



3.7 Learning methods as subject-matter

Whenever cultural mediation addresses the subject matters discussed in this chapter up to now, learning methods are also communicated, at least implicitly. We see this most clearly in connection with learning to play a musical instrument: techniques for practicing and developing interpretations constitute independent educational content in and of themselves in this context.

Cultural mediation focusing on works of art also transmits general and to no small degree normative knowledge about how to learn, though it often does so incidentally and without explicit acknowledgement. Participants learn what methods to use to read and interpret works, which aspects are important when interpreting them and which are not, how to approach the multiplicity of possible interpretations of artistic productions and what forms of expression, what vocabulary to use in describing them. It is not unusual for this to result in the creation of new forms of exclusion, which the cultural mediation was originally intended to prevent or even eliminate. One might see this when many specialized terms are used in director's talks or an exhibition tour. Or when phrases like "as you surely know" suggest to the audience that certain names or facts are generally known and that they should be familiar with them already from some other context.

Cultural mediators who aspire to a critical approach try to expose and question these norms in order to reinforce participants' autonomy and powers of judgement in engaging with art. A critical mediator aspires to a transparent transfer of knowledge, to analyze what is being taught and learned and what implicit content and unquestioned assumptions are being transported along the way.