

Lines of testimony

Paul Standish (UCL Institute of Education)

The topic of testimony has gained increased prominence in recent years in epistemology, where it is typically taken to refer to the possible acquisition of knowledge through the understanding and acceptance of someone else's judgement. There is no doubt that learning in this way is a prominent feature of education. This conception of testimony contrasts, however, with the more restricted way in which it is commonly understood: everyday usage situates the concept in such contexts as places of worship and courts of law. Testimony in these contexts is likely to be seen by the epistemologist as a special case of testimony in the wider sense, but is this accurate? With reference to contrasting traditions in philosophy and drawing on examples from film and literature, this paper considers the relationship between the epistemological and the everyday senses of testimony, exploring the significance of these matters for questions of teaching and learning as well as for the understanding of language as a whole.

Keywords: testimony, bearing witness, epistemology, David Bakhurst, Sanford Goldberg, Jacques Derrida, Paul Celan, Richard Moran

It has long been held by progressive educators that children learn best through direct experience.¹ Progressive movements have generally identified what they were doing in relation to ideas drawn from Rousseau and Dewey, and with reference to Comenius's *Orbis Pictus* and Ellen Key's *Century of the Child*. Direct experience of things meant that classrooms must change from the bare walls and drab furnishing, and from the reliance on blackboard exercises and teacher-talk of traditional practice, into places of sensory stimulation, with colourful wall displays, quiet corners, plants and pet animals, where children would learn through activity and experience. And this meant that the teacher's methods must be less directive and authoritarian, more supportive and more attentive, and responsive to the existing interests and energies of the child.

There is an animus behind these commitments, and this is understandable: one thinks of the sometimes wanton wielding of authority by the teacher and of the various ways in which what was learned must have been experienced by students as artificial and remote from their real lives. Yet the enthusiasms of the progressives became ideological, with immediacy of experience and activity pushing out ways of teaching that might evoke and inform, where these did indeed rely on what the teacher told the students. When, at a later stage, supposedly progressive ideas resurfaced in the move towards student-centredness in post-compulsory education (from community colleges in the 1980s to universities a decade or two later), similar nostrums were imposed: the lecture was disparaged in

favour of more active forms of learning, student choice gained a new prominence and student satisfaction a new authority, and short-term transparent learning goals displaced more patient forms of apprenticeship to the subject of study – all apparently promoting immediacy of experience in one way or another (albeit that this was often to be technologically mediated).

Within epistemology, the nature and legitimacy of students' being expected to learn not from direct experience but from what their teacher tells them has come under new scrutiny, under the broad description of knowledge by testimony. A recent issue of the *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, edited by Ben Kotzee (2013), brought together work by a number of philosophers offering complementary perspectives on the theme. Let me begin by considering two of these contributions, both as indicators of influential currents of thought and as a means of highlighting the somewhat specialised sense of knowledge by testimony in epistemology.

Where, then, in epistemology is the focus of concern? In his contribution to the special issue, 'Learning from Others', David Bakhurst writes:

[A] person can acquire knowledge by understanding and accepting someone else's utterance – not just knowledge that 'such-and-such' has been said or written but knowledge that such-and-such is the case. I can come to know if it is raining in Liverpool because someone who knows tells me that it is. This is what philosophers call 'knowledge by testimony' (thereby using testimony more broadly than in everyday discourse) (Bakhurst, 2013, p. 187).

The pointedly unremarkable nature of the example illustrates the wide reach of knowledge by testimony and helps to show the need to recognise its importance. With regard to schooling, Bakhurst invites the reader to consider Jamie, a 13-year-old student, who has just learned the following: (i) from his English teacher, that Jane Austen published six novels, (ii) from his biology textbook, that the structure of the DNA molecule is a double-helix, (iii) from his friend Luke, that Ann Boleyn was beheaded with a sword, (iv) from his classmate Stephanie, that the maths test is cancelled, (v) from Sheila, that Lucy kissed Jack behind the bicycle sheds, (vi) from a representative of the Public Health Unit, that smoking increases the risk of heart disease. The range of examples here serves to demonstrate the prevalence of testimony in education, and it encourages a consideration of testimony's formal structure: A learns from B about X, where, as the examples imply, B intends to inform A about X. It is possible that Jamie overheard Stephanie telling someone else about the maths test and that Sheila's gossip was not intended for his ears, but in most cases Jamie is being addressed. This, then, is how testimony is generally understood in epistemology.

As Bakhurst's parenthetical remark indicates, the epistemological sense contrasts with a more everyday sense, where the term carries a weight that makes its use appropriate to particular kinds of circumstances – that is, to particular kinds of X and to the concomitant responses of the one

giving testimony to that X. To put this in less formal terms, the contexts in which the term ‘testimony’ is used in everyday parlance involve, for example, giving evidence in a court of law, reporting an atrocity, attesting to one’s religious faith, or otherwise voicing one’s deep convictions. While truth-telling in these cases is obviously of the essence, this might be said to be implicit also in all those in Bakhurst’s list. But here there seems also to be a sense of something broader being at stake, which tests the mettle of those giving testimony, requiring them, as it were, to stand by their words – and, as the foregoing seems to imply, of their having faith in what they say, urging those addressed to believe them. There is, in any case, some irony in the nomenclature we are working with in that the epistemological sense of testimony seems to extend across, and indeed to foreground, everyday unremarkable experience, whereas the ‘everyday’ sense is more circumscribed. But for present purposes I shall retain Bakhurst’s terms. A part of my concern will be to work out whether testimony in the everyday sense should be seen as a special case of the epistemological sense, or simply separate from it, or overlapping in some degree.

In order to move forward, we need a more developed account of testimony in the epistemological sense. This will involve shifting the perspective from that of the person giving testimony to that of the addressee, the person who is expected to trust the testimony. To this end, let us turn to another paper in the same special issue.

The epistemological sense of testimony

Sanford Goldberg’s ‘Epistemic Dependence in Testimonial Belief, in the Classroom and Beyond’ revolves around the question of the trust young children have in what their parents say, and he illustrates this with a short vignette:

ICE CREAM Two-year-old Sally is told by Father that there is ice cream for dessert tonight. (Father speaks from knowledge.) Sally understands the testimony, accepts Father’s say-so immediately, and so without further ado forms the belief that there is ice cream for dessert tonight. To be sure, Sally’s acceptance is not blind. For example, if Father had made an effort to convey that he was only pretending – had he used unusual gestures while speaking, smiled exaggeratedly, winked, or given some other salient indication of insincerity that Sally recognized – Sally would not have believed him (Goldberg, 2013, p. 171).

Only pretending might have included saying something ‘silly’ (for example, that Fido, their pet dog, is really a giraffe), and Sally would have known that this was not true. Goldberg notes that, like other typical children of her age, she has a preference for testimony from people she knows well, and acknowledges that her relative lack of background knowledge limits her ability to scrutinise what she is told.

The story, then, lays the way for the initial formulation of a conflict between, on the one hand, ‘Cartesian Epistemic Autonomy’, which would require direct access to evidence for oneself, and, on the other, dependence

on the testimony of others. But the severity of the former requirement becomes modified in Goldberg's more realistic approach, which confronts what he describes as the 'Epistemic Dependence challenge' (p. 177): that no human being has first-hand access to all the information they need, and so a distinction needs to be drawn between informational and epistemic independence. This is congruent with the claim that

An epistemically autonomous subject is one who judges and decides for herself, where her judgments and decisions are reached on the basis of reasons which she has in her possession, where she appreciates the significance of these reasons, and where (if queried) she could articulate the bearing of her reasons on the judgment or decision in question. I will call reasons of this sort 'fully autonomous' (p. 169).

Direct access to evidence gives way to having one's own reasons. As initially formulated, the Epistemic Dependence challenge was to square (i) the epistemic dependence of very young children on their teachers (and other caregivers), with (ii) the educational aim of getting students to think for themselves. But this challenge needs to be met, Goldberg claims, '*without* surrendering the idea that (iii) cognitively immature children can nevertheless acquire testimonial knowledge from their teachers (and other caregivers)' (p. 177). Hence, an alternative conception of autonomy is required.

On this revised view, the ascription of intellectual autonomy is to be confined 'to those who have attained the sorts of critical capacities that suffice to enable them to succeed across a wide variety of informational environments' (p. 183), where success depends upon the exercise of reason about the credibility of those environments. Such capacities involve the assessment of information, and the child in the classroom needs to be understood in relation to this: it is in this context that the child is engaged in 'managing the flow of information' (p. 180). Hence, the aim is not to eliminate informational dependence but rather 'to equip students to manage their dependence in a world in which this dependence has a clear payoff (in the extension of knowledge each of us can acquire) but also exposes us to the threats of manipulation and misinformation' (p. 182). By contrast to the somewhat threatening, post-truth political resonances of this expression, Goldberg writes of the child's classroom or home environments in terms of 'epistemic happiness' (p. 180). Such environments are realised through the actions of broadly knowledgeable others in 'policing' testimonial norms and 'dampening the effects' of unreliable testimonies. 'In this way,' he writes,

our testimonial environments are 'cleaner' than one would predict in the absence of any such practice. And this 'cleanliness', in turn, makes the adult's task of discerning reliable from unreliable testimony easier than it would be if individual hearers had to rely on nothing beyond their own onboard resources (p. 181).

There is good reason to support the development of autonomy, and it would surely be wrong to decry such capacities for discrimination *per se*, but it is worth examining what these might involve or amount to.

The emphasis on information raises problems in a number of ways. It is worth noting that the term now has a depleted sense: 'to inform' used to mean to provide with the truth, such that 'to inform incorrectly' or 'to inform falsely' would involve a contradiction in terms. In the term's usage in 'information technology', by contrast, this implication has been modified if not removed. This makes more understandable Sandberg's preference for '*a priori* agnosticism' when it comes to giving credence to testimony, and this further distances this account from the everyday. Likewise, the 'cleanliness' of testimonial environments also smacks of the empiricism of data gathering and analysis, while 'onboard resources' extends the vocabulary, in much of the discussion, not only of confrontation but of combat. The echoes of J.L. Austin and ordinary language philosophy in the idea of the 'epistemic happiness' of school and home environments may have a mollifying effect, as does the somewhat saccharine, though agreeably humorous ICE CREAM story that animates the discussion. But the overall picture is one of the isolated subject managing information, and this casts the one giving testimony in a more distanced and instrumental role.

Capacity to manage the flow of information begins to sound like the quality that might be sought in the driverless car. For a human being, the major challenge in learning to drive is less a matter of mastering the coordination of control inside the car than of assessing the street conditions outside, adjusting what one does in relation to the various signs on the street, the movements of other vehicles, pedestrians, and stray dogs, and taking account of weather conditions. The street can be a highly complex and unpredictable environment, and the exercise of discrimination in multiple ways is needed. Yet such have been the advances in new technology that we are now not far from a time when driverless cars will be a part of the normal urban scene. The question this raises is how far the emphasis on managing informational environments is adequate to the nature of human experience, and, thus, how far such phrasing can delineate a credible idea of autonomy. One thing driverless cars cannot do is to decide where they want to go and why. Information would be relevant to any such decision, but it could never be sufficient. So, 'managing information' seems to leave out all that is most important in a human life.

A useful way forward at this point is provided by a distinction in the epistemology of testimony that Bakhurst raises – between reductivist and anti-reductivist accounts. How can someone come to know something merely by hearing what someone else says?

Reductionists hold that to be justified in believing the testimony of a speaker, the hearer must have good positive reasons for doing so that are not themselves based on testimony. Antireductionists, in contrast, hold that the hearer is entitled to believe the speaker's testimony without any positive reason for so doing, just so long as there are no available reasons *not* to believe the speaker (testimony thus involves a

distinctive sort of entitlement to believe that requires specific epistemological treatment)’ (pp. 188-189).

An important part of Bakhurst’s discussion concerns the difference between ‘believing something on the say-so of another and believing something in virtue of one’s initiation into a body of common knowledge and traditions of common inquiry’ (p. 200). Both are important dimensions of the ‘social character of knowledge’, but ‘while the epistemology of testimony concerns the former, the philosophy of education must concern itself principally with the latter’ (*ibid.*). His paper defends this distinction in a number of ways. We do not, as Elizabeth Anscombe puts it, ‘hope that our pupils *believe us*, but rather, that they will *come to see* that what we say is true—if it is’ (Anscombe, 1979, p. 145; in Bakhurst, p. 198). Similarly, he draws on arguments from Benjamin McMyler (2011) and Richard Moran (2006) to the effect that a distinction is to be drawn between ‘*telling* someone that *p* and *arguing* that *p*’ (Bakhurst, p. 198). In the former case, the speaker asks her audience to believe *her*, whereas in the latter, the audience is asked to attend to reasons or evidence for believing that *p*. ‘These modes of persuasion’, Bakhurst claims, ‘are central to the teacher’s art, but they need not involve testimony’ (*ibid.*). There is a sense in which the teacher does not speak in her own voice but for the subject-matter itself, presenting ‘common knowledge’ in which she invites her students to share. She is initiating students into some part of the ‘conversation of mankind’, in Michael Oakeshott’s phrase. Yet ‘her role is that of facilitator or conduit’, and ‘she does not typically portray her own voice as part of that conversation’. Her transparency in this is such that her students “look through her” to the shared subject of their inquiries’ (*ibid.*). The students, for their part, will not normally cite the teacher’s authority to justify a knowledge claim but seek to develop their account drawing from the subject-matter itself. And they will not be assessed to see whether they remembered what they have been told but rather on their understanding of the content. The liberal education to which such practices are said to contribute involves ‘initiation into a world-view, conceived as an evolving conversation’, in such a way that students are equipped, in the course of time, ‘to subject any part of their world-view to critical reflection’ (p. 199).

Much of the discussion at this point in Bakhurst’s paper brings into view what happens in the more advanced stages of schooling or, indeed, university education, and this contrasts with the experience of Jamie, the grade 9 student mentioned at the start. At other points in the paper, and drawing on John McDowell especially, reference is made to the experience of very young children, while in writing, towards the end, of a liberal education, Bakhurst allows for the fact that much of what matters in a student’s experience positions them less as independent critical reasoners and more as initiates into a new worldview. Moreover, students gain knowledge in much less overt ways – ways that would seem to refine and soften the contrast between teaching and testifying:

They acquire styles of thinking and reasoning; they acquire conceptions of salience and relevance; they learn conversational and

intellectual virtues—how to listen, how to ponder, how to reflect, and so on; they pick up concepts that are not overtly explained and they exercise conceptual skills that no-one tells them how to deploy. Some of this *could* not be explicitly taught, but must be shown, and in some cases the showing cannot advertise itself as such. A philosopher cannot tell her students how to reason. She needs to teach by example. She must encourage her students to reflect on and reason with the reasoning of others, though the students may better learn from example the less they try explicitly to emulate it. This is part of what it is to be initiated into an intellectual tradition and an important dimension of our epistemic dependence on others (p. 201).

The accuracy and insight of what is said here, however, seems not to be matched by some other aspects of the discussion, and I need to explain why I believe this to be so. The remarks relate most obviously to education at more advanced levels, but a connection can be made, I think, to Bakhurst apparently approving remarks about ideas he finds in both John McDowell and Sebastian Rödl. It is pertinent that their approach ‘does not recognise the epistemology of testimony as a distinctive sub-branch of epistemology, one that comes into focus only after a working account of knowledge is on the table, for the possibility of testimony is inherent in the very idea of knowledge’ (p. 200). The phrasing here seems cautious, however. Might it not be said more strongly that the *actuality* of testimony is inherent in knowledge, at the very least in terms of our coming into language? A caution is evident also in the remark that follows: that ‘Knowledge is the kind of thing that can be shared and held in common’ (*ibid.*). While there are obviously things we come to know and then can potentially share with others, this cannot be the case for our becoming knowing subjects because this depends upon our gradual participation in something that is already there, already shared, in the community in which we grow up, the community in which we find ourselves. Bakhurst’s appeal to the reader to remember ‘the running commentary on actions and events to which parents submit babies and infants’ seems to move in harmony with the point I am stressing here. He regards the fact that children are *addressed* in this way as ‘essential to [their] acquiring the concepts necessary to understand and evaluate utterances’ (p. 200); nevertheless, this phrasing has a programmatic quality that holds back from recognising in the round the child’s entry into a world. I shall return to this point.

That caution relates to a lack of clarity in the discussion regarding the age and maturity of the learners who are under consideration. Think for a moment of Jamie in his kindergarten years. At that stage, across a vast range of instances, he will believe that *p* on the say-so of his teacher. Goldberg’s argument comes in here to remind us that, on the whole, this will work out well, for his teacher will be a significant component of the ‘happy’ environment Jamie enjoys. But this is to deflect attention from that fact that it is difficult to see how it could be otherwise: he must at this early stage depend upon and accept the say-so of his elders, amongst whom his teacher will normally be a prominent figure. When the time comes for him to go to university, the situation will be different: he will not then normally cite his

teacher to justify his knowledge-claims but will draw on the subject matter itself.

Bakhurst makes the valid point that his teacher will be able to teach things that she does not believe or is not committed to. It is easy to see how this works in the case of skills. We can imagine the teacher who has no interest in computer applications in themselves, and finds the topic tedious, but has a short and succinct way of introducing students to the use of spreadsheets: she is successful in imparting what the students need to know. To take a more content-rich subject of study, we can think of the teacher of economics who is adept at explaining Marxist theory, even though she herself is committed to principles of the free market; and she may or may not be open about her own beliefs. The example Bakhurst gives, however, is curiously under-developed:

A creationist can effectively teach evolutionary theory, so long as she does not allow her creationist beliefs to interfere. If the students know their teacher's true beliefs, they do not learn by trusting her for the truth and she does not take herself to be offering them knowledge (they may trust her for the truth in the way we trust a thermometer to give the correct temperature, but this is a different kind of trust). For all that, she may do an excellent job (p. 198).

Bakhurst takes this to show that a teacher can be successful 'even if she does not believe the subject that she teaches' (*ibid.*). (What, incidentally, does 'believe the subject' mean? Do I believe physics, believe philosophy?) In my example, the students can learn about Marxism. Their teacher may maintain a stance of neutrality or she may be open about her own commitments, and while this is likely to affect in some way the experience of the students, it should not impede their coming to understand Marxism. Is the difference between creationism and evolutionary theory a contrast between theories? It is convenient, on Bakhurst's argument to suppose that it is, but surely this is wrong because of the nature of the commitments involved. Why else would this be such a corrosive issue? This is, however, only a part of the problem here. To teach a theory in my example is not to assert the truth of that theory. It is less a matter of telling someone that *p* and more a matter of telling someone that *some people believe* that *p* – as this might be phrased in teaching children. This is at an obvious remove from testifying that *p*, in both epistemological and everyday senses, and so the purchase of the example on questions of the relationship between teaching and testimony is weakened. In fact, the example works in such a manner as to obscure ways in which the testimony in teaching might be acknowledged.

There are symptoms of this elsewhere in Bakhurst's phrasing. Consider his suggestions that the teacher speaks in her own voice 'only in asides' and that her role is that of 'facilitator or conduit'; and further that 'she does not typically portray her own voice as part of' the 'conversation of mankind', in Oakeshott's phrase (p. 198). Insofar as the force of these remarks is intended to resist the cult of personality in teaching, they are to be welcomed. But, again, the reality is more complex than is suggested. Is

the teacher to be just a spectator to the conversation? What if one's teacher is, say, Charles Taylor? Is he a spectator, a commentator, a participant? And if he is not exactly a spectator but rather a commentator, where is the line to be drawn between this role and that of the active participant? Can an uncontested participant in the conversation – as Charles Taylor surely is – not be a teacher? Or perhaps not without changing roles? None of these separations is very convincing. Is philosophy to become the history of ideas? If a student writes, 'Hegel and I think that. . .', then there is reason to try to show them that a greater humility would allow what is to be learned to come better into view. But when F.R. Leavis makes his characteristic appeal to his student or his reader, 'It is so, isn't it? This is how it is, is it not?', this is designed to bring them into an exercise of practical criticism: his purpose is not just to tell them what great critics have said (Standish, 2016). It is difficult to see what initiation into a subject might amount to if teacher and *a fortiori* student are outside the conversation.

Moreover, Bakhurst seems too accommodating of the ideas of the teacher as 'facilitator' and 'conduit'. The former belongs to what has become an ideology of student-centredness, especially in post-compulsory education (witness the cliché that the teacher is 'not the sage on the stage, but the guide on the side'), if it does not open the way to the new 'science' of 'deliverology'.² 'Facilitator' is scarcely an innocent term. The less familiar and more interesting 'conduit' harbours richer associations and connections, but they need to be spelled out. It can suggest a passage or pathway for thought, and also perhaps the work of the conductor of the orchestra, understood not as the controller but rather as the channel – like, say, the conductor of electricity – through which the energies of the players and the music played are focused and intensified. But the point Bakhurst is making risks emptying the term of its potential for such significance, a significance in which the person and commitment of the teacher would be crucially present.³ Thus, it seems that what Bakhurst says here is in tension with what is said in the longer passage quoted above, that 'A philosopher cannot tell her students how to reason. She needs to teach by example' (p. 201).

The position that Bakhurst develops in 'Teaching, Telling and Technology' (in the present collection) is somewhat modified. He asks how far the turn to 'I-you' relations in recent philosophy is relevant to testimony. The 'essentially second-personal element in testimony' is that when you tell me something, I not only believe what you say: I believe *you*. And you are not only telling me what you believe to be true, but inviting me to trust *you*. 'We can wrong people', Bakhurst writes, 'if we do not believe them in such cases, and the character of the wrong is breach of trust' (Bakhurst, 2020). This is not wrong, but it seems to me too one-tracked an account of the offence that might be caused. A breach of trust can occur where I agree not to park on your land, but then, impatient one night, with nowhere to put my car, I do. You reprimand me ('You agreed that you wouldn't park on my land, and I trusted you not to do it.'), and I may be contrite or perhaps say a few appeasing words to quell your anger and then not to think more about it. But the withholding of belief in what someone ordinarily tells me is more than this: it undermines them as a person.

In this later paper, Bakhurst also distances himself from his earlier claim that the teacher does not speak ‘in her own voice’: she speaks for her subject or discipline. Hence, the students are not to believe *her*, they are to believe the discipline. The teacher is there to present what is believed and why, and only incidentally to say what *she* thinks (see Bakhurst, 2013, pp. 198). But in response to the criticism that this downplays the influence of the teacher’s personality on her ability as a teacher, he now prefers, with Rödl, to see the teacher as an embodiment, or personification, of her discipline. The discipline addresses the students through her. They engage with the discipline itself in the person of the teacher. But then he wonders whether this is to swing (on the part of the teacher) from self-effacement to self-aggrandisement. The teacher, avoiding this, must be self-effacing in that ‘she has to conform what *she* thinks to *what is thought*’. She is not teaching physics-according-to-her, but physics as such. She must ‘*give voice to*’ - speak ‘as’ - the discipline. Thus, she must ‘*think as the discipline*’, expressing words that she understands and, unlike the interpreter, endorses – and, hence, that are her own. ‘The teacher must make the discipline her own, so that discipline and teacher are a unity, each a condition of the voice of the other’ (Bakhurst, 2020).

I hope it is clear that I have some sympathy for the line Bakhurst takes in relation to the contrasts drawn, but the fact that they are drawn more starkly than is warranted has the effect of obscuring aspects of teaching that are important, aspects where questions of testimony come more into view. This is relevant both to the epistemological sense of the term and to the everyday. It is to the latter that I now turn. In doing this, I confess to a state of some puzzlement. I have commented on the shifts of tone in the papers by Goldberg and Bakhurst, but these are small in relation to the shifts of tone on which I must rely. For the articulation of the epistemological and the everyday senses of testimony involves different registers of thought and language. Epistemology’s adoption of the topic has the air of appropriating it to some more rigorous philosophical realm: it can seem indifferent to ordinary usage, as Bakhurst’s parenthesis – ‘(thereby using testimony more broadly than in everyday discourse)’; and it can appear oblivious to, or defiant of, the prominence of the theme in other philosophical traditions. In due course, I shall try to mend these connections, but first it is necessary to bring out the contrast to which Bakhurst refers with reference to different lines of thought and by considering cases of testimony *in extremis*.⁴

The everyday sense of testimony

Giving evidence in a court of law, reporting an atrocity, attesting to one’s religious faith, and voicing one’s deep convictions – such aspects of the human condition are brought into the public eye through the daily news. Through the ages, they have figured prominently in the arts, and they find their way into wider forms of entertainment, perhaps in such sensational forms as soap operas and confessional chat-shows. An example will, I think, suffice not only to illustrate testimony’s hold on the imagination but also to suggest its breadth of significance. In this and in the two further examples that follow, some greater contextualisation will be necessary.

The (1985) Harrison Ford film, *Witness*, directed by Peter Weir, begins as a story of crime and corruption. Set in 1984, the film depicts the recently widowed Rachel and her eight-year-old son, Samuel, who are travelling by train through Philadelphia. While waiting for a connecting train, Samuel goes into the men's toilet and witnesses a murder. He has avoided being noticed by hiding in a cubicle. But Rachel and her son are members of the Amish community, and to be in this station is already, for them, to be in an alienating place. Detective John Book is assigned to this case, and the boy is questioned. Samuel is unable to identify anyone from the line-up of possible suspects he is shown but then does recognise the face of the killer in a photograph in the police station of one of Book's colleagues receiving an award. Book investigates and finds evidence of his colleague's criminal activity in connection with narcotics, and he informs the Chief of Police. But it quickly becomes apparent that the corruption in the police department is more widespread, and Book himself is ambushed and shot. He manages to flee, taking Rachel and the boy with him, and, having destroyed all records that would implicate them as witnesses, he drives them back home to Lancaster County: there, he hopes, they can disappear amongst the Amish community.

When they arrive, however, Book faints through loss of blood, and it is decided that he will be taken into the community while he recovers. During his convalescence, he borrows Amish clothes and begins to help in the daily work that has to be done. It becomes clear that he and Rachel are mutually attracted, just as it is apparent that he is drawn into the rhythms and practices of Amish life. A high point in the film comes with the raising of the wooden frame of the new barn, the work of the whole community, of which Book has been a part. The story resolves in more conventional Hollywood terms, with the corrupt Police Chief, now threatening Book with a gun and holding Rachel and her son hostage, being exposed in a crime to which the gathered Amish community are all witnesses. Indeed, it is under their gaze, and no longer able to hide his guilt, that he eventually gives himself up. Order is restored, and Book leaves the community.

The film exploits multiple senses of witnessing – the witnessing of a crime, testifying to what one has seen, the witnessing at first hand of a different way of life, the bearing witness to God that defines that way of life, and the fact that that testimony is not confined to specific religious acts or rituals but is there in the very fabric of daily life and work; and lastly, there is the positioning of the audience of the film as witness to what is depicted, where that depiction can itself be a testimony to the importance of certain beliefs or practices or principles, and to a way of life. A clue to all this has always been there in the name: John Book points to the Book of John, which is one of the books in what is called the Bible's *New Testament*.

Witness is a mainstream work of fiction. I want shortly to extend the thoughts that it so readily raises by turning to a form of testimonial writing that works at the extreme. Before doing this, let me emphasise that what is being imparted in testimony cannot be seen simply as an abstract message strung along a story-line or as a principle formulated in a proposition. There is an importance to the words that are used, words taken up by the speaker, at a particular time, on a particular occasion. Let me try to expand on this.

We saw that Bakhurst presses the McDowellian point that the way the child, as a baby and infant, is addressed by adults is ‘essential to acquiring the concepts necessary to understand and evaluate utterances’ (p. 200).⁵ Powerful and important though the reference to young children is, the idea of the address prompts a redirection of attention in considering testimony - from the veracity of propositions to the relational, to the nature of persons as bearers of the truth, and to the approach of the other person in the expression of this truth. The preoccupation of Goldberg’s discussion, as we saw, is with the accuracy of information and, hence, the truth of propositions. But there is a difference between propositions and statements. The *expression* of a proposition depends upon its utterance or inscription in a statement. If ‘Emmanuel Macron became President of France in 2016’ is treated as a proposition, it is likely to be considered only in terms of its veracity, and to this extent it will survive its abstraction from context. If it is treated as a statement, it will more likely be considered in terms of when the statement was made, in which speech, to whom, and for what reason (‘Emmanuel Macron became President of France in 2016. Since then France has fallen into a state of increasing unrest.’). This is not a matter of denying the question of veracity – was it 2016? - but of bringing the statement’s significance into view in a different way. Whether or not someone is addressed is irrelevant to the truth of a proposition, but it is highly pertinent to the significance of a statement. To think in terms of statements locates the proposition in the dynamic circumstances of the human condition, which inevitably involves temporality. It is the way to questions of memory and faith. In fact, we can take this move from propositions to statements a stage further. Propositions are found in statements, and these are circumstantially temporally located, in space and time. But statements themselves are found in sentences, and sentences only occur in the sounds and marks of particular languages. This helps to show the extent of human dependence on natural language, encourages humility with regard to reason and relationships, and places weight on the words that are used.

In broad philosophical terms, this begins to expose a difference between Greek and Judaic traditions of thought, between truth as disclosure and truth as testimony. The former category, however, has a surprising breadth, extending from the preoccupation with the veracity of propositions in epistemology to the very idea of truth as disclosure in Heidegger. The Judaic roots of the latter connect with lines of thought in Kierkegaard, and then in the 20th century with Franz Rosenzweig, Emmanuel Levinas, Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, and Gianni Vattimo: in this tradition the disclosure of the truth already depends upon a relationship, to the one who addresses me, and this is always already ethical. It is this vulnerability and exposure that is evident in testimony in the everyday sense. It is impossible here to elaborate on this lineage of thought, but it would be equally wrong not to acknowledge it. Hence, in the following paragraph I provide a brief indication of the work of testimony at the extreme before turning the attention back to a more practical example of teaching and learning, in which something of what is at stake here may perhaps be seen.

An extreme point of focus in poststructuralist work about testimony is provided by the poetry of Paul Celan. The most famous poet writing in German of the second half of the 20th century, Celan was born in 1920 in a German-speaking part of the north of Rumania. All his family died in concentration camps, but he escaped, first to Austria and then to France, where he spent the rest of his life. He worked as a translator, principally of poetry. But the overwhelming subject of his writings is the experience of the Holocaust, such that the very nature and purpose of the work is a bearing witness. By the 1960s Derrida had become interested in Celan's work, without initially realising that they happened to be working in the same institution, the Ecole Normal Supérieure in Paris, and gradually he came to know him. Of Derrida's several texts about Celan, I shall refer just to one.

In "Poetics and Politics of Witnessing", he is interested in the relation between responsible witnessing and a poetic experience of language as address,⁶ especially as this is evident in Celan's *Aschenglorie*. To speak of a 'poetic' experience of language is not to affirm one's refined aesthetic sensibility: it is to draw attention to language as *poesis*, to language's productive aspects. The language of the poem is not functional or instrumental, and in a sense it is pointless, but it opens the world in a new way. Derrida's essay traverses a range of concerns. First, there is the eventful nature of language and its singularity, precisely the fact that someone speaks (writes, etc.) at a particular time and place, and that in so doing they take responsibility for what is said. Second, the themes of memory and survival are shown to be linked to the nature of language, whose very existence depends upon traces of what has gone before but is irrecoverable. And third, there is the relation between what he calls 'the space of believing' and 'the order of knowledge'. Directly pondering the nature of testimony, Derrida writes:

"I bear witness" – that means: "I affirm (rightly or wrongly, but in all good faith, sincerely) that that was or is present to me, in space and time (thus, sense-perceptible), and although you do not have access to it, not the same access, you, my addressees, *have to believe me*, because I engage myself to tell you the truth, I am already engaged in it, I tell you that I am telling you the truth. Believe me. You have to believe me" (Derrida, 2005, p. 76).

To bear witness is not to provide a proof. It is because testimony is not good that it is not accepted by revisionist historians. The contrast between an approach to testimony based on the veracity of propositions and one attuned to the effects or force of statements finds a parallel in the following lines. Derrida writes: '(1) *On the one hand*, bearing witness (which belongs to the space of believing, of the act of faith, of pledge and signature, . . .); and (2) *on the other hand*, guaranteed determination, the order of knowledge' (p. 78). And he extends this into a contrast between believing and knowing, which puts pressure on the former term to take it beyond its most familiar sense in epistemology in order to admit not just the richness of religious senses but the possibility that that richness is more indicative of the place of belief in human life as a whole. There is always this alternation between

believing and knowing, but in the end it may be that it is only through a consideration of testimony that one comes to see what belief in this richer sense might amount to: “The sworn word is constitutive of the testimony”, and “At bottom, [this] is perhaps the only rigorous introduction to what ‘to believe’ might mean” (p. 76). In this respect, bearing witness ‘can only appeal to an act of faith’ (p. 79). That this is not so far from a more Hellenic tradition is evident, Derrida notes, in the prominence of testimony in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*. It is through testimony that truth (*Wahrheit*) is kept safe (*wahren*). The role of the teacher and the school, it might be said, is to keep safe the conversation of humankind. The teacher, as exemplar, is the one who keeps safe the truth, where the truth is not just this or that proposition but commitment to a form of enquiry, and where that form of enquiry is not to be understood only as a methodology but as the substance of enquiry, filled out with familiarity with particular topics and literatures and questions, and stretches of the conversation (see Standish, 2019). Let me lower the temperature. Can we see this sustaining of the conversation, sustaining the substance of the concern with memory and loss, in the mundane circumstances of a school classroom? A particularly poignant moment in Alan Bennett’s *The History Boys* finds Hector, a teacher of English, and a student, Posner, reading and discussing Thomas Hardy’s *Drummer Hodge*, a poem about a boy-soldier who has died in war in South Africa.⁷ The scene takes place after school, on a day when this particular group of students – top-flight students studying history, who are staying on at school only as means of preparing themselves for entry to Oxford or Cambridge⁸ – have been on an excursion. The others have now gone home, and it is only Posner who comes to this after-school session when a poem is read and discussed. Posner stands and recites the poem:

They throw in Drummer Hodge, to rest
Uncoffined – just as found:
His landmark is a kopje-crest
That breaks the veldt around:
And foreign constellations west
Each night above his mound.

Young Hodge the drummer never knew –
Fresh from his Wessex home –
The meaning of the broad Karoo,
The Bush, the dusty loam,
And why uprose to nightly view
Strange stars amid the gloam.

Yet portion of that unknown plain
Will Hodge for ever be;
His homely Northern breast and brain
Grow to some Southern tree,
And strange-eyed constellations reign
His stars eternally.

Posner sits and the conversation continues:

- Hector: Good. Very good. Any thoughts?
- Posner: I wondered, sir, if this 'portion of that unknown plain' is like Rupert Brooke – 'there is some corner of a foreign field, . . . In that rich earth a richer dust concealed. . . '
- Hector: It is. It's the same thought. Though Hardy is better, I think. It's more, more, . . . well, down to earth, quite literally down to earth. Anything about his name?
- Posner: Hodge?
- Hector: The important thing is: he has a name. Say, Hardy is writing about the Zulu Wars . . . or later. Or the Boer War, possibly. . . These were the first campaigns when soldiers, common soldiers, were commemorated. . . The names of the dead were recorded and inscribed on war memorials. Before this, soldiers, private soldiers, were all unknown soldiers. . . And so, far from being revered, there was a firm in the 19th century – in Yorkshire, of course! – which swept up their bones from the battle-fields of northern Europe in order to grind them into fertiliser. Still Hodge, the drummer, has a name. Lost boy though he is on the far side of the world. . . He still has a name.
(Pause.)
- Posner: How old was he?
- Hector: If he was a drummer, he would be . . . not even as old as you probably.
- Posner: No, Hardy.
- Hector: Oh, how old was Hardy? When he wrote this? About sixty? My age, I suppose. A saddish life though not unappreciated. 'Uncoffined' is a typical hardy usage. It is a compound adjective, formed by putting 'un-' in front of the noun or verb, of course. Unkissed. Unrejoicing. Unconfessed. Unembraced. It's a turn of phrase that brings with it a sense of not sharing, being out of it, whether because of diffidence or shyness. A holding back. Not being in the swim. Can you see that?
- Posner: Yes, sir. I've felt that a bit.
- Hector: The best moments in reading are when you come across something, a thought, a feeling, that you'd thought special, particular to you, and here it is, set down by someone else, a person you've never met, maybe a person long dead – and it's, it's as if a hand has come out and taken yours. . . Let's just have that last verse again, and I'll let you go.

The lyrical form of the poem and its sadness of tone contrast with the pressured torment and trauma of Celan's work, but the themes are again of memory, loss, and memorialisation in words. The Hardy poem, as Hector points out, alludes to this even in its title, where the boy's name is reiterated and, hence, recorded again. Hector's speculation on the context of this death – the Zulu wars, the Boer war, and then the allusion to the battlefields of

northern France - extends the significance because of the countless other similar deaths, including those that were not recorded. That this poem is 'literally down to earth', unlike the heroic lines of Rupert Brooke, draws attention to the remains of bones gathered, laying the way both for Hector's observation regarding their commercial exploitation as fertiliser, anticipating the Nazi death-camps, and alluding to a faded Romanticism of death and renewal ('His homely Northern breast and brain / Grow to some Southern tree'). The glory of ash in Celan's *Aschenglorie* is the glory of words in remembrance, in their re-membling of the world, and as testament. And words can exist, as we saw, only as traces of what has gone before, even as they open onto what is yet to come.

The ambiguity, following the pause, of 'How old was he?' invites the parallel between the Hardy-Drummer Hodge relationship and that between Hector and Posner, causing a twinge of self-consciousness that they perhaps both feel. So literature is also about us, it seems, about what we find in ourselves, in our responses to the world. And the string of negative compound adjectives that Hector calls to mind applies to the 'saddish life though not unappreciated' that, in some way or other, they all perhaps share. (In a flash-forward, at the end of the film, following a memorial service for Hector, Posner confesses that he has become a teacher. He is not 'happy', but he is not unhappy about it.) The minor tragedy of Hector's death stands in part for the destruction of education - a parallel with the destruction of the monasteries is intimated - by philistinism in its various forms. Hector's sense of 'the best that has been thought and said' extends from great literature through popular song and film, and it is a testament to what is to be valued and to what is to be passed on. But, lest this sound pompous or ponderous, the somewhat cumbersome plot is carefully conceived to deflect too earnest a focus on these things: it tempts the audience towards a quick interpretation of the film that focuses on the boys' obsessions with sex and Hector's not always professional interest in the boys, to the neglect of what, most obviously in the *Symposium*, Plato evokes as the *eros* in education (see Standish, 2014).

Of course, the circumstance depicted in the film is a privileged one. This is an after-school activity, more suggestive of a university tutorial. But it is matched with a number of classroom scenes where again there is a genuine conversation. The teacher and the students are telling one another things. The point of the conversation is not to refine Posner's critical skills, though this may be an effect. And it is not exactly to impart information, although Hector does inform Posner about circumstantial detail relevant to understanding the poem.⁹ He might also have explained the meaning of 'kopje-crest' and 'veldt', and maybe also 'loam' and 'gloam'. But Hector's comments have more to do with evoking the kind of life depicted here, and with tacitly acknowledging the point of Hardy's depiction - which is to say its desire to acknowledge, in a sense to bear witness to, this apparently far-off event, real or imagined as this instance may be. And the comments are not given to thin air: they are addressed to a person. That the other person can be approached in this way, with this thought, is crucial to what the thought is: this teaching is a celebration, a revivifying, and a testament to

what Hardy is doing in relation to the reader of the poem. The teaching and the poem are addressed.

Concerns over privilege in this case, however, can be pressed further. The scene in question revolves around a Hardy poem that raises questions regarding the iniquities of war and social class, and the death of a teenage boy far from home. Celan's subject-matter is extreme, acute, and contemporary; Hardy's is more distanced, even picturesque, and filtered through the received discourse of English literary criticism and redolent of the genre of the school poetry anthology. Teachers of the humanities, of literature in particular, can be drawn to the sensational and the shocking for reasons that do not always serve their subject well, and the testimony that this examines and enacts can become a parody of what it ostensibly sets out to achieve. So it is important, in developing the present account, not only to look to exemplary moments such as we find extracted here from *The History Boys* but to the everyday practice of teaching and learning, across its wide range.

I worked for many years in a community college¹⁰ in an impoverished part of England, and I was frequently struck by the nature of the commitment to their work shown by some of my colleagues. They took an obvious pleasure and pride in the practices into which they were initiating students. I can think of a geography teacher, a chemist, a maths teacher, all of whom were gifted teachers. But I remember especially some that worked in machine-lathe engineering, bricklaying, hairdressing, beauty therapy, and textile design and manufacture: these teachers displayed a happiness in the workshop or salon, delight in their knowledge of the materials they worked with, and a quiet excitement in the craft that they shared with their students. What was being taught was not simply competence in a range of skills but acquaintance with a practice, strengthened by a sense of common purpose and of the value of what was being done. The relationships with the students were generated in this shared practice and commitment. I believe this is rightly understood as involving a sense of testimony – that they testified in their actions to the value of what they were doing and to its place in their own lives. This is not so far from John Book's assimilation into the values of the Amish community, in which craft practice and the doing of ordinary things with care played such an important part. But the sense of this in the film is coloured inevitably by the dramatic transformation that Book undergoes; here it is part of the everyday. It is important that it is not seen as a romanticisation of crafts and a sentimentalisation of ordinary experience.

The turn to this low-key ordinary experience happily links to a different lineage of thought that also helps to bring the importance of ordinary experience to the fore. This has been suggested by the references above to Austin and to Anscombe. Bakhurst himself contributes to this, though again I incline towards a different interpretation. When he elaborates on, for example, the fact that it is crucial to the upbringing of a small child that they are addressed by their elders even before they understand, he describes this as 'essential to [their] acquiring the concepts necessary to understand and evaluate utterances' (p. 200). There is a sense in which this is surely right, but the phrasing has a formal quality that holds back from

recognising in the round the child's entry into a world. For Rush Rhees, sharing with Anscombe the inheritance of Wittgenstein though partly in criticism of Wittgenstein here, the child's coming to speak is a matter not just of his coming to be able to communicate or express his wishes or answer questions but of his discovery that he 'can *say* things. . . The point, roughly, is that if he can speak he has got something to tell you or to ask you. In arithmetic it is different. "Telling you things" is not part of his achievement when he learns to multiply, whereas it is his principal achievement in learning to speak' (Rhees, 2006, p. 159). For the child to say things is for him to have a world, a world as opposed to a habitat, and it is to realise what the world is. That he can say things about the world is part of the world's coming to be.

The line of thought extending from Anscombe is found in the contemporary work of Richard Moran, whose *The Exchange of Words* brings together reflections on testimony over more than ten years. Commenting on the similarities and overlaps between the currencies of money and of words,¹¹ Moran comments:

The 'proprietary' aspect of words relates the economic to the expressive. Hobbes and others characterize a speaker's words as 'her own' in a fundamental sense, but as with the fact that the very reality of property and currency depends on a transpersonal system of recognition and acceptance, it may be asked in what sense one's words can ever be 'one's own'. In what sense can I make them count for what I want them to count for, and in what sense can something I do ensure that they will be *accepted* by the other person at the value I mean to give them? (Moran, 2018, p. 15)

This proprietary aspect extends also into matters of authorship and authority. Like currency, these depend upon institutions – that is, on partly negotiable intersubjective relationships – that do not have a stable form, material or otherwise: they require the continual testing out of meaning and validity. In testimony, the speaker gives her audience reason to believe what she says, but that reason does not depend primarily on external evidence: it depends on her willingness to make herself accountable. Such an analysis of testimony points to the fact that 'in its central instances speech is an action addressed to another person. . . [T]he kind of reason for belief that is presented in testimony is one that functions in part by binding speaker and audience together, and altering the normative relationship between them' (p. 67). This enables the realisation of a different understanding of the authority of the teacher, as well as opening the door to a more realistic possibility of authenticity. It is in this trying out of words that, in important respects, we find who we are – in the way we saw in the classroom scene depicted above.

When Hector tells Posner that the negative compound adjective is 'a turn of phrase that brings with it a sense of not sharing, being out of it, whether because of diffidence or shyness. A holding back. Not being in the swim', it would be bizarre to see this merely as a passing on of information. Indeed, his question, 'Can you see that?', is not intended to assess Posner's abilities so much as a testing of the possibilities of shared response. 'It is so,

isn't it?' he might have said. Nor is information being passed on when Hector goes on to voice the thought that 'The best moments in reading are when you come across something, a thought, a feeling, that you'd thought special, particular to you, and here it is, set down by someone else . . . , it's as if a hand has come out and taken yours. . .' Hector stretches his hand out, in synchrony with these words but also as if reaching for what he is trying to say, and with Posner's tentative response there is the frisson of a moment when the thought is raised that their hands will touch – in the audience's mind and in Posner's. Not, I think, in Hector's. Hector is testifying to something that he has experienced for which there could scarcely be a proof or even anything that might constitute substantial evidence. He is testifying to something that he has found in literature and to a kind of faith in this. This is simultaneously a faith in what we can do when we talk and teach and learn.

A part of my concern in this paper has been to work out whether testimony in the everyday sense should be seen as a special case of the epistemological sense, or as simply separate from it, or as overlapping in some degree. Reference to Moran's work, in the interweaving lines of this discussion, has helped to bring into view the way that a range of factors that we saw in the more dramatic cases of testimony above is in fact there in our ordinary dealings with one another. Certainly, such a connection with the ordinary is there amongst the poststructuralist authors I listed, and this is expressed most strongly in the work of Levinas, whose conception of alterity presses at every point the fundamental nature of the always already ethical, asymmetrical, human relationship.¹² Hence, my inclination is to suggest that the epistemological conception of testimony must be seen as arising against the broad background of testimony in the ordinary sense. And my suspicion of the epistemological construction of the questions testimony raises is that it colludes in a kind of repression of what is most basic and important, for education and for our lives as a whole.

It has turned out, if the present account is right, that the everyday sense of testimony extends through the ordinary world. It is there in our daily lives. Every day.¹³

References

- Bakhurst, D. (2013) Learning from Others, *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 47.2, 187-203.
- Barber, M., with Moffit, A., and Kihn, P. (2010) *Deliverology 101: A Field Guide for Educational Leaders* (London, Sage).
- Derrida, J. (2005) *Sovereignities in Question The Poetics of Paul Celan* (New York, Fordham University Press).
- Moran, R. (2018) *The Exchange of Words: Speech, Testimony, and Intersubjectivity* (Oxford, Oxford University Press).
- Rhees, R. (2006) *Wittgenstein and the Possibility of Discourse*, ed. D.Z. Phillips, (Oxford, Blackwell).
- Standish, P. (2009) Levinas and the Language of the Curriculum, *Levinas and Education: at the intersection of faith and reason* (London and New York, Taylor and Francis).

- Standish, P. (2014) Impudent Practices, *Ethics and Education*, 9.3, 251-263.
- Standish, P. (2016) Absolute Pitch and Exquisite Rightness of Tone, *Philosophy and Literature*: 226-239.
- Standish, P. (2017a) Rebuking Hopelessness, in Paul Standish and Naoko Saito (eds), *Stanley Cavell and Philosophy as Translation: The Truth is Translated*, London: Rowman & Littlefield: 61-72.
- Standish, P. (2017b) The Philosophy of Pawnbroking, in Paul Standish and Naoko Saito (eds), *Stanley Cavell and Philosophy as Translation: The Truth is Translated*, London: Rowman & Littlefield: 171-182.
- Standish, P. (2020) Knowing by Acquaintance, *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 54.5.

¹ The heyday of progressivism in the UK came in the wake of the Plowden Report (1967) and the Primary Memorandum (in Scotland, 1965), but this was after ideas of this kind had taken root in North America, Germany, and the Nordic countries.

² See the work of Sir Michael Barber (Barber, Moffit, and Kihn, 2010). Some thirty years ago I was working in a community college where one of my colleagues was ‘caught teaching’ in the ‘learning centre’. The idea of facilitating learning has been used to efface teaching and to promote simplistic ideas of learning – certainly a world apart from the conversation of humankind.

³ If Bakhurst’s point, in this section of his discussion, is to turn attention towards the content of what is studied, this is certainly to be endorsed. I have argued elsewhere against conceptions of teaching and learning that put excessive emphasis on skills, whether the critical thinking skills of the student or the interpersonal skills of the teacher (Standish, 2009, 2014).

⁴ There is some irony in the fact that modern epistemology’s engagement with this topic has origins in Hume’s writings about testimony regarding miracles. While such testimony is clearly remote from the kinds of examples that Bakhurst and Goldberg provide, Hume’s discussion moves within a naturalistic metaphysics that is remote from my concerns in what follows.

⁵ In the same special issue, Jeremy Wanderer remarks that, in contexts of *engaged reason*, the claim that teacher’s make on their students “is second-personally addressed, calling on you (the potential student) to recognise me (the wannabe teacher) as an *authority on the matter*” (Wanderer, 2013).

⁶ In Celan’s work this is accentuated by the recurrence of *Du*, the intimate address to the other person, which occurs around thirteen hundred times in his work.

⁷ My discussion is based on the film version. *The History Boys* was originally a stage play, which first appeared in 2004. Bennett wrote the screen-play for the film version, which was directed by Nicholas Hytner and released in 2006.

⁸ At the time the story is set, in the mid-1980s, a particular procedure was required of candidates for university places at Oxford or Cambridge. The students would complete A Level courses in their preferred three or four subjects, typically at the age of eighteen, and then stay on at school for an extra term and prepare to take a special examination set jointly by Oxford

and Cambridge. Hence, these are elite students within the school, and this particular group are all intending to read history at university.

⁹ In fact, in Hector is mistaken in some details of his explanation. Alan Bennet, it is reasonable to assume, artfully allows Hector these inaccuracies. They contrast with the insistence on getting it right that we find in the more traditional teacher, Dorothy, Hector's friend. 'You don't just have to know it, you have to know it backwards', she tells the boys. Knowing it backwards perhaps suggests not mindless rote-learning but a familiarity, a knowing by heart, knowledge by acquaintance. I am grateful to Sheila Webb for drawing my attention to the inaccuracies.

¹⁰ This was part of what is known in the UK as the further education sector, roughly equivalent to community colleges in North America.

¹¹ For further discussion of this connection, see Standish (2017b).

¹² For recent discussions in this journal, see Lee, 2018, and Standish, 2019.

¹³ An early version of this paper was first presented at a colloquium organised by David Bakhurst, and I am grateful for helpful responses I received on that occasion. David Bakhurst and Suzy Harris are thanked for comments on subsequent drafts.