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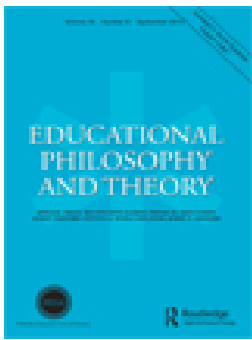To cite this publication, please use the final published version (if applicable).
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Notes on note-making: Introduction

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Note-taking – or, better, note-making – takes diverse forms (from scribing on a whiteboard or flipchart, to summarizing or responding to a lecture on paper or a laptop, to annotating on an analog or digital text) and takes place at all levels of education (from primary school to university). But it has been largely neglected by the philosophy of education, while being taken up by the learning sciences and other positivist approaches that predominantly see it as an instrument of learning (see Kiewra et al., 1991; Kobayashi, 2006; Mueller & Oppenheimer, 2014; Reed et al., 2016). In part, this is because note-making is a largely invisible practice that tends to disappear into its instrumentality, i.e., because it tends to be seen as serving ends other than its own; in part, this is because it has not often been treated as a philosophical topic of inquiry in the study of education. With the recent philosophical interest in educational technicity (e.g., in the work of Bernard Stiegler or Yuk Hui), which echoes the work of 20th-century scholars of media (e.g., Ivan Illich, Vilem Flusser, Friedrich Kittler, Donna Haraway, Katherine Hayles), the philosophy of education has belatedly turned its attention to the role of mediation in educational practices, digital mediation, in particular (e.g., in the work of Catherine Adams, Sian Bayne, Norm Friesen, Amanda Fulford, Naomi Hodgson, Petar Jandrić, Jeremy Knox, Anna Kouppanou and Stefan Ramaekers, to name just a few – and see Fulford et al. (2016) special issue on Technologies of Reading and Writing).

This special issue aims to explore what is educational in the seemingly humble gesture of making notes: not only how and why the practice of note-taking is educative in and of itself, but also what it says about education as such. The contributions to the issue each highlight different aspects of note-making and approach it differently, but all assume that note-making is an educational practice that merits philosophical study. Interestingly, they mostly focus on note-making as a non-digital practice (putting aside the use of laptops for note-making in class), perhaps because most were written prior to the great digitisation ushered in by educational institutions' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Let us first address how we see the different aspects of note-making highlighted by the contributions to the issue.

Phenomenologies and experiences of note-making

Oliverio explores the role of note-making in philosophy for children (P4C). In P4C classes, the teacher does not document the key concepts of the class on the board, as a lecturer might, nor do the students summarize what the teacher says in the class in their notes, as might happen in school or university; rather, the teacher makes notes using a flipchart to map the students'

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process of inquiry as it unfolds. Oliverio contends that the note-maker is the entire group – teacher and children together – understood as an 'intersubject': not as either private writers or a unified collective, but as something in between. Note-making is an intersubjective process that allows thinking to happen, as befits thinking as a process of communal inquiry (Dewey, 1986). The children speak while pointing at transcribed words on the flipchart, and the teacher picks up on these gestures and adds to the transcribed words. Note-making is thus done in front of others, with others. The flipchart, as the medium for the note-making of the teacher and students, is a 'hypomnematon,' as Foucault (1997) might say, a technological support through which the note-makers constitute themselves as subjects. Note-making in the P4C class is thus a collective practice of self-formation.

Bravo Palacios and Simons describe the phenomenological experience of note-making of a cohort of students at a Belgian university. The experience was complex, one of fluctuation, or 'finding a balance' between feeling dependent on the lecturer or autonomous, between expressing an original style in writing and imitating the style of peers, between paying attention to the words spoken and to writing. Note-making became a performance. The students used notes not only to show that they were engaged but also to hide their boredom (when students do not know what to do, they take notes); not only to capture a moment of understanding but also to express their enthusiasm (when students think they understand, they take notes). In the study, they became alert to the notes that they were making, rendering the experience of note-making suddenly strange, but also a thing of pride and the expression of a personal style. They concluded that they could not use others' notes to study from because each set of notes expressed the note-maker's style. Note-making for this group of students served as a shared but individualising experience akin to artistic practice, which suggests that, as Bravo Palacios & Simons argue, note-taking should not be formalized or standardized at the risk of devaluing it as a practice.

Korsgaard asks what happens before we take notes. He contends that we need to notice something before we take notes on it. The art of the teacher, as 'pearl-diver,' is to find and present to their students exemplary things that encapsulate a world, like 'pearls' (Arendt, 1995), that hold their attention and make them think. Students' note-making is about tracing out their thoughts about these things. Yet because the students are not always struck by the pearls in the same way as the teacher or even by the same pearls, they perform their own pearl-diving as they make notes. Note-making thus comes to embody what resonates with students and holds their attention – what is noteworthy, or *exemplary* (Wagenschein, 1999) – in the educational experience.

Lewis and Moffett offer a performance of the gesture of note-making that renders its normal function as an instrument of individual learning 'inoperative,' i.e., that deactivates that function and thereby liberates its potential (Lewis, 2018, after Agamben, 2016). In a lecture on the history of note-taking (the text of which was destroyed after being presented), they asked students either to transcribe verbatim all that was said or to doodle instead of writing words, and then to pass their notes to a fellow student. By disconnecting the notes from their purpose as instruments of learning, the gesture of note-making became apparent to the students – to the point of irritation for some students in the case of the doodles, which, while being done in public, could not be understood by others – as did the public dimension of note-making, namely, that the students can see each other taking notes and may look at each other's notes as they are writing. The performance also highlighted a dialectic between note-making and doodling: notes can always disintegrate into doodles, but doodles can also become meaningful notes. Thus, note-making comes into its own when its potential as more than an instrument of individual learning is liberated.

Zamojski and Vlieghe take note-making to be a pedagogical form in its own right, worthy in itself and not instrumental for something else (e.g., learning). Note-making in a lecture is an act of reconstruction whereby the students recreate, in their notes, the notes of the teacher speaking to them. It puts the thinking of the teacher on display by making public their prepared

notes. And because to write while another is speaking differs from listening to a talk without writing, note-making anchors the students bodily in the room and enjoins them in the experience of thinking with the teacher. Further, the activity of making notes during the lecture presupposes that students will use these notes after the lecture to bring the thinking in lecture back to life. The note-making of the lecturer and student are thus closely related, perhaps reciprocal: the teacher constructs; the teacher and student co-construct; the students reconstruct. Note-making is thus not a merely conceptual or representational experience, but an embodied and constructive one, and one of 'potentiality' (Lewis, 2013), namely, as Zamojski and Vlieghe put it, 'the experience of *what it means to create new thoughts and ideas*.'

Marin and Sturm highlight the multiple dimensions of note-making at university as a gesture, differentiating the instrumental, political and educational dimensions of note-making. In the last, they describe a dichotomy between note-making as individual gesture and collective gesture. They argue that we need not decide whether the gesture is only instrumental, only political or only educational, whether it is for study or the embodiment of thinking, because it is all these at the same time. More importantly, all note-making, as a reading of a teacher's reading, as it were, departs from that reading in ways that reveal its 'potentiality' (Agamben, 2007), whether by refusing its reading of the material, taking up an alternative reading, or offering a playful reading.

What is educational in note-making?

We would argue that to address the educational in note-making, one needs to look at the different ontologies of education – understandings of what education is in essence about – that are implied by any concept of note-taking. While the ontologies of education that the contributions brought together in this special issue imply may differ, their sheer variety alerts us to (the relevance of) the gesture of note-making. One thing that all the contributions do share is that they reject the kind of instrumental view of note-making that dominates the learning sciences. All adopted – either implicitly or explicitly – a post-critical view, by, as Zamojski and Vlieghe phrase it in their contribution, 'taking existing educational practices at face value, i.e., as practices that are meaningful in and of themselves, and articulat[ing] why these practices are worthwhile to care for' (see Hodgson et al., 2017). Let us look at what the contributors of this special issue argued is educational about note-making.

For Oliverio, what is educational in note-making is its intersubjective character, revealed, for example, in the communal inquiry of P4C. *Education is collective self-formation*. For Bravo Palacios and Simons, it is students learning to 'balance' their authority and the teacher's; originality and imitation; their mental, physical and emotional states; and attention and distraction. *Education (it is implied) is about learning to manage conflicting demands, for want of a better word*. For Korsgaard, it is the act of noticing, or taking note of something, in particular, something exemplary that thus becomes noteworthy. *Education is about attending to the exemplary*. For Lewis and Moffett, it is the potentiality revealed, for example, in the (mis)translation of the teacher's notes into the students' notes, by which shift of authority the teacher disappears and the student appears to other students. *Education consists in 'the movement between public and private, self and collective, thought and nonsense, attentiveness and distraction,' which movement reveals a potentiality for thinking and acting*. For Zamojski and Vlieghe, it is 'the [not merely conceptual] experience of *what it means to create new thoughts and ideas*,' in particular, 'of how ideas are architecturally constructed,' i.e., 'are formed and unfold.' *Education is the experience of potentiality per se (not unlike for Lewis and Moffett)*. And, finally, for Marin and Sturm, it is its mediaticity, or its status as a medium (Friesen & Hug, 2009, p. 68). Note-making is a form of writing that involves not the transcription of another's speech but its translation, such that it 'mak[es] present

the new thinking that takes place in between lecturer and students.' *Education is a collective mobilisation via the medium of writing.*

What the contributions have in common – to varying degrees – are three concerns. Firstly, they are concerned with thinking in action as embodied in note-making – though the notes are not instrumental to it, rather an externalisation of it. Secondly, they are concerned with thinking in action as embodied in note-making as a collective process – though not one that is unified. Thirdly, they are concerned with thinking in action as embodied in note-making as a mediatic practice – though, as we have said, mostly as a non-digital practice. What needs to be taken note of now is how the educational in note-making has been and is being affected by the great digitisation ushered in by educational institutions' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Post-script

We would like to acknowledge that one further contribution was intended for this Special Issue but was published separately in a normal issue of *Educational Philosophy and Theory*:

> Alirezabeigi, S., Masschelein, J., & Decuypere, M. (2020). The agencement of taskification: On new forms of reading and writing in BYOD schools. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *52*(14), 1514–1525. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2020.1716335.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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