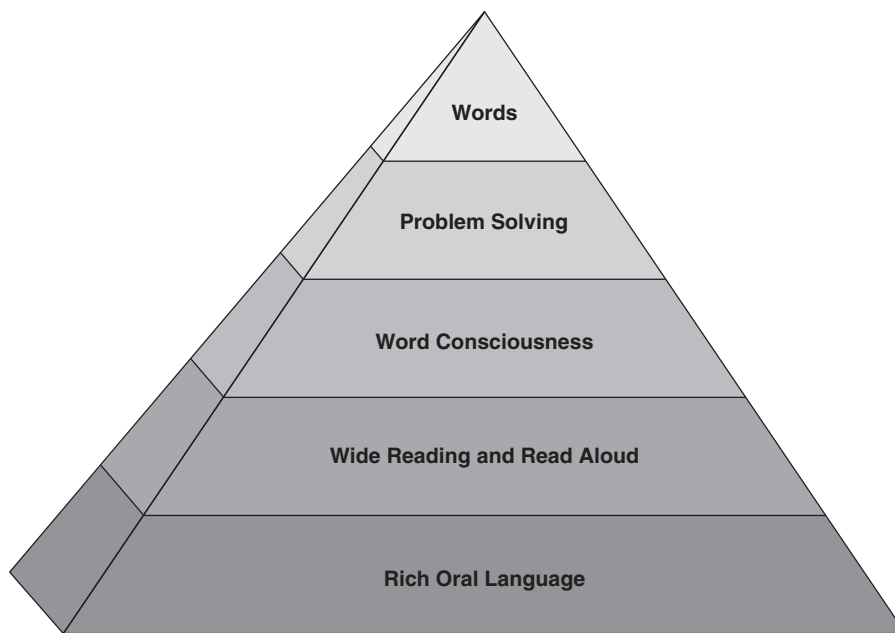


Introduction



We decided to name this book *Nourishing Vocabulary* to emphasize the fundamental nature of vocabulary instruction. Teaching vocabulary is more than conveying information about words; it is the nourishment of children's minds with meaningful ideas and rich language. We use the metaphor of the food pyramid to illustrate this message. We all know that a balanced diet of essential nutrients is necessary for children's health. An educational diet composed of rich language experiences is equally important to nurture children's intellectual growth and development.

How are our children being nourished in terms of their vocabulary development? A number of studies dating back to the 1970s have documented the lack of vocabulary instruction in schools (Durkin, 1978–1979; Roser & Juel, 1982; Scott, Jamieson-Noel, & Asselin, 2003). The publication of the National Reading Panel Report (2000) changed the educational climate and renewed interest in vocabulary instruction. Educators began to notice that vocabulary might be an aspect of the achievement gap, and vocabulary was designated as one of five key topics in the federally funded Reading First program. Despite the

emerging consensus regarding the importance of vocabulary, there is little evidence that children of the twenty-first century are receiving more vocabulary instruction than in past years, nor is there evidence that research-based instructional practices are often followed in classrooms (Biemiller, 2001; Scott et al., 2003; Watts, 1995).

In addition, a heavy emphasis on decoding instruction and rigid adherence to mandated reading programs have narrowed the curriculum in the early grades. When teachers follow the pacing guides and adhere to program fidelity, they often feel as though they are left with little time to devote to reading aloud, discussion, and independent reading. Consequently, many of the activities that are most effective in developing children's language and vocabulary have been pushed out of the curriculum. It seems easy to conclude that, when it comes to vocabulary instruction, many American children have been placed on a starvation diet!