

## ***Language<sup>+</sup>: Let's art a conversation!***

### Curatorial Statement

*Language<sup>+</sup>: Let's art a conversation!* provides an opportunity for students from The Park School of Baltimore and Baltimore Lab School to develop artistic forms of communication through workshops with professional artists and talks by guest lecturers. The workshops and talks incorporate the schools' curricula and interests into multiple formats of art making that introduce students to auditory, visual, and kinesthetic modes of self-expression.

Both Park and Lab School embrace contemporary, progressive education, making them ideal partners for *Language<sup>+</sup>*. The schools share the belief, espoused by John Dewey in his book *Education & Experience*, that education should be based on an individual's needs and experiences. This project uses movement, art making, design, and music to further explore that notion. It offers young people a variety of opportunities for discovering new interests and enhancing existing skills. *Language<sup>+</sup>* also showcases what the schools have in common, strengthens those ties, and presents opportunities for future partnerships.

Through three levels of curatorial vision, *Language<sup>+</sup>* has the potential to foster sustainable and reliable opportunities for institutions to develop interdisciplinary research models for youth. Here are the three levels of curatorial vision:

#### **1. Diversity in our society**

As individuals, it is increasingly important to develop awareness of diverse opinions and shared values. Art, because it is something of a common language, can help facilitate that process by transcending cultural barriers and tapping into human similarities. In the *Language<sup>+</sup>* workshops, students utilized various art-making formats, but they expressed similar ideas with common themes. Such results indicate how an interdisciplinary learning approach could benefit students by developing skills for self-expression that lead to positive outcomes.

#### **2. Models of collaboration**

*Language<sup>+</sup>* emphasizes the benefits of collaborative art making. In this instance, several classes at Park School worked together and also collaborated with Park's Lower School art teacher, second-grade teachers, the Lower School science teacher, and performance artist Liz Pelton to develop ideas around the theme of water for their workshops. Second graders explored that theme through different media, such as performance and dance, drawing, painting, and writing. Through multiple learning options—including nature walks—students developed an in-depth understanding of water and its importance.

At the Middle School level, the seventh-grade language art teachers collaborated with mixed-media artist Julia Kim Smith and the middle school art teacher on installations that helped students understand the concept of Euphemisms. In language art class, the students studied Euphemisms by reading Lois Lowry's *The Giver*, and the workshops deepened their understanding through hands-on, in-depth exploration of the concept.

An Upper School design class and a beatz (electronic music) class collaborated on a project that encouraged students to think about the relationship between design and music. Each class began with separate, independent projects. The design students created posters based on specific words and illustrated their meanings in a variety of graphic styles. The beatz students composed music based on specific words, as well. Then, the classes exchanged artworks to create an entirely new piece in response to the work they received from their partners. Instead of teaming up with an outside artist, the design and beatz students facilitated their own projects and worked individually and collaboratively. Visiting lecturer Ellen Lupton, director of MICA's MFA in Graphic Design program, spoke to the students about related design concepts and issues.

At Baltimore Lab School, ten aftercare students participated in weekly workshops that used art as a vehicle for studying water and community. The ten students also visited Park School, where they worked with Park second graders and attended a lecture by science teacher Laura Jacoby. By the end of the exhibition, Park second-grade students and their teachers will have visited Lab School and viewed its *Language+* exhibition.

### **3. The philosophy of *Language+***

Traditionally, curators select artists and finished artworks for exhibition. As a result, they focus on the final product more than the process. *Language+* subverts that tendency by, not only encouraging student-artists to explore the materials and media that appeal to them, but also by documenting the process and product in the final exhibition.

Meaningful curatorial practice can arise out of process-oriented projects that aren't competitive or hierarchical in nature. By utilizing a process-oriented approach, the work of professional artists and student-artists can naturally co-exist in an exhibition setting. *Language+* is a curatorial and educational method that can enhance existing programs and expand learning opportunities in community and institutional settings.

As Dewey explains in *Experience & Education*, "The most important attitude that can be formed is that of the desire to go on learning." *Language+* uses art making to help instill and solidify that attitude in diverse student populations.

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