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## Self-Work is Self-Liberation: Professional Development that is Beyond the Classroom

Kristine A. Din

I find myself writing and re-writing, scribbling notes when moments of inspiration overcome me, and repetitively hitting writer's block while searching the fibers of my soul to write this piece. I remind myself to believe that my knowledge and narrative are worthy. I hope for my unapologetic self to pour freely onto the pages of my notebook to not only lead to my own self-liberation, but to also encourage my peers and colleagues to be their uninhibited and authentic selves.

I ask myself, what does the future of higher education look like? Or rather, what should it look like? The future of higher education that I hope for lies in the discovery and liberation of self and others. I envision and encourage the creation of deliberate courageous spaces for students, scholars, and practitioners to peel back the covers and pages of history that have been shut from our curricula.

Imagine if students came into and emerged from their academic programs knowing and understanding their own history and the histories of others? Or even learned about multiple (intersecting) histories in their classes? Perhaps the cycle of socialization, the system that invades and influences many aspects of our lives, would reverse. Maybe I would experience less horizontal oppression and hostility from many people of color who have told me I have White privilege – when my brown skin could never be mistaken as white. Maybe oppression would not be as pervasive, marginalizing and toxic. Maybe we would be better able to connect to each other's humanity and remember that we are all beings of emotion who are capable of experiencing a spectrum of feelings. Because is that not what we all truly share in common? Human emotion stretches across difference and connects histories and narratives. Every person has their unique truth, and I will never know every single story, but I will always know what exclusion feels like.

Asian Pacific Islander American history is American history. The same way African American and Black history is American history. Latin@ American history is American history. And the history of Native Americans and First People's that

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colonizers so desperately tried to demolish is American history. The story of immigration and the pieces of legislation that prevent and allow certain groups into the United States is a part of American history. Every oppressed voice is a part of American history. I have an obligation as an educator to dig deep and uncover and share what is not being taught in classrooms and graduate programs to challenge and re-write this so-called Truth.

I realized in order to truly understand myself and the power behind my voice is by learning my complex, rich and dynamic history as a Filipina and Asian Pacific Islander American living in the United States. More specifically, my focus has been on investigating the counter-stories told from the perspective of my people – not from the impossibly skewed point-of-view of the colonizers. By devoting hours to reading texts, watching documentaries, and surrounding myself with other various forms of literature that have never surfaced in any class, I have created a strong and formidable sense of self that is impenetrable by the demands of oppression and colonialism. I have built a fortress with bricks of courage and it is grounded by my ethnic and cultural roots; roots that stretch so deep that these walls cannot be shaken.

My liberation has come from my own self-work and from the support of many, but imagine if students had intentional spaces and opportunities to find their own liberation? Perhaps one would argue that colleges and universities have Ethnic Studies programs and (multi)cultural centers/offices and other forms of diversity requirements – but is that enough? I would argue that though these programs and centers exist at many institutions, they are under-funded, understaffed, and undervalued. I would also argue that it is not the sole responsibility of these programs, centers and offices to educate faculty, staff, and students around history, diversity and social justice. It must be a shared effort. I pose these thoughts and questions, because I wonder, how are practitioners and educators (especially those outside of multicultural affairs) supposed to effectively work with and relate to a perpetually diversifying population of students? Without knowing, learning and understanding our own as well as different (and not limited to) racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious histories, can we fully serve the students we deeply care for? These histories are beyond the scope of student development and identity theories learned in the classroom. They are beyond analyzing case studies and writing memos. The opportunities to reflect and learn about oneself are few and far between especially if they are not deemed a priority by staff and faculty at all institutional levels. Becoming a successful practitioner is beyond having a tangible skill-set. It is more than knowing how to respond to crisis, being an experienced conduct officer, or providing academic and career advice. Becoming a talented practitioner must include personal reflection to examine biases, challenge history, and learn how personal narratives can influence one's philosophy as an educator.

I believe that self-reflection, coupled with listening to the voices that have been silenced throughout history, positively contributes to the creation of a grounded sense of self to better serve students and colleagues in my overlapping spheres of influence. With a better understanding of who I am, I can then encourage and support students and colleagues from all backgrounds to learn their history, find their centeredness, erect their own fortresses of courage, and to ultimately produce their best selves.

The ideas of doing self-work, pursuing self-liberation, and challenging history are not adequately integrated into graduate programs and professional development opportunities. This reflection is not only a form of unapologetic self-expression, but also a proclamation. It is a call to challenge practitioners and educators to be courageous. Learn the ugly history that is twisted with hurt and hate. Only then can we find freedom. There is beauty in struggle and we must be willing to embrace it. Turn inward while looking at the many mirrors that reflect the many facets of self. Enriching self will enrich others. Liberating self will liberate others. Our voices are one choir. The more voices we add, the louder the song we sing.