Micro-Unit and Structure Tasks

Vocabulary acquisition is an essential component of academic success for all students, particularly students with language-based learning differences. According to Dr. Barbara J. Ehren, researcher and expert in literacy instruction for diverse learners, "unless a word is stored and can be accessed during reading, it is not a functional part of [a student's] knowledge" (2002). Given that vocabulary is crucial for comprehension, vocabulary instruction should be a cornerstone of classroom teaching. Below are suggestions for instructing vocabulary at any age.

Target Words

It is important to determine specific target words for instruction as it is nearly impossible to directly teach every single vocabulary term that students may need to know. So how do educators choose which words to target for instruction?

- As a rule of thumb, if the student cannot read the word, the student likely does not know the word
- Background building concepts are important to introduce prior to beginning a new unit that will require knowledge of connected terms.
- **Tiered Vocabulary**: Tiered vocabulary refers to the concept that vocabulary words can be categorized based on the level of frequency with which students may encounter those words. Tier 1 words are basic, everyday words. Tier 2 words are frequently used words. Tier 3 words are more content-specific.

Graphic Organizers

Word:	part of speech:
Antonyms:	**Synonyms:**
♦	♦
♦	♦
♦	♦
Sentence:	
Picture:	

With direct instruction in vocabulary terms, it is not enough to provide a definition. Rather, educators should work to discuss paraphrased definitions that show an understanding of the word meaning, synonyms, antonyms, use of the word in examples, visuals, and even what the word does not mean.

Morphology

Morphology is the study of the forms of words, based on the morpheme, which is the smallest unit of meaning. Language intervention expert Dr. Ronald B. Gillam notes the important role that working memory can play in vocabulary acquisition. Instructing vocabulary from a morphological approach can help to alleviate the pressure on working memory by targeting "chunking" skills. Teaching affixes is one way to target morphological vocabulary instruction. By learning affixes, students can begin to chunk words by recognizable morphological units. This skill allows students to develop independence, which can be applied to additional unfamiliar words.

Context Clues

Considering that direct instruction cannot account for all vocabulary acquisition, students must also learn ways to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words with increased independence and accuracy. To aid in this process, educators can teach students how to utilize context clues to determine the meaning of an unfamiliar word when it is encountered in context. There are six specific context clues that provide hints at the meaning of words:

- **Definition:** the definition of the unknown word is provided, possibly as an appositive phrase (identifies or explains a noun).
  - Example: Many animals in India are prey for the dhole, a kind of wild dog that runs in packs.

- **Restatement:** the definition of the unknown word is provided through a restatement of the word.
  - Example: Press gangs - groups who roamed city streets to pick up men and force them into naval service - were but one of the daily hazards of London's life in the early 1800s.

- **Example:** the definition of the unknown word is provided through an example, sometimes recognizable by signal words.
  - Example: Many once-common devices, such as mechanical pinball machines, adding machines, and wind up watches, are now obsolete.

- **Compare / Contrast:** the definition of the unknown word is provided through comparing/contrasting the term to a possibly more recognizable term or concept.
  - Example: I don't like your innuendos; why don't you come out and say what you mean?

- **Description:** the definition of the unknown word is provided through a description or modifier.
  - Example: One by one, members of the group split off and approached a few of the more malleable sailors, who might be swayed to join the mutiny.

- **Synonym / Antonym:** the definition of the unknown word is provided through the use of a synonym or antonym.
  - Example: Tim said, "I am starving." He was famished because he had not eaten all day.

HOW DOES THIS CONNECT TO MICROUNIT AND STRUCTURE TASKS?

Vocabulary instruction should be structured to microunit multiple opportunities for student interaction with word meanings over a variety of formats and contexts. This repeated exposure and increased knowledge of word meanings is the best way to build a lexicon that is accessible and translated into long-term memory.