

Session title: Imposter Phenomenon in Academic Developers: Stories, Sparring and Solace?

Session type: Lightning Talk

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Session summary:

The session shares some findings from a digital storytelling collaboration among three academic developers working in the same institution, where we explored our routes into academic development. A common theme that emerged was imposter phenomenon (IP): worrying we did not deserve the work success we've had. Drawing on recent literature challenging whether IP is uniformly detrimental, we suggest that there may be some solace in reflecting on the positives IP might have regarding competencies such as interpersonal connectedness.

Session outline:

We used an established digital storytelling methodology (Wu and Chen, 2020) to explore our routes into academic development. Our aim, as three academic developers with diverse backgrounds, was to enhance our understandings of ourselves and each other through production of individual digital stories. Exploration of these stories revealed rich complex experiences, going beyond the work environment, helping us connect further as a team.

One prominent theme which emerged was imposter phenomenon (IP). Often referred to as imposter syndrome, IP leads individuals to believe that they do not deserve the success they have achieved or belong in the role they have attained. The prevailing wisdom is that IP is overwhelmingly detrimental to individuals. Published work (Rudenga & Gravett, 2019) has highlighted the prevalence of IP in academic developers, arguing for increased awareness of, and empathy for, IP within the academic development community.

For us, IP appeared in different ways in our routes into academic development. An ongoing sparring emerged: between imposter thoughts (I'm not a 'real' teacher, I'm a failed academic, why should anyone listen to me) and other positive, evidence-based, thoughts about the effectiveness, impact, and scope of our work. We reflected on how the scale of, and expectations on, academic development work over the past three years has exacerbated this sparring.

In a workplace context, Tewfik (2022) has argued against the view that IP is uniformly detrimental to individuals. Imposter thoughts may, sometimes, lead to enhanced interpersonal effectiveness through an 'other-focused orientation'. There may be some solace for us, then, as academic developers. While IP is undoubtedly a challenge, a nuanced view would recognize that IP can sometimes help with personal connections vital to our role.

This session will share our reflections emerging from our stories, and how this might provide some solace for the ongoing sparring with IP.

References:

Rudenga, K.J. & Gravett, E.O. (2019) Impostor Phenomenon in Educational Developers, To Improve the Academy: A Journal of Educational Development, 38(1), <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/tia.17063888.0038.107>

Tewfik, B.A. (2022) The Impostor Phenomenon Revisited: Examining the Relationship between Workplace Impostor Thoughts and Interpersonal Effectiveness at Work, Academy of Management Journal, 65 (3), <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2020.1627>

Wu, J. & Chen, D.T.V. (2020) A systematic review of educational digital storytelling, Computers & Education, 147, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2019.103786>