometimes shown in behavior or appearance* (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019). Humanity can be conceptualized in two ways. One is a collective sense, referring to all human beings as a species, and the other is the quality of being kind, thoughtful, and sympathetic towards others (Collinsdictionary.com, 2026). The main theory guiding this research is Amartya Sen's Capability Theory. According to this theory, poverty is not only a lack of money, but also a lack of freedom and opportunities. Because of this, poverty limits what people can do and makes it harder for them to live with dignity.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, proposed by psychologist Abraham Maslow in 1943, states that people need to have their basic needs met, like food, shelter, and safety, before they can reach higher levels of self-esteem and self-actualization. When basic needs are not

met, as is often the case in poverty, it can prevent people from building self-worth and dignity (McLeod, 2025). In addition, Stigma Theory shows how society's views of people can erode their sense of dignity. People living in poverty are often judged or left out, which can make them feel ashamed and isolated. These stories help explain how poverty affects not just the materials needed but also emotional health, identity, and dignity (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2024)

2.2.2 Contextual Framework

This study examines the lived experiences of Filipino families experiencing poverty. In 2023, approximately 15.5% of the Philippine population lived below the national poverty line, which has significant implications for family welfare and economic stability. The Philippines Statistics Authority that 17.54 million Filipinos were classified as poor in 2023 (Cordero, 2024). Many families struggle with low wages, unstable jobs, and a large informal labor sector where workers often lack job security and benefits.

Consequently, families often struggle to consistently meet basic needs such as food, healthcare, and safe housing. In this context, Filipino family system commonly emphasizes parental responsibility and sacrifice for their children's wellbeing (Wood, 2025)

Cultural values such as *Hiya* (shame) and *Utang na loob* (debt of gratitude) shape how families navigate poverty, often supporting resilience and endurance. Despite efforts to preserve dignity through perseverance, poverty imposes emotional and social pressures on children, modifying their education, identity, and feelings of belonging. Understanding this context is necessary for studying the impact of poverty on dignity and humaneness within Filipino family life (Britanico, Chris and Rowel, n.d.).

2.3 Thematic Review of Literature

2.3.1 What is Poverty?

There are three primary frameworks for defining poverty: the income perspective, the basic needs perspective, and the capabilities perspective (UNDP, 2014). Jeffrey Sachs explains that it is important to distinguish between the three levels of poverty: extreme (absolute), moderate, and relative poverty.

Extreme poverty refers to situations where households cannot meet the basic needs of survival. People in this category often experience chronic hunger, lack access to health care, safe drinking water, sanitation, and cannot afford education for most of their children. This form of poverty is mainly found in developing countries, such as the Philippines. Moderate poverty describes conditions where basic needs are only just met, leaving individuals in a vulnerable position. Relative poverty, more common in high income countries, people may lack access to cultural goods, entertainment, recreation, quality health care, education and other perquisites for upward social mobility (Sachs, 2005 p.20)

Human Poverty

Human Poverty goes beyond income, encompassing deprivation in essential aspects of life, like education, healthcare, shelter, and access to opportunities. Reflecting the inability to live a fulfilling life due to the lack of *Dignity, Participation, and Freedom, often resulting from social, political, and economic inequalities* (Team, 2025).

2.3.2 How is Poverty Measured

The World Bank has long described a “complicated” statistical standard income of £0.74 per day and £1.48 per day, which can be used to measure moderate poverty. In the Philippines, poverty is measured through combined income-based thresholds with multidimensional indicators, capturing both economic and social deprivation. The Philippine Statistic Authority uses standard three-part method:

1. Per Capita income
2. Poverty Line estimation
3. Aggregation of data

In this system, household income from surveys is divided equally among all members, “assuming” everyone shares resources fairly.

Poverty lines are set by first estimating the cost of basic needs, starting with food for a 2,000-calorie daily diet, then adjusting for non-food expenses like housing and

transportation using Engle's coefficient. This method supplies detailed, location-specific poverty thresholds and tracks national trends (Ramon et al, 2024).

2.3.3 Causes of Poverty Globally and in the Philippines

Globally, poverty is caused by a combination of economic, social, health, environmental, and political factors.

Economic given: low income, unemployment, and limited industrial development result in restricting access to opportunities. Social inequalities, such as discrimination and lack of education, reinforce long-term poverty across generations. Health issues and high medical costs further reduce people's ability to work and maintain stability. Additionally, environmental challenges like natural disasters and unequal development between urban and rural areas worsen conditions for poorer communities. Weak governance, including corruption, prevents effective solutions and sustains cycle poverty (NEXT IAS, 2025).

Kaye Uyamasuy, a social worker for Mercy in Action, has a large insight on families living in poverty in the Philippines. She states, "The cycle of poverty for Filipino families often begins with the Education Trap". She expanded by saying "The Philippine economy suffers from an 'intense' urban-rural divide, where high paying industries and infrastructure are heavily concentrated in Metro Manila and Cebu, resulting in families from provincial areas to migrate and overcrowding the cities".

She mentions that families in the countryside are often left in a state of agricultural neglect. With environmental factors such as typhoons, small-scale farmers and fisherfolk struggle with low yields and are constantly affected. This can result in wiping out families' entire livelihood in a single day. Example of this would be the 2013 Typhoon, *Yolanda* in which 90% of housing was destroyed and estimated 16 million people were affected (OCHA, 2023).

In the Philippines, medical emergencies often cause families who are just above the poverty line into deeper poverty because of high healthcare costs, even when they have PhilHealth coverage. Problems with governance and corruption worsen by weakening social safety nets and leaving vulnerable groups without adequate support (Uyamasuy, 2026). To back this up, the Philippines healthcare system has always been facing several

challenges, including enough healthcare workers, gaps in infrastructure, a high burden of disease, and problems with the governance (ASMPH Center for Research and Innovation, 2020).

The causes of poverty show that deprivation continues because of linked economic, environmental, and governance issues. These conditions affect families the most and help us understand how poverty specifically impacts Filipino mothers in their caregiving and social roles.

2.4 Motherhood in the Filipino Context

2.4.1 Psychological reasons why mothers are primary caregivers

A primary caregiver means an individual who takes full care of an infant in terms of their health, wellbeing, and other important factors. Mothers take on the role of primary caregivers because females are innately adapted to feeding their children, women have estrogen and other hormones, which men do not have, that are essential for a child's development.

According to Freud's 'cupboard love theory' an infant's instinctual needs can only be fully satisfied by their biological mother, which helps in strengthening the already-existent mother-infant emotional bond.

2.4.2 Filipino Mothers

Cultural expectations have strongly influenced motherhood in the Philippines, but these roles have changed over time and were not always limited to the home. In pre-colonial society, women, including mothers, often held positions of authority and influence. For example, a *Babalyan* (*Visayan term*) (Brewer, C. 2020), served as spiritual leaders, healers, and keepers of knowledge. These women would marry, raise children, still take active roles in their communities, showing motherhood did not restrict women's social, economic, or political involvement. This period was marked by more equal gender relations, with women contributing far beyond household duties.

Over time, during the colonial period, motherhood became more linked to caregiving and household duties. Many mothers now balance several roles, such as caring for their families, earning income, and being active in their communities. By doing so, they challenge the idea that motherhood only belongs in the home (Tiamzon-Abiera, 2024).

The number of single mothers has increased significantly in recent years. Government and NGO data shows 90% of the country's approximately 15 million single parents are women.

Mothers often experience greater difficulties than other parents due to the absence of a co-parent or any help. They are fully responsible for childcare, emotional support, and household management, often without financial assistance. This leads to increased financial pressure and work-life imbalance, as they struggle to meet both economic and caregiving demands.

2.4.3 Psychological Impacts on Mothers in the Philippines Experiencing Poverty

Research suggests that single-mother households are more likely to experience poverty, with many livings below or near the poverty line in the Philippines. Although employment rates among single mothers can be relatively high, this does not always prevent financial stability due to low wages and job security in the Philippines. As a result, poverty remains a persistent issue for many people.

Like all mothers, they carry weight that's often invisible. As an individual firsthand observant and talking to Filipino mothers, I have gained insights to their silent struggle and impactful behavior. The American Psychological Association has consistently found that women, especially mothers, report higher levels of stress than men. The PMHA and studies from University of the Philippines have reported a growing number of Filipino mothers facing depression, anxiety and burnout (PMHA, 2022; UP Center for Women's and Gender Studies, 2021).

A 2023 Pulse Asia survey found that 60% of mothers name "financial stress" as their main concern. Women with low-income communities are also more likely to feel depressed because of job insecurity and unstable income (Gracia, 2025).

Effect of Financial Stress on Parenting

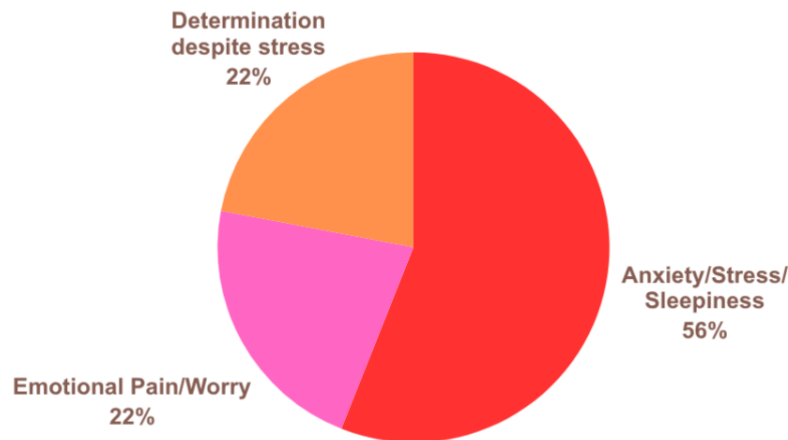


Figure 1: Survey

Figure one shows a survey I conducted among Filipino families; the results show that most parents (56%) majorly experience anxiety, stress, sleepiness due to financial pressures. Meanwhile, 22% remain determined despite challenges. Overall, the findings suggest that financial affects the well-being of parents.

Society expects mothers to be strong, patient, and always giving. They take emotional stress at home and often expect struggle to be dealt with quietly. The idea of “*sakripisyo*” means “*sacrifice*”, is deeply rooted and sometimes celebrated in saying things such as “*isusubo na lang, ibibigay ko pa sa anak*” (I was just about to eat, but I’ll give it my child instead) and “*bawal magkasakit ang nanay*”(Mothers aren’t allowed to get sick). All of these reflect a common belief: a mother’s needs always come last (Gracia, 2025)

This impact may result in mothers experiencing numbing, compassion of fatigue, and mental health deterioration. The National Center for Mental Health showed an overwhelming citing of the words “overwhelm” and “emotional exhaustion” as a reason for distress (NCMH, 2023).

As social expectations change, Filipino mothers are finding caregiving more difficult due to current economic challenges. Because of this, it is important to examine how poverty affects their psychological and emotional well-being.

2.4.4 Dignity,

1. Defining Dignity: Self-Worth, Agency, and Human Value

In academic discussion, dignity refers to the inherent value of each person, grounded in self-worth, agency, and the ability to form meaningful choices. It goes beyond just “respect” or social recognition, linking human value to the capacity to act independently and make one’s own decisions.

A key aspect of this definition is agency. Dignity is closely tied to an individual's capacity to make their own choices about well-being, relationships, work, and self-improvement. In this view, dignity is not just given by others; it is shown through living autonomy and taking part in forming one’s own life (Philopedia, 2025).

Dignity is about more than just having money or wealth. While income can affect a person’s opportunities, dignity is about what people can do and who they can become. Amartya Sen explains that poverty is not only a lack of income, but also a loss of “capabilities”, which are the real freedoms people have to live in ways they value. When people have fewer capabilities, their dignity is affected because they have fewer real choices (Sen, 1999).

Martha Nussbaum expands this idea by connecting dignity to key human capabilities needed for a dignified life. These include health, bodily integrity, practical reasoning, and relationships with others. She argues that dignity depends on people having real opportunities to develop and use these capabilities, especially when social inequality restricts them (Jamil, 2024).

Overall, dignity combines self-worth, agency, and capabilities. People realize their value when they are free to make meaningful choices and live a life; they consider worthwhile.

2. Poverty as a Structural Constraint on Dignity

Poverty in the Philippines is a structural barrier to dignity because it limits people's real freedom to make meaningful choices about their lives. It is not simply a result of personal failure. Instead, poverty is shaped by economic inequality, unequal access to education and healthcare, and job security. These conditions restrict Filipinos ability to act freely and pursue their own goals and values.

In my survey, I gathered that parents have no choice but either not to send their kids to school or that they have to sacrifice their time in order to provide for their family. One parent quoted that they would have to work multiple jobs to secure their child's needs and put them first than their own. Social worker Kaye stated that the biggest challenge parents face when providing for their children is the *"insufficiency of a single source of income."* She explains that the rising costs of basic commodities and education, a single salary, are rarely enough to support a family of five. Their biggest challenge is finding a job that offers enough flexibility or affordable childcare, which is rarely available in the Philippines. Without a strong support system, many are forced into low-paying informal work and remain just one emergency away from financial collapse (Uymasuy, 2026).

This showcases that poverty really limits choices, and it's not because of one's personal failure but simply because the system is corrupt. Mothers in this case, have "double burden" resulting in constrained choices and showcasing inequality due to lack of support for all the causes of poverty.

Dignity is influenced by both societal conditions and individual choices. Poverty restricts individuals' options and autonomy, thereby constraining their capacity to live with dignity. Access to education can restore opportunities and enhance personal freedom; this relationship will be examined in the following section.

2.4.5 Education as hope

Point 1: Education as a pathway out of poverty

All the mothers I surveyed believed that Education was the key for their families to come out of poverty. One quoted *“Growing up, I saw that education was really important so that life would be good. That’s why I want to give my kids that opportunity even if it’s hard.”*

Many Filipinos believe, by providing access to quality education, individuals can improve their economic prospects and break the cycle of poverty that often traps (as Kaye stated) families, believing individuals to choose their own future.

Going back to Amartya Sen, her approach emphasizes the importance of education in enhancing individual freedoms and social justice, focusing on capabilities that enable people to lead lives they value.

2.5 Synthesis and Gaps

Research shows that poverty in the Philippines affects more than just income. It also limits access to education, healthcare, and opportunities, therefore affecting people’s dignity. Theories such as Sen’s Capability Approach explain how poverty restricts choices and leads to social exclusion.

Filipino mothers are especially affected because they are the primary caregivers whilst being the breadwinner in the household. Studies showcased that poverty is linked to stress, anxiety, and burnout for these mothers. Many believe that education is an important way to escape poverty.

However, there is still not enough research as to how Filipino mothers living in extreme poverty can discover their own dignity and how they can be supported in more beneficial, sustainable ways to ensure their children can easily access school and remove barriers to them going into higher education and employment. Which in turn would reduce the stress, pressure and daily struggles Filipino mothers face.

2.6 Conclusion

As I review everything I’ve learned, I have a deeper understanding of all the complex layers there are to poverty and the number of barriers that mothers living in extreme poverty have to overcome just for basic human rights of their children. Doing this research has made me feel more empathy for families in marginalized communities. Learning

about mothers and how to support them has given me a better idea of their experiences and their silent struggles. This has influenced my own Theatre Piece 'The Garden They Couldn't Grow'.

Chapter 3

Practical Artistic Development

3.1 Initial Inspiration and Intentions

I used a method inspired by Llinos Mai, with whom I previously worked during the Collaboration Project Module, where my peers and I created an original musical, *Camp Count Down*. As an initial step, I compiled a brief list of categories, including themes, theatre styles, personal preferences, and favourite films.

The images below illustrate my early brainstorming ideas. At this stage, many of these topics were unfamiliar to me and required further research. The check marks highlight the areas I found most interesting and wanted to explore more.

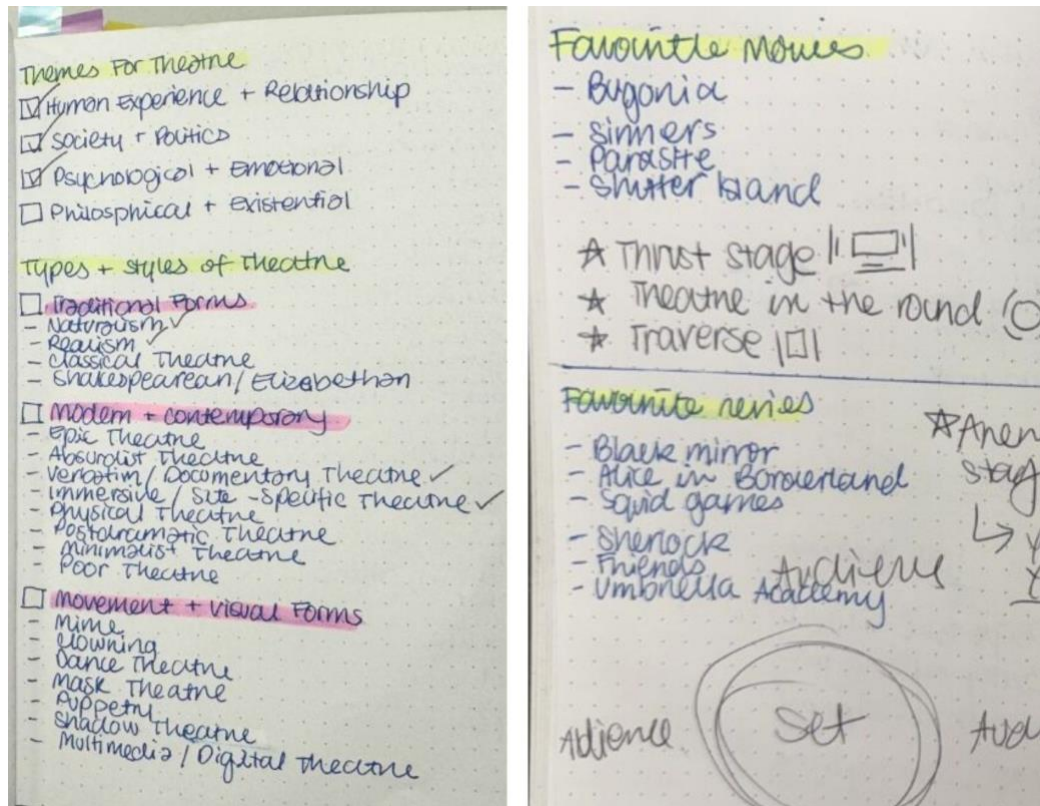


Image 1: Initial brainstorm of themes and ideas (Todd-Rosal, 2026)

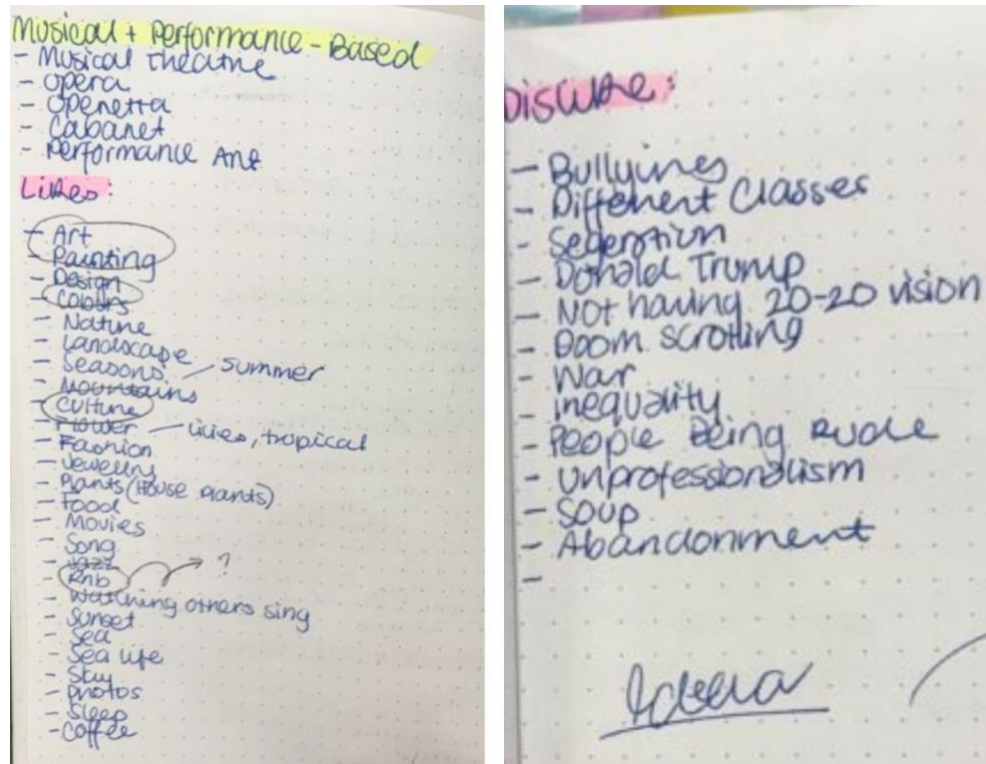


Image 2: Initial brainstorm of themes and ideas (Todd-Rosal, 2026)

Llinoise Mai taught me that 'personal experiences' were a great source of inspiration.

One evening, I sat in my room and thought about my life in the Philippines and everything I experienced there. Mercy in Action had a big impact on my life. My parents worked there, helping vulnerable communities with education, housing, and care for families. For years, that community felt like a second family.

If I created theatre, I would make sure it had a purpose and reflect my culture, background, and experiences. I want my work to show who I am as an artist and as an individual. From this, I began reaching out to friends and family members in the Philippines to gather insight into the realities faced by families living in Extreme Poverty, and to understand the lengths they go to in-order to provide for their family.

That evening, I spoke with my mother, Emily Rosal, who has served as a Director of MiA Philippines for over 15 years. She recounted an experience involving a 'Source Mum' at MiA.

‘Source’ in MiA refers to a community support group for mothers, fathers and young people, providing mentoring as well as mental and spiritual support (MIA Philippines Director, 2026).

She described visiting a family in an urban area of Sabou, where a mother, only hours after giving birth to her fourth child, was already sewing fabric to earn income. The mother explained she had to continue working to provide food and basic needs for her family, despite her conditions. My mother reflected on being deeply moved by the mother’s resilience and determination. She quoted

“I was overwhelmed that she had no time to recover and I was just really amazed and blown away by the heart of the mother.” (Rosal, E. (2026). Personal Interview)

3.2 Research and Influences

As a director and creator, I focus on bringing realism to the stage by depicting everyday life and the people of the Philippines. I aim for authentic reactions and believable performances. My directing combines symbolism, improvisation, and a strong visual approach. There was always room to explore.

3.2.1 Relevant Theatre Practitioners,

Konstantin Stanislavsky

Developed an acting system that draws on imagination, emotional memory, and character research. His ‘Magic If’ helped me see things from Carmelita’s point of view, guiding me to make choices that felt real and emphatic by thinking about her situation and surroundings. His focus on physical actions and working together also shaped how I directed, helping actors perform naturally and explore scenes together to make them feel authentic. (Ates, 2023)

Uta Hagen

Hagen's method is based on realism and emotional honesty. She uses her own experiences and her 'nine questions' to dig into a character's motivations and challenges. This approach shaped how I developed Carmelita and helped me pay close attention to her emotional struggles as a mother. I also used interviews and surveys to make sure her inner life felt real and not exaggerated.

Michael Chekhov

Chekhov's method emphasizes psychological gestures and physical storytelling. I put this into practice by guiding the actor to show Carmelita's emotions through movements. For instance, actions like working and planting seeds helped show her emotional struggle and determination without using words.

Comparison/Synthesis

Stanislavski and Hagen's both focuses on emotional realism, drawing on imagination and personal experiences. In contrast, Chekhov's approach highlights physical expression and also uses imagination.

In my work, Stanislavski and Hagen helped me develop the emotional depth of Carmelita's and daughter's. Chekhov's method improved physical storytelling, making the performance feel both real and expressive.

3.2.2 Movies Inspirations and other media influences

When it comes to watching films, series, and other practical platforms. I tend to enjoy forms that showcase political statements, the realities of the world, and everything about society and its justice system. Here are some examples that influence during the early development of my theatre piece.

A major influence for me is *Parasite*, directed by Bong Joon-ho. The film is well known for exploring class inequality and offering strong social critique. As the first Korean film to win both the Palme d'Or at the *Cannes Film Festival* and the first-language film to win an *Academy Award for best picture* (Eldridge, 2024). It shows how stories can bring attention to important social issues. The way it uses tension, symbolism, and realism inspired me to show poverty and my character's experiences in a direct and powerful way.

3.3 Creative Process

3.3.1 Characters

Carmelita is a name that means little poem in Tagalog. In *Spanish*, it can also mean, *garden or orchard* (Name Discoveries, 2016). This Idea inspired my practical piece, and I wanted the main character to reflect that meaning. In a way, she is in her own garden. Maybe her mother named her Carmelita because she hoped her daughter would help them escape poverty. I created her to be overworked, like every mother in the Philippines that I have seen and got surveys from. She's resilient and inspiring.

Efren, the daughter, is a student. Her name comes from Spanish, and it means *fruitful* (Namepedia.name,2026). She plays a silent role, representing hope, but she also feels trapped and wants her mother's nurture.

Neither character represents just one person. Instead, they stand for the whole community and aim to share a universal experience.

3.3.2 Script

Writing this piece was challenging, so I broke it into three five-minute sections to help with pacing and clarity. I chose a poetic style, using symbolism and including real words from events and interviews.

Before we started, I made an outline for each section to prevent repetition and guide the audience through the story. I named the parts Soil, Seed, and Bloom to show a natural cycle with deeper meaning. Soil stands for the home foundation; Seed is about providing

for the family and daily needs, and Bloom represents safety, achievement, and hope for what's ahead.

3.3.3 Set Design



Figure 3: Set Design Process (Author's own image, Kailyn)

Shown above is an overview of my set vision. I wanted to showcase clear separation from Efren's section in the space and Carmelita's space.

The image below shows that the boxes only have vines on one side. I wanted to showcase that Efren's inner circle only had the garden in her section. And the outer circle with rubbish everywhere to showcase her situations and what she's surrounded with the entire duration of the show.



Figure 4: *Set Design Final Outcome* (Author's own image, Kailyn)

3.3.4 Sound

At first, I wasn't sure if I wanted to include any music or sound effects in the show. I thought that letting the script and its words stand alone would be powerful enough, and I worried that adding audio might take away from that. But when I came across the song **'Secret Garden' by Aurora**, it really captured the feeling I wanted for the show. It brought a mystical, dreamlike mood that fit perfectly at the beginning and end, suggesting that hope returns.

3.3.5 Costume



Figure 5: Costume Design Process of Carmelita (Author's own image, Kailyn)

Designing the costume was one of my favourite parts of the project. Figure # shows the steps I took to reach the result. I wanted to highlight the artistry and symbolism of Filipino fashion and colours. The outcome is inspired by traditional Filipino fashion, often called the Filipiniana. The colours represents the red and blue of the of the Philippine flag. In the Philippines, red signifies war when placed above blue. I wanted to show that the performance was about a struggle within herself and a struggle with society.

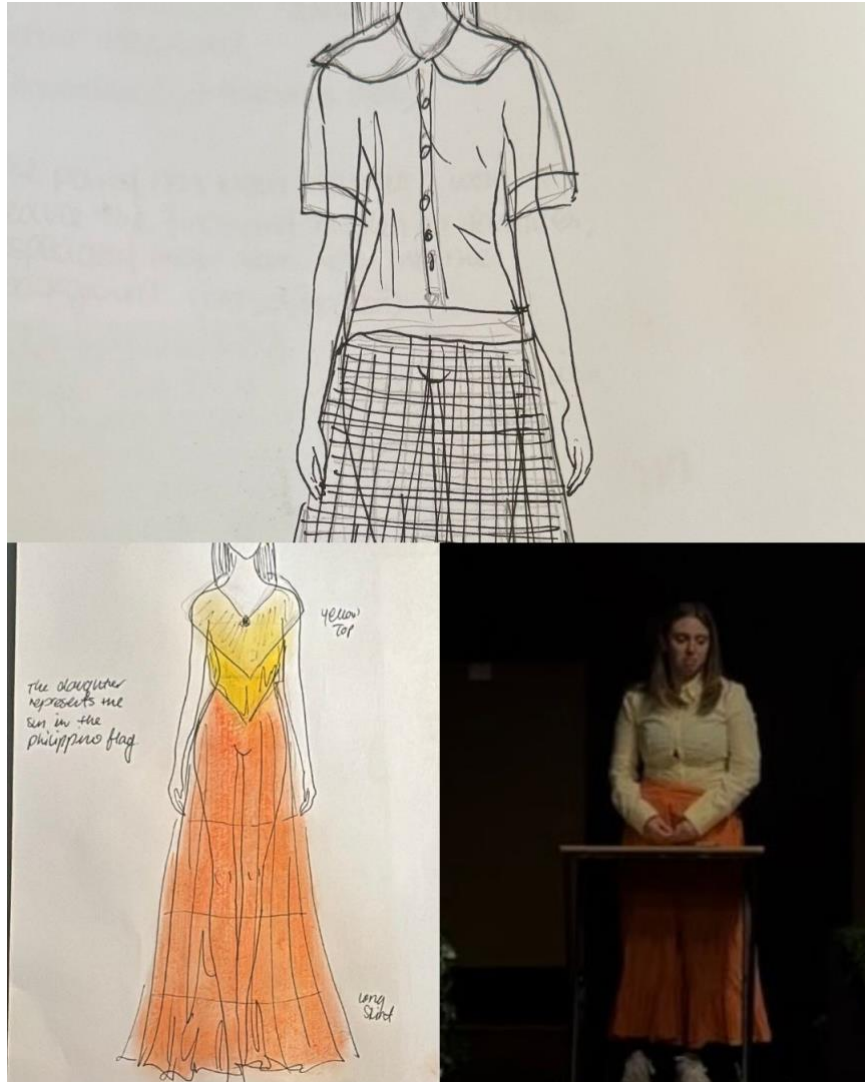


Figure 6: *Costume Design Process of the daughter (Author's own image: Kailyn)*

Figure # shows how I designed the daughter's costume. At first, I planned to use a typical public-school outfit. Later, inspired by Carmelita, I decided that Efren should represent the 'sun' from the Philippine flag, symbolising hope, better days, and light in the piece.

3.4 Experimentation and Exploration

3.4.1 Early rehearsals

Read-through and initial contact,

After scheduling a call with Bea Carpio, I was keen to do a read-through. Social media made it possible to join from any location, and being at home at the time made the process particularly convenient.

Aims of early rehearsals,

The purpose of this session was to discuss the project's vision, outline my motivations for writing, and explain why it holds significance. In my experience, directors such as Matthew Holmquist in *"The World Goes Round"* and Robert Bowman on *"I Love You, You're Perfect Now Change,"* have helped me establish an early connection with the performer. This approach helps build trust, create a safe environment, and make it much easier to settle into the rehearsal process.

I also clarified that the piece is not based on a specific individual but is instead inspired by mothers in the Philippines. We discussed Bea's background to gain insight into her upbringing, which reinforces my belief that she was well-suited to the role and could authentically represent Filipino identity within the performance.

Working dynamic,

During the session, I explained the structure of the piece, particularly the use of a cliff-hanger ending. I wanted the conclusion to remain unresolved, allowing the audience to form their own interpretation. I also outlined my intended staging within each part, including the final moment where the character locks eyes with her daughter, realizing her purpose and concluding that what she has done is enough.

I guided Bea through each section of the script, encouraging her to take time with delivery and fully engage with the text. I introduce initial physical staging ideas, such as retrieving scraps from the ground in the pre-part one section and planting them as if they are seeds in part two, eventually leading to the destruction of her "garden".

Following the readthrough, I invited Bea to share her thoughts and creative ideas. Due to our shared cultural background and understanding of themes such as poverty and

injustice within the Filipino context, she suggested incorporating Filipino phrases into the performances. I supported this idea, as it would enhance authenticity, giving her the freedom to integrate these elements naturally.

Reflection,

We ended the call with a shared sense of excitement. Bea expressed enthusiasm about working on a piece with strong meaning and purpose, which was encouraging as a creator. This initial session successfully established a collaborative and open working relationship, setting up a positive foundation for the rehearsal process moving forward.

3.4.1 First in-person rehearsals

Context, setting and who was involved,

Our first in-person rehearsal took place in Studio Three at Haywood House, WAVDA. The session involved me (director), Dee Parker, and Bea Carpio, who met for the first time in person during this rehearsal. This was the first in-person rehearsal of the production, marking the beginning of practical staging and collaborative exploration within the rehearsal room.

Purpose of the session,

The purpose of this session was to introduce the performers to one another, discuss expectations, and begin exploring staging and interpretation of the piece. I also aimed to observe Bea's original initial approach to the role in order to understand what felt natural in terms of performance and staging, which could then inform further development.

Initial atmosphere,

The atmosphere in the room was exploratory and open, as this was the first time the cast and director had to work together in person. There was a sense of curiosity as we began to get to know the piece better.

Transition into action,

We began the rehearsal by discussing the piece and each performer's expectations of the other performers' work. During this conversation, Dee reflected on the character's emotional states, while I clarified that the two characters would not interact until the final moment of the piece. After a rough run-through, we reflected on the session. Bea felt the piece's message was strong and effective but noted that holding the script limited her fluency and delivery. She identified line learning as an area for improvement.

Overall, I felt like the rehearsal was successful. Despite still using the script, Bea demonstrated professionalism and strong engagement with the role of Carmelita. My feedback focused on encouraging her to take time with the text, allow language to guide emotional expression, and deepen her understanding of the character across all three sections. I left the rehearsal feeling confident and encouraged, as Bea had clearly connected with my vision and the emotional core of the piece.

3.4.2 Middle Phase and Final Stage

Development of the piece,

The next scheduled rehearsal with Bea took place on Tuesday, 21st and focused on technical elements and set elements. During the session, I met Liz, who was responsible for the production's technical aspects. We carefully discussed the vision for each section of the piece, alongside the specific requirements, including the development of a lighting cue sheet to support the performance.

Kailyn, R. (2026) *Lighting cue sheet: The Garden They Couldn't Grow*



LIGHTING CUE SHEET

Part	Cue	Cue Point	Description	Notes
PRE PART 1	LX 1	Set already	General Wash	
	LX 2	Steps in her circle	Black Out	
PART 1	LX 3	Before Daughter stands up	Warm colour	Light Shines on Daughter
Transition to Part 2	LX 4	After 'A space to do her work-'	Red	Flicker of Red
Part 2	LX 5		Blue	Fades in
	LX 6	After 'COST MONEY!!'	Bright Light	Audience can be seen to all

Created for WAVDA Studio Theatre Independent Project

I chose this approach this way because the design was still in a draft stage and not yet finalized. Given that I wasn't fully aware of the available equipment, and Liz needed the information presented in a format that she could easily understand, this method seemed practical.

We discussed the important moment in the show, particularly the transition between parts. Originally, I wanted to use red lighting with a flickering effect to simulate the effect of flames or malfunctioning (Theatre crafts.com, 2026). However, we instead opted for slow blackout followed by a gradual slow fade-up, which still signals the end of one scene and transitions into the next.

Challenges and adjustments,

If I could have done anything differently before entering the technical rehearsal, it would have been to know what equipment we had available in Studio Theatre, WAVDA. The result of this was adapting to what we had during the session, which took a bit of time.

Refinement,

In the final stage, there wasn't much to do but do the marketing and creating a poster with a QR code that takes people to a website that has all the information such as the Cast list along with their headshots, Thanking Liz and WAVDA.

I wanted to input, testimonies from mothers about their struggles, hoping to inspire those reading it and lastly a section for people to click onto if they are ever interested in wanting to provide change for families in Philippines through Mercy in Action.

Performance Readiness and Final Reflection,

Bea and Dee explore the world in depth in our tech session. Enhancing, performing through the use of space, and taking notes from me very well.

From being in tech and having time to rehearse the next day. There wasn't much to play around. By that stage, I didn't want to further mess with any stage directions and delivery of text. As I want to be a natural delivery.

I made too sure to check on my actors, making sure they feel safe and ready because it matters to me that they are confident in presenting. As a director, I put a lot of faith in my actors in delivering the show with love, passion, and importance.

Chapter 4

Practical Final Outcome

4.1 Moments Before

Informing Bea that she can come in early to warm up and prepare as she prefers. This helps her fully warm up and settle her nerves.

Setting up was a challenge for me because the pervious performer ran over time. I felt a sense of panic as I knew I had an external audience coming, but to keep it professional,

I waited, and informed family and friends that there might be a slight delay. I apologize, as you would, in a normal theatre setting.

Setting up the space was chaotic. I should have arranged things more carefully. My tutor advised against having the audience sit fully in the round. There are no lights behind that area, causing an effect on the audience's view and experience.

4.2 Experiencing the Performance

4.2.1 Limitations

A large portion of the issues were technical. We started too early; our cue was to wait until everyone was in and settled, but there was a slight timing problem with the sound fade-in. Another issue was the missing transitions between parts, which weren't applied despite the cues. In addition, there were abrupt lighting changes in the wrong places, and the ending song came in too suddenly, more of a jarring "that's loud" moment, rather than building up gradually at the correct cue.

4.2.2 Success

Despite having only one day of an hour and a bit of tech rehearsals, we managed to put on a good show. Bea did such an amazing job of just adapting to the technical mistakes and carried on, never losing her character or her physical and mental state. I mentioned to her that it could technically go wrong, but told her that if it does, to keep going, and that it doesn't matter at all. And the aim is to deliver the themes and aims of the piece.

As a director and creative maker, it was difficult for me to fully sit down and watch. In the back of my mind, I was overthinking what people were thinking in the moment, what the audience was reacting to, and the performance delivery. There were many times when I stood by the tech to signal lighting cues. But I know for next time that I should have just sat down, watched, and observed instead of worrying.

There, sharing work with those you care about feels vulnerable. The process was exciting and memorable.

4.3 Post-Performance Analysis

A profound sense of relief and exhaustion followed at the end of the performance. Audience members approached me to express their appreciation, describing the piece as both beautiful and emotionally impactful. Some shared deeply personal reactions, with one remarking, “I cried; she cried,” highlighting the emotional chime of the work. Overall, I was pleased with the audience’s response and positive feedback given.

According to Laugharne (2026), *“It was fantastic, very detailed, and heartfelt”*.

Another stated, *“It was incredibly moving, Kai had a strong marketing and great story to share. I really enjoyed the setting of the piece and the important message shared within it. She expanded by saying, “The piece, felt rehearsal with others delivering a very heartfelt performance-”. and concluded with “I think, this raw, emotive story compelling exposes the brutality of poverty and the impacts it has on families, in particular single mothers.” (Weaver, 2026).*

4.4 Future adaptations

As this piece is a project, I feel deeply passionate about, I am eager to continue developing and expanding it into a full theatrical production. Given the opportunity to stage it without any constraints of time and budget, I would extend the script beyond its current 15-minute format into a full-length performance. This would allow for a more detailed exploration of the mother’s life, offering greater depth to her circumstances and enabling the development of a richer, more cohesive narrative.

I would also further develop the set design to fully realize my artistic vision. This would evolve showcasing beauty of mother nature, with harsh realities the cruelty of the family's environment, highlighting both contrast and symbolism. Lighting and set would play a crucial role, with carefully selected colours used to represent themes such as danger, hope, and emptiness, alongside effects designed to captivate the audience and deepen their emotional connection to the characters.

I would also explore Filipino fashion in greater depth, using costume colours and textures to add symbolism. These choices would complement audio elements and instruments, enhance the atmosphere, and express the piece's artistry and emotional depth.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This dissertation explored how poverty, dignity, and the experiences of Filipino mothers are interconnected, drawing on both academic research and creative work. By bringing together theory and performance, I found that poverty is not only about a lack of money. It also affects people's feelings, self-worth, and dignity. Frameworks such as Amartya Sen's Capability Approach showed that when people have fewer resources and opportunities, it is harder for them to live independently and with self-respect.

The literature review found that Filipino mothers often carry a "double burden" as both caregivers and providers. They usually put their children's needs ahead of their own to help ensure their children have a better future. Cultural values such as sacrifice and resilience support this role, but they can also lead to emotional stress and exhaustion. Surveys and interviews backed up these findings and offered a closer look at the daily struggles and hopes of families living in poverty.

The practical part, *The Garden They Couldn't Grow*, turned these findings into a personal and emotional story. The performance used naturalism and realism to show the real struggles of Filipino families. This approach aimed to help the audience connect with the topic. Although there were some technical issues during the final show, the performance still delivered its message. Audience feedback supported this.

Overall, this project demonstrated that theatre can be an effective way to raise social awareness. It encourages people to reflect. The work also highlighted the need for more research and action to support Filipino mothers in poverty. Improving access to education and long-term help is especially important. In the end, this dissertation shows how storytelling can draw attention to marginalized voices and inspire real social change.

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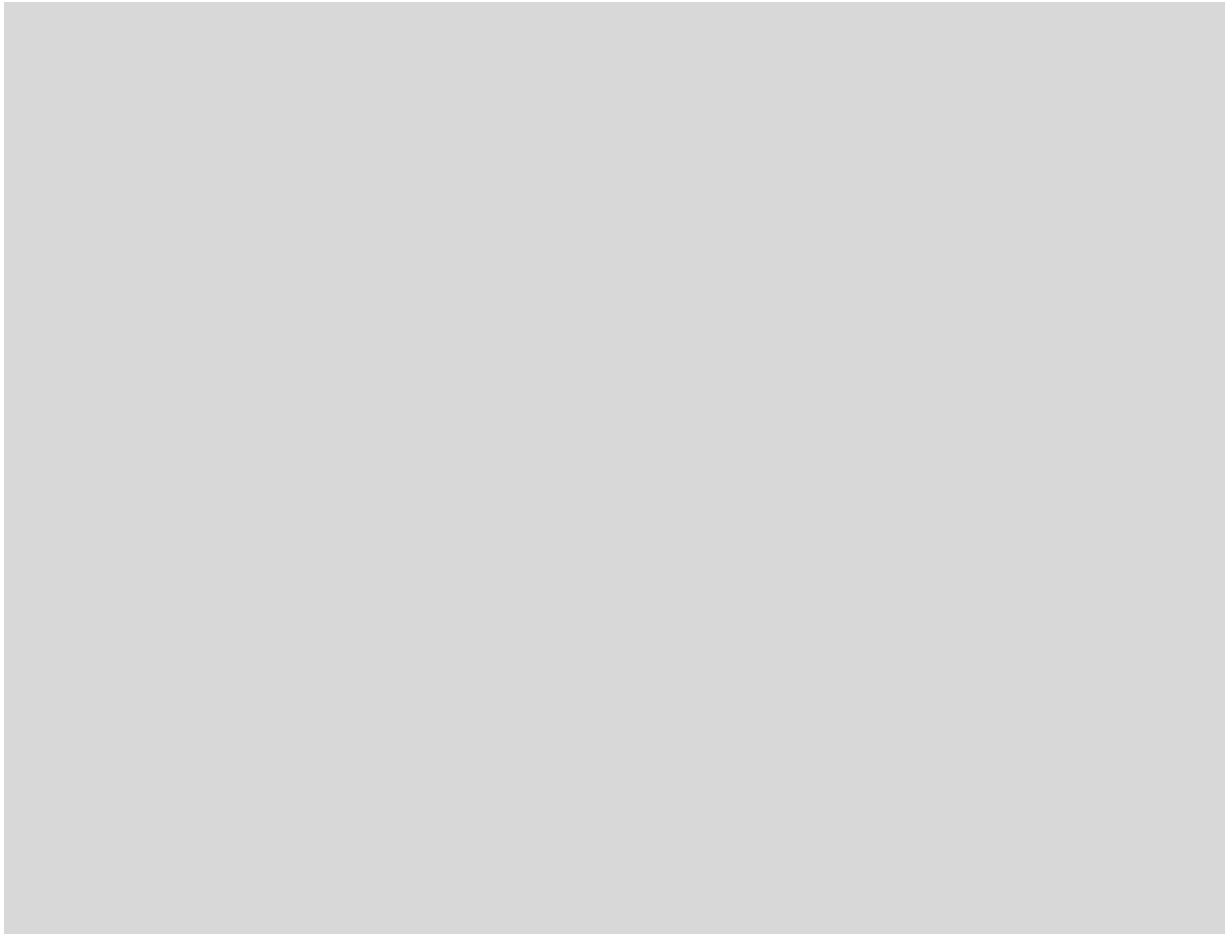
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