

Scholar Identity & Positionality Memo

Purpose

To document the evolution of your identity as a researcher, scholar, and knowledge creator.

Associated Essays in Constellations:

Clouds, Pines and the AI Beside Me

<https://pathwaysandjourneys.com/constellations/f/clouds-pines-and-the-ai-beside-me>

Show Me the Child . . . <https://pathwaysandjourneys.com/constellations/f/show-me-the-child-at-seven>

Memo Header

Memo Title:

Date: May 22, 2026

Context: Reflection on the intellectual foundations that shaped my worldview and positionality as a scholar, beginning in my undergraduate years and evolving through my work in education, neurodiversity, transformative learning, and cognitive pluralism.

Identity Themes:

positionality, scholarly voice

References:

Apted, M. (1964–2026). *The Up series* [TV series]. Granada Television; BBC.

Blackmore, C., & Cooper, G. F. (1970). Development of the Brain depends on the Visual Environment. *Nature*, 228(5270), 477-478. <https://doi.org/10.1038/228477a0>

Segall, M. H., Campbell, D. T., & Herskovits, M. J. (1963). Cultural differences in the perception of geometric illusions. *Science*, 139(3556), 769–771. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.139.3556.769>

Section 1: Identity Event

What occurred that affected my identity as a scholar?

Throughout my early academic development, several research studies profoundly altered how I understood human cognition, perception, and learning, they became foundational lenses through which I began interpreting education, neurodiversity, culture, and identity.

The first pivotal moment came through exposure to Blakemore and Cooper's kitten study, which demonstrated that kittens raised in environments containing only vertical stripes could no longer perceive horizontal lines. The implications of this study extended far beyond neuroscience. It disrupted my assumption that perception was objective and universal. Instead, it suggested that the brain adapts to the environments in which it develops, constructing reality through exposure.

A second influential moment emerged through the work of Segall, Campbell, and Herskovits on cultural differences in visual perception. Their research demonstrated that individuals raised in different environmental contexts interpreted visual illusions differently. This expanded my understanding of culture beyond social behavior into cognition itself. It suggested that environments shape not only beliefs and opportunities, but the very architecture of perception.

A third formative influence came from Heller and Bergman's work with individuals placed in anechoic chambers. Participants deprived of sound began generating phantom auditory experiences. This reinforced a profound realization: the brain is not passive. It actively constructs meaning and fills gaps in perception.

These ideas later intersected with my reflections on the 7-Up documentary series, which longitudinally followed individuals from childhood into adulthood across decades.

Revisiting the series through the lens of these studies transformed my interpretation of human development. I no longer saw the participants merely as products of social class or circumstance. I saw how environments shaped cognition, expectation, identity, and possibility itself.

Section 2: Internal Reaction

What internal responses emerged?

This realization challenged many inherited assumptions about objectivity, intelligence, normality, and education.

Internally, I began recognizing aspects of my own cognition within these frameworks. My tendency toward nonlinear thinking, pattern recognition, interdisciplinary synthesis, and deep associative connections no longer appeared as intellectual weaknesses or distractions.

I questioned whether my way of thinking was "too abstract," "too interdisciplinary," or insufficiently aligned with traditional academic expectations.

The more I recognized how systems privilege particular ways of perceiving and processing information, the more I reflected on moments in my own educational experiences where divergence had been misunderstood rather than cultivated.

Emotionally, I experienced: Wonder

Section 3: Positionality Reflection

How did my lived experience shape this moment?

I experienced them as mirrors reflecting broader truths about human cognition, education, and neurodivergence.

I recognized that my own worldview had been shaped by navigating systems that often-rewarded standardization while undervaluing cognitive plurality.

These studies reinforced my growing belief that:

Perception is adaptive rather than universally fixed.

Educational systems often privilege narrow cognitive norms.

Context shapes not only achievement but identity formation itself.

My background in education further shaped my interpretation of the 7-Up series. Rather than seeing deterministic life outcomes, I saw the long-term interaction between environment, opportunity, expectation, and internalized narratives.

I also became increasingly aware of my own sensitivities and biases:

A tendency to empathize with individuals who diverge from dominant systems.

Section 4: Voice & Authority

What did I learn about my scholarly voice?

The 7-Up series especially reinforced the importance of longitudinal understanding and contextual interpretation. It showed me that human development cannot be reduced to

isolated variables. Identity unfolds through relationships among environment, perception, opportunity, and adaptation. I recognized parts of myself in several of the characters, changing over the 54 year span.

I also recognized where I previously silenced myself (to avoid rolled eyes):

Avoiding unconventional conceptual connections.

Suppressing creative or philosophical dimensions of inquiry.

Section 5: Emerging Scholar Identity

What kind of scholar am I becoming?

My scholarship is increasingly guided by several core values:

Recognition of neurodivergent strengths.

The intellectual strengths emerging in my work include:

Pattern recognition across domains.

Systems-level thinking.

Ability to synthesize neuroscience, education, sociology, and lived experience.

Capacity for longitudinal and ecological interpretation.

Reflexive awareness of positionality.

I continue to navigate concerns about:

Whether interdisciplinary work will be perceived as sufficiently rigorous.

Whether neurodivergent ways of thinking will be fully understood within academic systems.

Section 6: Integration Into Dissertation

How does this shape my research?

These reflections directly shape my dissertation work and broader research agenda.

First, they influence my interpretation of neurodivergence. I increasingly approach neurodivergence not through deficit-based frameworks, but through ecological and constructivist perspectives that emphasize adaptation, context, and cognitive plurality.

Second, these insights affect methodology.

Rather than attempting to eliminate subjectivity entirely, I aim to make positionality visible and ethically engaged.

The 7-Up series reinforced the importance of longitudinal understanding in human development. It demonstrated how early environments echo across decades while still leaving space for neuroplasticity, adaptation, and transformation.

This work reinforces my belief that education should not seek to normalize minds into sameness.

Instead, education should create environments where different forms of cognition can develop into strengths.

Closing Reflection

Identity Statement

My worldview has been shaped by researchers who revealed that perception itself is constructed, adaptive, and contextual. These insights continue to influence how I understand education, neurodivergence, identity formation, and the future of human learning.