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| **School Name** | Conservatory Lab Charter School |
| **Grade Span Targeted by Best Practice** | K1 - 8 |
| **Contact** | Nicole Mack, Principal, [nmack@conservatorylab.org](mailto:nmack@conservatorylab.org)  Rhonda Berkower, Curriculum Specialist, [rberkower@conservatorylab.org](mailto:rberkower@conservatorylab.org) |
| **Related Charter School Performance Criteria/Conditions for School Effectiveness** | Curriculum and Instruction |
| **Innovation/Best Practice(s)** | Interdisciplinary Project-Based Learning |
| **Rationale Supporting Best Practice** | There is a growing body of research that supports the use of project-based learning as a way to engage students, boost cooperative learning skills, and improve academic skills. Holm, Margaret. “Project-Based Instruction: A Review of the Literature in Prekindergarten through 12th Grade Classrooms,” *Insight:* Rivier Academic Journal, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2011. <https://www.bie.org/object/document/project_based_learning_a_review_of_the_literature_on_effectiveness> |
| **Partner** | EL Education (formerly Expeditionary Learning) and K2, Grade, 1 and Grade 2 classrooms at several Boston district schools, including the E. Greenwood, Thomas J. Kenny School and the P.A. Shaw School |
| **Target Audience for Best Practice** | K-8 schools looking to develop interdisciplinary, project-based teaching and learning. Conservatory Lab has successfully partnered with K2, Grade, 1 and Grade 2 classrooms at several Boston district schools, to introduce and develop these instructional practices and curricular resources. |
| **Objective for Disseminating this Best Practice** | To transform teaching and learning practices in order to enhance student engagement, nurture a growth mindset, boost academic performance in reading and writing, develop critical thinking skills, and build perseverance, collaboration, and other character traits to prepare students for future success. |
| **Summary** | Since 2009, **Conservatory Lab has developed, implemented, and published interdisciplinary curriculum units that integrate evidence-based literacy practices to build knowledge in science and social studies content areas.** Each unit consistently generates high-quality student products that demonstrate mastery of Common Core standards in reading informational text, research, and writing. An example of an outstanding 2nd-grade product, “Slithering Snake Stories,” can be found at<http://tinyurl.com/snakestories>.    Conservatory Lab is an EL Education (formerly Expeditionary Learning) school and our curriculum and practices were developed with the support of EL school designers and coaches. **Our interdisciplinary units are anchored in a project-based approach that promotes deep and collaborative learning** and incorporates EL core practices: rigorous research, fieldwork and experts, creating and publishing high-quality products for authentic audiences, differentiated instruction, and learning through the arts.  Evidence-based literacy practices include small-group guided reading; interactive read-alouds with accountable talk; shared reading; fluency practice and readers’ theater; multiple and close reading of informational text; and guided writing with models, exemplars, and a highly-scaffolded critique and revision protocol. Units feature hands-on activities, projects, and fieldwork to continually reinforce targeted literacy skills, as well as oral language development and vocabulary acquisition.  Embedded in the context of engaging, project-based units, these tested literacy practices provide a powerful and effective vehicle for raising the level of students’ reading and writing competencies, as well as listening and speaking skills. **The power of this approach is exemplified in an EL video series** featuring a Conservatory Lab 2nd-grade classroom entitled *Inspiring Excellence: A Classroom of Quality in Reading, in Writing, in Listening, in Speaking, in the Arts, and in Scien*ce, available at<http://vimeo.com/channels/inspiringexcellence>.    **A consistent structure for common planning time with teachers, coaches, and administrators, including extended periods of planning time at key points during the year, is critical for the successful development and implementation of interdisciplinary, project-based learning**. |
| **Reflection** | Partnering with the E. Greenwood, Thomas J. Kenny, and the P.A. Shaw schools underscored the importance of pacing and curriculum modifications to meet individual student and classroom needs, as well as videotaped and/or live models for celebrations of learning at the end of units that feature students showcasing and sharing their work in interactive ways with families and the school community. |
| **Resources** | The Curriculum section of the Conservatory Lab website features interdisciplinary project and student product descriptions, including bibliographies, videos, and other resources.  <http://www.conservatorylab.org/projects/>. |
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