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Practice First: Flipped Training for Gallery Educators

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by Andrew Palamara

In *Practice First: Flipped Training for Gallery Education*, an article in the latest issue of the *Journal of Museum Education*, author Andrew Palamara shares how his side job as a high school soccer coach, where practice on the field rather than viewing player tapes was most effective in making players proficient, inspired him to “flip” the learning model for training new docents at the Cincinnati Art Museum (CAM). His approach focused on making the practices of gallery teaching the main emphasis of in-class training sessions, with online webinars providing instruction in the museum’s discipline and gallery content. The following Reader Guide, developed in conjunction with the author, is offered to help foster reflection and conversation about the potential impact of such an approach at your museum.

You can [access the article online](#) through our publishing partner Taylor & Francis’s *Journal of Museum Education* web page.

1. What do you see as the strengths of your current docent training program? What do you see as its challenges?
2. What aspects of your current program might you want to change?
3. The author describes his thirty sessions of “flipped” training as a learning model where students spent the first nine sessions discussing and engaging with core aspects of gallery teaching techniques. In the balance of the course, students viewed webinars and did readings on their own, with class sessions emphasizing application of content to teaching with the museum’s collections.
 - Does this model differ from your training program? If so, how? In what ways is it similar?
4. During their in-class collections training, the CAM docent candidates “took turns leading the group

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in a discussion or gallery activity, using the methods they acquired in the first nine weeks of their training” (p.309).

- Do you think your own program needs more opportunities for your gallery educators to practice gallery teaching? If so, how might you create those opportunities?
 - Which aspects of gallery teaching do you think deserve more time to master?
5. The author discusses his use of the “flipped” or backward design process as identifying important skills for new docents to develop, and classifying the skills on a spectrum of low to high priority (p.307).
- What are the most important qualities or skills you think that your gallery educators need on a consistent basis?
 - The author’s choice of skills gives top priority to empathy and ways to engage visitors of all abilities, with knowledge of art history and gallery content as second, and roles of museum staff as last. In what ways are your choices similar to or different from the author’s?
6. In collaboration with the museum’s curators, the author created online webinars on the museum’s collection that modeled a regular gallery tour and focused on aspects of art that can be detected through observation (p.308). This required a degree of compromise and shared perspective between author and curators.
- When working with other staff on training materials, what do you have in common? Where do your objectives diverge?
 - Making significant changes to your docent training can affect other staff besides you. How might you manage the expectations and involvement of your colleagues in such changes?
7. The author says the structure of a flipped training model was beneficial in significant ways, including enabling CAM trainees to access webinar content more than once and to witness and take part in a wide range of gallery teaching methods throughout the course. But some “still expressed the desire to learn about art in a more traditional format” (p.310).
- When might it be necessary to cater to various learning styles in your gallery educator training?
 - When might it be necessary to prioritize one mode of learning over another?
 - Which concepts might be better suited for more traditional forms of learning?
8. After considering the issues and concepts explored in this reader guide, do you think your docent training program might benefit from changes in focus such as the author describes? If so, how might it benefit? What challenges do you think might arise?

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9. If you were to transform your training to a flipped model, consider which elements would be facilitated in person versus through print or digital materials. Use the following chart to help organize your thinking around your training process:

Topic / Content / Skill / Strategy	Training Mode		Instructional Approach(es) <i>(ex. group discussion, breakout activity, lecture)</i>
<i>Example:</i> Understanding visitor motivation	In person	x	<i>Role play using scenarios with different visitor identities.</i>
	Print media		
	Digital media		
	In person		
	Print media		
	Digital media		
	In person		
	Print media		
	Digital media		
	In person		
	Print media		
	Digital media		
	In person		
	Print media		
	Digital media		
	In person		
	Print media		
	Digital media		