

## Chapter 6

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

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### 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

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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

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