Imagine a four-day, museum-based, summer institute for educators where participants not only immerse themselves fully in the experience, but also then use that experience to create powerful new programs in their universities, museums, and schools, and then share those experiences with past and future participants through conference reunions, presentations, and social media. That is what many of the over 290 art and classroom teachers, museum educators, higher education faculty, and arts leaders have done in the nation’s capital every summer since 2010, after learning together and networking with fellow educators from across the United States and beyond. To date, 12 sessions have been held under the direction of Renee Sandell—who created, initiated, designed, and led this yearly program for the National Art Education Association (NAEA); this also includes a one-time pilot SummerVision session held at Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Arkansas, in 2015.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the philosophy that has guided the development of SummerVision DC (SVDC), first as a professional development opportunity and then through its continuing evolution into a Professional Learning Community (PLC). The chapter includes vignettes about six past participants who have embraced the concept of leadership that the program seeks to inspire. Their stories serve as the foundation for a more thorough discussion of the impact of the program and its effectiveness as a professional development opportunity over time.

AN INTRODUCTION TO SUMMERVISION DC
SummerVision DC (SVDC) is an immersive professional development experience in which participants spend four days in a minimum of seven well-known art museums in Washington, DC. Participating museums have included the National Gallery of Art and Sculpture Garden, the Freer and Arthur M. Sackler Galleries, the National Museum of the American Indian, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, the National Museum of Women in the Arts, the Phillips Collection, the Smithsonian American Art Museum and National Portrait Gallery, the Corcoran Gallery of Art, the National Museum of African Art, the National Building Museum, and—most recently, in 2017—the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

The program’s focus on actively advancing visual literacy and critical thinking skills provides opportunities for participants to study multiple perspectives for engaging with works of art and artifacts in order to develop layers of meaning, use interdisciplinary pedagogical approaches, and
engage in object-specific strategies to deepen engagement within classroom and gallery settings. They also engage in visual journaling, interactive discussion of readings, and hands-on learning to actively complement the experience. SVDC’s visual journaling utilizes Renee Sandell’s Marking & Mapping™ as a highly accessible form of drawing for both novice and expert artists. Using Portable Studio materials, including artist quality watercolor pencils, this active, open-ended, notating process facilitates continuous daily visual journaling throughout the program.

The program is guided by Renee Sandell’s (2009) Form+Theme+Context (FTC)™ methodology that rebalances and integrates learning content for critical thinking and deeper learner engagement within diverse educational settings. As pre-program work, participants familiarize themselves with museums by utilizing Sandell’s FTC Palette for Decoding an Art Museum (2013). FTC Palettes are designed as visual organizers that—by balancing formal, thematic, and contextual considerations—help users decode and encode any learning content, including works of art, literature, and cultural institutions such as museums, a major component of the SVDC experience. This pre-program virtual experience provides an opportunity for access and orientation as well as a basis for understanding before participants arrive at each DC museum.

SVDC participants also use Carole Henry’s book, The Museum Experience: The Discovery of Meaning (2010), as an introductory text to the role of art museums in facilitating interpretive experiences. The program is structured as an experience (Dewey, 1934/1979) designed to be transformative through encounters guided by art museum educators with carefully selected works of art within the museum environment and discussion and reflection both before and afterward that is focused on finding meaning that is personally and intellectually relevant to the participants. Participants are not asked to develop lesson plans, unlike many other professional development programs. Participants are, in fact, asked to deliberately put aside thoughts of how they might use what they are learning in a classroom; instead, they are asked to allow themselves to fully experience what they are encountering. They are encouraged to focus on the experience of SVDC itself—to engage in the present, as John Dewey explained, in order to realize “the full meaning of each present experience” (p. 49).

The idea of the museum as experience, rather than as an “arbiter[s] of taste and the ultimate authority” (Adams, Falk, & Dierking, 2003, p. 15), is foundational to the structure of the program. John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking (1992, 2013), known for their more than 25 years of research investigating factors that comprise meaningful museum experiences, broadened the definition of that experience from simply what happens within the museum itself to one that encompasses the “totality of the experience” (2013, p. 23). That “totality of experience” includes the first thoughts anyone has of visiting a museum, through the actual visit to the museum, and the thoughts and reflections about that visit “days, weeks, and even years later” (p. 23) that person may have.

SVDC as an experience is defined broadly in a similar way. It begins when a participant first considers attending and decides to register, completes the pre-visit questionnaire, and visits the SVDC Facebook page to begin connecting with other participants and explore SVDC’s posted history. Once they have registered, participants receive links to assigned readings and other information provided in the NAEA SVDC e-portfolio, and they are asked to begin to explore participating museums via the museums’ websites, using FTC Museum Palettes, which guide their investigations of the museum as a work of art by noting its unique formal, thematic, and contextual qualities. Exploration of the website includes attending to the museum’s particular environment, ambiance, services, and emphasis/scope as revealed through its permanent collection and special exhibitions, along with its location, history, outreach, mission, and purpose—all of which contribute to its significance and relevance. These pre-visit virtual engagement notations on each individual FTC Museum Palette transform it
into a self-guided map that can be readily brought to life with personal experiences during a museum visit and afterward. By linking virtual to actual experience, participants are able to share meaningful discoveries as they add commentary to the palettes to document personal and collective FTC insights, assessments, and questions.

This preliminary research continues throughout the four days in the museums themselves, and then extends in a variety of ways as former participants share reflections on the SVDC Facebook page, convene at national and state conferences, and interact with educators in their schools, colleges, and museums. In fact, on the first day of the sessions, Falk and Dierking’s (2000) extended definition of the museum experience and its application is introduced and linked to the nature of the participants’ own experiences in SVDC, giving them a broader conception of the potential of that experience.

That a four-day experience could offer such potential for participants is a direct result of the conception of SVDC as a PLC designed to foster learning, networking, and leadership among its participants. While PLCs generally have been used as system-wide tools for school improvement, they also can help advance the professional development of educators (Breidenstein, Fahey, Glickman, & Hensley, 2012). SVDC began in 2010 as a professional learning opportunity in response to three
factors: Sandell’s previous Washington, DC museum-based professional development courses; the NAEA publication of Henry’s text, *The Museum Experience* (2010), and; NAEA member demand for additional professional development offerings beyond its annual convention. The program is situated uniquely within the museum environment and is extended both before and after the museum sessions by technology and annual reunions at NAEA National Conventions. It has now evolved into a PLC consisting of over 290 diverse art and non-art educators who have experienced firsthand the art museum as a catalyst for professional development and interdisciplinary collaboration (Sandell & Henry, 2014). Another dimension of the community’s robustness is evident in the SummerVision DC Facebook page consisting of 260 members, including past participants, prospective participants, SVDC museum educators, and other art educators interested in learning with the community through its online presence.
STORIES FROM THE SVDC EXPERIENCE
In this section, narrative vignettes from several past participants illustrate the program’s potential for inspiring change.

Niki, a museum educator, attended the first session of SVDC in 2010. Her attendance was precipitated by the fact that her museum, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, was in the process of being built and she planned on using FTC (Sandell, 2006, 2009) to train gallery guides, school tour guides, and employees as “the beginning point of all curriculum development and educational research” (personal communication, May 2013) at her museum. One of the surprises for Niki that first year was her viewing a work of art on loan from Crystal Bridges that was part of an exhibition at the National Museum of Women in the Arts. The FTC approach to interpreting art (Sandell, 2009) resonated with her. Once she returned to Arkansas, she oversaw the development of FTC Palettes for 160 (which later grew to 200+) core art objects in the museum’s collection for the training of guides who implement gallery, trail, and architecture tours. After the program, Niki and another inaugural member of SVDC created the SVDC Facebook page. Niki returned to SVDC for another four-day session in 2012, bringing her colleague Aaron as a fellow participant. As Interpretation Manager at Crystal Bridges, Aaron was responsible for the management and production of content and interpretative information for museum guests on art and nature, developing approximately 60 FTC Palettes for flora, fauna, and natural features as part of Crystal Bridges’ Outdoor Collection. Niki helped with arrangements for the June 2015 pilot session of SummerVision at Crystal Bridges, which was led by Renee Sandell and Aaron. Exploring art, nature, and architecture, this four-day program focused on deeply engaging participants in active FTC research of a selected art object from the museum’s permanent collection.

Susan, an adjunct professor of art at the University of Maine at Augusta, attended SVDC in 2014. The following fall, she redesigned an existing course at her university, Contemporary Studio Practice and Theory, based on her experiences at SVDC utilizing FTC, visual journaling, and other strategies intrinsic to the program. She documented the experience in a video, “Seven Museums and Galleries in 14 weeks: A Tour of the Maine Art Scene with Sustained Viewing Activities,” and posted the video on the SVDC Facebook page, thereby potentially sharing her course idea and process with all past and future participants. Her students shared their experiences with classmates through their visual journals and brief solo presentations, all recorded in Susan’s video.

David and Scott, two 6th-grade teachers from Fairfax County, Virginia, attended SummerVision in 2014. They immediately began using the strategies for conversing with works of art that they learned that summer in both of their classrooms and training sessions with their fellow teachers. Their focus has been on the use of music and dialogue, as modeled that previous summer in the Peacock Room of the Freer-Sackler Gallery, to deepen their students’ experiences with a work of art in connection with concepts they were teaching in the classroom. For example, David described his use of music and photography to engage his students in learning about the Civil Rights Movement. He explained, “whether it was a somber, slow song... or upbeat songs used to lift the spirits, the students made connections between the lyrics and mood of the song and the time period” (personal communication, February 2015). Scott used a reproduction of Aaron Douglas’ 1936 painting Into Bondage from the Corcoran Museum to discuss slavery in America. Inspired by the music activities at the Freer and Sackler Galleries, he also taught his students about hidden meanings in the Negro spirituals of the time period; his classes then learned to sing one with him. He also used the visual analysis techniques from Sandell’s Conversing With Works of Art activity to teach his students how to analyze postcard-sized photographs as primary sources. According to David, all of these activities “aligned perfectly” (personal
communication, February 2015) with the new Social Studies assessments for their county that require students to look at an image and use their knowledge of a time period to explain its significance. David and Scott’s leadership skills were evident in their plan to continue using SVDC strategies to engage students in workshops with their fellow teachers.

Another attendee, Pamela, teaches middle and elementary level art in Alabama and has attended SVDC for five summers. She credits her participation in SVDC with increasing her confidence in and enthusiasm for teaching so much that she has given talks to other teachers in her county about the strategies she has experienced. She explained that, for her, SVDC continues to be “life changing personally and intellectually” (personal communication, February 2015).

THE ROLE OF MUSEUM EDUCATORS

Museum educators at each museum are an essential component of SVDC. For example, each year, educators at the National Gallery of Art welcome the group to the Education Studio, which becomes the SVDC base of operation for the first day of the program. Participants meet the staff over coffee and begin bonding as a community. The morning session, led by Sandell, introduces the group to the ideas underlying SVDC and culminates with a Conversing With Works of Art experience using postcard reproductions from the NGA to build critical response skills and community bonding. Sandell’s Conversing With Works of Art is a hands-on, multi-sensory workshop activity designed to foster the discovery of visual forms, ideas, feelings, and contexts embedded in works of art. Each participant is guided through a unique, in-depth, personal “conversation” with a postcard art reproduction by using a packet of playful materials and creative strategies to decode and explore the artwork and its layers of meaning. The experience concludes with an opportunity for group sharing of connections, discoveries, and classroom applications.

At this early gathering, the group also receives their visual journals and portable art studios consisting of a small, lightweight, stand-up pencil case filled with six Inktense watercolor pencils, a water brush, a fine-tip Sharpie pen, a Sketch N’Wash pencil, a sharpener, and a ViewCatcher “necklace” to capture details of artworks they will get to experience.

After lunch, participants head to the galleries where the educators model strategies for encouraging perception and interpretive response. The sessions are informal, with participants engaging in open dialogue and using their journals freely to visually and verbally respond to the experience. It is important that participants are comfortable throughout their experience, so lightweight stools are provided to encourage lingering and contemplation, and conversations are guided in a way that encourages and supports multiple interpretations.

Before engaging the participants in site/object specific experiences and providing instructional packets relevant to the individual museums, each museum educator greets the group when they arrive and gives the participants a brief introduction to their unique institution. For example, one museum educator might highlight their overarching goals and the museum’s mission; or, another might point out important architectural features. Then, the museum educator takes the group into the galleries to experience key works in depth. The visual journals become a growing record of these interactions with works of art and often, they are integrated into gallery activities to increase perception and foster interpretation. The activities are object specific and reflect the time and effort each museum educator puts into the planning of the encounter with the work of art. Participants sketch, listen to poetry, and enjoy music in the galleries; their museum experience is enriched by additional enhancements such as
dialogue and small group activities (like generating a short poem from individual response to inspirational prompts) that help them collectively connect with the art. The goal is for them to become “collaborators in the meaning-making process” (Lankford, 2002, p. 106).

Ultimately, each SummerVision program ends with an opportunity for all participants to engage in an hour-long, silent visual meditation by Marking & Mapping™, using Portable Studio materials on an 11x15 inch sheet of watercolor paper to reflect on highlights and take-aways from the four-day experience. Once completed, these folded SVDC Maps are placed end-to-end and displayed in the Reynolds Center courtyard as valued individual and collective artistic documentation that inspires the final group meeting and closing celebration.

**PROGRAM ASSESSMENT AND ITS IMPACT OVER TIME**

Each year, survey data collected from participants both before and after the program have revealed participants’ initial reasons for attending SVDC, as well as the immediate impact of the experience on their professional practice. Additionally, before each new session begins, the prior year’s preliminary questionnaire data, which includes participants’ goal statements, is shared with SVDC museum educators. Moreover, these data continue to inform the development and evolution of the program’s structure and content.

In addition to the regular data collection from participants, in 2014, NAEA commissioned an outside evaluator, art educator Enid Zimmerman, to design and implement a program evaluation for SVDC to assess the impact of the then five-year-old program on professional practice and leadership. To familiarize herself first-hand with the program, Zimmerman attended one session of SVDC 2014 as a participant. She then implemented her three-phase evaluation, beginning with Phase One, an online survey sent via email to all SVDC attendees since 2010. In the Phase One online survey report, Zimmerman assessed attitudes about the personal, pedagogical, and professional impact of attending SVDC and being part of a PLC. This online survey was followed by Phase Two, an in-person focus group discussion held at the NAEA Convention in New Orleans in March 2015. Initial findings from the online survey included the following generalized participant observations about SummerVision DC’s impact on their work as educators. They noted:

- increased personal and professional initiatives
- expansion of teaching practices such as augmented looking and talking about art activities in their classrooms
- integration of art with other school subjects
- increased collegial contact with SVDC participants, museum educators, or program administrators
- assumption of leadership roles in art education as a result of attending SVDC
- active promotion of art education initiatives and becoming leaders of PLCs within their schools
- enhanced personal and professional development from using artmaking skills in visual journals
- identification of transformational SVDC experiences
- suggestions of opportunities for expansion of the program to other cities and in social media beyond the Facebook page
- exhibition of their own artwork
- publication of articles about their art educational pedagogical practices and advocacy presentation at local, state, and national venues of their personal, pedagogical, and leadership initiatives.
CONCLUSION
In her full SVDC Program Evaluation, Zimmerman (2015) connected the intensive professional communal learning from SVDC to important areas of professional development for art educators, resulting in an updated feminist research model of leadership formation and networking (Thurber & Zimmerman, 2002). Using the Thurber and Zimmerman (1997) Development of Voice in Inservice Education Model, Zimmerman distinguished between private voice, collaborative voice, and public voice as meaningful examples of evolving leadership of the profession. Zimmerman (2015) concluded:

Based on the study of processes and outcomes of the survey and the focus group meeting, SVDC has potential to impact educational reform and policy about implementing collaborative and professional development/leadership that can transform art teaching and learning in a wider variety of museum-related programs. Applying the Thurber Zimmerman Leadership Voices Model to other community-building processes has potential [to] link all NAEA strategic goals and to reinforce best practices embedded in quality professional personal and professional leadership development. (pp. 19-20)

As evidenced in the excerpt of her evaluation above, Zimmerman echoed SVDC’s own program assessments, affirming that the program that began in 2010 as a professional learning opportunity in the nation’s capital has engaged hundreds of educators from all over the US and around the world with 11 DC art museums; it has evolved into a PLC that continues to have positive impact on its participants. Zimmerman’s evaluation supported the NAEA’s and museum educators’ efforts in working with teachers in different virtual and face-to-face learning sites, to provide meaningful opportunities for art educators seeking renewal of skills and knowledge in a professional community (Sandell & Zimmerman, 2017, p. 308). As it evolves, the SVDC museum-based program is inspiring deeper professional learning engagement supported by networking and leadership in art education that is vital to meet the 21st-century needs of today’s learners in an increasingly visual age (NAEA, 2009).
REFERENCES


ENDNOTES

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2 http://forthcovision.onair.cc/category/formthemecontext-ftc-2
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