
Juan Luis Vives on Study Notebooks: Education, Language and Epistemic Value

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Abstract: This paper outlines Juan Luis Vives' (1493–1540) instructions for the creation and management of a study notebook, contained in his *De ratione studii puerilis Epistolae duae* (1524) and *De disciplinis* (1531). It aims to show that this set of rules went beyond educational purposes, since it was consistent with Vives' conception of knowledge, and in particular with the characteristics that he attributed to language. Recent studies have rightly pointed out that his ideas about knowledge and language were in line with the anti-scholastic trend of the time, which sought to move philosophical reflection from the abstract and metaphysical to the concrete and empirical. The paper argues that Vives' reflections on notebooks and note-taking were part of the same project, since his notebook was the main ground for organizing the empirical level of knowledge.

Keywords: Juan Luis Vives, Notebooks, Education, Knowledge, Language

1. Introduction

In the twenty books that make up the treatise *De Disciplinis*, Juan Luis Vives (1493–1540) devoted much space to the strategies young people can adopt to learn. He described the acquisition of knowledge as a complex student-led performance, of which he considered the different types of action that comprised it. Vives evaluated the pros and cons of each of them, the senses that were involved in each case, and after careful review he also decreed which one was best. Among the various activities that students could avail themselves of, Vives recommends one above all: “Let them be convinced that nothing conduces more truly to wide learning than to write much and often, and to use up a great deal of paper and ink.”¹ In the subsequent pages of the treatise, he therefore offered specific instructions on how to obtain and retain new knowledge through the use of one's own notebooks, that is, how to implement that “much and often” that he declared essential.

The description of a personal document of notes is a topic to which Vives devoted considerable attention. His reflections encompassed many aspects of the relationship between learning and writing, and his recommendations addressed both boys and girls. They took into consideration the age of the writer and applied several of the types of handwritten note ordering practiced at the time, sometimes combining them.

This paper will outline Vives' most important instructions for creating a study notebook, demonstrating that this set of rules went beyond educational purposes. It was consistent with a certain conception of knowledge held by the Spanish-born humanist and, in particular, with the characteristics he attributed to language. Recent studies have rightly pointed out that his ideas about knowledge and language were in line with the anti-scholastic trend of the time, which sought to move philosophical reflection from the abstract and metaphysical to the concrete and empirical.² The notebook was also part of the same purpose, understood as a canvas for experiencing and organizing the empirical level of knowledge.

Vives' instructions for the preparation of study notebooks were not an exception in the pedagogical literature of the time. On the contrary, they were part of a vast tradition that has been the subject of considerable scholarship.³ Manuals advising how to create and organize one's own notebook circulated widely. Their goal was to practice learning effectively, while the moral aspect was never far away. They were also available in collections by various authors.⁴ Studies have focused both on the theoretical instructions for annotation contained in the manuals and on the types of annotation that flourished at the time. Thanks to a large amount of available documentation, it has been possible, for example, to identify different types of miscellaneous notebooks and even to create valuable glossaries. In the case of study and academic notebooks, it has also been possible to identify the various stages of writing a manuscript document.⁵

Dealing with the characteristics of the notebook and guidance for its proper use recur in more than one of Vives' works; the following pages will focus on two such cases that were produced several years apart, providing an example of his continued interest in the subject. The first is *De ratione studii puerilis Epistolae duae*, first printed in 1524; the other is the aforementioned *De disciplinis*, his monumental work published in Antwerp in 1531.⁶

2. Vives' multiple notebooks

De ratione studii consists of two letters addressed to a boy and a girl, respectively. One letter is addressed to Charles Mountjoy, son of influential courtier William Blount 4th Baron Mountjoy; the other letter is addressed to Princess Mary, daughter of Queen Catherine of Aragon.⁷ It is a relatively short text, and for this reason it circulated in print along with other works. It was first pub-

lished along with other brief texts by the Spanish-born humanist, but it was also included in manuals on study method, which became popular from the 1530s onward and that collected the writings of various authors.⁸

The instructions that Vives set forth in the two letters are aimed at young students, as Charles and Mary were about seven years old when the volume was dedicated to them.⁹ Therefore, these were rules aimed at those who were learning to read and write and included basic information for those in the early stages of learning.¹⁰ The letters are structured in titled paragraphs, and the titles allow for an overview of the different themes covered in the work, even revealing the recurrence of some of them, appearing in both of the letters. For example, there are paragraphs “Lectio,” “Memoria,” “Annotationes,” “Sermo,” and “Syntaxis” in both of them. Their order changes from one letter to the other. Also worth noting is the fact that “Lectio” appears twice in the first letter and that the paragraph “Annotationes” in the first letter is in the exordium, while in the second letter it closes it. Care must be taken, however, in establishing, through titles alone, the themes that prevail in one letter or the other, as if to indicate that there are differences between boys’ and girls’ education. For example, in the letter addressed to Charles, information about readings by authors who are also distinguished by categories according to subject matter prevails in the second part. In the letter to Mary the focus appears, however, to be Latin grammar. In truth the difference is only apparent, it is mainly in the titles not in the general content.¹¹

Ways to develop one’s own notebook is a theme that appears in various parts of the text, but it is the paragraphs that recur in both the instructions to Charles and Mary entitled “Memoria” and “Annotationes” that contain the most extensive treatment.

As a general premise, and the first aspect worthy of attention, it is necessary to keep in mind that the notebook described by Vives in his works is multifaceted. This is evident in his suggestion that the physical characteristics of the notebook should vary according to the notes it contains. In other words, as its internal structure changes, the external form also changes, giving rise, in the case of *De ratione studii*, to three different types of notebooks Vives dwelled upon at different times.

The first of these notebooks is suggested to Mary by providing essential instructions for creating it: “Prepare for yourself a little booklet of blank paper in which you will write those little sentences in your own hand which you will send to memory.”¹² Vives explains later that that notebook is to become for the young princess her own manual, or dagger, playing on the double meaning of the term *enchiridion* as Erasmus of Rotterdam had already done with his *Enchiridion militis christiani*.¹³ However, it becomes clear that the internal arrangement of this personal document is far from the commonplace book system popular at the time. The annotations concern only short sentences, “sententioles,” and do not follow any organizing principle. The model appears similar to the medieval florilegia with the goal of exercising writing on the one hand and supporting memory on the other. It is a notebook that is shaped like a container that is perpetually being updated, allowing ongoing exercise of the mind through writing, which is the act through which mnemon-

ic skills can be activated (“memoriae mandatura est”). For example, Vives explained to Princess Mary that the things that we write ourselves with our own hand persist better in memory than those written by others.¹⁴

Again, in his instructions addressed to Charles, Vives dwelled on the relationship between memory and knowledge, observing that without the former, one cannot have any knowledge as any effort to acquire it becomes futile. Recalling the myth of the Danaids whom Zeus had condemned to carry and pour water into a barrel with a pierced bottom for eternity, he remarked that knowledge without memory is like water introduced into a pierced jar “pertusum dolium”¹⁵ that inevitably loses its contents. For this reason, he urged the student that a concept or simply a word he wanted to memorize should always be taken out of context and noted down in order to remember it and reuse it in the future.

The second type of notebook is also offered to Princess Mary, but in this case the document has a larger format than the previous one: “Let the learner also keep with her a somewhat larger notebook in which she personally notes down the useful words for everyday life, rare or elegant, found as she goes along in the authors she reads, and also the witty and pleasing sentences or those that are serious or acute, which may constitute an example for her life.”¹⁶

Here the larger notebook format corresponds to a more varied content than in the previous notebook. Vives, however, does not speak of “capita” or “loci” that identify topics, but rather of types of words and phrases. That is, the categories that structure this kind of notebook refer to vocabulary and grammar and do not aim to provide descriptive elements of reality as is the case with a phrasebook or a commonplace book.¹⁷ The clustering process of its contents is guided by two criteria, one based on the principle of general usefulness for the enhancement of knowledge, the other on the pursuit of personal gratification and delight.

This very type of notebook is also described in another Vives’s work the *Introductio ad sapientia*.¹⁸ The text consists of a collection of precepts of various themes and lengths, among which we read: “You will keep a little book of paper where you will note down whether you have read or heard something pleasant, something elegant, something wise, or something refined, something rare, something useful for everyday speech, which you keep ready at hand if the situation calls for.”¹⁹

Some instructions already present in the *De ratione studii*, such as those regarding the importance of exercising writing, are also found in Vives’ *Introductio ad sapientia* (1524), for example, in the precept number 176 “Write, transcribe, rewrite frequently, and annotate”. The whole book is arranged in precepts grouped into thematic chapters that basically provide examples for developing the notebook itself, i.e., they are “model” contents with topics ranging from moral rulings, education, to the care of the body and relationships with others. One could assume a conjoint reading of the *De ratione studii* and the *Introductio ad sapientia* in which the former text presented guidelines for learning and using a notebook, while the latter put pre-selected and ordered materials at hand to begin composing one’s own notes.

Coming back to *De ratione studii*, there is still one last

notebook described by Vives that is recommended in this case to Charles. From a physical point of view, it is a “book of pure paper of right measure” (“librum chartæ puræ justæ magnitudinis”), i.e., it is not specified as to its format, or what qualifies such right measure, or, in particular, whether its dimensions are larger or smaller than the previous two. The main recommendation is to organize the notebook,

which you will divide into certain places and as nests, in one of them you will note the words used for daily use, both of soul and body, our actions, games, clothes, times, dwellings, and food; in another rare information, and in another wittily, and in another skillfully pronounced; in another sayings and formulas of speech, or which few understand, or which are often used; in another maxims; in another holidays; in another witty sayings; in another the difficult passages of writers, and all such other things as shall be seen by you or your teacher; and thus you shall have carefully recorded and arranged all these things, so that you know not only the book: you should read, reread, memorize, and commit to memory, so that the actions contained in the writings will be no less in your bosom than in the book, and they will come to you as often as you need them.²⁰

The sectional structure of the notebook just described is more elaborate than that of the two notebooks previously proposed to Princess Mary. However, even in this case the “headings” do not stand for topics but continue to be titles for ordering types of expressions, as in the patterns observed earlier.

In the final part of the passage, moreover, the exhortation to take deep ownership of the contents of one’s notebook makes use of a reference to the learner’s corporeality. The paper document is no longer just one’s personal manual of knowledge, as its contents are broken down into actions that migrate from the notebook to its creator. As seen with regard to the use of the hand, the involvement of the body in the learning process would, according to Vives, facilitate memory.²¹ In the last type of notebook presented by Vives, there is also a kind of backward journey from the document to the person in which the learner accepts the annotated actions in his or her chest and completely appropriates them, making them part of himself or herself.

3. Senses and writing practice

The advice to take notes and have one’s own notebook returns in Vives’ mature work, the aforementioned *De disciplinis*, where we also see a considerable broadening of the theme. The treatise is divided into three sections delimiting different subject areas: the 7-book *De causis corruptarum artium*, which contains a critique of the decadence of the disciplines of study; the 5-book *De tradendis disciplinis*, which illustrates a reformative and pedagogical project; and finally the 3-book *De artibus*, which brings together a series of texts on linguistic, grammatical, rhetorical, and dialectical topics.

Reflections on types of annotations are concentrated in the second section, *De tradendis disciplinis*, and are introduced by some observations regarding the relationship between the senses and learning: “I only call that knowledge” Vives pointed out “which we receive when

the senses are properly brought to observe things and in a methodical way, to which clear reason leads us on.”²² Among the senses, the Spanish-born humanist then focused on hearing, emphasizing its importance in the cognitive process: “hearing is the medium of learning,” noting that “those living beings who lack the power of listening are not capable of learning.”²³

Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* was clearly echoed in his words. In the first book, one reads that living beings who cannot hear sounds, for example the bee, are unable to learn, while those which, in addition to memory, also have hearing may learn.²⁴ If the Greek philosopher placed the sense of sight alongside the sense of hearing, as sight allows one to acquire more new knowledge than the other senses, Vives developed the topic of the sense of hearing by introducing the subject of writing practice. It represented a tool through which the student could practice hearing, as he first listened to his teachers and then wrote down what they had said in his own book of notes.

As already observed in *De ratione studii*, more than one model of notebook also appears in *De tradendis disciplinis*, and these are again examples in which types of notebooks are distinguished in different sizes according to their contents and organization. The first of these seems to reproduce only in more detail the third type of notebook already described in the letter to Charles in his handbook on the method of study:

let each boy have an empty paper book divided into several parts to receive all that falls from his teacher’s lips, since this is not less valuable to him than precious stones. In one division let him put down separate and single words. In another proper ways of speaking and turns of speech, which are in daily use; and again, rare expressions, or such as are not generally known and explained. In a separate division, let him make history notes; in another notes of anecdotes; in another, clever expressions, and weighty judgments; in another, witty and acute sayings; in another, proverbs; in other divisions, names of well-known men of high birth, famous towns, animals, plants, and strange stones. In another part, explanations of difficult passages in the author. In another, doubtful passages, which are still unsolved. These beginnings seem simple and bare, but later he will clothe and ornament them.²⁵

While the divisions and cases echo the description of the notebook recommended for Charles, and hearing maintains a key role in the transit of knowledge from the teacher’s “lips” to the notebook, differences also appear. In this case, there are no instructions to divide the document into sections because the notebook appears already structured and ready for use. In the final part, moreover, it is urged to note down even what one does not understand, as there will be an opportunity to return in time to all the notes made to introduce additions and changes. Two different pieces of information are thus introduced. The first is that even what appears inscrutable and too complex still needs to be put into an organized structure. The second is that the notebook is an open text, the drafting of which includes preliminary and subsequent stages to that of writing through listening. In Vives’ view, it was a transitional notebook, that is, a preparatory document for making a new, more articulated version into which the contents of the first would flow. The humanist was not slow to introduce a more evolved version of the notebook, pre-

senting a second model that also had a larger format than the previous one:

The boy should also have a larger book in which he can put all the notes expounded and developed at length by the teacher, also what he reads for himself in the best writers, or the sayings which he observes used by others; and just as he has certain divisions and headings in his note-books, so let him make indexes of these places for himself and distinguish them by headings in order to know what he shall enter into each division.²⁶

Once again, the size of the notebook corresponds to a peculiar arrangement within it that appears the most elaborate compared to all the notebooks previously described by the author in *De ratione studii* and *De tradendis disciplinis*. In addition to the sense of hearing, here the sense of sight is also added, enabling the student to carry out a series of focused readings. The various contents of this notebook could in fact be ideally separated into the two macro areas from which the subject draws knowledge, namely, what he hears and what he reads. In both cases, the teacher's lecture and the books, it is still always the student who chooses what to note down by deciding from time to time the importance of a given piece of information and then its placement in the notebook. After all, Vives left room for self-study and had already dwelled on its importance in *De ratione studii*. As much as the work was addressed to two very young students, he urged Charles to be first and foremost a teacher to himself: "beware that in a short time you may be a great instructor to yourself, and from that first class of good men, who know everything through their own faculties."²⁷

As noted, at the beginning of the first book of *De tradendis disciplinis*, Vives stated that the senses coupled with a "methodical way" were the means of acquiring knowledge. In the description of the last type of notebook, it was made clear what the characteristics of that way would lead to it, that is, organizing the contents grasped by the senses into *capita*.

Because of the variety of knowledge Vives' student was tasked with collecting, the document was reminiscent of the *Noctes Atticae* by the Roman writer and jurist Aulus Gellius, which brought together literary, philosophical, legal, and antiquarian annotations. If, however, Gellius claimed that he put the material together in no particular order—and that the disorder would indeed increase his reader's curiosity—in Vives' notebook that fragmentation was countered. Indeed, in both types of notebooks described in *De tradendis disciplinis*, the use of indexes was recommended. And in the last notebook described in the treatise, Vives suggests using *loci* to organize a wide variety of notes and even transcriptions of works or parts of works, which characterized miscellaneous manuscripts.

In other words, Vives considered all of the various types of manuscript notes of the time and combined them with each other, but also attempted to establish an internal organization. As will be seen in the next section, it is not far-fetched to speculate that some of the tools of rhetoric and dialectic may have influenced his instructions for organizing the notes in the notebooks described in *De tradendis disciplinis*. More generally, looking at Vives' notebooks as a whole, they seem to reflect some of the most salient aspects of his positions on the nature of language and the knowability of reality.

4. Note-taking, language, and reality

The material feature that first jumps out at us about Vives' notebooks is the link that is established between the content of the document and its dimensions. During the sixteenth century, the publishing world had begun to associate specific corresponding book formats with literary genres. In the case of his notebook, however, the format did not correspond to a given literary genre but rather the complexity of the content, thus materially distinguishing different orders of knowledge. Put differently, the document would correspond to one's space of action as one selects, organizes, and ultimately diversifies one's knowledge. The broader or more complex the subject, the greater the space needed to accommodate it.

Along with the complexity of the varied information and structure it contains, Vives' notebook also appears linked to the stages of the individual's education. Indeed, it turns out to be shaped by the abilities and needs of its creator, moving from being a stimulus for memory in childhood to becoming a refined product of writing and an extension of intelligence in maturity. Charles and Mary, as still children, will have a notebook where they jot down first simple words, then sentences and short speeches in a crescendo of complexity. Its function as a more or less orderly archive to support memory is not of secondary importance. If in *De ratione studii* knowledge without memory was described as water in a perforated jar, in *De tradendis disciplinis* the link between memory and knowledge is stated again. Here memory is defined as consisting of two actions: "quick comprehension and faithful retention; we quickly comprehend what we understand, we retain what we have often and carefully confided to our memory. Both are helped by arrangement of facts, so that we can even recall what has passed away."²⁸

Providing order to the information in the process of its comprehension and memorization plays a key role, and this is achieved by following Vives' instructions for the internal organization of notebooks. The image that eventually arises is that of a document that is a malleable tool capable of adapting and reflecting the various stages of human learning.

If the notebook changes according to the complexity of its content and the maturity of its creator or user, then it is possible to identify consistencies between the characteristics of these documents and Vives' reflection on the relationship between language and the stages of human life. Moreover, looking at his multifaceted notebooks from a broader perspective also highlights their similarity to Vives' idea of reality, which is equally multifaceted.

In *De tradendis disciplinis*, language is defined in two ways. It is the means for the aggregation of individuals, that is, it has a social dimension because it "bound them to move as closely as possible among one another in an indivisible, perpetual society."²⁹ At the same time, language is a tool that enables the transit of information from inside to outside and from outside to inside the subject. More specifically, the language is used both to express what is going on inside the mind and to provide the mind with some knowledge of the surrounding environment.³⁰ In both uses, however, social and epistemic, Vives warned that language had not always been the same. It went through stages of development corresponding to the

history of man on earth, moving from simple sign systems of communication to increasingly complex structures. Initially, the man who was aware of having “tender body, exposed as it was to injury from the weather and the sun”³¹ was completely committed to his own survival and possessed only elementary language. The language corresponding to this stage of human history on earth consisted of single words and nouns concatenated with each other; there were no syncategorematic words (such as “all,” “if,” “and,” “unless,” “only,” and “except”), and there was also a lack of terminology for grammatical and logical categories.³² As survival concerns began to diminish, phrases and idioms were gradually added to language as well.³³

Language grew in complexity as

man’s mind, freed from anxiety for the needs of the present, began to live again, and to contemplate leisurely, as it were, this theatre, in which man was placed by God [...]. Curiosity led him forward, and when he thought he had made a discovery, he felt great joy as if from a victory. That pleasure was constantly increasing, since some things seemed to follow from the finding of others, just as when the beginning of a thread is secured, it is found to be connected with another set of things quite different from those which were being examined. Then, in showing his inventions as if they were children born from himself, he derived pleasure by no means small in imparting them to others.³⁴

Language makes it possible to describe things that are contained in reality, but it has also gone through different stages of complexity, depending on the conditions of man’s life on earth. First, a simple language consisting only of words, and then gradually more and more complex. As seen, the notebook described by Vives also is employed to grasp and fix the reality that the subject experiences and, like language, goes through different stages of complexity that correspond to the evolutionary stages of man. Corresponding to these stages are different types of notebooks, ranging from the simplest and most elementary, such as the first two recommended to Princess Mary, where “words for everyday life” are noted, to increasingly complex structures. It is clear that, rather than describing reality as they observed it, the children of *De ratione studii* were advised to collect words and phrases mostly based on their reading of authors and the lessons of their teachers. In his works, Vives often emphasizes observation, but it would be a stretch to read this general kind of empiricism even into his fairly general instructions that focus on reading, listening to the teacher, and exercising. What is relevant here is the parallel that can be drawn between language development and notebook types.

In Vives’ advanced version of the notebook presented in *De tradendis disciplinis*, however, what the subject observes and learns from different sources and with the use of different senses is recorded. In it, words and phrases were eventually ordered with *loci*, which served as labels that facilitated the transition from reality to the mind. Vives was thus echoing reflections around the value of the sermocinal arts conducted by ancient thinkers such as Cicero, Quintilian, and Boethius and by contemporaries such as Rudolph Agricola.

For Vives, labels were thematic, relating to a variety of topics and deriving from consideration of what things had in common with one another.³⁵ By identifying simi-

larities between things, they could thus be grouped into categories. In other words, *topics* related what was known to what was not, guiding both human argumentative and cognitive activity. That is, they were the basis of a useful method not only for organizing any kind of discourse and analyzing texts, but also providing a grid for knowledge management.

Vives’ labels were also not embedded in a hierarchy of universals, as had been the case in the scholastic school of thought. They would somehow reside in individual things and be grounded in reality alone, as things were grouped into classes based on what humans could observe about them with their senses, that is, empirically. The starting point, as noted above, was the repeated observation of reality in the Aristotelian mode, but it was stripped of all transcendence and metaphysical abstraction. This gave rise to a kind of “horizontal ontology” as effectively defined by Lodi Nauta³⁶

The use of *loci* as tools for organizing knowledge was consistent with the general trend of the time and of anti-scholastic calls for moving philosophical thinking away from the abstract and general toward the concrete and singular. Vives shared with humanists like Lorenzo Valla, Mario Nizolio, and the aforementioned Agricola a critique of philosophical abstraction that went along with a critique of linguistic abstraction.³⁷

While some, such as Valla and Erasmus, had pitted the tools of philology against the formalism of scholastic logic, Vives had made a different choice, one that also left its mark on the instructions for organizing the notebooks in *De tradendis disciplinis*. He followed in the footsteps of Agricola, who had first developed a scheme of rhetorically derived *loci* in his *De inventione dialecticae*.³⁸ To Agricola’s scheme, Vives added a description of how to apply it in a concrete way through the use of a notebook, which also offered the possibility of managing and organizing a gradually increasing volume of knowledge. In the works of the Spanish-born humanist, the limits of human knowledge, based on his senses and devoid of abstractions, is a recurring theme that helped build an image of the thinker marked by epistemological pessimism and skepticism. Also contributing to this image was the author’s focus on the study of knowledge of the probable in his reform of the disciplines, which was accompanied by the exposition of the picture of nature and its intimate structure: “The first precept in the contemplation and discussion of nature, is that since we cannot gain any certain knowledge from it, we must not indulge ourselves too much in examining and inquiring into those things which we can never attain.”³⁹

A moderate skepticism also served Vives as a *destruens* tool to polemicize with the scholasticism, which considered logical syllogism the only way to achieve human knowledge; instead, the *pars construens* of his thought was entrusted with important instructions for organizing and preserving one’s knowledge, such as those for arranging a notebook. By constantly returning to the theme of the notebook with its various notes and formats, the philosopher was outlining a method for constructing one’s own knowledge, the only possible one, while at the same time reaffirming his polemic against the language of scholasticism, which was considered insufficient to describe the variety inherent in reality. Recover-

ing the original function of words as an expression of realities was the goal behind his recommendations, clearly expressed from the very first pages of *De tradendis disciplinis*: “Whatever is in the arts” Vives warned, referring to the different branches of knowledge “was in nature first, just as pearls are in shells, or gems in the sand, but because the dull eyes of many men passed them by without notice, they were pointed out by men, more alert, and the latter were called discoverers.”⁴⁰

The inventors evoked in the passage were not epic or extraordinary figures, but simply those who were able to detect what was hidden and give order to knowledge through the reworking of what they experience:

We award also the same honour to those who have collected rules from experiences, e.g. Hippocrates, who, as is related by M. Varro, collected the rules of medicine which were found in the Temple of Aesculapius and from them made formulae, and in fact formed a conception of the art. But those who bring together scattered facts and make clear what is confused, and explain the involved, and bring light and clearness to what is obscure, have also obtained the name of discoverers.⁴¹

The inventors such as Hippocrates collected and ordered in their own annotations what was discovered by their senses or those of others, and “this material, collected by men of great and distinguished intellect, constituted the branches of knowledge”.⁴²

5. Conclusion

The educational sphere and the epistemic sphere seem to proceed hand in hand in Vives’ thought, as his instruction in note-taking reflects a specific vision of reality. In line with this vision, the Spanish humanist described knowledge management in its practical dimension, attributing a key role to the use of the notebook. That is, he showed that cognitive experience is exquisitely empirical and that it was realized by the individual who can “bring together scattered facts and make clear what is confused.” If the encyclopedic approach to reality was supported by the senses, sorting into *loci* eventually allowed the mind to discover the reality that was described and preserved in physical documents, the notebooks.

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, the early modern instructions for the composition of study notebooks and the transition from different types of notebooks have been the subject of careful study. Research interest was stimulated by the abundance of recommendations available in the treatises and manuals of the time and based on theoretical, taxonomic and administrative principles.⁴³ Practices and methods of various kinds have often been related to documentary sources, and several stimulating case studies produced between the 16th century and the first half of the 17th have emerged in archives.

In the notebooks described by Vives, there appears to be a comprehensive record of the types of annotations, such as *florilegia*, commonplace collections, and miscellanea. This includes both disappearing and emerging methods of note-taking. More intriguing, however, is the possibility of observing this range of cases in relation to Vives’s view of reality and language.

A few decades later, thinkers such as Francis Bacon and John Locke would carefully consider the use of notebooks through the eyes of the epistemologist, aiming to include them in their method of organizing knowledge.⁴⁴ In early modern Europe, Vives’ instructions on notebooks can be seen as an early attempt in the same direction, highlighting a line of humanistic empiricism with broad temporal boundaries that would include Vives himself. While in fact the major expressions of this line are certainly Bacon’s reflections, taken up and developed by Locke, Vives’ analysis of notebooks could be placed at the very beginning of the same tradition of thought.

Notes

¹ Juan Luis Vives, *Opera omnia*, ed. by G. Mayans y Siscár, 8 vols. (Valencia: Monfort, 1782–90), reprinted London: Gregg Press, 1964), III, 3. Henceforth abbreviated as *Opera omnia*. Unless otherwise stated all quotations from *De Disciplinis* are to *On Education. A translation of the De tradendis disciplinis of Juan Luis Vives*, Foster Watson (ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913) 108. Henceforth abbreviated as *On education*. On Vives see C. Fantazzi, ed., *A Companion to Juan Luis Vives* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); L. Casini, “Juan Luis Vives”, in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford, CA, 2021).

² Within this trend there were obviously many differences. See Alan Perreiah, *Renaissance Truths: Humanism, Scholasticism and the Search for the Perfect Language* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), in particular chapters 4 e 5 and Lodi Nauta, “De-essentializing the World: Valla, Agricola, Vives, and Nizolio on Universals and Topics”, in A. Frazier and P. Nold (eds.), *Essays in Renaissance Thought and Letters: In Honor of John Monfasani* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 196–215.

³ See Ann Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Jacob Soll, “From Note-Taking to Data Banks: Personal and Institutional Information Management in Early Modern Europe”, *Intellectual History Review*, 20, 3 (2010), 355–75; Richard Yeo, *Notebooks, English Virtuosi, and Early Modern Science* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014); Alberto Cevoloni (ed.), *Forgetting Machines: Knowledge Management Evolution in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

⁴ Prominent among them were the names of Erasmus of Rotterdam and Philip Melancthon. See Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought*, especially chapters 5 and 6; Valentina Lepri, “Note-Taking with Method: Remarks on the Theories of Knowledge in Early Modern *De ratione studii* Manuals”, in Valentina Lepri (ed.), *Knowledge Shaping. Student Note-taking Practices in Early Modernity* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023), 9–28.

⁵ In this research area, it has been made clear, for example, that the drafting of a notebook could vary from two types up to six, as in the case of notes produced in Jesuit circles. See Ann M. Blair, “Student Manuscripts and the Textbook”, in Emidio Campi, Simone de Angelis, Anja-Silvia Goeing, and Anthony Grafton (eds.), *Scholarly Knowledge: Textbooks in Early Modern Europe* (Geneva: Droz, 2008), 39–73; 39–40, Ann M. Blair, “The Rise of Note-Taking in Early Modern Europe”, *Intellectual History Review*, 20 (2010), 303–16; Paul Nelles, “Libros de papel, libri bianchi, libri papyracei. Note-Taking Techniques and the Role of Student Notebooks in the Early Jesuit Colleges”, *Archivum Historicum Societatis Jesu*, 76 (2007), 75–112; 85.

⁶ Juan Luis Vives, *De disciplinis libri XX* (Antwerp: Michael Hillenius Hoochstratanus, 1531). References to the use of the notebook can also be found in Vives’ *Introductio ad sapientia* (1524) and *De ratione dicendi* (1533). For the former, see footnote 14, for the latter see Juan Luis Vives, *De ratione dicendi*, ed. by David Walker (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 118, 33.

⁷ The composition of *De ratione studii* corresponds to the beginning of the author’s stay in England (1523–1528?) where he was able to attend the royal court, teach at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and come into contact with prominent figures in the English cultural milieu of the time, such as Thomas More.

⁸ See *supra* footnote 4.

⁹ Charles Mountjoy and Princess Mary were both born in 1516. In 1527, Vives became the latter's tutor.

¹⁰ Since one of the two letters, Vives' *Satellitium animi* and another work by Vives, *De Institutione Feminae Christianae* (written in 1523), dealt with women's education, they have been the subject of a number of studies. See Juan Luis Vives, *The Education of a Christian Woman: A Sixteenth-Century Manual*, ed. by Charles Fantazzi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Gloria Kaufman, "Juan Luis Vives on the Education of Women", *Signs*, 3/4 (Summer, 1978), 891–6, Anthony Douglas Cousins, "Humanism, Female Education, and Myth: Erasmus, Vives, and More's 'To Candidus'", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 65, No. 2 (Apr., 2004), 213–30.

¹¹ Within the paragraphs, as additional an example, suggestions related to grammar to the young nobleman are of equal measure to those to the princess, as those of authors and readings also dot the letter to the young princess. In both ideal libraries for the two students, there are also both ancient and coeval works. These become examples for understanding and practicing communication skills and the use of "sermo" and "syntaxis," that is, for the application of grammar to writing in its various genres.

¹² My translation. "Conficiat sibi libellum ex vacua charta, in quo sua manu conscribat sententias, quas memoriae mandatura est, eritque ei vice cuiusdam enchiridii." *Opera omnia*, 1782, 266.

¹³ Vives' circle included Erasmus of Rotterdam, and a number of letters between the two humanists testify to this. In one of them dated March 18, 1527, Vives informed Erasmus that his *Enchiridion militis christiani* had been translated into Spanish and read with interest. See Alexander Dalzell (trans.), Charles G. Nauert (ed.), "The Correspondence of Erasmus: Letters 1658–1801 (1526–27)", in *The Collected Works of Erasmus* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 12, 482–485: 483 (letter 1792).

¹⁴ "Magis haerent memoriae quae nos ipsi manu nostra scripsimus, quam quae alii" (Vives 1782, 258). Similarly, Erasmus in his *De copia* had described the use of the hand as a tool that supports memory (Erasmus 1971, 118–9, Erasmus 1978, 671). The common source for both humanists, however, was Quintilian's *De institutio oratoriae*: "Non est inutile iis quae difficiliter haereant aliquas adponere notas, quarum recordatio commoneat at quasi excitet memoriam," Quintilian, *The Orator's Education*, Loeb Classical Library, V, Book 11, 2, 72–73.

¹⁵ *Opera omnia*, 1782, 271. In Ovid., *Metamorphoses*, 4, 463.

¹⁶ "Habeat librum vacuum majusculum, in quem manu sua con jiciat tum verba, si qua, inter legendum graves auctores, inciderunt vel utilia usui quotidiano, vel rara, vel elegantia; tum loquendi formulas argutas, venustas, lepidas, eruditas; tum sen tentias graves, facetas, acutas, urbanas, falsas; et historias ex qui bus exemplum vitae suae possit petere". *Opera omnia*, 1782, 268. The passage is found in the "Annotations" paragraph addressed to Princess Mary.

¹⁷ Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought*, 134–7.

¹⁸ The work was compiled, like the *De ratione studii*, during Vives' stay in England. *Introductio ad sapientia* is dedicated to Mary Tudor, sister of Henry VIII, and published by Dirk Martens in 1524 along with Vives' *Satellitium animi sive symbola*.

¹⁹ My translation from *Introductio ad sapientia*. Koen Vermeir, "Education and the Cultivation of the Early Modern Self: Cultura Animi as Self-Care in Juan Luis Vives", *Early Science and Medicine*, 28/1 (2023), 63–94.

²⁰ "Compones tibi librum chartae purae justae magnitudinis, quem in certos locos ac velut nidos partieris: in uno eorum annotabis vocabula usui quotidiani, velut animi, corporis, actionum nostrarum, ludorum, vestium, temporum, habitaculorum, ciborum: in altero vocabula rara, exquisita: in alio idiomatica et formulas loquendi, vel quas pauci intelligunt, vel quibus crebro est utendum dum: in alio sententias: in alio festive, in alio argute dicta: in alio proverbialia: in alio scriptorum difficiles locos, et quae alia tibi aut institutorum tuo videbuntur: sicque haec omnia habebis annotata et digesta, ne solus sciat liber: tibi legenda, relegenda, memoriae mandanda atque infigenda sunt, ut non minus scripta gestes in pectore, quam in libro: et occurrant, quoties erit opus." *Opera omnia*, 1782, 272. These instructions were addressed to Charles in the "Annotations" paragraph.

²¹ Another example of the body's influence on the memorization process can be seen in Vives' recurrent recommendations for healthy living.

"What one learns just before one goes to sleep is far more vividly reproduced in the morning than what one learns at any other time, provided one has gone to bed, neither oppressed by drinking, or by eating to excess, nor weary and exhausted for want of food" *Opera omnia*, I, 3, *On education*, 109.

²² *Opera omnia*, I, 2, *On education*, 22.

²³ *Opera omnia*, I, 3, *On education*, 107.

²⁴ Meth. I, 1 980a–b.

²⁵ *Opera omnia*, III, 3, *On education*, 108.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ "tu annitere ut brevi tempore ipse tibi magnus sis monitor, et ex primo illo bonorum genere, per se qui omnia norunt," *Opera omnia*, 1782, 280.

²⁸ *Opera omnia*, III, 3, *On education*, 109.

²⁹ *On education*, I, 1, 14.

³⁰ See Lodi Nauta, "The Order of Knowing: Juan Luis Vives on Language, Thought, and the Topics", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 76, 3 (2015), 325–34: 330–4; Valerio Del Nero, *Linguaggio e filosofia in Vives. L'organizzazione del sapere nel «De disciplinis» (1531)*, (Padua: CLUEB, 1991) and more in general Richard Waswo, "The Reaction of Juan Luis Vives To Valla's Philosophy Of Language", *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme Et Renaissance*, 42, 3 (1980), 595–609 and *Language and Meaning in the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

³¹ *On education*, I, 1, 12.

³² For these Vives used the traditional naming of secondary words (secundaria) or word words (nominum nomina).

³³ On the words that are employed to express what has been thought by the mind, see Nauta, "The Order of Knowing," 330.

³⁴ *On education*, I, 1, 16.

³⁵ For instance, quality, substance, action, cause and effect—on this, see Nauta, "The Order of Knowing", 338.

³⁶ See Nauta, "The Order of Knowing", 344. To Lodi Nauta, we owe the most in-depth analysis on Vives' thinking with regard to the ordering of knowledge.

³⁷ See Lodi Nauta, "The Critique of Scholastic Language in Renaissance Humanism and Early Modern Philosophy", in Cecilia Muratori and Gianni Paganini (eds.), *Early Modern Philosophers, and the Renaissance Legacy* (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2016), 59–79 and more in general Erika Rummel, *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance and Reformation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

³⁸ In Agricola's view, the production of knowledge is a two-step process. The first is to arrange the headings (capita) taken from rhetorical topics, used to identify arguments and arrange them in the discourse. The second is a reading in which two systems will be in place. In the first one, the words used in a given text are analyzed in relation to other terms that the author could have chosen; in the second one, the topical invention is applied to the key words of a given topic. See Peter Mack, *Renaissance Argument: Valla and Agricola in the Traditions of Rhetoric and Dialectic*, Leiden and New York: Brill, 127. Agricola was echoed in the works of Vives and especially in *De tradendis disciplinis*, where Quintilian for the ancients and Agricola for the contemporaries were referred to as models of style and language (Mack, *Renaissance Argument*, 304–306 and 314–315).

³⁹ *On education*, IV, 1, 166. The features of Vives' skepticism have been the subject of thorough analysis, identifying in it both elements of anti-intellectualism in controversy with Aristotelianism and academic skepticism. See José A. Fernández Santamaría, *Juan Luis Vives: Escepticismo y prudencia en el Renacimiento* (Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 1990); José A. Fernández Santamaría, *The Theater of Man: J. L. Vives on Society* (Philadelphia, PA: Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, 1998); Lorenzo Casini, 'Self-Knowledge, Scepticism and the Quest for a New Method: Juan Luis Vives on Cognition and the Impossibility of Perfect Knowledge', in Gianni Paganini and José R. Maia Neto (eds), *Renaissance Scepticisms* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009), 33–60.

⁴⁰ *On education*, I, 2, 20.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Soll, "From Note-Taking to Data Banks: Personal and Institutional Information Management in Early Modern Europe", *Intellectual History Review*, 20,3 (2010), 355–75; Yeo, *Notebooks, English Virtuosi, and Early Modern Science*; Cevolini (ed.), *Forgetting Machines: Knowledge Management Evolution in Early Modern Europe*.

⁴⁴ See Richard Yeo, "Between Memory and Paperbooks: Baconianism and Natural History in Seventeenth-Century England", *History of Science*, 45 (2007), 1–46; *Notebooks, English Virtuosi, and Early Modern Science*, 86–87; "Thinking with Excerpts. John Locke (1632–1704) and his Note-Books", *Berichte zur Wissenschafts-Geschichte*, 43, 2 (2020), 180–202; Michael Stolberg, "John Locke's „New Method of Making Common-Place-Books: Tradition, Innovation and Epistemic Effects," *Early Science and Medicine* 19 (2014), 448–70.