Technologized Situated Partnering Practice: Leveraging Interobjective Representations of Technology in Use and Its Transformative Effects in Business Education

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Abstract. This paper proposes a novel form of partnering between business education tutors and students as autonomous learners, conceptualised as technologized situated partnering practice (TSPP). Relying on business students' narratives, we explain how TSPP allows the maintenance of student engagement in an environment that is heavily saturated with technologies. We show that while being engaged with technology, business students consider tutors as learning partners which allows them to valorise lifelong learning by contextualizing, reinventing and problematising their daily activities in a situated partnering practice they co-construct with tutors. We also show that the dynamics of TSPP can be managed by tutors, if the latter appreciate students' learning processes and leverage interobjective (i.e. shared and overarching) representations of *technology in use*. We discuss the implications for tutor-student partnering practice and for the tutors' reliance on technology to foster teaching and learning practices that have transformative effects.

Keywords: partnering, technology in use, IT in business education, digital, teaching and learning practice, transformative learning.

1. Introduction

Higher education today operates in a teaching and learning environment related to the knowledge society that is saturated with technology, and that calls for an understanding of how student autonomous learning can be supported (Lai 2011;

Selwyn 2016). In this context it is relevant to determine how students as autonomous learners could successfully build on tutor engagement whether the student's learning is operating in normal circumstances (Henderson *et al.* 2017; Mughan and Kyvik 2010; Zhou and Wei 2018) or in more exceptional conditions such as during a pandemic (Daniel 2020; Yan 2020). Simply put, for a higher education institution that is expected to transmit the right skills in the right manner, it is legitimate to ask how to pilot students as autonomous learners maintaining the dialogue between themselves and their tutors. Even though seeing students as partners has been considered important for a constructive dialogue between students and tutors (Healey *et al.* 2014; Dollinger *et al.* 2018; Smørvik and Vespestad 2020), there is still a significant lack of work establishing the rules that could facilitate student-tutor partnering alongside ubiquitous presence of technology. In this paper, we aim to bridge this gap by exploring technology-based learning journeys in students' perspective. We show how students as autonomous learners and tutor engagement unfold in a novel form of partnering called technologized situated partnering practice (TSPP). At stake here is the introduction of TSPP as a practice allowing us to understand how higher education institutions in general and business schools in particular could encourage partnering by enabling their facilitators and particularly tutors to foster the suitable usage of everyday technologies so that relevant skills can be transmitted in the classroom (Redpath 2012; Arbaugh *et al.* 2013; Whitaker *et al.* 2016).

We define TSPP as an ongoing form of partnering practice between students and tutors underpinned by ubiquitous technological influence in higher education. TSPP relies on the growing but under-researched structuring effects of all IT based experience relevant to the student-tutor dialogue. It follows that TSPP is not necessarily deliberately sought by students and tutors but it has situated beneficial effects for them through facilitating students' transformative learning, considered as "the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action" (Mezirow 1991, p. 162).

 The paper shows that while being responsive to their learning environments, students may be considered to be effectively engaged in TSPP. We establish that this engagement is based on *technology in use* that favours the development of opportunities to develop students' critical thinking alongside a dialogical process engaging tutors and students. Our results precisely elicit student-learning processes through which these opportunities can be built by tutors resulting in transformative outcomes through the revision of the student's meaning structures. While enabling shared reflexive engagement and the validation of partnering for lifelong learning, TSPP as a whole supports both higher education institutions and student agendas.

Practically our findings are beneficial for tutors as they show how in TSPP transformative outcomes occur on an ongoing basis relying on specific initiatives

of tutors providing opportunities for students to engage in partnerships. In this way, this research determines fruitful ways to demonstrate the consolidation of dynamic relationships helping students and tutors to face the contingencies of ordinary life together through an oft-challenging reciprocity (Fowler *et al.* 2012; Bryson 2016; Weiler and Williamson 2020). The paper shows that TSPP does not operate in a vacuum: it can, to some extent be orchestrated by tutors so that the transformative effects can be harnessed through the leveraging of student learning processes and interobjective representations of *technology in use*. Interobjective representations are defined here as the implicit, shared and overarching representations about objects that are here *technology in use*, through which human relations operate between different groups of individuals (here students and tutors) (Latour 1996; Sammut *et al.* 2013).

To summarize, the objectives of this paper are threefold: first, we aim to make explicit the dynamics of TSPP in the students' perspective by finding out the key processes that underlie student and tutor engagement in situated technologized partnering ; second we aim to show the worth of leveraging interobjective representations of IT in use to orchestrate the student-tutor partnering from the tutors' viewpoint, and third, we aim to provide a contextual understanding of the extent to which IT can support partnering by offering tutors and students the possibility of maintaining a dialogue both inside and outside the classroom.

The dynamic of TSPP is captured through qualitative data that stems from focus groups and individual interviews with business school students. Leveraging student narratives allows us to consider the understanding of the dynamics of the relationship between students and tutors while harnessing a practice-based approach and the nascent background knowledge of what technologies can do for learners in everyday life (Henderson *et al.* 2017; Costa *et al.* 2018). Our data brings detailed accounts of how student expectations and learning journeys are shaped by interactions with tutors through IT. Findings reveal the dynamic of TSPP as a practice and they shed light on the way TSPP can be leveraged through the possibilities tutors have of acting upon interobjective representations of technologies in use (Latour 1996). We show that by enabling students and tutors to access shared practical understanding, rules, and teleo-affective structures (understood as structuring goals and their related means and emotional states), through material and technological arrangements, *technology in use* widely contributes to the understanding of the ways technologized situated partnering as a practice leads to transformative effects and mutual value.

The paper is organised as follows: first, we present a theoretical background to the importance of transformative learning as a contextual element on the basis of which the relations between tutors and students as autonomous learners can operate in a technology-saturated environment. We then explain what engagement with technologies and tutor-student partnering could mean in this context. Then we present our methodological choices and our main findings that demonstrate the dynamics of TSPP. The next part includes a discussion of our