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Sighting horizons of teaching in higher education

Ronald Barnett[1] · Carolina Guzmán-Valenzuela[2]

Abstract This conceptual paper tackles the matter of teaching in higher education and proposes a concept of 'horizons of teaching'. It firstly offers an overview of the considerable empirical literature around teaching—especially conceptions of teaching, approaches to teaching and teaching practices—and goes on to pose some philosophical and social theoretical considerations that open further the territory around teaching in university. Against this background, we propose the concept of 'horizons of teaching'. Horizons of teaching provide a context in which it makes sense for teachers to give themselves to the teaching enterprise and to go on giving themselves to teaching. Horizons include diverse and intricate layers at both micro- and macro-levels that interact in a permanent and dynamic way; they involve persons and collectivities; and they concern structures and agency. The paper concludes by proposing that horizons of teaching configure and delineate curricula and the pedagogical relationship in a way that might contain a revolutionary potentiality in recasting teaching in higher education.

Keywords Horizons of teaching · Teaching practices · Conceptions of teaching · Teaching approaches · Structures · Agency · Ideologies

Introduction

Over the past 40 years, a worldwide literature has developed that has sought to understand teaching in higher education. Characteristically, it has focused on 'conceptions of teaching' and 'approaches to teaching' and, to a lesser extent, on actual teaching *practices*. Through

✉ Ronald Barnett
r.barnett@ioe.ac.uk

Carolina Guzmán-Valenzuela
carolina.guzman@ciae.uchile.cl

[1] University College London Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL, UK

[2] University of Chile, Centre for Advanced Research in Education (CIAE), Periodista José Carrasco Tapia 75, Santiago, Chile

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this literature—really, multiple literatures—our understandings of higher education teaching have been transformed. However, this literature has rather little to say about the sponsoring of higher education teaching.

What is it that gives teaching in higher education meaning? Where do such meanings come from? From teachers? From institutional structures and processes? From national policies and political institutions and even from global formations? From large values and ideas (of justice, reason, equality, emancipation, human becoming and, say, ecology)? It is, of course, from all of these acting in complex relationships together. But this whole dimension in the understanding of teaching has, we want to contend, been seldom addressed. The key problems, therefore, that we wish to address are these: from where do conceptions of teaching and the will to teach emerge? Might a theoretical framework be developed that provides an understanding as to how is it that teachers go on giving themselves to teaching? In this paper, we respond to the first question by introducing the concept of *horizons of teaching* and also build a framework around this concept in response to the second question.

Teachers in higher education are more than 'teachers in higher education'. They are persons with values and wide social beliefs and hopes; and those values, beliefs and hopes are played out in a context partly shaped by state and global interests. And, we shall argue, this interplay of personal values, beliefs and hopes together with the wider societal and global context plays its part in supplying not just meaning but motivational energy to an academic's teaching efforts. There is much evidence to the effect that, hardly surprisingly perhaps, teachers vary considerably in their teaching *practices*. This is particularly so in higher education where, characteristically, teachers have considerable degrees of freedom. As such, they are able to come at their teaching informed by their positionings within global *and* higher education structures, their own values, perceptions of the context in which they are working, and a sense of their pedagogical responsibilities and allegiances and their continuing interactions with their students.

This combination of structures (both national and global), values, wider perceptions and felt responsibilities supplies a *background* to the ways in which teachers both conceive of and approach their professional tasks. Out of this background may emerge a set of *horizons* against which a teacher conducts her or his teaching. (The extent to which such a 'background' is held uniquely by individual teachers or is shared across, say, a course team or a discipline or within a nation could be a matter for empirical inquiry.) As implied, horizons are multiple and we attempt to unravel that complexity in what follows.

The structure of this paper is as follows. We start with a brief survey of the existing literatures on teaching in higher education and observe that there may be a disjunction between a teacher's espoused conception of her teaching and her actual teaching practices in situ, a situation calling for some explanation. We go on, in the next section, to suggest that behind conceptions of teaching, and teaching approaches and practices, stand horizons, horizons reflecting not only agentic intentions but also external structures. In the following section, we identify three distinctions so as to clarify the idea of teaching horizons which lead, in the next section, to the depiction of multiple sets of horizons at work simultaneously. Four sets of teaching horizons are identified, and their interrelationships are illustrated (in a diagram). We then consider the relationships between horizons of teaching and the existing frameworks in the literature—conceptions of and approaches to teaching and actual teaching practices—and depict those relationships in a second diagram. We end by drawing out some conclusions and suggest especially that a suitably nuanced framework of horizons of teaching may have potentially revolutionary potential.

Understanding teaching in university

In the international study of teaching in universities, two frameworks have taken particular hold in the literature, one of *conceptions* of teaching and the other of *approaches to teaching* (Dall'Alba 1991; Kember 1997; Trigwell and Prosser 1996; Åkerlind 2003; Parpala and Lindblom-Ylanne 2007; Postareff and Lindblom-Ylänne 2008; González 2009; Stes et al. 2010; Prosser and Trigwell 2014). A third concept, the concept of teaching *practices* (Kane et al. 2002; Trowler and Cooper 2002; Trowler 2005; Guzmán-Valenzuela 2013), has not received as much attention as the two former ones, but it is also evident here. We consider that these three frameworks—of conceptions of teaching, of approaches to teaching and of teaching practices—are valuable, and we wish to add to those framings through the concept of *horizons* of teaching.

Crudely, as a first pass, we can understand the existing frameworks as standing on separate levels. *Conceptions of teaching* refers to the ways in which university teachers *conceive* of teaching as such (Ginns et al. 2008). Conceptions of teaching are, in essence, a response (by individual teachers; by course teams) to the tacit question: What is it to teach? Basically, *two* conceptions of teaching have been distinguished. One, the so-called teacher-focused conception, is that of teaching understood as an imparting of information to students in order to achieve their assimilation of it. Another conception of teaching, the so-called student-focused conception, is focused on students' learning and experiences (Åkerlind 2003). Critical here is that the student should undergo some kind of worthwhile personal development. A greater criticality or the acquisition of an authentic voice might be in view here.

Depending on the *conceptions* of teaching that they hold, teachers will *approach* their own teaching practices in one or another way (teacher-focused or student-focused). Some authors have criticized such a distinction (between a teacher being content- or student-focused), suggesting that it does not capture entirely the character of teaching since, at both poles of the distinction, teaching is viewed from a strong cognitive and individual perspective that insufficiently takes into account the social context of teaching practices (Ashwin and McLean 2005; Fanghanel 2009; Guzmán-Valenzuela 2013). It has also been said that these conceptions of teaching are more focused on the individual cognitive structures rather than analysing the interplay between individuals and social, institutional or even more global structures (Fanghanel 2009, 2011). Teaching conceptions and approaches have been also critiqued because they mainly use surveys or interviews with teachers and seldom take into account students' points of view (Guzmán-Valenzuela 2013).

An insight into the frameworks of *conceptions* of, and *approaches* to, teaching is to suggest that it is all in the mind (of the teacher) since they refer to teachers' perceptions (Ashwin 2009). Here lies the well-known distinction made more than a generation ago by Argyris and Schön (1974) between 'theory-in-action' and 'espoused theory'. Whereas an academic's conception of, and approach to, teaching are evidence of her espoused theories, and are a matter of her educational aims, her declared intentions and her pedagogical hopes, theories-of-teaching-in-action point to the teaching practices in themselves in situ. And there may be a gap—a chasm indeed—between a teacher's conceptions of and approaches to teaching and her/his actual teaching practices (Kane et al. 2002); and perhaps this is inevitably so, since teaching is dynamic, with its real-time character being continuously influenced by interaction between teachers and students (Ashwin 2009; McAlpine et al. 2006).

A teacher may evince a set of personal conceptions of and approaches to teaching imbued with concepts of criticality, student empowerment, emancipation, authenticity and self-discovery while, on investigation, it may be observed—by a researcher, say—that her teaching practices are characterized by low risk, control, hierarchy, knowledge assimilation and reproduction and the acquisition of rather low-level skills. Such a gap between espoused teaching (conceptions and approaches) and teaching-in-action calls for some explanation. We suggest that a suitably nuanced and multi-perspectival concept of *horizons of teaching* may assist towards this end.

Forming teaching practices: sighting horizons

Teachers do not act aprioristically but rather reflect on teaching activities in an ongoing way, against the background of their own teaching presuppositions. Teachers learn by doing; and they learn by reflecting on and by examining their teaching (Schön 1983, 1987). In the process, they work within but may also come to alter their background under-standings, which in turn open spaces for new personal conceptions of teaching and teaching approaches.

While there are cognitive processes, both values and beliefs involve non-rational and affective dimensions, and these *non-reasoned* dimensions also inflect teaching approaches and teaching practices. Although they belong to a more private and intimate sphere (Trowler and Cooper 2002) and are not easily researchable, values and beliefs are nevertheless important components of teaching practices. They give meaning to teaching practices and sustain them and orient them.

We suggest that *horizons of teaching* stand behind all of these elements—conceptions, values, beliefs, approaches and practices—and these horizons interact with other elements in time and space. The concept of horizons has been a long-standing concept in phenomenology and hermeneutics, evident in the work—for example—of Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. The most recent major expositor of the concept has been Hans-Georg Gadamer, for whom the idea of horizons played a role in his hermeneutics. For Gadamer, 'a horizon is not a rigid boundary but something that moves with one and invites one to advance further' (Gadamer 1989, 245). These elements of pliability and timefulness are, for us, important in the idea of horizons that we wish to develop in this paper.

Although teaching horizons depend on the present (what is taught in the here and now), they are anchored in the past (through learning and experience and acquired values), and yet are oriented to the future. The concept of teaching horizons points to a forward momentum, with hopes (and even anxieties) through sightings of future possibilities. Space, too, comes into the reckoning, for these teaching horizons can be local, national or global in their reach, and all of these spatial horizons may be working simultaneously (as when students in a global classroom, reaching across the continents, are encouraged to collaborate on projects focusing on local issues).

It follows that all of the three moments of teaching which have been given particular attention in the literature—conceptions, approaches and practices—have a common component in that they each derive at least part of their character from horizons. Horizons stand behind conceptions, approaches and practices; horizons inflect them, imparting colour and vivacity to them. But this is not a dictatorial relationship—a point to be developed—for horizons can be modified, not least by actual teaching experiences and

changing conceptions of teaching. A teacher may move into a different pedagogical situation (for example, a university that has its own characteristic understanding of the relationship between research and teaching) and so somewhat different and even newer horizons may come into play *independently* of teachers themselves.

Structures and cognitions

Our paper so far has amounted to a set of initial sightings in bringing our concept of horizons of teaching into view. Those sightings have here taken the form of reflecting on the dominant theoretical frames that have been developed over the past near-forty years of research on student learning and teaching in higher education. Our suggestion, in effect, has been that—rightly significant as they have been—there is a hinterland beyond those dominant theories which awaits further exploration. The sense of a teacher as willed, as having certain dispositions, and as having—as we may put it—a certain kind of pedagogical being has been rather thinly in view. We shall now develop this sketchy set of reflections by delving briefly into the philosophy of critical theory before going on to develop and advance our own conception of teaching horizons.

In speaking of horizons of teaching, we are concerned here with the considerations that might stand as the background to a person's teaching endeavours. This concept of 'background' requires qualifications. A first qualification lies in the distinction between, on the one hand, the background being *explicitly* held by a teacher and, on the other hand, being held *implicitly* (Guzmán-Valenzuela and Barnett 2013), hardly part of the conscious equipment that the teacher brings to her/his tasks. A second qualification lies in the distinction between that background being composed in part by *empirical* considerations and, separately, being composed in part by more *conceptual or value* considerations. A third qualification lies in the 'structure-agency' debate (Archer 1995): structures can impart a horizon to action, whether recognized or not; at the same time, a person—or a group (such as a course team)—may attempt to give expression to their own agency. These three sets of distinctions call for further elucidation. There are, of course, interconnections among them.

The *first distinction, that between a horizon being either recognized as such or being rather implicit*, raises long-established debates in philosophy and social theory, for example, in relation to matters of ideology, false consciousness and bad faith. Marxism and the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory [in which the ideas of ideology and false consciousness have their home (Habermas 1978; Adorno 1997)] and phenomenology and existentialism [in which the ideas of bad faith and absurdity have *their* home (Sartre 2003)] are schools of thought that pose sharply this matter of a horizon being either recognized or not. The concepts of ideology and false consciousness, for example, gain their traction from positing a world in which subjects think and act being somewhat hidden behind a veil (Rosen 1996).

Within these frameworks, groups may come firmly to believe that the world is of a certain kind and so act within that horizon when it is *quite other*. For example, some teachers may believe that their efforts are contributing significantly to improving the capacities of students to live well in a multicultural society—their concepts of and their approaches to teaching have precisely that orientation—when, in fact, the home students and the international students in their classes, *and* in meeting spaces in their university, retain a distance from each other and so contribute to a situation in which higher education

reinforces a divided world. The point here is that horizons can both impose themselves and generate illusory perceptions.

The *second distinction is that between a horizon being formed by empirical consider-ations on the one hand and by more conceptual considerations on the other hand*. For example, empirical matters concerned with inequalities in society or with the ecological degradation of the planet may help to shape a set of horizons for some teachers in uni-versities. They may become interested in the work of particular international groupings of universities [such as the Talloires Group or the GUNI association (Watson et al. 2011)], working out concrete ways of bringing ecological perspectives into their teaching. On the other hand, for others, more abstract concepts such as knowledge, truth, objectivity, integrity, justice, freedom and openness may be more influential in shaping horizons within which they play out their academic lives.

These two domains may work together. A teacher may be guided by a (conceptual) horizon of, say, justice or equity *and* may be energized by empirical considerations that the contemporaneous world is far from being (empirically) characterized by either justice or equity. Nevertheless, analytically, the two sets of horizons—empirical and conceptual—should be kept separate.

The *third distinction* here is implied by the 'structure-agency' debate: structures can impart a horizon to action, whether *recognized or not*; at the same time, a person—or a group for that matter—can determine to set their own horizons and strike out on their own, so establishing their own agency (Fanghanel 2011). Note the asymmetry at work here. Structures are at work whether they are recognized or not and whether agency is or is not present. However, agency (seriously to count as agency) has to have some degree of self-awareness attaching to it.

Across the world, universities and academic life cannot nowadays be understood in any serious way unless attention is paid to its deep and global structures, such as the global knowledge economy, cognitive capitalism, neoliberalism, state and regional policy frameworks and the developing digital age. These structures profoundly both shape and even condition universities and the life of academics and so can be said to impart horizons to the work of universities. The university, and those who work in them, are implicated in these structures, whether these structures are recognized or not.

Horizons of teaching: a set of multiplicities

Let us now move to focusing head-on the main target of our paper, that of horizons of teaching. Horizons of teaching are the considerations—explicit or implicit—that open a space in which an individual's teaching is situated, *whether self-reflectively or not*. In practice, such considerations are likely to be a conglomeration of values, ideas and empirical observations or assumptions on the part of the individual concerned and the structures and ideologies acting on the teaching function (which may even be global in their nature). Together, there is at work here a hinterland of reasons, motivations *and* forces (at once institutional, national and global) that may sustain or, at least, orient a teacher in his or her professional endeavours over decades.

A person's horizons not only impart meaning to a person's teaching but also supply energy to a person's teaching. Her or his horizons provide a context in which it makes sense for a person to go on giving themselves to teaching (beyond the formally contracted numbers of hours and days in a year). They also set up *dispositions* in relation to teaching.

Such horizons help to sustain a person's will to invest themselves in teaching across their professional lives. It is against a person's horizons that the traditional idea of teaching as a vocation has its setting. But horizons may also *dampen* an orientation towards teaching. Amid structures that privilege research or (for some) open spaces for self-directed consultancy and income-generating activities, an individual's horizons may be set in that way and an individual may become ill-disposed toward his/her teaching tasks which may be felt as imposed.

Teaching horizons are parameters of both space and time against which teachers comprehend their teaching. Some will see themselves as maintaining traditions that are centuries old, some will see themselves as preparing students for the world of tomorrow, some will see themselves as opening paths into the local labour market, and still others will see themselves as trying, in their teaching endeavours, to help their students become critical global citizens. And all kinds of movements of such temporal and spatial horizons are possible—forwards, backwards, outwards and even inwards as teachers' horizons move.

Horizons of teaching, therefore, constitute a set of multiplicities (Deleuze and Guattari 2007, 24), with movements in many directions. Horizons of teaching are symptomatic of structures *and* open themselves to agency. They take on temporal components, into the past, present and future. They are at once local, national and global. And they embody varied and even discordant value systems.

Four sets of teaching horizons

Awkward issues arise from the analysis so far proffered. To what extent are horizons a conscious part of a teacher's inner cognitive and value equipment? Or, to what extent might such horizons simply be there, working as taken-for-granted axioms of his/her working life; her assumptive world indeed (Sabri 2010). Or, to put the matter directly, to what extent might it plausibly be suggested that horizons are supplied by deep societal (and possibly global) structures in which higher education teaching has its contemporary locale and to what extent can it be said that teachers may still express their own agency?

Such questions suggest that there are *several* kinds of horizons that are placed in a hierarchical set of relationships with each other; and we would identify *four*.

Horizon 1—personal horizons—is that of an individual teacher's own *life-world, her values, priorities, interests and involvements.* This horizon helps to supply a teacher's professional identity. Concepts such as equality, liberty, economic growth, emancipation, feminism, knowledge inquiry and a fascination with (and even love of) a discipline, and multiculturalism might come variously into play in providing a horizon to an individual's will to engage in the activity of teaching. Such concepts, as it were, help to attach individuals to the world; and the extent to which individuals as teachers attach themselves to such concepts helps to form both their wider identities in the world and their more local pedagogic identities.

Even though such a conceptual apparatus may fill out an individual's teaching horizons, it is a further matter as to whether such concepts, ideas and interests are consciously and self-reflectively recognized by a teacher or whether they remain somewhat hidden, and yet still working as horizons. Whether self-reflectively noticed or not, it is crucial here to note that these conceptual attachments do not supply straightforwardly an individual's concept of teaching or mark out his/her teaching practices. As we are elucidating the matter here,

teaching horizons are somewhat distant and are not close at hand, whereas a person's conceptions of teaching and their approaches to teaching are self-evidently closer to his/her pedagogical actions.

An individual teacher may be concerned with ecological matters—and may, in her more personal life be a member of various ecological associations—and so the idea of ecology may supply a horizon to her teaching. But having such a horizon leaves open in a large way the actual conceptions of and approaches to her teaching that she might take up and her ensuing actual teaching practices; that is, there may be considerable variability in the ways in which and the extent to which such an ecological horizon might embed itself in her teaching.

Horizon 2—horizons-in-reflection: Horizon 2 is the horizon that comes into view as a result of a teacher reflecting on the situation in which she finds herself. She may espy variously her institution (she may feel her institution values and supports her teaching or hinders it), her discipline or professional field (she may regret some recent tendencies in it, in its favouring of certain intellectual fashions, as she sees them), the contemporary and changing national policy framework for higher education (which she may feel is having a corrosive effect on university teaching or possibly to the contrary a liberating effect), or even, say, the general nature of her students (she may feel that they are changing over the years of her teaching practices for example) and the ensuing pedagogical relationship in which she is playing her part.

In other words, against this horizon, a teacher reflexively becomes aware that her teaching has its place in a set of particular circumstances that impart horizons to her teaching. To draw on Marginson and Rhoades's (2002) term, both she and her teaching take on a 'glonacal' character being infused at once by local, national and global horizons. She understands or believes that these horizons inflects her teaching, variously influencing it, colouring it, and even distorting it at times (when, for example, she feels that her teaching has to be accorded a lesser place in her priorities due to the national and institutional research policy frameworks, or she senses that her teaching values are more difficult to sustain when, in a marketized situation, her students are situating themselves as 'customers' in the pedagogical relationship).

Horizon 3—horizons-of-structures: This is a horizon that is imparted by deep impersonal structures at play, irrespective of their being recognized or not. Here enters the so-called structure-agency dimension of teaching horizons. Universities are large-scale institutions and connect to a larger or greater extent with global dimensions of knowledge production and epistemological flows, with the globalized knowledge economy and the growth of cognitive capital (Boutang 2011). They are also caught up in global academic markets, with global flows of academic personnel and international students. More locally, they are implicated in labour markets and national policies on development, and innovatory areas of economic advancement, all of which play out differentially across countries. There are, therefore, ontological layers at work that produce a structuring of university teaching.

These horizons—whether in the form of structured 'generative mechanisms' [to draw on a term from Bhaskar's Critical Realism (Bhaskar 2008, 48–50)] or of ideological formations—play themselves out in fine-grained ways. To reiterate, they do not determine in precise ways the nature of teaching (not yet, at any rate in so-called public universities *although* they may do in some private universities). Indeed, they may serve as moments where, for instance, teachers look for ways of countering overt vocationalization of the curriculum or, indeed, look to open the curriculum beyond classical disciplinary orientations to include more work-based learning. There, we might discern such a conception of teaching

as a form of *resistance* against a horizon of national (and possibly global) forces. But this reflection only serves to emphasize the power of such underlying and embedded structurings of teaching horizons, which may therefore, in large part, be going unrecognized.

Horizon 4—horizons-as-teaching-project: This last horizon is a kind of deliberate amalgamation of the previous three sets of horizons, but it is distinctive. It emerges as an academic's *teaching project*, in which her intuited values and hopes of herself and of her teaching (horizon one) are subjected to a serious self-scrutiny (horizon two) but within a conscious attempt to discern the university's underlying structures and its embedded ideologies (horizon three). It is here that a teaching game-plan is eked out, in the form of broad principles, that the fullest possible extent of a person's agency is worked at, seeking spaces, perhaps collaboratively, to bring off large teaching ventures. This is a horizon of micro- and possibly macro-politics, in which an academic manoeuvres herself so as to maintain her values and hopes (horizon one), and searches for spaces to do so, against the horizon of the presenting structures and ideologies (horizon three). This calls for a continuous self-interrogation, and self-criticality (horizon two), as the individual seeks both to come to terms with any ideological traces that she identifies within herself *and* enters into (tacit or explicit) negotiations with the horizons of her own institution.

These four sets of horizons are not just hierarchical but stand in complex relationships with each other, which we attempt to depict in Fig. 1, their interrelationships marked by the arrows. Broadly, personal horizons (1) may be scrutinized by horizons-in-reflection (2), which in turn may help to shape those personal horizons. All the while, horizons-of-structures (3) are acting, perhaps unnoticed, on personal horizons (1), but they can become an object of reflection and scrutiny by horizons-in-reflection (2). On the basis of such interactions and reflective processes, horizons-as-personal-plans (4) may form which recognize horizons-of-structures (3) but which may offer agentic teaching projects even within and despite the force of those structures. When formed, horizons-as-teaching-project (4) can themselves become subject to personal scrutiny against horizons-in-reflection (2), which in turn may alter personal horizons (1) and even (subversively or openly) act upon horizons of structures (3). Horizons of teaching, therefore, are multi-layered *and* have the potential to bring both structur*e*s and agency together.
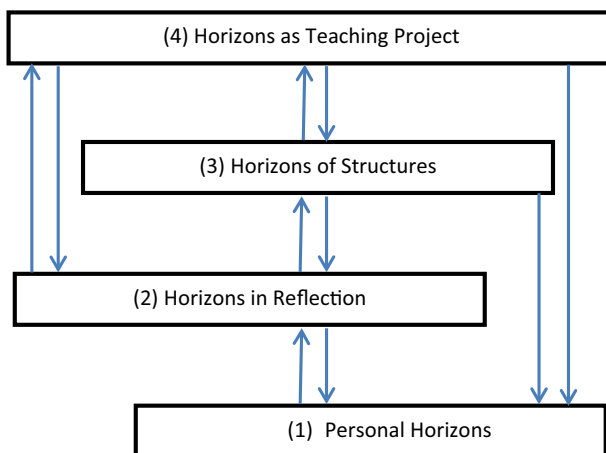
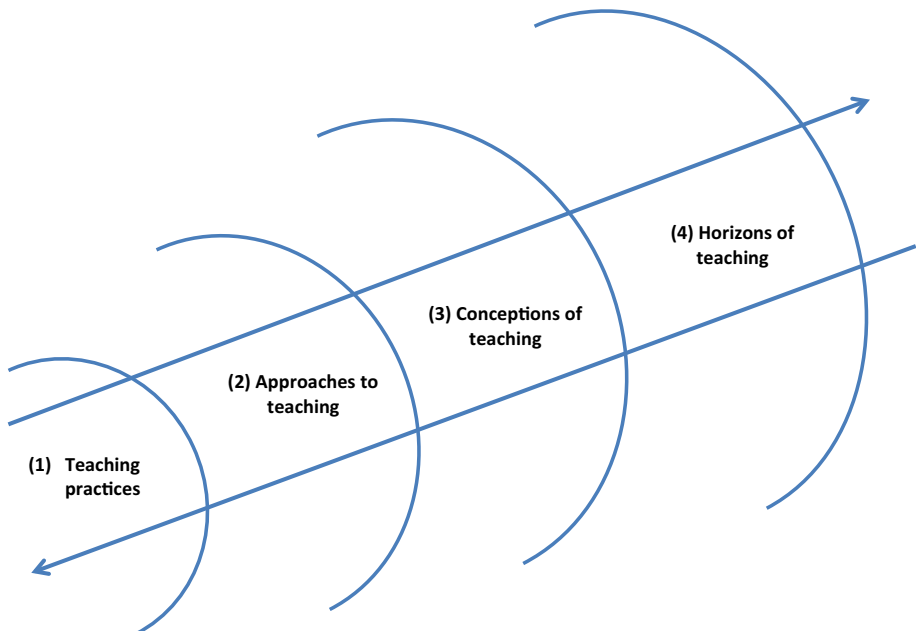**Fig. 1** Four sets of teaching horizons

Placing university teaching horizons

In this paper, we have discerned four lenses, as it were, through which university teaching can be sighted, namely those of (1) teaching *practices* (to be observed in situ especially in the enactment of the teacher's pedagogical relationships and interactions with her/his students); (2) *approaches to teaching* (the orientation that teachers in a university self-consciously take, in approaching their own teaching); (3) *conceptions* of teaching (the ways in which teachers conceptualize what, in general, is to count as 'teaching' in higher education); and (4) teaching *horizons*. This last has been our main target, and, here, we have disentangled teaching horizons as *four* sets of horizons, in which a teacher's own agency and the structures at work come into play to different degrees.

From this assemblage of teaching layerings (horizons, conceptions, approaches and practices), the question arises as to the relationships between them and especially the place of teaching horizons. Metaphors suggest themselves. Is the relationship between these sightings of teaching to be thought of as one of a set of layers in a vertical pattern or more like, say, the layers of an onion? That is to say, is there a sense to be extracted such that these sightings of teaching stand in a hierarchical relationship to each other or is it that they are more a matter of core and periphery? Is it that, as implied in the hierarchical metaphor, *horizons* of teaching are in some way more powerful, more significant or more elevated than *conceptions* of teaching or actual teaching *practices*? Or perhaps it is the other way around, with teaching horizons providing foundations for teaching practices? Or is that, as implied in the onion metaphor, teaching horizons are at the centre and gradually unfold into conceptions of teaching and approaches to teaching and then to teaching practices?

Fig. 2 Placing horizons of teaching

Our own suggestion here is something of a blend of these possibilities—and hence our diagram (Fig. 2), with its rather loose diagonal sets of relationships. Teaching horizons stand themselves in a kind of structuring relationship to teaching conceptions, approaches and practices, but the energies between these layers are *multi-directional*.

The term 'horizons' is deliberately chosen. Teaching horizons set the landscape in which teaching unfolds; and they may stretch out in both time and space. Teaching conceptions, approaches and practices have their place within (these) horizons. Horizons are—as we have seen—a complex of social (indeed global) forces, national and institutional policies, intellectual fields, discursive formations and personal meaning (value) structures. They provide a terrain (to opt for another metaphor) within which individuals (and groups) form and, indeed, contest the nature of teaching in higher education. They offer compass bearings by which teaching may be steered, by teachers and those concerned with teaching, both individually and collectively. And they move over time, receding and drawing nearer and even changing completely.

We also want to urge that, distant as some of them may seem, teaching horizons can affect the intimate spaces not only of the curriculum but of the pedagogical relationship itself. This indeed is the nature of structures, that they both orient and *open* possibilities for the practices with which they are related. These influences on the pedagogical relationship are themselves multiple. Structures may generate discursive horizons within which higher education teaching is practised. They may generate ideologies within which curricula are developed. And they may, through value structures, hold together an academic's teaching approaches and conceptions. Horizons may provide a *bearing*, accordingly, that subtly filter themselves into the intimate spaces of teaching in higher education.

It is apparent that horizons of teaching, as we have explicated the idea, have a complex ontological character. In the analysis, we have offered here, horizons of teaching definitely exist; they have a real and robust ontological character and would be open to empirical inquiry. Indeed, they have their existence at different ontological levels, at the deep level of (Bhaskar's) 'generative mechanisms', at the level of ideological formations, at the level of agentic engagements and at the level of reflexive conversations. Such horizons are by no means 'just in the mind'; and even where they *are* in the mind in the form of 'reasons, norms and such like', they have an ontological presence, having 'causal properties in the fullest sense' (Bhaskar 2002, 97). In turn, our phrase 'horizons of teaching' offers us an entrée into a concept that has epistemological substance, assisting—we contend—an understanding of a dimension of teaching not hitherto readily available.

Inter-personal horizons

Throughout this paper, we have been placing the individual teacher in the centre of our inquiry. We have inquired into both as to how horizons affect the teacher and as to how the teacher might come to form her/his own horizons; and, in that light, we have considered as to how the individual teacher and her/his horizons can be situated in the structure-agency nexus. None of this should be taken to imply that we are wanting to project a Robinson Crusoe view of teaching, it being undertaken only in a solitary fashion. On the contrary, we recognize that teaching in higher education is an interpersonal and social matter (however much in settings around the world, it may still seem, on a casual examination, to be a private matter). Sociality enters—or can enter—each of our four sets of teaching horizons.

Sociality may enter a teacher's intuited values and hopes of herself and of her teaching (horizon one) since those values and hopes may well be developed and sustained collaboratively, for example, as a course team grapples collectively in the redesign of a programme of studies. And different horizons will almost certainly reveal themselves in any such interpersonal reflections: an annual course-team awayday may well open to deep-seated differences of value-orientations between members of the course team. One member of the team may place a high value on serendipity and creativity and seek to outflank an institution's 'learning outcomes' systems for curricula design while, for another member of the course team, disciplines may lie at the heart of academic life and so that horizon may open to a teaching approach build around 'threshold concepts' (Meyer and Land 2005) even if it runs against that same institution's concern with 'employability'. And once revealed, any tensions between different horizons—both between course team members and between the course team and their institution—will need to be worked through.

Sociality may come into play in the individual teacher submitting her inner hopes and values to self-scrutiny (horizon two) as she interrogates, say, her professional actions and relationships to self-reflection but inflected by the hopes and values of teaching colleagues or by the in situ nature of the working out of the pedagogical relationship with her students. Sociality comes inevitably into play in the university's underlying structures and its embedded ideologies (horizon three). And lastly, sociality comes into play in the integration of all of these levels (horizon four) as the individual, often in concert with others, works out teaching projects that seek to accommodate life-plans and educational projects within the deep structures of policies and politics on institutional, national and global levels. For example, the international 'scholarship of teaching and learning' movement could be said to be a form of collective agency deliberated organized to address the hegemony—at institutional, national and global levels—of research-as-an-ideology.

Conclusions

A considerable research literature on teaching in higher education has accrued over the past 40 years or so. That literature has focused on conceptions of teaching, and on approaches to teaching and, to a lesser extent, on actual teaching practices. In this paper, we have sought to extend that literature by opening a perspective on teaching that we have termed 'horizons of teaching'. The difference is captured in the observation that whereas we may steer *by* horizons—to use our term here—we do not steer *towards* them; conceptions of teaching, teaching approaches and teaching practices, on the other hand, supply much more determinant directions of pedagogical travel. However, the less intimate connection between teaching horizons and actual teaching practices does not imply a lesser significance for teaching horizons. On the contrary, it is horizons that supply meaning to the whole enterprise of teaching, both on a personal and collective level. *Personal* horizons may even be sources of creative resistance to *structural* horizons present at institutional, national and global levels.

In interrogating this idea of horizons of teaching, we have delineated four such horizons (Fig. 1), involving to a greater or lesser degree, persons *and* collectivities and, more especially still, structures *and* agency. Horizons, accordingly, form a complex working at different levels and being infused with different degrees of reflexivity. We have suggested that horizons may variously be both personal and impersonal, both an expression of agency and of deep societal and even global structures. As such, horizons may open the

possibilities both of, say, individual universities seeing new pedagogical horizons for themselves and of academics' increasingly agentic horizons emerging out of a personal and collective critique of given ideological horizons, for example, of an *adopted* horizon of civic education against a perceived *given* horizon of an unequal world. The idea of horizons of teaching contains a moment of potentiality, of there being always space to recast higher education teaching in radical ways; and to change horizons, not merely one's own but to help agentically to bring new horizons into view for higher education institutions and even for higher education systems.

The concept of horizons of teaching here turns out to be not only an analytical concept (interpretable and researchable on different levels) but a potentially revolutionary concept. Admittedly, the identification of that potential calls for more work than is possible in a single paper, work that needs to be at once conceptual, theoretical, empirical and practical.

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