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Education as change: A few projects and some reflection

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As a scholar in education and technology, the connection to identity change did not seem to me at all relevant at the beginning of my career. As a good educational psychologist, I thought identity was a topic for clinical or dynamic psychology. I was interested in how students learn and how research could support this magical process of deep and lasting learning. Sometime later, almost 30 years ago, I was fortunate enough to coordinate a wonderful international project called Euroland, funded by the EU community. Students of various ages, from Italy and the Netherlands, were tasked with designing and building Europe in a virtual desktop environment. Students, teachers, and researchers connected in an initially empty virtual space that was gradually filled with houses, flowers, trees, fountains, and many other digital objects. The project was great but there was something escaped the cognitive and socio-cultural interpretative lens I had at that time. Anyone connecting to Euroland spent a lot of time carefully choosing their Avatars, and one of the questions I was most frequently asked by students was "How do I look with this Avatar?" or "What impression will others have of me with this Avatar on?" Questions I not only didn't know the answer to, but I could not understand why were so frequent.

At the time, I worked in Nijmegen, the same as Prof. Hermans, but we did not know each other. By chance, one day, I stumbled upon the poster for the Dialogical Self Conference. Instinctively, I thought that poster could answer the questions I was asking myself about Euroland. I asked Professor Hermans for an appointment. A long, intense meeting ensued, an epiphany for me: students in the virtual world were testing various "positionings"!

From then on, the question of I-position became crucial to my research. Since then, I have conducted many projects inspired by DST, both in virtual worlds (I-city; Diversity City), in text-based discussion forums, as well as through pen-and-paper writing activities. Recently, I adopted DST as framework to analyze written survey produced by prisoners who decide to undertake university studies. DST offers interpretative lenses that not only help understand the identity implications of learning but it could also inspire research and offer useful implications for education.