

# ABEABC Conference 2026



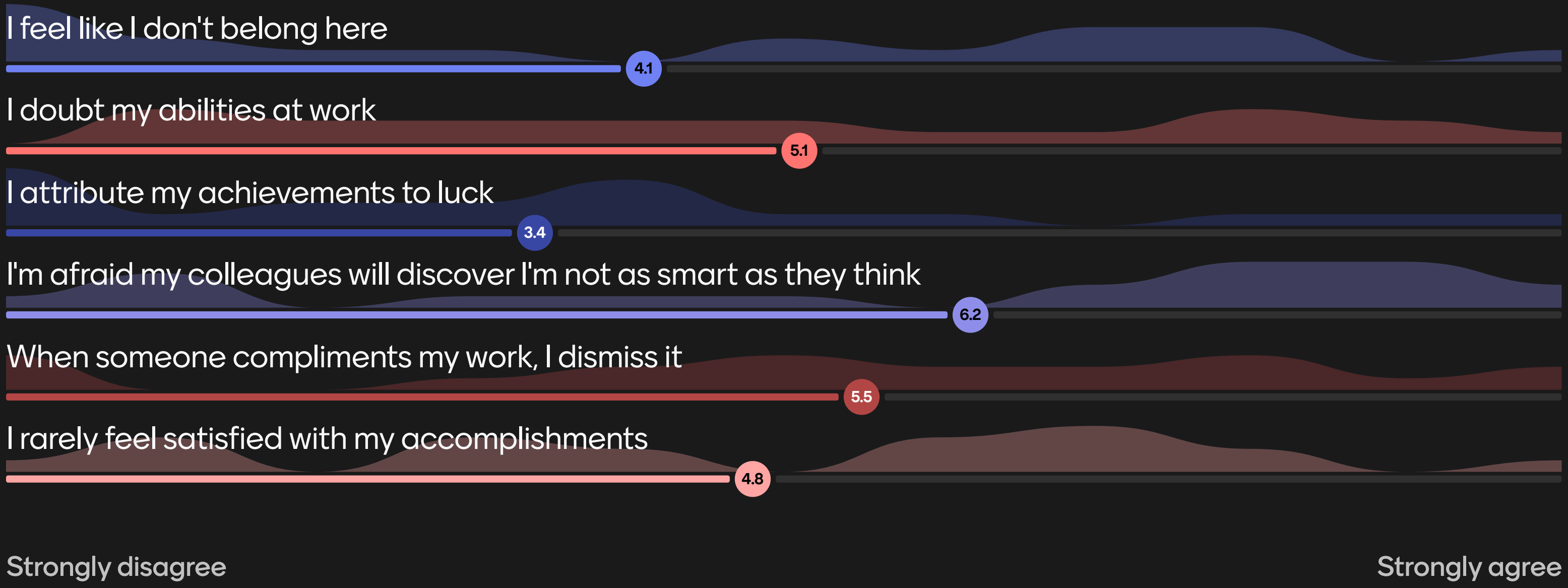
# From Self-Doubt to Self-Trust: Supporting Adult Learners in Overcoming Imposter Feelings

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ABEABC Conference 2026



# Respond to these statements honestly... 🤔



Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

# How I Got Interested in This Topic

"I'm just not university material. Everyone else is smarter.  
I should drop this course before I embarrass myself."

# Finish the sentence:

"I worry that..."

"Sometimes I feel like..."

"Other students probably think I'm..."

# Student Comments:

"I worry that I'm not going to have what it takes to finish school again."

"I worry that I will fail this program."

"I worry that I won't succeed."

"I worry that I will struggle to make friends."

"I worry that I'm too stupid for this place."

# Student Comments:

"Sometimes I feel like I'm not smart enough for this course."

"Sometimes I feel like I don't belong here."

"Sometimes I feel like I made a mistake of going back to school."

"Sometimes I feel like I have failed myself, and my friends and family view where I am at in my education as a failure."

"Sometimes I feel like I'm too antisocial."

# Student Comments:

"Other students probably think I'm not good enough in class."

"Other students probably notice my anxiety."

"Other students probably think I am too awkward."

"Other students probably think I'm too old."

"Other students probably think I'm rude, weird, quiet, and stupid."

# What Is Imposter Syndrome

A pattern of thinking where capable individuals feel like frauds, believing they don't deserve their success and will eventually be "found out."

First identified by Clance & Imes (1978) studying high-achieving women

# Key Characteristics

- Attributing success to luck, not ability
- Fear of being "exposed" as incompetent
- Discounting accomplishments
- Comparing yourself unfavourably to others
- Overworking to compensate for feeling inadequate

# Why ABE Students Are Especially Vulnerable

## 1. Years away from formal education

- "I've forgotten how to be a student."
- Rusty academic skills create self-doubt

# Why ABE Students Are Especially Vulnerable

## 2. Past educational trauma

- "My 8th grade teacher said I'd never amount to anything."
- Old negative messages resurface

# Why ABE Students Are Especially Vulnerable

## 3. Real life pressures

- Working, parenting, caregiving while studying
- Less time/energy than traditional students

# Why ABE Students Are Especially Vulnerable

## 4. Visible differences

- "I'm twice the age of everyone else in class."
- Standing out creates feelings of not belonging

# Why ABE Students Are Especially Vulnerable

## 5. The "should" narrative

- "I should already know this."
- "I'm too old for this."
- Shame about gaps in knowledge

# The Imposter Syndrome Cycle

1. Imposter Thought: "I don't belong here."



2. Anxiety/Fear



3. Unhelpful Behaviors: avoiding, procrastinating, overworking, isolating



4. Poor Performance or Burnout



5. Thoughts of Defeat: "See? I knew I wasn't good enough."



6. Cycle Repeats but Stronger

# The Hidden Cost

Students drop out not because they can't do the work,  
but because they believe they can't.

# The Solution: A Teaching Unit

Four 2-Hour Sessions in a Student Success Course



# Session One: Name It

## Goal: Awareness & Recognition

- Anonymous thought sharing: "I'm not the only one!"
- Self-assessment and recognition
- Breaking isolation through naming
- Thought journal

Magic moment: *"Wait, other people feel this way too?"* Naming breaks the isolation.

# Session Two: Impact on Learning

## Goal: Understanding the Cycle

- Discussing realistic case scenarios
- Recognizing personal patterns
- Learning to challenge and reframe imposter thoughts
- Sharing discoveries

Realization: *"I wasn't procrastinating because I'm lazy; I was procrastinating because I was terrified of failing."*

# Session Three: Strategies & Tools

## Goal: Building the Toolkit

- Strategy 1: Collect Evidence
- Strategy 2: Challenge the Thought
- Strategy 3: Share Your Feelings
- Strategy 4: Practice Self-Compassion

Students practice using strategies with current challenges to see which ones work for them.

# Session Four: Integration & Action Planning

## Goal: Moving Forward

- Personal Narrative Essay (2-3 pages)
- Strategy Guide for Other Learners (creative format)
- Presentation (10-15 minutes)
- Evaluation Focus: Understanding of IS, Self-Reflection, Application, Growth

*"The evidence list saved me. When I wanted to quit, I looked at everything I'd already accomplished.  
I couldn't argue with that."*

# Evidence List: One thing you've learned or improved at as an educator

Better at incorporating student ownership and reflection

Learning to listen more.

Connection

Confidence in my subject area!

Students want to be listened to. They want us to know their stories.

Better at writing grant proposals and connecting them to student needs

Talking with students who struggle in new contexts.

Improving my skills teaching students with extremely low literacy

# Evidence List: One thing you've learned or improved at as an educator

Being aware of different learning styles and finding ways to accommodate them.

That I can slow down more intentionally when I provide space for students to ask questions or share their thoughts

Giving more space/time for students to come up with their own thoughts

I gained a lot of confidence as a new instructor when students responded positively about the course and me at the end of the course.

Acknowledging the effort takes just to just show up, for some (attention to unique pace)

How essential communication is between learners and teachers

Technology - juggling screens , multi locations , different tech

Creating summaries of small pieces of textbooks not leaving this to chapter summaries.

# Evidence List: One thing you've learned or improved at as an educator

Gaining more knowledge of how to work with students with various disabilities

Being intentional in my relationships with students so they feel seen

Time management

Accepting people where they are at and have present / past trauma

Recognize students as autonomous learners, at the same time ensuring they know they can reach out at anytime for support or clarification.

That I do need my own space and the "burnout" is real.

Compassion

Successfully dealing with a student who was bullying other students

# Evidence List: One challenge you've successfully navigated

Learning to say no.

Asking for help in challenging times (with the union and conflict resolution). Understanding I am not my only advocate

Performing too many different roles and surviving.

Maintaining balance as workloads increase.

Accepting institutional change without so much emotion

Finding common ground with colleagues who have very different approaches to student needs

Being ok with not having to input info during a meeting. To just listen and soak it up

Boundary setting around expectations for response times.

# Evidence List: One challenge you've successfully navigated

(Working on) Managing responsibilities to students and responsibilities to colleagues, dept., and university

Learning i can do hard things

An interpersonal conflict between students that escalated to the ombudsperson.

Bridged greater understanding between Indigenous community and a non-Indigenous educator.

Putting aside whats in front of me not just physically but in my mind when a student knocks on the door and requires presence

Learning to ask for emotional help

Helping students work through their Fight-Flight-Freeze response!

Boundary setting with administrators

# Evidence List: One challenge you've successfully navigated

Clear boundaries

When to say no and being able to defend why we (ABE) are our own department

Coping and helping students navigate the institutional changes.

After a difficult term, I have ideas to meet forward next year.

After a student didn't receive my feedback well, I felt bad like I offended her. But then she admitted that she was defensive and reactive, but understood where I was coming from.

# Evidence List: One piece of positive feedback you've received

That it is obvious I care about my students and their success.

A student with past educational trauma told me I made them feel comfortable enough to learn

That I am organized.

You were so real, and we felt connected to you.

One student who began the school year very confrontational told me they were able to let down their guard in my classroom.

I appreciate you.

Good job I hate this one though. It doesn't feel real or genuine

That I provide good role modelling for students

# Evidence List: One piece of positive feedback you've received

Thank you for caring

That I recognized who they are not just what they can do, which made a difference to them

"You made me believe I could do it and that I deserved to!"

Thank-you for your flexibility.

That I'm an excellent teacher (in a card I was given)

Student thanked me because this time the course "clicked" for them.

That I make people feel seen

Student saying that I made math do-able

# Evidence List: One piece of positive feedback you've received

"Thanks for the course!  
You're a great teacher!"

When students struggle in  
my discipline and then say  
at end of term they gained  
confidence in their skills 😊

Thanks for being real

That they feel seen

Your class has inspired  
me to continue studying  
this topic deeper

Your patience and  
encouragement helped  
me to succeed.

# Debrief Questions

- How did it feel to articulate your competence?
- How did it feel to learn about someone else's?
- Was this easy or difficult? Why?
- What would it be like for your students to do this regularly?

# Key Takeaways for Implementation

- Name it explicitly
- Normalize, normalize, normalize
- Make it practical by teaching strategies
- Connect to academic performance
- Model vulnerability
- Integrate throughout semester

# Adapting to Your Context

Don't have four sessions?

- Condense to two lessons or integrate into existing curriculum
- Even one 90-minute session on naming and normalizing helps
- Use strategies informally throughout your course

# Student Voices (Thought Journal)

I never really knew what to call it until I started this class. Those feelings you get before entering a new place or room, meeting new people, or learning new things. Imposter Syndrome is the perfect name for it; it's like someone else is telling you that you are inadequate for whatever it is you're about to do, say, or think.

(...)

I haven't figured out the best ways to deal with it yet; it's something I'm still learning, but I have a good feeling that this class will teach me, or at least help me recognize ways to handle it. All I know is that if you give in to the imposter thoughts in your head, you will never succeed.

# Student Voices (Essay)

Coming back to school after working full-time has been a wild shift. I went from earning money and handling real-world responsibilities to sitting in classrooms again, trying to remember how to write essays and study properly. At first, I thought I'd adjust quickly, but Imposter Syndrome hit hard. I kept thinking, "You're not a real student. You're just pretending." But now I've started challenging those thoughts.

(...)

Moving forward, I'm going to keep using Evidence Lists and Reframing to fight my Imposter Syndrome. I'll remind myself that I've earned my spot here. Every time I submit an assignment, attend a class, or push through self-doubt, I'm proving that I belong. I'm not behind; I'm rebuilding, and that takes strength.

What's next?

# Cultivating Growth Mindset

Students helping themselves and helping others...



# Thank you!

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