Chapter 6
My Process of Becoming:
I–As Successful or I–As Imposter?

Lauren Ashley May
Virginia Tech, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on the author's process of transitioning into a position as a doctoral candidate. This journey has assisted in the understanding of personal identities and the world. Within this chapter, personal experiences are used to exemplify and examine the ways in which the author has worked to navigate aspects of both personal and scholarly identities that have been and continue to be under construction. Examining transactions with texts and writings, prioritizing mental health, accepting and utilizing support from advisors, and seeking out conversations with faculty and other doctoral students have all assisted in navigating the challenges that have arisen throughout the doctoral journey. This process of becoming is further examined through the exploration of various positions within the dialogical self.

INTRODUCTION

I remember the moment I received the call from my advisor informing me of my acceptance into the Curriculum and Instruction doctoral program at a large research university in the United States. I remember the coffee shop I had just walked into when I heard my phone ring, the smell of lattes, the sound of blenders, and the feel of my heart pounding as I fought to contain my excitement. At the time, I did not have an accurate understanding of the pressures involved with this journey. My doctoral adventure has been far from easy, but I would not change the decisions and moments that led me here.

Reflecting upon my lived experiences, I know that every moment has contributed to my process of becoming. Bakhtin (1981) discussed how an individual's process of becoming is a path of ideological development that can refer to how an individual constructs their ways of viewing the world. He describes this formation as, "an intense struggle within us for hegemony among various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions and values" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 346). Thus, as we engage in dialogue with the world, numerous influences contribute to a never-ending process of ideological

development. Our engagement with lived experiences assists in our creation of meaning, supporting the formation and adaptation of our various identities.

As we progress through life, we constantly make meaning from various words, utterances, and experiences. A word "enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 276) where individuals can make sense of the words they encounter. Some influences can move the word along a path that encourages one meaning, while others pull the word away from one meaning to make room for other perspectives and interpretations. The word "presentation," for example, could cause excitement in some individuals but anxiety in others. The decision on how to perceive the word, "presentation," is dependent upon the lived experiences and influential contexts of the individual. With the tension between various influences, an individual can formulate a meaning for the word. Bakhtin's (1981) theory of language and the process of ideological development can be extended to explain how individuals generate meanings from lived experiences. Based on our individual experiences and influences, we work internally to find a healthy tension in the construction of meaning. Therefore, developing understandings from my time in a doctoral program is based on my current state of knowledge and the influence of lived experiences. This process is constantly active as I engage with my identities, lived experiences, and cultural contexts in the construction of meaning.

I currently identify as a doctoral candidate and future teacher educator, but I also align with an assortment of personal and professional individualities. All my identities have the potential to influence my process of ideological development while simultaneously working towards hegemony. This chapter focuses on my process of transitioning into my position as a doctoral candidate in a Curriculum and Instruction program and details the navigation of challenges that encouraged me to promote a position of success over a position of failure or feeling like an imposter. The journey has assisted in developing my own identities and the ways I make meaning with the world. Within this chapter, experiences from my doctoral journey exemplify how I have navigated aspects of my personal and scholarly identities that have been and continue to be under construction. The consideration of my various identities assisted in necessary motivation during strenuous moments within my doctoral journey along with the encouragement for others to do the same. The following sections delve into my process of becoming through the exploration of various positions within my dialogical self.

BACKGROUND

I view myself and my research through a sociocultural lens in which individuals are constructing understandings based on their own lived experiences and cultural contexts. With this belief, experiences and contexts may influence individual understandings as we engage in processes of meaning creation. In the exploration of my own identities, I look to Hermans and Hermans-Konopka (2010), as they described how "people are continuously in a process of positioning and repositioning" (p. 7) their dialogical selves. We are each impacted by language, lived experiences, and cultural contexts; therefore, our identities can shift in levels of importance as we engage with the world.

Everyone has numerous positions that can become more or less prominent depending on the current context. I can be known as wife, daughter, white, hiker, doctoral candidate, sister, middle class, former teacher, and various other identifying aspects of my being. These positions may shift in prominence as I find myself in different contexts. If I am on the Appalachian trail, my identity as a hiker will be important; if I am in a doctoral class, my identity as a researcher will move into a more prominent position. These

personal identities, or I-positions (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010), make up our dialogical selves. The concept of I-positions suggests that individuals are each comprised of positions that relate to various aspects of their identity; they are dynamic and constantly adapting to the current environment or context. Several I-positions, such as *I-as* wife, *I-as* hiker, or *I-as* caring, are based on aspects of my identity related to relationships, interests, and personality; however, other positions may stem from friendships, occupations, religious beliefs, race, gender, sexuality, or other concepts with which we can identify.

Repositioning

The positions we have can shift and reposition themselves within our dialogical self. My position of *I-as* student was prominent throughout my K-12, undergraduate, and graduate education. Within my master's program, I also became aware of my classroom identity repositioning itself from *I-as* student to *I-as* teacher. When I began the student teaching part of my master's program, I noticed a shift between identifying as a student in college courses and identifying as a full-time teacher. Hermans and Hermans-Konopka (2010) describe how "the *I* fluctuates among different and even opposed positions and has the capacity to imaginatively endow each position with a voice so that analogical relations between positions can be established" (p. 33). My position of *I-as* full-time English teacher, for example, became more dominant as former positions of *I-as* student and *I-as* student-teacher became less central to my identity. While I no longer identified as a student or student teacher, both positions still influenced my actions and responses as a full-time teacher. Decisions made within the classroom were often attributed to my reflections on the position of *I-as* former student. While my student identities were no longer dominant within my dialogical self, I was able to reflect on those former positions to assist in making meaning in my position of *I-as* full-time teacher.

Prior to entering the doctoral program, the position of *I-as* full-time 6th – 12th grade English teacher was prominent in my life. While this position came with challenges, it was a comfortable position where I could refine pedagogical skills and focus on relationships with students. Along this part of my journey, however, I noticed how many colleagues and teacher friends became increasingly frustrated with their own positions and experiences. While I was not aware back then, seeds were being planted to focus my interests and future research on teacher attrition and teacher identity. Experiences from my years in the position of *I-as* 6th – 12th grade English teacher have contributed to my current I-positions and will continue to contribute to my future positions as I progress in the field of education.

I-positions make up a unified structure within an individual even as positions can shift in dominance with varying contexts. Within these shifts, positions have the potential to come into conflict with one another. My position of *I-as* successful in my doctoral program regularly comes under threat from my position of *I-as* imposter. While the precursor "I" promotes unity within my dialogical self, the separate positions threaten to impose two drastically different feelings and motivations based on the context. My position of *I-as* successful motivates me to adapt and navigate challenges, while my position of *I-as* imposter suggests that I am a fraud through critical internal dialogue. These two positions contradict one another, but they are both dominant and influential as they can affect all the other positions within my dialogical self.

As we encounter various lived experiences and cultural contexts, our I-positions may reposition within our dialogical selves. At this point in my research career, I have found Wiegand et al.'s (2021) thoughts to be true in that "graduate school often begins with feelings of hope and excitement, but there can also be feelings of fear and self-perceived inadequacy" (p. 35). As I progress through my doctoral

program focusing on Curriculum and Instruction, I have learned more about my dialogical self and the specific ways in which I come to understand the world than at any other time in my life. In doctoral courses, I have been encouraged to articulate my opinions and biases, how my subjectivities influence beliefs, and how those beliefs impact my decisions and responses. Considering these questions assisted in my understanding of how important it is to know oneself and how we each develop meanings based on our unique lived experiences and cultural contexts. My various I-positions carry significant weight in how I generate understandings from research data. Addressing subjectivity encourages researchers to address opinions, beliefs, worldviews, and influences that may impact the research; however, Freeman et al. (2007) explain that individuals involved with a research project are "always positioned culturally, historically, and theoretically" (p. 27). Therefore, no research can be free from individual subjectivities or the influence of I-positions. As I continue with my doctoral program and overall process of becoming, I have learned the importance of acknowledging and understanding the various identities that may influence my research.

The Imposter Phenomenon

At the start of my experience transitioning into a position as a doctoral candidate at a large university in the Southeastern United States, I became immersed in an unfamiliar environment. Education was always straightforward, K-12 was a breeze, undergraduate courses were more fun than work, and my Master of Arts in Teaching program required a slight stretch in cognitive ability and comfort. As a full-time teacher, I was able to fall into a pattern of lesson plan creation and implementation that was, again, more fun than work. It was not until I entered my doctoral program that I began to see the importance of challenging my mindset and understandings rather than swiftly completing the bare minimum.

Reflecting on my educational experiences, I identify with Clance and Imes' (1978) description of the female told that she can accomplish anything she sets her mind to, "The family conveys to the girl that she is superior in every way… there is nothing that she cannot do if she wants to, and she can do it with ease" (p. 3). I flourished under praise from my immediate and extended family as they congratulated me on well-written poems, math tests passed, or science fair awards received. I remember being pushed and praised: "I swear she was reading by the time she was three!" or "Of course you received another Accelerated Reader award." or "You are now in the National Honors Society, what board position will you pursue? President? Treasurer?" While I am thankful that my parents encouraged me to value education, this support also significantly influenced my overall process of becoming as I perfectly fit Clance and Imes' (1978) description of a girl creating and harboring feelings associated with the imposter phenomenon,

The child, however, begins to have experiences in which she cannot do any and everything she wants to. She does have difficulty in achieving certain things. Yet she feels obligated to fulfill expectations of her family, even though she knows she cannot keep up the act forever. Because she is so indiscriminately praised for everything, she begins to distrust her parents' perceptions of her. Moreover, she begins to doubt herself. (p. 3)

As I progressed through undergraduate courses, I began to have these experiences involving more strenuous assignments and learning experiences. I found myself needing to study before a physics exam or revise and edit a paper before submission. These situations were unfamiliar to me as everything from my past had seemed so simple.

Failure

One connection between an individual told they can accomplish anything (Clance & Imes, 1978) and the imposter phenomenon lies within the concept of failure. As a child and young adult, I never accepted failure within myself. This admittance is not to say that I never failed; I certainly did. For example, no matter how many hours of practice and concentration, I could never read music and play the piano. My excuse for failing was that I did not want to learn; I had no desire. The truth was that I wanted to excel at the piano. My grandmother, a talented pianist, gave me lessons every week throughout my early childhood. However, since musical ability was not something that came to me with ease, I could not accept the imminent failures I would have along the way. At the time, it was easier to make an excuse for myself than reveal imperfection to my family.

After having internalized the idea that being above average and capable should come with ease for someone like me, I considered myself an imposter whenever I had to work harder in courses or activities. While my parents had always encouraged study habits and effort, I felt like the more effort required of a task or course, the less I felt competent at finishing successfully. When I took economics and accounting courses in my undergraduate program while exploring various career options, I found myself needing significant amounts of study time and preparation. These struggles reinforced the notion that I should not pursue a career related to those courses. If it did not come naturally to me, I had no business taking courses in that field. I had no desire to push myself to take more courses than those needed to earn my degree; I purposefully made the track towards my degree simple by taking English, Film, Communication, History, Psychology, and Language courses that aligned more with my strengths. I continued with my process of becoming by avoiding failure throughout K-12, a bachelor's, and even a master's in teaching. Throughout my years of education, I attempted to take roads with more guarantees for success rather than branching outside of my comfort zone and risking failure.

I eventually realized that teaching middle and high school English was no longer my final goal as I worked for the education director within my master's program. I traveled around the state procuring interest in academic programs for my university, recorded data from various education professors, assisted with CAEP accreditation, and eventually fell in love with the idea of becoming a professor, researching, and supporting future teachers toward their own goals. I taught in public schools for several years and enjoyed the freedom that many teachers have of running the classroom without the control or interference from others. While I feared administration coming in to observe during the challenge of a failed lesson plan, chaotic classroom, or lacking assessment, most of the time I felt comfortable teaching behind the closed door of my classroom away from evaluating eyes. After teaching in public schools, I thought that, since my experiences with education had come easily so far, earning a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction would be another simple challenge to navigate. I did not yet understand the strenuous tasks required of an emerging academic.

Infuence

Clance and Imes (1978) introduce the terminology of the imposter phenomenon. The imposter phenomenon, also frequently referred to as the imposter syndrome, can apply to successful individuals who may view themselves as lacking or unworthy compared to others. The imposter phenomenon carries significant weight as it has the potential to influence "how individuals perceive themselves, expect others to perceive them, attribute successes, navigate challenges, and collaborate with others" (Wiegand et al.,

2021, p. 35). In the first semester, I found myself wondering how I had managed to gain acceptance into the Curriculum and Instruction doctoral program. I perceived myself as ambitious but did not always expect others to perceive me as capable of such aspirations. A critical voice in the back of my mind constantly reminded me that I was an imposter, so I made efforts to conceal myself. I was reluctant to contribute to group assignments and class discussions due to this critical voice attesting to my position as an imposter. By restraining my instincts to participate in discussions on a broader and more in-depth level, I believed that I could be quiet and make it appear as though I was intellectually on par with other individuals in the course.

A study by Chakraverty (2020) describes the imposter phenomenon specifically within science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) postdoctoral students. The understandings involve six triggers of the imposter phenomenon, which can apply to all individuals, including those outside of STEM: "1) not pursuing new things, 2) not making social connections, 3) impaired academic communication, 4) not applying, 5) procrastination and mental health, and 6) feeling undeserving or unqualified" (p. 342). With lived experiences and cultural contexts, individuals may encounter the imposter phenomenon in all, some, or none of these six ways. I have experienced moments related to each of the six themes; however, not making social connections and feeling undeserving or unqualified have been two triggers more strenuous to navigate. With one of my positions being *I-as* shy, it can often be a struggle to engage in social interactions, both in personal and professional aspects of my life. I tended to be more withdrawn in my first-semester doctoral classes as I feared my colleagues thinking me unworthy of my academic placement. Remaining quiet and distant in those classes allowed me to sink further into my *I-as* imposter position because I denied myself the ability to create connections with others. My critical, inner *I-as* imposter thoughts continued to remind me that I was undeserving and unqualified for my placement in the doctoral program. As a result, meetings with my advisor could often be overwhelming as I worried about him regretting his choice to hire me as his teaching assistant and take me as his advisee.

I am a doctoral candidate, future Ph.D., and future teacher educator; failure is inevitable as I progress through job applications, conference proposals, and article or chapter submissions. Problems can arise, however, when individuals understand failure in different ways. One individual may see failure as a lack of ability, while another may see it as bad luck or the result of an arduous task (Clance & Imes, 1978). Failure can often bring about side effects such as frustration, anxiety, or depression (Clance & Imes, 1978), thus creating significant mental barriers for individuals to navigate. This kind of mental barrier also serves as self-critique with the potential to deter progress as we each navigate relationships with ourselves. "One of the fascinating phenomena in the study of the self is the fact that human beings develop relationships not only with other people but also with themselves" (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p. 120). When I have experiences of failure, my relationship with myself becomes tense as I consider potential actions that may have promoted a more successful outcome. If a conference rejects my proposal, as they have done on multiple occasions, I conduct an informal evaluation of myself. I consider the time spent writing the conference proposal, how many times I edited and revised it, and if the proposal addressed the conference call or theme. Once this is complete, I compare those results with the times I was accepted to present at a conference. Therefore, my failures result in self-evaluation and critique as well as a comparison with prior successes.

Self-criticism can occur when we do not meet expectations and "tend to evaluate ourselves in a negative way" (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p. 123). The results of self-criticism are similar to the effects of the imposter phenomenon in that they can be evident through symptoms of sadness, depression, withdrawal, shame, or submissiveness (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). As I progressed through

the first semester of my doctoral program, I was continuously navigating the effects of self-critique as I worried that someone would point out my flaws and recognize me as an imposter. Self-criticism, however, did not consume my doctoral journey. There were numerous instances when my *I-as* successful position flourished under the praise of my advisor for teaching a difficult lesson, when a co-author and I were accepted into our first journal, or when professors asked to use my assignment as a model for future students. The positive experiences intermingled with the negative; however, the negative experiences typically held more power over me. While I am still navigating those effects throughout my process of becoming, my doctoral program has assisted in my gaining knowledge regarding how one may avoid the influence of the imposter phenomenon. With these understandings, I am slowly learning how to see myself as a qualified and deserving doctoral candidate working towards a research career and confident position of *I-as* successful.

NAVIGATING THE PROCESS

As a doctoral candidate in the middle of dissertation work, the imposter phenomenon still influences my decisions and work ethic. Fitzgerald (2018) explains that "just as the beginning of a research project is characterized by doubt, the beginning of a research career entails uncertainty in oneself due to a lack of an established scholarly identity" (p. 265). Graduate students, pre-tenured faculty, and those interested in pursuing a research career may find it takes a significant amount of time to develop a clear identity within the field (Wester et al., 2020). The amount of time needed to establish oneself depends on the individual's lived experiences, cultural contexts, and successful navigation of challenges as multiple identities are positioned and repositioned within the self.

Wiegand et al. (2021) discuss how small amounts of the imposter phenomenon may encourage individuals to have more high-achieving desires and work ethics; however, those amounts depend on the individual and their own experiences. While some aspects of the imposter phenomenon and failure may be motivational in reaching elevated expectations for oneself, too many feelings of doubt and expressions of self-critique could negatively influence the progression and repositioning of identities within one's dialogical self. While my experiences still involve feeling various effects of the imposter phenomenon, I have found that there can be numerous ways through which doctoral students, academics, researchers, or other positions within education may navigate their processes of becoming and emerge with more positive and motivating feelings towards the self.

Transactions

As I began my doctoral journey, I found myself heavily transacting with the literature examined and topics discussed. Rosenblatt (1995) describes transactions by stating: "the reader approaches the text with a certain purpose, certain expectations or hypotheses that guide his choices from the residue of experience. Meaning emerges as the reader carries on a give-and-take with the signs on the page" (p. 26). Rosenblatt (1995) also discusses the social origins of the reader and the text and how both can influence the meanings made. Taking the time to think critically about how I make meaning from texts and experiences helps strengthen my understandings and various influential identities while my *I-as* imposter weakens. My involvement with doctoral courses assisted with my reading and reflecting on texts utilizing different worldviews, methods, frameworks, and opinions. Rosenblatt (1995) explains

how transactions involve meaning being made from the combination of the specific individual and the information on the page as "personal factors will inevitably affect the equation represented by book plus reader" (p. 75). Most of my professors provided the space and encouragement for students to make meaning through transacting with the content, collaboration, and our individual experiences. In this way, our course discussions were enlightening as individuals within the learning space brought their own experiences, contexts, and considerations to the conversation. Rather than only viewing the text through our own eyes or guessing at the professor's interpretation, we utilized the space to create our connections with the content. Various influences maintained a healthy tension as I generated meanings based on multiple influences within the environment.

Transactions occur with every book, article, or excerpt read as we bring our ideas into the process of making meaning. One significant transaction I had was in a doctoral course where we read and discussed Plato's (1902) writing on the allegory of the cave. Positioning ignorance as bliss, a theme I have understood within Plato's writings, has been an interesting notion to consider along my doctoral journey. Before entering my Curriculum and Instruction doctoral program, I felt as though I knew myself well. Education was easily navigable; I could easily guess what the teacher or professor wanted me to write, I could exceed the assignment expectations, and I could do it all while maintaining a healthy sleep schedule and social life. The more I discover about myself, the more I understand that even though the journey through this doctoral program is for a terminal degree, my various identities and pursuit of knowledge can never be terminal. I see myself increasingly as the individual in Plato's cave being dragged up the cave ascent towards the daylight. I know that I will never look directly at the sun with complete understandings and confident responses; however, the process of reaching the daylight is more easily navigable as I begin to think critically about knowledge acquisition and making meaning with texts and experiences.

One step along this ascent towards the daylight occurred within a qualitative methods course where we each wrote a short paper describing the researcher's role in the construction of knowledge. For one of the first times in my life, I needed to articulate my exact beliefs about how individuals make meaning for themselves. I grappled with the various ideologies we had discussed within the course: positivism, constructivism, interpretivism, and others; however, I struggled with finding the words to express my understandings. With this exercise, I began to see my ignorant tendencies and the contentment I had for navigating life's challenges by finding the quickest paths to success. As I researched various ways to understand individual truths and the world, I transacted with the words I read and wrote. Writing out my thoughts and continuously revising them helped me articulate my expanding beliefs and methods of generating meaning. This assignment assisted with my overall process of becoming by encouraging my acquisition of personal knowledge and understandings that support me in writing research rationales, subjectivities, and understandings. In this way, feelings associated with my *I-as* imposter position diminished as my ability to articulate my process of generating meaning reinforced my *I-as* successful position. Rather than remain in the dark of Plato's cave, my process of becoming continues to involve transacting with my beliefs as I ascend towards the daylight.

Mental Health

Maintaining personal mental health is a terrific way to navigate challenges within the process of becoming. However, this maintenance is easier said than done since many individuals, including myself, tend to avoid those more personal topics. Throughout my doctoral program, circumstances and stress have encouraged me to transact with new information and learn more about myself in the process. I identify

with a participant in Leshem's (2020) study on doctoral student journeys when she states, "I feel like I am on a roller coaster. There are days when there is a breakthrough and there are days when I am quite down as I am unable to express my ideas properly" (p. 176). Throughout this process, I have learned that failures can bring me to my lows for several days at a time; for example, if my conference proposal receives a rejection, it often takes a day or two to increase my motivation levels and work ethic back to, what I consider, appropriate. On the other side, if I receive a comment of praise from my advisor, my work ethic tends to increase, and my confidence swells as I become more enthusiastic with my work. With this spontaneous, emotional roller coaster, it can often be exasperating to meet personal deadlines and fulfill expectations for myself and my program. In the process of making meaning, various influences can find balance with the tension of possible interpretations as individuals make meaning from language. One example of a balance that resulted in an emotional low occurred during the writing of my prospectus and dissertation study plan, where my advisor had a difficult conversation with me concerning my efforts. I was putting energy into formulating a research plan, but I was rushing my drafts and seeking to finish sooner rather than taking the time to consider the language and content of each draft. My advisor had to initiate a difficult conversation that called me out on my rushed decisions. Tensions helped me find meaning and understanding within this experience; unfortunately, the meaning I took away initially caused symptoms of my imposter phenomenon to strengthen. My *I-as* imposter took control and left my motivation levels lower than expected. On the emotional roller coaster, I was at a low point that left me struggling to focus and produce exceptional work. For days, I struggled to write a single paragraph without allowing myself to become distracted with socialization, housework, or other minuscule tasks unrelated to my prospectus and research plan. After several days of navigating my mental health and writer's block, my identity began to reposition. I was able to refocus and understand that while the conversation with my advisor was uncomfortable and left me feeling low for several days, it was a necessary discussion regarding how I needed to slow down and focus on my process of becoming. That conversation pushed my position of *I-as* successful towards more dominance within my dialogical self.

Considering how to navigate the highs and lows of mental health, my advisor frequently reminds me to still engage with the things I love. While working towards a doctoral degree can inhibit many activities (Pember et al., 2019), it should not be work that breaks down our mental health. Pember et al. (2019) discuss how many graduate students thought that their research and higher education positions would suffer if they "took the time to step away from their desks and exercise, eat well, spend time with family, or sleep" (p. 12). I understand how easy it is to be distracted by the pressure of job applications, course papers, conference proposals, or research studies. Wiegand et al. (2021) discuss the continued importance of practicing self-care, especially while navigating challenges. I take action to preserve my mental health by spending time in nature; I love hiking, climbing mountains, and being away from the crowds and the rush of everyday life. While more times than not I still think about my responsibilities waiting for me at home or work, this alone time focusing on enjoyable activities contributes to my consistent mental health, energy, and overall happiness while experiencing the effects of the imposter phenomenon.

Support

The amount of support from colleagues, professors, and advisors provided to me during my initial years of engaging with research was essential to my process of becoming. Rickels (2021), a graduate student in music teacher education, describes how various supportive individuals made him aware of conferences and symposiums, encouraged him to submit proposals, read his work to assist with preparations,

and introduced him to other scholars and significant individuals throughout the event (p. 4). I identify with Rickels' (2021) description of this avenue of support as my advisor walked me through these steps with every conference we attended in my first year as a doctoral student. My confidence grew as my conference proposals were accepted and presentation experiences went well. With his encouraging me to apply, assisting with presentations as needed, and introducing me to friends and scholars at these events, my position of *I-as* imposter felt less controlling within my research career. My positions of *I-as* successful and *I-as* future teacher educator became more prominent as I learned how to make the most of these scholarly events and continue developing within my process of becoming.

Considering other support methods, Wiegand et al. (2021) discuss examples of graduate students becoming more involved with mentorship and research positions. For one of the authors, "serving as a research assistant allowed her to build her skills and confidence" (p. 35). Considering my personal experiences, being placed in positions of power and authority can make an individual feel deserving and credible within the world of academia. I have found that my role as a graduate and teaching assistant has helped my research identity develop. In the act of successfully helping others with research or coursework tasks, there is a sense of accomplishment as I demonstrate abilities or skills for others to witness. In this way, my position of *I-as* imposter weakens as others see my successes and my ability to assist others towards success.

When my advisor asked me to teach his English methods course while he was on sabbatical, I could feel my position of *I-as* successful strengthening while the imposter phenomenon voices declaring inadequacy diminished. With his affirmation and belief in my ability to lead the course, I was able to reach a high on the roller coaster of my doctoral journey. Serving as a teaching assistant in his methods courses, writing conference proposals, discussing theory, and presenting research together has provided me with significant amounts of time to support my position of *I-as* successful. The more support and encouragement I receive as he guides me towards a path of research and success, the more I can ignore the critical inner voice from my position of *I-as* imposter.

With numerous examples of support, the various influences on my understandings can positively build on my successful position(s) and decrease feelings associated with the imposter phenomenon. I can more easily develop my research identity as I seek continued support in reinforcing my position of *I-as* successful within my doctoral program.

Conversation

The idea of being social is straightforward, but numerous conversations have been instrumental within my process of becoming. Doctoral students have opportunities to socialize and learn from various individuals within their programs. While my position of *I-as* shy has often made this a challenge, I have grown to understand the importance of building relationships with advisors, professors, and other doctoral students. A relationship with an advisor is often the most influential factor in graduate school (Sverdlik et al., 2018). The advisor within their specific program or department "plays a major role in students' agency development through socializing incoming students into the department and the discipline, managing the opportunities available to students throughout their studies, and shaping students' career paths" (Sverdlik et al., 2018, p. 373). Thus, advisors hold tremendous power in the present and future circumstances of doctoral students. Students must spend adequate amounts of time conversing with their advisor; in this way, there is time dedicated to addressing concerns and considering appropriate actions to further the student's education.

Within my own experiences, my *I-as* confident position becomes stronger the more I engage with my advisor. During these engagements, I can ask him questions, verify my assumptions, and talk through his advice concerning research, conferences, job applications, courses, or other significant matters in doctoral studies. Pember et al. (2019) describe how "there is a strong need for role models among graduate students…who support and encourage self-care and wellness while encouraging academic achievement" (p. 12). Therefore, an advisor should be willing to promote academic success while also considering the student's mental health and overall well-being in the process. My advisor exemplifies this in his frequent reminders of how criticisms are meant to support and guide me towards success. Difficult conversations addressing issues always end positively as he stresses the importance of communicating why he pushes or critiques me in various ways.

Not all conversations involve critique. In the months before my acceptance into the Curriculum and Instruction program, I was still teaching full-time in the K-12 classroom. My now advisor did not hesitate in responding to my numerous emails asking questions about the program and his work. I would read responses during my planning period and respond during lunch or after school. While my position of *I-as* teacher was more important at the time, I was also excited about pursuing the next chapter in my career. My advisor did not hesitate to oblige me with conversations and statements of advice. Reflecting on those emails, my advisor explained one piece of guidance that I find beneficial even as I write this chapter. He said that the faculty you choose to work with are the most important factors to consider before entering a doctoral program. As a 6th – 12th grade English teacher, that advice seemed obvious and almost trivial while looking forward to my end goals; however, I better understand the importance of that advice today. The faculty, your advisor, and course professors are the ones you engage in conversation with to better understand yourself, others, and research. Without those relationships and exchanges with faculty, I imagine that process of understanding would be much more difficult. Now, it is clear that those initial exchanges involved my advisor already attempting to set me up for a position of *I-as* successful. In our conversations since then, he has continued to offer advice for my current and future situations.

In addition to conversing with advisors and faculty, other doctoral students and colleagues can contribute to an individual's position of *I-as* successful or *I-as* imposter. In Leshem's (2020) study, one participant describes her reluctance to engage with her colleagues, "I never thought I had something important to say…I look around and I see people talking eloquently about things they do not know much about. I envy them" (p. 178). Being shy and reluctant to speak around colleagues can be a defense mechanism for doctoral students attempting to navigate the normalcies of their program. Within the first semester of my doctoral program, I took a professional seminar course. Throughout the semester, I maintained feelings of inadequacy by viewing my colleagues as more knowledgeable than myself. In class, I displayed a quiet persona and would only respond to questions I felt confident with answering. It was not until the third year of my doctoral program, when other students and myself were reminiscing about the course, that we realized we all had similar feelings of inferiority in terms of knowledge and ability in that class. This honest conversation with my peers provided my *I-as* successful position with much-needed reinforcement within my dialogical self and process of becoming.

Considering the importance of conversation and engaging with peers, I could have avoided the symptoms of the imposter phenomenon earlier if I had encouraged personal exchanges and connections with other graduate students earlier in my doctoral program. As I worked to generate meaning from my interactions with other doctoral students in this first-semester course, I allowed myself to be intimidated by others' critical thinking skills, thorough analysis of research, and rapid publishing rates. It can be easy to forget that every individual is at a unique moment in life that is influenced by their lived experiences

and cultural contexts. Comparing oneself against a peer often fails to consider those individual experiences. In this regard, it is important to occasionally step out of comfort zones and begin conversations that can promote these truths. While it may feel awkward and vulnerable, initiating a conversation on this topic could provide a safer environment for yourself and others who may also be experiencing the effects of the imposter phenomenon.

CONCLUSION

In numerous instances during my time as a doctoral student, my position of *I-as* successful was pushed away as thoughts surrounding a position of *I-as* imposter took shape. The identities within my dialogical self were, and continue to be, in a constant state of repositioning. If my advisor praises something I have accomplished, then I may feel more successful; on the other hand, if a conference denies my proposal for presentation, I may feel more like an imposter. Examining my transactions with texts and writings, prioritizing my mental health, accepting support from my advisor, and seeking out conversations with faculty and peers have all assisted in navigating the challenges that have arisen throughout my doctoral journey. After this in-depth reflection on my identities, I see the value in taking the time to explore those circumstances revolving around *I-as* successful and *I-as* imposter positions. While my childhood fear of failure has followed me into this doctoral program, taking the time to examine my own beliefs and process of making meaning has given me the knowledge for how to be more honest with myself; therefore, I encourage others to go through this reflection as well.

While symptoms of the imposter phenomenon can be stressful and a hindrance to success, Wiegand et al. (2021) say that "in very small doses, these patterns of thinking and feeling can propel us to be motivated and high-achieving professionals" (p. 35). We may desire bountiful success, but I also believe that failures and rejections can keep us motivated to continue our navigation of doctoral programs, tenure tracks, and full careers. Wester et al. (2020) found that research self-efficacy, combined with moderately frequent levels of the imposter phenomenon, were attributes of the most successful scholars. I can see the truth in these claims as I consider my effort and motivation. If I am involved with easily attained success after success, my efforts to produce work that meets elevated expectations may decrease. However, if there are failures along the way, I may be more motivated to engage in efforts to achieve bigger goals and expectations for myself. Therefore, limited effects of the imposter phenomenon may also be a sign that things are progressing well if one can navigate those effects and use them as motivation to have higher personal expectations for the future.

I have found that the more I discover about myself, the more my identities strengthen. I am motivated to learn and study the lived experiences and cultures of others. However, there are always lows that accompany the highs on the doctoral journey roller coaster. Collins et al. (2020) compare the imposter phenomenon to an addiction that must be dealt with daily. The effects of the imposter phenomenon were powerful enough to pause and threaten my progression towards becoming a successful academic on more than one occasion. My *I-as* successful identity often faltered in this process of becoming, but those experiences also helped reconstruct and reposition my identities. While I am aware that I cannot expect myself to master a skill without practice or effort and I know that success can involve pushing one's limits, this idea is easier said than done. Diving into my own identities and making meaning through how those identities interacted with each other provided me with the stimulation necessary to continue

my journey towards becoming an academic in higher education. I believe this same process could assist others who are seeking careers in higher education as well as those already immersed in it.

As I currently apply for higher education positions and seek to further my research understandings, I am constantly navigating the effects of the imposter phenomenon that may arise on the doctoral journey roller coaster and impact my process of becoming. I am learning to make meaning and view the world in various ways as I seek to understand the influences of my *I-as* imposter position and encourage my position of *I-as* successful. Part of this journey involves changing my perceptions of personal failure and learning to use those experiences to better myself in the future. With the assistance of this dynamic and developing part of myself, perhaps I will even give the piano another chance.

REFERENCES

Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). Discourse in the novel. In M. Holquist (Ed.), *The dialogic imagination. Four Essays* (EmersonC.HolquistM., Trans.; pp. 259–422). University of Texas Press.

Chakraverty, D. (2020). The impostor phenomenon among postdoctoral trainees in STEM: A US-based mixed-methods study. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, *15*, 329–352. doi:10.28945/4589

Clance, P. R., & Imes, S. A. (1978). The imposter phenomenon in high achieving women: Dynamics and therapeutic intervention. *Psychotherapy (Chicago, Ill.)*, *15*(3), 241–247. doi:10.1037/h0086006

Collins, K. H., Price, E., Hanson, L., & Neaves, D. (2020). Consequences of stereotype threat and imposter syndrome: The personal journey from STEM-practitioner to STEM-educator for four women of color. Taboo. *The Journal of Culture and Education*, *19*(4), 161–180.

Fitzgerald, S. R. (2018). The role of affect in the information seeking of productive scholars. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, *44*(2), 263–268. doi:10.1016/j.acalib.2018.01.001

Freeman, M., DeMarrais, K., Preissle, J., Roulston, K., & St. Pierre, E. A. (2007). Standards of Evidence in Qualitative Research: An Incitement to Discourse. *Educational Researcher*, *36*(1), 25–32. doi:10.3102/0013189X06298009

Hermans, H., & Hermans-Konopka, A. (2010). *Dialogical self theory: Positioning and counter-positioning in a globalizing society*. Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511712142

Leshem, S. (2020). Identity formations of doctoral students on the route to achieving their doctorate. *Issues in Educational Research*, *30*(1), 169–186.

Pember, S., Usdan, S., Guyotte, K., Birch, D., Nickelson, J., & Knowlden, A. (2019). "It's (just) grad school": Effects of normative influence on the healthy eating behavior & intentions of graduate students. *Health Educator: Journal of Eta Sigma Gamma*, *51*(1), 2–18.

Plato. (1902). *The republic of Plato* (J. Adam, Ed.). University Press.

Rickels, D. A. (2021). Seeing and hearing: Cultivation of early career scholars. *Journal of Music Teacher Education*, *30*(3), 3–6. doi:10.1177/10570837211022170

Rosenblatt, L. M. (1995). *Literature as exploration* (5th ed.). The Modern Language Association.

Sverdlik, A., Hall, N. C., McAlpine, L., & Hubbard, K. (2018). The PhD experience: A review of the factors influencing doctoral students' completion, achievement, and well-being. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, *13*, 361–388. doi:10.28945/4113

Wester, K. L., Vaishnav, S., Morris, C. W., Austin, J. L., Haugen, J. S., Delgado, H., & Umstead, L. K. (2020). Interaction of imposter phenomenon and research self-efficacy on scholarly productivity. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, *59*(4), 316–325. doi:10.1002/ceas.12191

Wiegand, B. R., Barton, A., Zakszeski, B., & Mackey, I. (2021). Imposter syndrome: What is it and how to overcome it as a graduate student. *Communiqué*, *49*(8), 35.