Miller Primary School

Testimonial for Stephen Graham's PM CPD Workshop

I first met Stephen Graham at his "Creating a Balanced Reader and Writer" course which was run by Scholastic on the 11th October 2018. I was offered a place on this training course as my school had just purchased PM Benchmarking from Scholastic. We had both reading and writing on our School Improvement Plan and so this course attracted me as it could support our improvement as a school. I attended the course with my Scottish Attainment Challenge Leader of Learning and we were both inspired by what Stephen talked about. He was practical in his approach and his delivery was highly entertaining. We questioned our current learning and teaching of reading in light of Stephen's strong belief that different genres each have a specific layout which needs to be specifically taught to children so that they can interpret the text and create a particular text type. We returned to school and we shared what we had learned about creating a balanced reader and writer with the staff who were also interested in this idea. We realised that there was a lack of age appropriate reading materials for children who are older with lower abilities in reading and so we purchased Fast Forward texts from PM. We introduced the Fast Forward texts to specific children which increased their confidence, fluency and phrasing when reading as they were interested in the content of the texts. This had a positive impact on the reading levels of the children involved.

Moreover, we were fortunate enough to secure a training day on 22nd March 2019 with Stephen in our school which motivated and engaged all my staff and Senior Leaders from other schools in the authority who attended. The focus of this training was on PM Benchmarking and creating a balanced reader. Stephen used children within the school as a demonstration group on how to benchmark which made it very relevant for everyone. The children felt at ease with him and he modelled how to assess and then discussed what the findings were from the assessment in terms of future learning and teaching for the specific children.

Staff were up skilled in using PM Benchmarking, teaching reading in terms of genre specific features and they were motivated to use the strategies Stephen had talked about within their learning and teaching. We also explored this further as we developed our writing and reading policies as well as organising our reading resources to ensure that they were benchmarked. We also supplemented our reading resources to ensure we had a range of non-fiction texts.

Furthermore we discussed evidencing a balanced writer across the year and so we created a genre focus per term across the school and assessed writing using genre specific criteria for cold pieces of writing. At the end of the academic session, our cold piece results allowed teachers to assess children across a range of genres and this strengthened our professional judgement of whether children were truly balanced writers. We used this information and the benchmarks when deciding whether children were achieving the level at P1, P4 and P7.

As we are a Challenge Authority, we have a Challenge Leader of Learning who was trained by the Authority and focused on writing by taking targeted support groups. We also used some of our Pupil Equity Funding to train a teacher in Reading Recovery which was successful for targeted children. All of this coupled with our training in creating a balanced reader and writer helped to close the gap throughout the school as our reading results rose by 3% and our writing results rose by 10% compared with the previous year. We have further developed writing this session by introducing the PM Writing scheme and although it is early days, most children have been motivated by the resource.

Lorraine Booth, Head Teacher

Case Study Developed December 2019