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Horizons of teaching: a new conceptualization of teaching in higher education

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Introduction

- This paper revolves around the *sponsoring* of higher education teaching.
- Key questions:
 - 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)?
- We suggest the concept of '*horizons of teaching*'
 - to refer to the interplay of personal values, beliefs and hopes
 - together with the wider societal context plays its part in supplying not just meaning but also
 - motivational energy to an academic's teaching efforts.

Beyond conceptions of teaching and teaching approaches

Conceptions of teaching:

- the ways in which university teachers *conceive* of their teaching practices (Ginns, Kitay & Prosser, 2008).
- Basically, *two* conceptions of teaching:
 - imparting of information to students in order to achieve their assimilation of it.
 - students' learning and experiences (Akerlind, 2003).

No sharp boundary between these two conceptions

- All kinds of intermediate and hybrid conceptions may be deployed by teachers. .

Depending on the *conceptions* that teachers hold, they will *approach* their teaching practices in one or another way (content-focused or student-focused).

Beyond conceptions of teaching and teaching approaches

Critiques of these distinctions:

- 'Teaching approaches':
 - teaching is viewed from a strong cognitive and individual perspective which insufficiently takes into account the social context of teaching practices (Ashwin & McLean, 2005; Fanghanel, 2009; Guzmán-Valenzuela, 2013).
- 'Conceptions of teaching'
 - - more focused on individual cognitive structures rather than analysing the interplay between individuals and social, institutional or even more global structures (Fanghanel, 2009, 2011).
- Research using these concepts mainly use surveys or interviews with teachers and seldom take into account students' points of view (Guzmán-Valenzuela, 2013).
- Distinction between 'theory-in-action' and 'espoused theory' (Argyris and Schön, 1974):
 - There may be a gap between a teacher's conceptions of and approaches to teaching and her/his actual teaching practices (Kane, Sandretto & Heath, 2002);
 - perhaps inevitably so, since teaching is dynamic, with its real-time character being continuously influenced by interaction between teachers and students (Ashwin, 2009; McAlpine, Weston, Timmermans, Berthiaume & Fairbank-Roch, 2006).

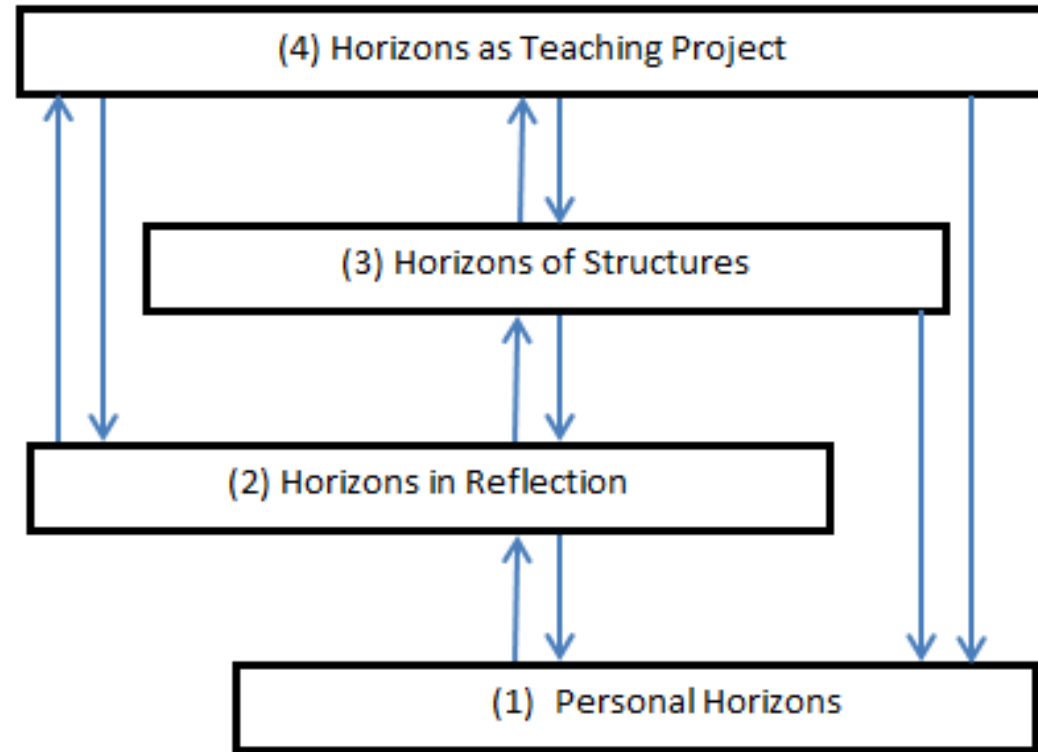
Teaching horizons

- Teachers vary considerably in their teaching *practices*. They:
 - come at their teaching informed by
 - own values,
 - perceptions of their context
 - a sense of their pedagogical responsibilities and allegiances and
 - their continuing interactions with their students.
 - All of this supplies a *background* to the ways in which teachers both conceive of and approach their professional tasks.
- Yes, cognitive processes, but values & beliefs involve non-rational & affective dimensions,
 - and these non-reasoned dimensions also impart teaching horizons.
- We suggest: *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.

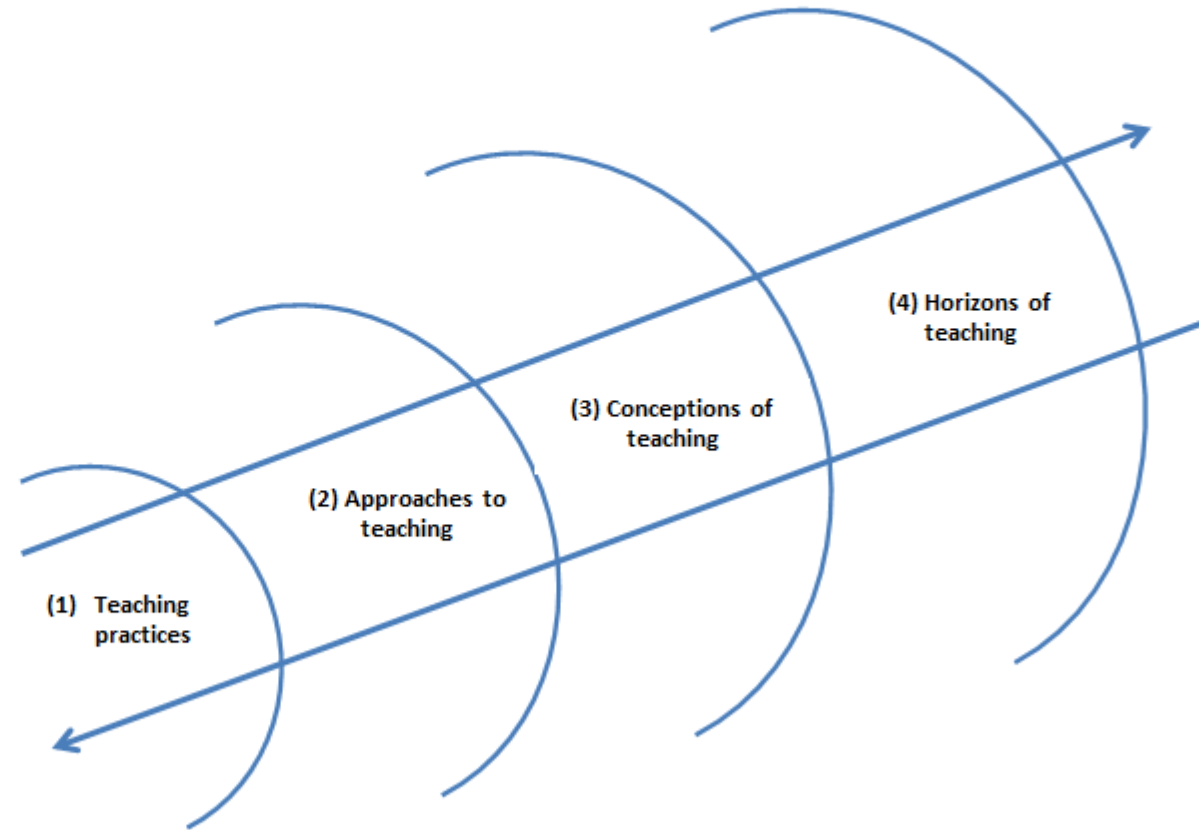
Teaching horizons

- The concept of horizons of teaching forms a complex.
 - the considerations – explicit or implicit - that open a space in which an individual's teaching is situated,
 - *whether self-reflectively or not.*
 - likely to be a conglomeration of values, ideas and empirical observations or assumptions on the part of the individual concerned
 - and the influences and structures acting on the teaching act.
- A person's horizons not only impart meaning to a person's teaching but also supplies *energy* to a person's teaching. They impart a *pedagogical will*.
- Teaching horizons are parameters of both space and time
 - against which teachers comprehend their teaching.

Four sets of teaching horizons



Placing university teaching horizons



Conclusions - 1

- The literature on teaching in higher education, amassed over the past forty years - a missing dimension.
 - Missing a lens on teaching that we have termed here 'horizons of teaching'.
- Horizons supply meaning to the whole enterprise of teaching, both on a personal and collective level.
 - Personal horizons may even supply points of creative resistance to the dominant horizons
 - (present at institutional, national and global levels).
- Four such horizons, involving to a greater or lesser degree
 - persons *and* collectivities and, more especially,
 - structures *and* agency.

Horizons may variously be both personal and impersonal,

- both an expression of agency and
- of deep societal and even global structures.

They

- may even open the possibility of increasingly agentic horizons emerging out of a personal and collective critique of given ideological horizons.

Conclusions - 2

Accordingly, the idea of horizons of teaching:

- contains a moment of potentiality,
 - of there being always potential to recast higher education teaching in radical ways.

So:

- The concept turns out to be not a descriptive concept but a potentially revolutionary concept.

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