

# Changing Perceptions

## Reconceptualizing Museums' Training Programs for Seasonal Educators

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### Background

- Museum educators are facilitators; bridge between visitors and museum collections
- Museum educators come from a wide variety of backgrounds, leading to difficulty in training
- Seasonal museum educators are unique in their short-term employment

### Preparation is often brief or insufficient

- No shared model of practice, no common body of knowledge or skills required
- Museum educators' training programs tend to focus on content or logistical knowledge, and ignore pedagogical and contextual knowledge

### Methodology

- Research questions:
  - (1) Delivery: how do museums train their seasonal staff?
  - (2) Topics: what do museums have their seasonal staff learn during training?
- Online survey sent to trainers of seasonal museum educators, open for 4 weeks
- Sent to museums and other informal educational institutions across Alberta, Canada
- 16 usable responses

### Results & Discussion

- Most museums small (50% only one to five full-time staff)

- 88% had initial training programs
- 94% had ongoing training programs

- 75% hired <7 seasonal staff yearly, yet relied on educators to provide programming and connect with visitors



Figure 1. Seasonal educator training program delivery methods, n=16. More than one response was accepted.

“Although I have the expertise to be able to train seasonal employees, with my enormous workload in an underfunded and understaffed institution, I do not have the time to properly train them.” – Respondent

- Challenges for trainers of seasonal educators: limited time, limited resources, opposition from others

- Seasonal educator training programs are similar to other museum educators' training programs



Figure 2. Seasonal educator training program delivery methods, n=16. More than one response was accepted.

“The training program is largely informal at this time. I would say there is not one yet developed.” – Respondent

- Yet, same respondent reported seasonal educators learned through reading, independent research, led through programs, subject matter and education/interpretation experts, and practice programs . . . . .

- Generally, reported programs were well rounded: varied delivery methods and topics

- Room for improvement: most time devoted to interpretation techniques and practice, balance with other important topics



Figure 3. Participants' combined hours spent on seasonal educator training program topics, n=15 (as one participant did not complete this section). More than one response was accepted.

### Implications

- Training sometimes unsatisfactory, but many programs show solid foundations
- Reconceptualized model of practice: cyclical, ongoing, dynamic and varied, with guided development and experience

We must shift our perceptions of training programs

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