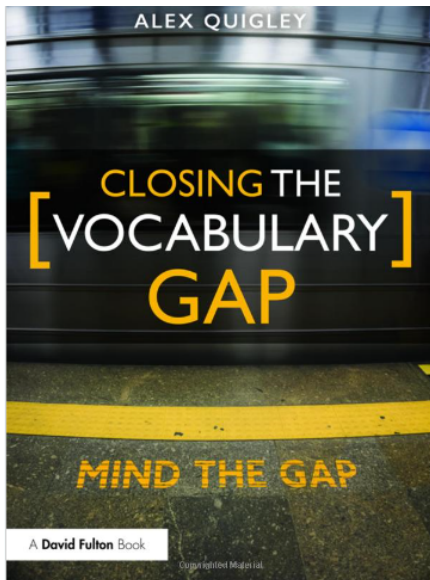


Closing the vocabulary gap by Alex Quigley

Book Review by Natalie Gunn



As a teacher, the vocabulary and knowledge that we have as experts can sometimes be taken for granted and we can often 'assume' that a child has a wider vocabulary range than they do in reality. In 'Closing the Vocabulary Gap' Alex Quigley looks at the huge discrepancy in vocabulary between our disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged learners and gives a range of strategies in which we might 'close this gap'.

He begins with some shocking statistics about the differences in communication and 'vocabulary exposure' that these children might experience outside of the classroom. We learn that whilst some parents 'spoke an average of more than 3,000 words per hour to their child, others spoke fewer than 500 words' and Quigley believes that our aim as teachers is to help to close this gap by equipping our learners with a 'word hoard' of '50,000 words' or more. Whilst this may seem daunting, Quigley outlines a range of incredibly effective strategies that could be adopted by all subjects to help close this gap, one of which is teaching our students to be inquisitive about language by breaking down words into their morphological and etymological roots.

Within English we are trialling this at the moment and Sally Hinchliffe has just re-launched our 'word of the week' based on Quigley's research. Each week we introduce a new word and its definition, but also break the word down into its different parts (morphology) so that students can really see how the word is constructed. We then think about 'word families' and synonyms as well as examples of the word in use.