

SHARING THE LOOKING GLASS: EXAMINING ACTION RESEARCH WITH
EARLY LITERACY TEACHERS IN LESOTHO, AFRICA

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APPROVAL OF THE CAPSTONE PROJECT

This capstone project, *Sharing the Looking Glass: Examining Action Research with Early Literacy Teachers in Lesotho, Africa*, has been approved by the Graduate Faculty of the Curry School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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DEDICATION

To the teachers at Mountain Kingdom Primary School
who were brave enough to be seekers of new ideas

To Harlan de Brun and Claire de Brun who remind us all that we must not allow our
helping hands to hurt- we must plant the seeds and trust that they will take hold.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Advisor: Marcia Invernizzi

For many developing countries, education holds the key to combating challenging economic, health, and social issues. Education and literacy are seen as a human rights issue that offers a gateway to economic and educational prosperity, informed health decisions, and the ability to contribute to society (Gove & Cvelich, 2011). Providing access to high-quality literacy instruction is at the forefront of educational policies and initiatives around the world as a means to ensure that all learners have access to the transformative powers of education (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2014). Yet, understanding what early literacy practices work, for whom, under what conditions within challenging sociocultural and economic conditions remains elusive (Nag, S., Chiat, S., Torgerson, C., & Snowling, M. (2014). To improve instruction and provide quality early literacy instruction in developing countries, it is important to identify literacy practices appropriate for addressing areas of need within the local context (Dubeck, Jukes, Booker, Drake, & Inyega, 2015; Pretorius, 2014; Sailors et al., 2014).

This study grew out of the grass-roots efforts of the principal and teachers at a small, rural elementary school, Mountain Kingdom Primary School (a pseudonym), in Lesotho, Africa, to provide their learners with quality literacy instruction. Through the use of participatory action research, a working partnership between the researcher and the teachers was created as a means to help participants identify problems in early literacy instruction from Reception (kindergarten) to Grade 3 and create an action plan designed to address the instructional needs within their local context. The study consisted of an

11-day onsite study in Lesotho, Africa. During the study, classroom observations, interviews, and documents were collected to identify challenges and supports to early literacy instruction. Findings from the study indicated that one of the major challenges to literacy at Mountain Kingdom Primary School was a lack of literacy instructional materials in the learners' native language, Sesotho and second language, English. Literacy instruction failed to address early literacy skills that are important to developing reading in the early primary grades: phonemic awareness, word recognition, oral reading fluency, and writing. Instructional practices focused on teacher dominated talk and call and response, which led to low student engagement within the lessons. The learners had fewer opportunities to develop higher order thinking skills and use literacy to develop reading and writing skills. From classroom observations and teacher interviews, several important supports were identified that could be leveraged to improve instruction. First, the teachers and learners valued literacy and wanted to become literate. Teachers were committed to academic achievement and wanted to improve their learners' literacy instruction. When given the opportunity, learners were very motivated to engage in the lessons. Desire and motivation were two very important dispositional factors that could be leveraged to improve practice. With the help of the teachers and principal, an action plan was created to prioritize the verified areas of need and address the challenges to instruction. The teachers and researcher identified three main challenges to address: access to print, opportunities for learners to be more actively engaged in the learning process, and development of the teachers' knowledge of the reading process and instructional practices to support early literacy skills. This study focused on the first two phases of the participatory action research cycle, verifying the problems of practice and

developing an action plan to improve practice. The next phase of the participatory action research cycle will be for the teachers at Mountain Kingdom Primary School to participate in professional workshops designed to support their understanding of early literacy. As part of the recommendations, an extensive plan was designed to support changes in their instructional practices.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

For many developing countries, education holds the key to combating challenging economic, health, and social issues. Education and literacy are seen as a human rights issue that offer a gateway to economic and educational prosperity, informed health decisions, and the ability to contribute to society. Providing access to high quality literacy instruction is at the forefront of educational policies and initiatives around the world as a means to ensure that all learners have access to knowledge and skills that allow for competition within the global setting (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2014).

Literacy is fundamental to success in formal schooling and provides the foundation to participate in the larger community. Research points to the importance of literacy achievement for individuals over their lifetime but also for their community and society (Gove & Cvelich, 2011). The early primary grades are seen as the time in a learner's life when key foundational literacy skills are learned that support later learning (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Perhaps one of the most important findings from reading research shows that learners who are behind in reading during the early grades rarely catch up to their peers without significant support (Snow et al., 1998). The learner's reading development remains relatively stable across the grade levels, meaning if a learner is a poor reader in the early grades, chances are the learner will continue to be a poor reader in later grades unless instruction improves (Juel, 1998). In the early primary grades, instruction focuses on learning to read. As learners continue into the

upper primary grades, the goal shifts with a focus to read to learn and to gain important content knowledge through reading. Learners who fail to acquire the necessary skills for reading during the early primary grades are hindered in their ability to gain instructional content from print in the upper elementary grades¹. Therefore, learning to read requires good instruction during the early primary grades to ensure that the reader gets off to a good start.

Because early literacy instruction is key to later literacy and school success, it is important to identify the literacy practices that succeed under the unique sociocultural and economic conditions of a developing country in order to ensure learners are provided quality early literacy instruction. This study grew out of the grass-roots efforts of the principal and teachers at a small, rural elementary school, Mountain Kingdom Primary School (a pseudonym) in Lesotho, Africa, who were struggling with providing their students with quality literacy instruction. Through a working partnership between the researcher and the teachers, this study explored the early literacy practices at Mountain Kingdom Primary School, identified practices that influence early literacy instruction, and recommended instructional changes to improve practice. For the learners of Mountain Kingdom Primary School, a good start in reading in both Sesotho (mother tongue of Lesotho) and English is crucial for their success in the later primary grades.²

This chapter begins with background information about the policies created to provide access to education and explains the challenges to providing quality education to all learners. This background information is key to understanding the issues faced at

¹ Primary grades in Lesotho begin with Reception (US Kindergarten) through Grade 6. Upper primary begins with Grade 4.

² Lesotho is the country; Sesotho is the first language or mother tongue of the Basotho people; Basotho is the name of the people who reside in Lesotho.

Mountain Kingdom Primary School as the teachers attempt to provide education for their learners.

Providing Quality Education: The African Context

For developing countries in Africa, two key international initiatives, *Education for All* adopted in 1990, and the Millennium Development Goals in 2000, provided the impetus for creating educational policies to provide access to education (Morojele, 2012). These two initiatives allowed countries to create programs to expand early childhood care and education, provide free and compulsory primary education for all, promote learning and life skills for young people, and improve the quality of education (Avenstrup, Liang, & Ravenstrup, 2004; UNESCO, 2001).

Free Primary Education in Lesotho, Africa

According to data compiled by UNESCO (2012), Lesotho faces tough economic and health related issues, which have a direct impact on the educational system. Lesotho is a small, landlocked mountainous country within the borders of the Republic of South Africa. Lesotho's unemployment rate is 45%, with approximately 35% of the population earning less than one U.S. dollar per day. In 2012, the incidence of HIV/AIDS in Lesotho was at 23%, the third highest in the world. Approximately 25% of the Basotho learners have no surviving parent. For the Basotho people, the need for a free primary education is crucial as the means to combat poverty and the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS and to provide the Basotho citizens with a better future (UNESCO, 2010/11).

In 2000, the Lesotho government enacted a free primary education policy to “ensure that by 2015 all learners, particularly girls, learners in difficult circumstances, and those belonging to ethnic minorities have access to complete, free, and compulsory

primary education of good quality” (Ministry of Education and Training, 2008b, p. 1).

The Lesotho Ministry of Education created policies with the focus on creating lifelong learners who could succeed within the context of school as well as the local and global community, fostering positive social attitudes and civic values, and alleviating the threats of poverty and disease (Ministry of Education and Training, 2008a).

Challenges to Implementing a Free Primary Education

Prior to 2000, more than 68% of the Basotho learners attended school. Schools in Lesotho were sponsored by church agencies, which charged tuition fees to cover the operational costs of school. Many Basotho learners could not afford the tuition costs (Morojele, 2012). With the introduction of a free primary education, the government paid teachers’ salaries and provided textbooks and instructional materials. In 2000, the first year of the government-mandated free primary education, enrollment rates increased to 82% (Avenstrup, Liang, & Nellemann, 2004). With more students enrolled in school, Lesotho’s literacy rates improved. In 2012, the World Bank indicated a 92% literacy rate for Basotho females and a 74% literacy rate for Basotho men between the ages of 15 and 24 (UNESCO, 2012).

Unfortunately, even with the improvements in basic literacy rates and increased enrollment in primary schools, Lesotho struggles to provide a quality primary education to all school-aged learners. The Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ), which monitors the quality of education in sub-Saharan Africa, conducted a survey of learners in 14 English-speaking African countries to evaluate their competencies in math and reading. The report showed that Basotho learners in Standard 6 (U.S. Grade 6) achieved only a basic level of numeracy and

literacy skills and lacked higher order thinking skills required for success in junior and secondary levels of school. Lesotho students fell well below the average score of 500, with scores of 451 on reading and 447 on mathematics (Jopo, Maema, & Ramokoena, 2011; Mothibeli & Maema, 2005).

Poor academic success within Lesotho schools is attributed to a lack of resources to support the increase in student enrollment that resulted from the free primary education and high-grade level repetition. Resource shortages include a lack of school facilities, poor teaching conditions, a scarcity of educational materials such as books and supplies, and a lack of qualified teachers (Avenstrup, Liang, & Nellemann, 2004). In 2007, SACMEQ found that only 86% of the Grade 6 students had the minimum learning materials (one exercise book, a pencil, and a ruler) to successfully participate in classroom activities (Jopo et al., 2011). Though providing access to education is an important first step to ensuring a bright future for Basotho learners, high dropout rates, poor completion rates, and grade-level repetition remain a problem for Lesotho primary schools (Avenstrup, Liang, & Nellemann, 2004).

Repeaters and dropout rate. Data gathered by the UNESCO (2009) monitoring report shows that even with free primary education in Lesotho, the primary enrollment rate indicates that not all school-aged learners attend school. Even with free primary education, overtime attendance levels dropped. In 2009, 71% of the boys and 75% of the girls attended primary school. Poor attendance is attributed to the need for labor, early marriage, and issues relating to HIV/AIDS. Many learners are heads of household or care for parents who have health issues relating to HIV/AIDS. The survival rate to the end of primary school is very poor for both males and females. Only 56% of the female

students who begin primary school actually finish, and only 38% of the male students finish. Only 22% of the male students and 36% of the female students continue on to junior and secondary school.

Lesotho has made strides in ensuring access to education for females. Across the grade levels, overall female enrollment is higher than enrollment of males, indicating a high level of parity. In many sub-Saharan African countries, females are not allowed to attend school (UNESCO, 2009).

Repeating a grade creates challenges for Lesotho primary schools. Approximately 28% of the learners repeat a grade, thus creating a strain on existing resources. In the primary grades, 30% of the learners are over nine years old (UNESCO, 2010/11). Learners who repeat a grade are less likely to perform well in the higher grades. According to SACMEQ, learners who repeat a grade during the primary grades score lower in reading and math on Standard 6 achievement tests (Hungu & Thuku, 2010). Supporting learners in the early grades could help improve academic achievement in the upper graders.

Teacher-pupil ratio. The high number of repeaters also creates issues of overcrowding, which raises teacher-student ratios and limits the availability of teaching resources. According to Lesotho educational policy, the recommended teacher-pupil ratio for primary schools is 1:40. In 2012, the average teacher-pupil ratio was 1:34. However, in rural areas where schools face teacher shortages and an influx of learners, the teacher-pupil ratio ranges from 1:40 to 1:60 (UNESCO, 2012).

Mulkeen and Chen (2008) examined the impact of teacher-pupil ratio on student performance and found that teacher-pupil ratio had a negative impact on teaching quality

and the ability of teachers to meet the needs of their students. Teachers lack the necessary pedagogical training to work with large class sizes. The challenging classroom conditions influence teacher morale and performance. Schools that are overcrowded struggle to find qualified teachers, so they resort to hiring teachers who lack the proper teaching credentials. The teachers are not prepared to handle the challenges of overcrowding. All of these issues—repeaters, dropout rates, teacher-student ratio—have an impact on the ability of teachers to provide students with a quality education.

Language of Instruction

Unlike most African countries, Lesotho is a largely monolingual country where almost all Basotho people speak the official language, Sesotho. English is the second official language of Lesotho (Kamwangamalu, 2013). Lesotho's language policy encourages the use of Sesotho (referred to here as home language, mother tongue, or L1) as the primary language of instruction in the early primary grades, Reception (equivalent to U.S. kindergarten) through Grade 3. Research supports education that begins with a child's home language (Alidou, Brock-Utne, Heugh, & Wolff, 2006). Learners who gain early literacy skills in their home language transfer phonemic awareness and word recognition skills to reading in a second language (Bialystock, 2006). Learning in a familiar language raises academic achievement and increases knowledge, which supports language learning in a second language (Goldenberg, 2008; Gove & Cvelich, 2011).

In Lesotho, English is taught as a separate subject in Reception through Grade 3. From Grade 4 through secondary school, English becomes the primary language of academic instruction (MoET, 2008a). All academic subjects are taught in English, with Sesotho language and reading taught as a separate subject. High academic skills in

Sesotho and English are crucial if learners want to attend school beyond Grade 7.

Success in English also plays an important role outside the school community. For Basotho learners, English is a global language that provides access to greater knowledge and the ability to compete in a global society (Hunt, 2007). However, access to written material in Sesotho and English is limited. Learners rarely speak English outside of school. Therefore, opportunities to read and speak English are limited. The lack of use and practice makes it difficult for learners to gain proficiency in English. Reading materials in both Sesotho and English are scarce, making reading practice in either language difficult (Jopo et al., 2011).

The classroom teachers' ability to speak and read English fluently and the parents' use of English in the home contributes to students' school success (Hungu & Thuku, 2010). In a recent survey of Basotho teachers, principals, and secondary students, respondents attributed poor English skills at the secondary level to limited exposure and use of English in the primary grades. Respondents concluded that a stronger literacy environment in the primary grades would better prepare students for the academic challenges of secondary education (Lekhetho, 2013).

The Problem: Improving Early Literacy

In order to improve academic success for all students across the grade levels, the next step for education in developing countries is to understand how to provide quality education within the context of complex socio-economic and educational challenges (Gove & Cvelich, 2011; Perry, 2009). Schools and teachers are not equipped to change the large social, economic, and health-related issues facing learners; however, given the opportunity and support, it is possible for schools to improve their current early literacy

instruction by first determining their areas of need and then creating an action plan based on effective early literacy practices known to improve literacy instruction (Dubeck, Jukes, & Okello, 2008). Research on early reading interventions shows that providing students with good literacy instruction during the early primary grades is key to preventing reading failure in later grades (Snow et al., 1998). In the Lesotho context, better literacy instruction in the early primary grades in both Sesotho and English may improve the overall quality of education and help to mitigate issues related to high dropout rates and overcrowding. Learners who have higher levels of literacy when they enter the upper elementary grades will be better prepared to use reading and writing as tools to learn new content and transition from instruction in Sesotho to English.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this capstone project was to examine the literacy instruction at Mountain Kingdom Primary School (MKPS) in Lesotho, Africa, within the context of sociocultural and economic challenges and, together with local stakeholders at the school, to offer suggestions to improve pedagogical practice during early primary literacy instruction. The principal at MKPS wanted to be proactive in finding creative solutions to the problems she believed interfered with the educational success of her students and limited their educational opportunities, life choices, and economic futures. The problem of practice could be expressed by a question: for schools that are resource-poor and face challenging social and economic conditions, how could early literacy programs be designed to focus on instructional needs unique to the local context and improve opportunities for learners to gain the necessary literacy skills to become proficient users of English and Sesotho?

The Need to Examine Early Literacy

The principal at MKPS believed that better literacy instruction in the early primary grades might be a solution that would mitigate poor academic achievement in the upper grades, reduce grade repetition (28% of the students repeat a grade), and help students achieve better scores on the Primary School Leaving Examination for Grade 7, which is required for junior and secondary school.

I want your help in examining our early primary program to see if we are missing opportunities to improve their English and reading. I don't think our learners get enough practice in reading and writing in our early primary classes. I worry that we aren't doing enough for our learners in the lower primary grades and wait until fourth grade to teach English and reading. I would like you to equip us as teachers with knowledge about how to teach learners to read and speak in English. We want our learners to be able to read on their own in the future. I hope that you can help us get more knowledge. I need to know what can be done to support the reading development of learners in Reception through Grade 3. They need a good foundation in reading to move them forward in school. (Mme Memadinle, personal communication, June 12, 2014)

The Relationship between Early Literacy Skills and Later Achievement

At the end of primary school, Grade 7 learners take the Primary School Leaving Examination, which is a multiple-choice test written in English covering reading, science, and social studies. Learners also write compositions, letters, and stories in both Sesotho and English. Learners must pass the exam if they wish to go on to junior and secondary school (UNESCO, 2010/11, p.18). Table 1 shows the scores from the Primary School

Leaving Examination. Scores for the exam are a percentage of the correct answers to the questions on the test. Learners can pass the examination with a score of 40%, the lowest tier. To earn the highest level, or first tier, learners have to answer 60% or more of the questions correctly, 50% for the second tier, 40% for the third tier. Based on the scores for the past three years, learners at MKPS have passed the Primary School Leaving Examination (Table 1). In fact, scores over the past three years have improved. For 2013 and 2014, there are more learners with scores in tier one (60%) and tier two (50%). Over the three years, all learners passed the examination (with the exception of learners who were absent). However, for the past two years, almost 50% of the learners have earned scores between 40% and 50%. Those scores could indicate that learners have not attained high levels of literacy in Sesotho and in English. The principal worried that even though students were passing the examination, their literacy skills in English and Sesotho might not be advanced enough for success in the junior and secondary schools.

Table 1

Pass Rate for Primary School Leaving Examination (LES) Grade 7 for Mountain Kingdom Primary School

	2012 Primary school LES scores	2013 Primary school LES scores	2014 Primary school LES scores
Pass rate by tier	Number of students with score	Number of students with score	Number of students with score
First tier (score of 60%)	4	18	19
Second tier (score of 50%)	15	10	12
Third tier (score of 40%)	16	7	5
Fail (score below 40%)	0	0	0
Absent	0	2	2
Total number of students in grade & eligible to take the examination	35	37	38

Pass rate scores are computed by a percent of the number correct on the exam.

Source: Examinations Council of Lesotho (2012, 2013 and 2014)

Improving Literacy Instruction at Mountain Kingdom Primary School

Based on Primary Level Examinations scores and a general concern for the overall quality of literacy at MKPS, the principal contacted me to seek support in improving early literacy instruction. Through a working partnership with the teachers at MKPS, we examined the current early literacy practices and identified instructional practices that could be improved. Based on teachers' needs, we created an action plan to support early literacy instruction in the early primary grades.

Researcher's Role

Though the principal at Mountain Kingdom Primary School requested my help in examining the current literacy practices in the primary grades, as a Western researcher, I recognized that I am in a position of power and status. For years, developing African countries looked to Western research findings to shape educational policies and practice

(Perry, 2009). However, Western studies and solutions fail to reflect the sociocultural and socio-educational realities of African schools. Recently, African scholars have encouraged a combination of Western and African perspectives to find solutions to African literacy problems (Perry, 2009). By visiting Mountain Kingdom Primary School, I examined the current practices within the sociocultural realities influencing the school. The solutions recommended to enhance literacy instruction considered the unique conditions at Mountain Kingdom Primary School relating to the use of Sesotho and English, limited resources, class size, student achievement, instructional practice, teacher training, and opportunities to use literacy at school.

Conceptual Framework

In designing the capstone project, I tried to create a conceptual framework that would allow me to examine the unique social, political, and cultural conditions that exert pressure on the literacy development of the Basotho learners. According to Easterly (2006) in *White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done so Much Ill and so Little Good*, literacy initiatives in developing countries have failed to produce changes in literacy achievement because the recommendations failed to address the unique challenges presented at the local level. He argued that what is needed are “searchers,” not “planners.” Planners are those who come into a situation with preconceived ideas about what should be done with very little input from local stakeholders. From his perspective, real change comes when “searchers” work side by side with stakeholders to create an action plan adapted to the local conditions. Answers do not exist ahead of time. Instead, through engaging stakeholders in the problem-

solving process, innovative solutions can be created for the local context and revised as needed.

In order for me to be a searcher, it became necessary to create a conceptual framework that allowed me to frame the problem of practice from a sociocultural perspective and incorporate theories of effective early literacy instruction for English language learners. I adopted a conceptual framework that combined the sociocultural learning theory with contextualized transfer of best practices.

Life conditions and experiences within Lesotho limit opportunities for learners to engage in high quality literacy activities. When learners fail to acquire the necessary strategies and skills needed to handle academic work, we must not assume that the absence of the necessary skill set reflects a lack of ability (Gambrell, Malloy, Marinak, & Mazzoni, 2015). Without further exploration of the literacy context within Mountain Kingdom Primary School, we cannot fairly evaluate these learners until we ensure there are opportunities to engage in the literacy practices known to support literacy development.

Much of our knowledge about reading instruction comes from research conducted in developed countries. Though some research exists regarding promising practices to improve literacy within the African societies, it is difficult to apply this research to the Lesotho context without understanding the nature of the literacy instruction and specific needs at MKPS. This research project invited the stakeholders at MKPS to be a part of the problem-solving process and leveraged current instructional practices to meet the instructional needs of the learners. Once areas of need were identified, evidence-based practices known to improve early literacy were used to address the challenges unique to

MKPS. In Chapter 2, I discuss in more detail the conceptual framework and its support in the literature and the research design.

Research Design

For this study, I used a qualitative participatory action research design, which allowed me to examine the perspectives of the principal, teachers, and school board members, who are the main stakeholders at Mountain Kingdom Primary School. A qualitative approach, which focuses on an interpretist view, allowed me to “understand the process within a given context and the relationship between the events and the actors” (Vrasidas, 2001, p. 8). Through classroom observations, interviews with stakeholders (principal, teachers, and school board members), and a review of educational documents (educational policies, grade-level syllabi, Primary School Leaving Examination, Grade 7, reading curriculum, and instructional resources), I examined the following research questions:

Research question 1: What are the literacy practices in the home, school and community of children in Reception (U.S. kindergarten) to Grade 3?

Research question 2: How can literacy practices be leveraged to support early literacy development?

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

With the Education for All initiative, adopted in 1990, and the Millennium Development Goals in 2000, a majority of the world's learners were afforded a remarkable opportunity to attend school. However, ensuring quality education for these learners has been a very difficult task (Gove & Cvelich, 2011). Providing high-quality literacy is at the heart of the problem. At a very basic level, literacy includes listening, speaking, thinking critically, reading, and writing. However, as our world becomes more complex as a result of rapid changes in technology and changes in our social and cultural landscape, so does our understanding of what it means to be literate (National Council of Teachers of English, 2013).

To be literate today, learners must not only possess the capacity to use basic levels of literacy, but they must also learn to organize and manage information from a variety of sources; think critically, analyze, and evaluate information; ask questions and solve problems; and communicate and collaborate with others inside and outside their classrooms (Griffo, Madda, Pearson, & Raphael, 2015; National Council of Teachers of English, 2013). The ability to use these more advanced literacy skills is essential if learners are to become lifelong learners who can fully engage in life and participate in a global community (Griffo, Madda, Pearson, & Raphael, 2015; National Council of Teachers of English, 2013). For resource-poor countries, just attaining basic levels of literacy for the citizens continues to be a daunting task. If we believe learners in

developing countries deserve their place in the global community, then helping them achieve high levels of literacy is imperative.

This chapter outlines the conceptual framework supporting this research study and describes the reading research that supports high-quality reading instruction. It examines best practices in literacy instruction as well as promising African literacy initiatives to help identify methods of instruction that have the potential to provide learners in Lesotho with quality literacy instruction. This study is nested within what is known about best practices in literacy instruction and the ways those practices can be situated within the complex context of Africa.

Conceptual Framework

The underlying assumption of this study is that in order to apply best practices in literacy instruction as a means to improve reading achievement, those practices must be adapted to the sociocultural context of the learning community. Without careful consideration of the needs of the learning community, policies and practices will fail to produce social change. The guiding conceptual framework for this capstone project blends two ideas fundamental to supporting change: the sociocultural learning theory and contextualized transfer of best practices in literacy instruction.

In considering the African context, it is important to remember that research findings from developed countries may not easily transfer to the sociocultural realities of the schools in developing countries (Nag, Chiat, Torgerson, & Snowling, 2014). In developed countries, research related to best practices and pedagogy that works in early and beginning literacy instruction occurs in schools with available literacy resources, access to reading texts within a child's first language, and quality instructional practices.

For most African schools, the delivery of quality instruction is hindered by issues relating to (1) appropriate reading instruction, (2) allocation of instructional time, (3) language of instruction, (4) teacher training and professional development, and (5) availability of materials in English and/or the mother tongue (Trudell, Dowd, Piper, & Bloch, 2012). Creating a realistic working solution for any school within this context requires examining the research findings and adapting the intervention or practice to fit within constraints of the local context.

This section explains how the conceptual framework provides a model for examining sociocultural factors within a learning community and how best literacy practices can be applied to improve instruction.

Sociocultural Learning Theory

In order to acknowledge the complex cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic conditions at Mountain Kingdom Primary School, this study is framed by the sociocultural learning theory. Sociocultural learning theory helps explain how language and literacy function in society to promote social relations, cultural models, power, values, and attitudes (Gee, 2007). From this lens, reading is viewed as a social process and can be used to “establish, structure, and maintain social relationships among people” (Tracey & Morrow, 2006, p. 101). According to Gee (2004), reading is rooted within a social context and culture. Reading depends on a specific time and place. One’s experiences are mediated by culture. Learners learn that language has a specific context or “community of practice or identity kits” (Ruddel & Unrau, 2004, p. 94). Learners learn that each community of practice has its own set of values, beliefs, and interactions. For learners whose practices are in conflict with the standards or values of the dominant

culture, problems arise related to expectations, acceptance, and even success within the situation. When examining the literacy practices of learners from developing countries like Lesotho, it is important to recognize the social, cultural, and economic situations that support and/or hinder their ability to learn and gain access to knowledge. By examining these conditions, which influence literacy, solutions can be tailored to address areas of unique need within the learning environment.

From a sociocultural lens, literacy is capital that gives those who have it status and power to engage in practices that are valued (Gee, 2004). It becomes important to carefully examine the kinds of literacy practices that are valued by both the dominant culture (global community) and the local stakeholders to ensure that everyone has access to these practices. Researchers who support the sociocultural view of literacy believe that literacy is viewed too narrowly when the focus is just on school-based skills (Street, 2001). Identifying the literacy practices inside and outside of Mountain Kingdom Primary School made it possible to build upon or leverage existing literacy practices that supported the learners' early literacy skills as a means to improve instruction. By understanding what practices were valued within the community and coupling these practices with what is known from reading research to improve early literacy instruction, I hoped to create an action plan to improve instruction that addressed the unique sociocultural needs of Mountain Kingdom Primary School.

Contextualized Transfer of Practices

According to Reimers, Cooc, and Hashmi (2012), *Education for All* has failed to ensure that all learners are acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills to alter their social status and expand their freedom. This is not because of the lack of political

commitment from the national and global level, but because of ineffective approaches used to educate all learners. Reimers et al. contended that what is needed to support quality education is knowledge of what works. If knowledge of what works is to be transferred from one educational setting to another, then it is necessary to understand what can legitimately be transferred from one context to another. Educational innovation comes from contextualized transfer of educational policies and practices that have demonstrated their effectiveness in one context while carefully analyzing how differences within a new context might limit the transferability of the practice. In essence, quality education is a product of a system rather than a single policy like *Education for All* or a literacy intervention. Context matters.

Figure 1 illustrates the process that allows for early literacy and possible issues relating to instructional practices to be examined within the sociocultural context. The six-step process to support change in early literacy instruction involves (1) verifying current instructional needs within the local context, (2) analyzing the context in which the problem resides and identifying potential solutions, (3) verifying enabling and constraining factors within the learning community that influence the problem of practice, (4) determining instructional practices from reading research that support instructional changes to address areas of need, (5) supporting teachers as they engage in new practices to improve early literacy instruction, and (6) evaluating the effectiveness of the instructional change and reengaging the process if necessary. This process allows stakeholders to participate in creating solutions to their own problems and transfer best practices to fit their unique social context (Reimers et al., 2012).

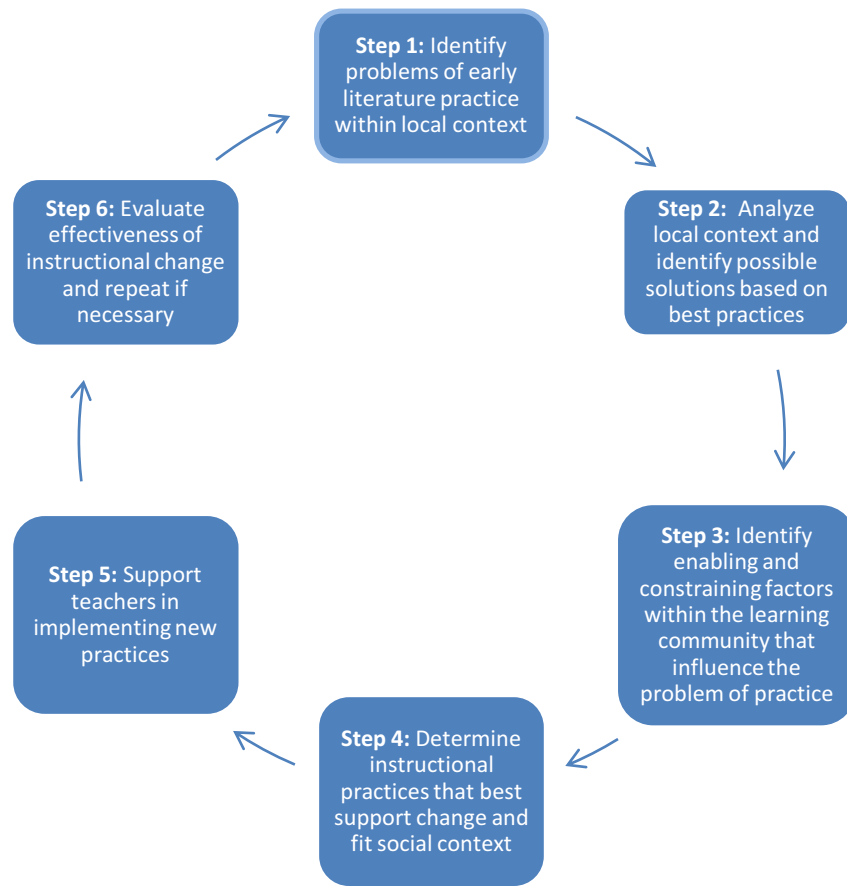


Figure 1. Conceptual framework based on the socio-cultural learning theory and contextualized transfer of practice.

This capstone project employed the first four steps of the conceptual process to support change in early literacy instruction at MKPS. In order to improve early literacy instruction, the model required the problem of instructional practice to be identified within the local context. Through the literature review, existing research relating to best practices for improving literacy instruction was examined. The literature review identified potential instructional practices, which then became the basis for the action plan created to improve instructional practices at MKPS.

In the next section, the literature review, I examine existing research relating to second language acquisition theory and instructional practices known to support the development of literacy skills for English language learners. Understanding the stages of

literacy development and identifying instructional practices that develop literacy skills is key to evaluating and developing an instructional plan at MKPS. I discuss the following topics: (a) theories of second language acquisition and the relationship between L1 and L2 literacy development, (b) the components of an effective early literacy diet, and (c) potential instruction practices to promote literacy in developing countries.

Literature Review

Second Language Acquisition

Understanding the theories of second language acquisition and literacy development in English can help teachers develop appropriate instructional practices to ensure that learners gain the necessary skills to move along the developmental continuum. The theories also help explain the challenges learners face when acquiring the English language in developing countries. In the following section, I explain the theories of language acquisition and developmental continuum of language proficiency. I begin by explaining two of the most influential theories of second language acquisition: Cummins's and Krashen's theories of second language acquisition. These two theories are the theoretical basis for many instructional practices suggested to support the development of English language literacy, which I describe at the end of this section.

Cummins' theory of second language acquisition. According to Cummins (1981), learners develop two types of language: basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). BICS is the informal language learners use for everyday social interactions. BICS tends to be highly contextualized, cognitively less demanding, and easier to learn than CALP (Coleman & Goldenberg, 2009). It is sometimes referred to as playground language because learners

acquire it through social interactions with peers. The situational cues and gestures within the context of language help learners understand the meaning of language. When learners are exposed to meaningful context with ample time to use language, BICS can be developed in 2 to 3 years with language exposure. CALP, more currently referred to as academic language, develops differently from BICS. Academic language is the language of academic content, textbooks, and formal writing and develops through formal education. Academic language develops more slowly than BICS because the language is more cognitively demanding and complex, with abstract, content specific vocabulary (Coleman & Goldenberg, 2009, 2010). Because of the complexity of developing academic language, Cummins (1981) concluded it can take up to 4 to 7 years to develop academic language proficiency.

In order to develop academic language, learners need to develop an extensive vocabulary knowledge that includes breadth (knowing the meaning of many words for similar or related concepts) and depth (knowing multiple meanings of common and uncommon words); an understanding of complex sentence structures; a recognition that written vocabulary is different from oral vocabulary; and an understanding of the structure of argument, academic discourse, and expository texts (Scarcella, 2003). Dutro and Morgan (2005) concluded that learners need to be able to use academic language not only to comprehend teacher-talk or written text but also to express their own thinking orally and in writing. Learners need to be able to use their language skills to interpret and infer meaning from oral and written language, understand the meaning and text structures from various genres, and flexibly use instructional strategies for variety of purposes.

According to Scarcella (2003), there are some problems with Cummins's theory

of second language acquisition. The terms BICS and CALP imply that learners have a fixed understanding of the two types of language and that skills are clearly delineated between the two. A learner either has the skills or does not have the skills. In reality, some aspects of both types of language develop over time, and instructional practices can be used to support the development of both BICS and CALP. For example, phonemic awareness supports the development of beginning oral language, yet it can support advanced skills in academic language when it helps learners access difficult academic vocabulary while reading unfamiliar words. Both BICS and CALP are more complex than is implied by defining each as either basic or more complex forms of language. It would be erroneous to assume that the cognitive demand for BICS is less difficult than CALP. In the context of this study, it became problematic to apply the theory to the context of Africa, where communities are linguistically isolated and do not have exposure to either BICS or CALP in English. However, Coleman and Goldenberg (2009) explained that an understanding of BICS and CALP allows teachers to distinguish between language that is informal, contextualized, and used for social interactions and language that is formal, abstract, and used primarily for teaching and learning academic context. This distinction helps determine the degree of support and types of instructional strategies teachers should use to develop skills in BICS and CALP.

Krashen's monitor hypothesis. Krashen's (1982) theory of second language acquisition consists of five hypotheses that account for the acquisition of a second language: acquisition-learning hypothesis, monitor hypothesis, natural order hypothesis, input hypothesis, and affective filter hypothesis.

1. Acquisition-learning hypothesis: language can be learned two ways, through

acquisition and through learning. Acquisition is the result of a subconscious process that occurs when the learner engages in meaningful interactions in L2. Learning a language is the result of formal instruction, where the learner consciously focuses on form and rules about language. According to Krashen (1982), acquisition is key to constructing the language system because fluency in L2 is due to what we have acquired and not what we have learned. It is possible for learners to learn and understand a specific language rule (e.g., grammar rule) but be unable to apply that rule when speaking. Language is thus acquired without formal instruction in a naturalistic way when second language is used in meaningful interactions with native speakers (Hoover, Baca, & Klinger, 2016; Lightbown & Spada, 2016). Yet, in the context of developing countries, where learners are not exposed to native speakers of English, learners will not acquire the necessary language skills without explicit instruction (Scarcell, 2003).

2. Natural order hypothesis: language learners acquire language and specific grammar rules in a predictable sequence. There is a natural order to grammar structures, with some structures being acquired earlier than others. Errors in language structure are seen as inevitable, temporary, and they will disappear in a predictable order. Research supports that learners can improve their grammar use and syntax structure when they receive corrective feedback, which helps the learner realize their use of the target language is incorrect (Lightbown & Spada, 2016). There are six corrective feedback forms: *explicit correction* provides the correct form of the language, *recasting* reformulates

the learners' speech without the error, *clarification requests* show the learners that their speech was misunderstood, *elicitation* supports the learners' responses through prompting a response with questions, *repetition* refers to the teacher's reiteration of the student's inaccurate speech, and *metalinguistic feedback* provides comments or questions about the correctness of the speech, which allow the learner to think about the nature of the error and generate the correct form of language without direct support (Lightbown & Spada, 2016, pp. 139-141). Through corrective feedback, teachers are able to support the learners' language growth and grammatical development and help the learners internalize the correct language form.

3. Monitor hypothesis: acquisition and learning are two ways language is learned. The acquisition system initiates the learner's speech and is responsible for language fluency and intuitive judgment about the correctness of the utterance. The learning system monitors or checks the correctness of the spoken or written language used by the learner. In order for learners to alter or correct speech, they must understand the language rules, be able to focus attention on form and correctness of language, and have enough time to use the rules (Hoover et al., 2016; Krashen, 1982).
4. Input hypothesis: language is acquired when the learner is exposed to input that is understandable or comprehensible. Second language acquisition is the direct result of the learner's ability to understand the target language in natural communication situations. Krashen (1982) theorized that we understand language input that is a little bit beyond our current level of proficiency with

the support from extra-linguistic context. He suggested that if a learner is at stage i with the knowledge of syntax, the learner can progress to $i+1$ by understanding input at that level of complexity (Krashen, 1982, p. 20).

Krashen cautioned against language teaching that focuses on mechanical drill to support language use. Though learners may comprehend the language drills, the language focus may seem trivial and learners are apt to not pay attention after a few repetitions. From his perspective language teaching should focus on meaning and communication for authentic purposes. Instead of instruction that focuses on drill, he recommended activities that access background knowledge, use gestures and pictures, and include extensive reading (Krashen, 1982). Comprehensible input is at the heart of many instructional strategies used to support language acquisition. From a teaching perspective, comprehensible input is what the teacher gives to the learner through instructional supports by developing oral language prior to instruction, developing comprehension skills, and providing first language support (Anthony, 2008). Second language learning models have long believed comprehensible input was a necessary and sufficient condition for language acquisition (Pica, 2005; Swain, 2005). However, researchers now believe that comprehensible input is not enough; output as a learning process is also important and helps facilitate language learning (Swain, 2005). I discuss output theory as a means to support second language acquisition below.

5. Affective filter hypothesis: a learner's ability to acquire language is dependent

on nonlinguistic factors that include affective and social-emotional variables. These variables are motivation to learn the language, self-confidence and self-esteem; a low-risk and low anxiety learning environment can support or prevent the comprehensible input from being accessed by the learner to develop language skills (Krashen, 1982). If learners are highly motivated, self-confident, and in a low anxiety environment, they are more likely to succeed (Hoover et al., 2016). Ultimately, learners will acquire second language when they obtain comprehensible input and their affective filters are low enough to be receptive to language input (Krashen, 1982).

Output hypothesis. As noted earlier, researchers have added to Krashen's theory of *comprehensible input* to now include output. According to Swain (2005), output in terms of the learning process allows learners to notice when they do not know how to produce language (speak or write) to communicate an idea. The output triggers the learner's attention, which allows the learner to seek new information about the language and its use. Output also allows the learner to test his or her hypothesis about how language works. The learner creates an initial response and receives feedback from others about its accuracy and meaning. Feedback allows the learner to modify his or her language to ensure accuracy of form and meaning. The final function of output allows the learner to develop metalinguistic knowledge by reflecting upon his or her use of language and the language of others. Output also ensures that the learner has ample opportunity to develop and practice language in a meaningful context, which aids in language proficiency. Swain suggested that learners participate in collaborative dialog with partners or groups of learners to share ideas and practice using language in

meaningful context. By working with others, learners examine the accuracy of the language, determine if their ideas are understood, and adjust their language accordingly.

The three output functions allow the learner to notice language, practice and modify output, which supports the acquisition of language (Anthony, 2008; Swain, 2005).

According to Anthony, strategies that encourage language output include the collaborative conversations mentioned above, vocabulary development, writing, and reading. Suggested strategies for supporting language output include

1. Collaborative conversations can include the use of open-ended questions to encourage student engagement. Limiting teacher-dominated talk and low level questions can encourage longer responses from learners, encouraging greater language use (Anthony, 2008).
2. Vocabulary development supports both spoken and written language. Introducing learners to new words through storybook reading provides a meaningful context for new words. Learners can be invited to make personal connections to the new words and make associations with the meaning of the words in their first language (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2013);
3. Writing can be used as an important authentic form of output that allows learners to express their ideas. When learners are encouraged to talk about the writing process and share their work with others, they are gaining valuable insight about language structure and language as a tool to communicate ideas. Learners can read aloud their writing and get feedback about their work.
4. Reading extensively can give learners access to new vocabulary. Learners can choral read and partner read material to produce, practice and hear fluent

language. Storybooks can be converted into reader's theater plays and performed to provide opportunities to use, practice, and reflect on language. Through acting out the stories, learners also focus on language meaning and expression. Teachers can use think-alouds when reading with learners to model how to use language and make meaning from the text. Over time the learners can begin to use strategies on their own or with pairs as a means to continue to use language to interact with text in a meaningful way (Anthony, 2008).

Tension with second language acquisition theories. According to Dutro and Morgan (2005), second language may not be acquired in the same way as one's first language. Krashen's theory implies that language will develop naturally given comprehensible input and opportunities to engage with other language learners. However, there are some (e.g., McLaughlin, 1985), who believe language must be systematically and explicitly taught and that some language skills can be developed more quickly through instruction.

Stages of English Language Learners' Literacy Development

According to the stage theory of literacy development, acquiring literacy skills occurs in distinct phases or stages (Chall, 1983; Krashen & Terrell, 1983). An understanding of the stages of literacy development and expected literacy behaviors associated with each stage helps teachers plan and modify their instruction to meet the developmental needs of their learners. The stage theory helps explain the language proficiency level of the learner and helps ensure that the teacher provides appropriate instruction that matches the learner's level of development. Table 2 summarizes the five

stages of second language acquisition identified by Krashen and Terrell. These stages are preproduction, early production, speech emergence, intermediate fluency, and advanced fluency. Within the chart, the characteristics of each stage are explained as well as the expected literacy behavior in terms of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills the learner will likely exhibit. Within the stage theory, there is no right or wrong place to be on the continuum. The stages span across the normal developmental sequence associated with the learner's literacy behavior. The learner's literacy behavior for any given stage is usually the focus of instruction. As learners progress through the higher levels of literacy development, they are able to use literacy skills more critically and understand more complex and abstract concepts.

Table 2

Stages of English Language Learners' Literacy Development

Stage	Characteristics	Child's Reading Behaviors
Preproduction Silent Period	The learner: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has limited English spoken language. • Uses nonverbal responses: nods, points, and draws. • Has minimal comprehension. • May appear to lack attention and concentration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening: learner can point to pictures and words, follow simple directions, and match objects to words or spoken language; • Speaking: learner can name common objects, pictures, and people, and respond to simple who, what, when, where, and why questions; • Reading: learner can begin to match speech to print and begin to recognize concept of print; start to identify letters and sounds. • Writing: learner can draw and label pictures, draw pictures to convey meaning and express ideas.
Early production	The learner: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has limited comprehension. • Produces one- to two-word responses. • May respond to who, what, where, when questions with one- or two-word responses. • May participate in conversations using memorized or familiar phrases or words. • May complete sentences when given sentence frames. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening: learner can follow two- step oral directions and match objects to print and oral information to objects; • Speaking: learner begins to ask questions using who, what, where, and when; orally describes pictures and events and restate facts; is still focused on listening; language production will have many errors; • Reading: learner can identify information from text and attempt to sound out words and use decoding skills to figure out simple words; recognize a few words by sight. • Writing: learner can develop short phrases and sentences, provide responses to prompts, list

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses verbs in present tense. 	items, and develop drawings to support writing.
Production stage <i>Speech emergence</i>	<p>The learner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has good comprehension. • Produces simple sentences. • Produces writing and speech with grammatical errors. • Begins to develop a sight word vocabulary. • May describe, compare, and make predictions and answer more advanced questions (how and why). • May not understand inferential material (jokes) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening: learner can complete multiple-step instructions, categorize and sequence information, locate and select information for oral language. • Speaking: learner can make predictions, retell stories, describe procedures. • Reading: learner can use context clues to make meaning, sequence stories and identify the main idea; continues to develop decoding skills and sight word knowledge; is beginning to develop fluency.
Intermediate fluency	<p>The learner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has excellent comprehension. • Makes few grammatical errors in oral language; but may make grammatical errors in writing. • May engage in dialogue freely. • May understand more words than he or she can express in language output (receptive and expressive language may not match). • May process cognitively demanding language slowly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening: learner can compare and contrast and make connections and draw conclusions from oral material. • Speaking: learner discusses issues and concepts, engages in problem solving tasks. • Reading: learner can interpret material and data, locate important details, support main idea; focuses on automatic word recognition and fluency; recognizes spelling patterns in words and checks for meaning. • Writing: learner is able to summarize, create original ideas, and edit and revise writing.
Advanced fluency	<p>The learner:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has language, usage, meaning, and fluency closely matched to a native speaker's. • Has excellent comprehension. • Has academic skills similar to a native speaker's. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening: learner is able to draw conclusions, discuss, and reflect on ideas; make connections to new information. • Speaking: learner debates and refutes ideas, provides examples and justification for reasoning, and can defend his or her point of view. • Reading: learner can conduct research, use multiple sources of information, draw conclusions, and make connections across different forms of text; use reading as a tool for learning content; use reading strategies to make meaning of print; and expand vocabulary. • Writing: learner can use writing to express novel ideas and write for a variety of purposes for varied audiences.

Sources: Developed from material found in Hill and Miller (2008), Hoover et al. (2016).

In the following section, I identify instructional practices that combine the theoretical frameworks for second language acquisition and stages of literacy development to support oral language development of second language learners. The

suggestions are by no means comprehensive. The suggestions take into account the need for both comprehensible input and output of oral language.

Classroom Practices Supporting Oral Language Development

Oral language is comprised of the child's expressive (speaking) and receptive (listening) skills. Oral language is the foundation of reading and writing. Through storybook reading and content-based lessons, children can be exposed to rich language and encouraged to engage in meaningful conversation. Teachers can support oral language development of their students through a variety of methods, including encouraging interactions with peers and adults; engaging in storybook reading and content-based lessons; having children speak in full sentences; applying conversation discourse rules (taking turns, actively listening, responding to questions, staying on topic); and providing opportunities for children to share their ideas, opinions, and perceptions on a variety of topics (Justice & Kaderavek, 2002; Tracey & Morrow, 2015).

Dutro and Morgan (2005) took the stance that classroom instruction should include opportunities to develop language naturally through meaningful context as well as direct explicit instruction. They further explained that language instruction requires "teaching English, not just teaching 'in' English or simply providing opportunities for students to interact with each other " (p.228). They elaborated: "English language instruction should provide not only ample opportunities for meaningful and engaging uses of language for a wide range of social and academic purposes, but necessary instruction in how English works. It should be deliberate, strategic, and purposeful" (p. 242). To support language acquisition, Dutro and Morgan advocated the use of six

general principles that combine instructional practices that promote natural engagement with language and explicit teaching:

1. Access and build on the learner's prior knowledge of both language and content to help make connections between known concepts and new learning, use graphic organizers and questioning strategies to help learners connect existing knowledge with new concepts;
2. Provide meaningful context for learners to develop and use language to build knowledge and develop deeper understanding of new concepts; support language use and understanding through the use of visuals, gestures, graphic organizers, and word banks;
3. Promote comprehensible input by modeling language use; present new information in small chunks; provide frequent feedback to learners regarding their language use;
4. Encourage many opportunities for learners to practice language in meaningful situations in small groups or with thinking partners; focus on cooperative learning groups that encourage speaking and listening among peers instead of teacher-directed activities;
5. Create a learning environment that is positive and supportive, which encourages language practice and corrective feedback (building upon Krashen's [1982] affective filter hypothesis), and encourage learners to notice errors and adjust language based upon corrective feedback;
6. Reflect on language forms and the learning process by adjusting the cognitive demands of the language content to allow learners to focus their attention on

concepts as well as on language form, and encourage learners to reflect on their learning and thinking to support metalinguistic thinking; pre-teaching vocabulary and front-loading content (accessing prior knowledge, making predictions about what will be learned, providing pictures, using a graphic organizer like a KWL [what I know, what I want to learn], using props or environmental print, taking a field trip) can alter the cognitive demand of the lesson. (Dutro & Moran, 2005, pp. 242-245)

Language of Instruction

There is a great deal of evidence that children's reading proficiency in their native language is a strong predictor of their ultimate English reading performance (August & Shanahan, 2006; Garcia, 2000; Lee & Schallert, 1997; Reese, Garnier, Gallimore, & Goldenberg, 2000), and that bilingualism itself does not interfere with performance in either language (Yeung, Marsh, & Suliman, 2000).

In some African countries, children in the early primary grades are instructed in English, even if it is not their mother tongue or home language. In Lesotho, however, the language policy for school instruction encourages the use of Sesotho as the language of instruction in the primary grades, Reception to Grade 3. These children are considered emergent bilinguals and English second-language learners, because they first encounter a new language at school and have limited oral proficiency in that language (Bialystok, Luk, & Kwan, 2005).

Children learn to speak, read, and write in Sesotho during the primary grades, with the expectation that in Grade 4 they will move to English as the language of instruction. Sesotho is the mother tongue or L1 at Mountain Kingdom Primary School.

In the early primary grades, English is taught as a separate subject; often, the goal of this instruction is oral language development. The underlying assumption for instruction in the learner's first language is that if children learn literacy skills in a language they are more familiar with, they will be able to quickly and successfully transfer those skills to learning English (Goldenberg, 2008). In the past it was thought that literacy instruction should not begin until learners developed sufficient oral language proficiency in their L2. However, Slavin and Cheung (2005) found that learners benefit from literacy instruction that occurs in both languages throughout the day. The skills developed in one language will transfer to another language if teachers provide instruction and opportunities for learners to practice skills in meaningful ways (Hoover et al., 2016).

Relationship between L1 and L2 Reading Development

In the following section, ways in which children are able to use their native language (L1) to support reading acquisition in their second language (L2) will be explored. Understanding how a child's first language supports learning in a second language provides the foundation for important language instructional practices. We know that children who are already literate in their first language are able to use their knowledge of L1 literacy to support their acquisition of L2 literacy (cross linguistic relationships). Languages vary in terms of their phonological, orthographic, morphological, syntactic, and semantic systems. The degree to which the two languages are linguistically similar or dissimilar can influence L2 reading development (Grabe, 2009).

Theoretical frameworks for L1 and L2 reading development. Three main theoretical frameworks have been proposed to explain the relationship between L1

literacy and L2 reading development and how cognitive processes relating to literacy are shared (transferred) across languages. These include (1) the Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis, (2) the Linguistic Threshold Hypothesis, and (3) the Dual Language System.

Developmental interdependence hypothesis. According to the Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis, also referred to as the Common Underlying Proficiency Hypothesis, L1 literacy instruction supports L2 literacy (Cummins, 1991). There are similarities between L1 and L2 that can be used to support the development of both languages. When students are literate in their first language, they will have knowledge about the reading processes that will be the basis for reading in L2. Once readers have gained these cognitive skills in their first language, they should be able to use these same cognitive processes in another language, especially when taught to do so.

Applying the developmental interdependence hypothesis in Africa can be problematic. Within this hypothesis are two key assumptions: (a) the child has developed adequate language skills in the L1; and (b) the child is explicitly taught to use the knowledge from L1 to support skills in L2 (Goldenberg, 2008). Research from Piper and Miksic (2011) that examined mother tongue instruction in Kenya, Malawi, and South Africa indicated that teachers did not explicitly bridge the skills between L1 and L2. Children were not made aware of the language skills that could be transferred between languages. Unfortunately, the children's L1 was also not sufficiently developed. Therefore, children ended up having language deficits in both languages, because L1 skills were not advanced enough to support L2.

Language threshold hypothesis. The role of L2 language proficiency and L2

reading development is dependent upon a certain level of language proficiency in the second language before the reader can transfer reading skills from L1 to L2. This hypothesis may seem in direct contradiction of the Interdependence Hypothesis. However, according to Bernhardt (2005), the two hypotheses are not in conflict. Instead, the Language Threshold Hypothesis helps explain what might transfer and under what conditions transfer occurs. Several studies investigating L1 reading abilities and L2 language proficiencies with varying levels of L2 reading proficiencies showed strong correlations between L2 language proficiency and L2 reading comprehension but only weak correlations between L1 reading comprehension and L2 reading comprehension (Grabe, 2009; Lesaux, Geva, Koda, Siegal, & Shanahan, 2008). In groups where L2 proficiency levels were high, the relationship to L1 reading proficiency was stronger. Though a language threshold is not likely to exist in absolute terms, evidence suggests that in order for students to use their knowledge of L1 literacy, a certain level of L2 proficiency is needed (Grabe, 2009).

In the context of Lesotho, the learners must develop high levels of literacy in both languages. Though the language policy in Lesotho advocates for literacy instruction in both languages beginning in the early grades, the reality is that literacy instruction in both languages is poor with a focus on a kind of rote learning known as chalk-to-talk instruction. Reading is taught from the chalkboard, where lists of letters, words, and sentences are written for children to say aloud in unison. Writing consists of copying words and sentences from the chalkboard. Learners are rarely invited to use literacy in authentic acts of writing or storybook reading (Pretorius & Mokhwesana, 2009). Without

higher levels of language and literacy in both the learner's L1 and L2, it is difficult for the child to take advantage of any skills that could be transferred between languages.

Dual language system. According to Koda (2007), the Dual Language System suggests that L2 reading is more than just how L1 interacts with L2 reading, but that two languages are interacting and involved in all aspects of learning to read in L2. The Dual Language System may very well be different from the system used by L1 readers and even native speakers of English. The prior learning experiences in L1 act as a reservoir of knowledge and skills that interacts with L2 literacy skills. Ultimately, a new system is formed based on a combination of the two languages (Grabe, 2009; Koda, 2007). The important aspect of the L1 relationship to L2 is to identify the common resources or universals available for readers to use across languages. These universals are what make learning to read in a second language similar across all languages and are key skills to be developed when learning to read in a second language. Grabe (2009) identified the following five universal mapping principles that support reading development in all languages.

1. Consistent cognitive architecture: All readers integrate pattern-recognition skills, working memory, long-term memory, inference skills, drive for coherence of interpretation, and general cognitive learning principles.
2. Print relationship to speech: All orthographies activate spoken-language processing though the levels at which each language optimally develops. This relationship will vary. Moreover, phonological decoding is a universal of all languages.
3. Reading transfer facilitation: L2 reading will be facilitated when features

being transferred from the L1 are similar to the features of the L2. When any two languages differ in specific mapping details, facilitative transfer is limited.

4. Metalinguistic awareness: Reading in all languages requires that readers become aware of multiple levels of language knowledge and their use in building reading skills. These levels of metalinguistic knowledge useful to reading include phonological awareness, orthographic awareness, morphological awareness, syntactic awareness, and discourse awareness.
5. Similarities in text-interpretation principles: All languages build meaning through an integration of text model comprehension and a situation model that includes the reader's background knowledge, attitude, and culture.

(Gabe, 2009, p. 124)

Not all literacy skills in L1 transfer to L2. For skills that do not seem to transfer, such as vocabulary knowledge and listening comprehension, development of these skills in L2 will support the L2 reading ability (Chiappe & Siegal, 2006). This also indicates that children must receive instruction in their L2 with specific emphasis on developing literacy skills (Grabe, 2009; Trudell et al., 2012). In order to help learners understand the similarities and difference between L1 and L2 literacy, adjustments in instructional practices need to occur. Adjustments may include explaining similarities and differences between first and second languages, focusing on sounds that are different between the two languages; teaching syntax order; pre-teaching vocabulary (explicitly teaching vocabulary might interfere with comprehension); explaining culturally relevant concepts and background knowledge to support comprehension (Goldenberg, 2013).

According to Alidou, Brock-Utne, Heugh, & Wolff (2006), “Language is not everything in education, but without language, everything is nothing in education” (p.9). For children in a resource-poor learning environment who lack access to high-quality language experiences, it is difficult to draw any real conclusion about how skills in the first language can be used to facilitate growth and knowledge in a second language (Piper & Miksic, 2010). Lack of oral language skills in both L1 and L2 can be attributed to poor instruction and few opportunities to use language in a meaningful context. Recent research has suggested that due to poor oral language skills and inadequate reading and writing skills in Sesotho, children are unable to transfer literacy skills from their L1 (Sesotho) to learning in L2 (English) (Piper & Miksic, 2010). Improving children’s L1 and L2 is key to ensuring high levels of literacy in both languages. Language development is dependent on the cultural and linguistic environments of the learner, which must include meaningful contexts, intensity, and use of language (Cha & Goldenberg, 2015). Though learners benefit from learning to read in their native language and in English, high-quality instruction, not the language of instruction, is the key to supporting both language and literacy development (August & Shanahan, 2006; Cheung & Slavin, 2005).

Orthography of Sesotho. The role of orthography is an important factor in language and reading development. With alphabetic languages, each phoneme of the language is matched to a grapheme counterpart within the written system for the language (Grabe, 2009). The orthography of the language is the representation of the sounds of the language by written or printed symbols. According to the Orthographic Depth Hypothesis, “orthographies have varying degrees of transparency between the

phonological segments of the language and the orthographic symbols intended to represent the phonological segments” (Grabe, 2009, p. 114). If the phonology and orthographic patterns within the language are a clear one-to-one match to each other, the language is thought to have a shallow, or transparent, orthography.

Sesotho is an orthographically transparent language with consistent mapping between letters and sounds (Phindane, 2014). However, in the case of English, the orthography, or written form, does not clearly match the phonological representations within speech. English has one of the most opaque, or deep, orthographies among alphabetic languages. The orthographic complexity of English makes it more difficult for students to apply letter-to-sound correspondence when reading or spelling words. For children who are learning to read English as their L2, the role of English orthography becomes extremely important in learning to recognize English words. Learning to recognize words in English is a very complex process.

Instructional Practice to Develop Reading and Writing

Learning to read and write involves complex cognitive processes and emotional and social factors. Each component affects the beginning reader’s ability to learn to read. To become a fluent reader who can make meaning from the text, the reader must develop the following skills: word knowledge skills associated with vocabulary and learning new word meanings, and decoding the sounds within known words; text knowledge associated with text structures and literary elements; and broader communication skills related to reading and writing, speaking and listening, and thinking (Griffo et al., 2015). Research has confirmed that learning to read and write in an alphabetic language requires quality literacy instruction that includes skills in oral language and reading-related skills,

including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, and writing (August & Shanahan, 2006; National Early Literacy Panel [NELP], 2008; Pretorius & Mokhwesana, 2009). English language learners also benefit from evidence-based instruction focusing on explicit instruction, interactive learning environments, collaborative learning for language and reading development, student engagement, extensive and varied vocabulary development, and development of academic English (August & Shanahan, 2006; Gersten, Baker, Shanahan, Linan-Thompson, Collins, & Scarcella, 2007; Saenz, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2005).

All learners need instruction that focuses on specific word-level skills that help them understand phonemic awareness, alphabetic knowledge, print-related skills, word recognition, and orthographic knowledge. They also need to engage in meaningful expository and narrative texts that allow them to interact with the readings, to act upon prior knowledge to make new knowledge, and to develop rich oral vocabulary and comprehension skills. More importantly, teachers need intentionally to draw connections between the common underlying processes that are shared between the learner's first language and the second language (Coleman & Goldenberg, 2009; Goldenberg, 2013).

For this study, understanding the key components of high-quality instruction helped determine what areas of instructional practice currently employed at Mountain Kingdom Primary School needed to be supported, enhanced, or changed. In the following section, the essential literacy components to quality literacy instruction are described: reading-related skills, including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, and writing. Within each component, evidence-based practices, along with research relating to studies within the African context, are presented

to offer ways in which literary instruction can be used to support English language learners' acquisition of skills.

Phonological awareness. Phonological awareness reflects skill in hearing the spoken sounds of language. It is an umbrella term that includes the ability to hear and identify rhyme, alliteration, and the individual sounds within a word (Invernizzi & Tortorelli, 2013). Phonological awareness represents a continuum of shallow to deeper awareness of sounds in words. Phonological awareness also includes phonemic awareness, which is the ability to isolate and manipulate the individual sounds or phonemes in words. Without phonological awareness, children are unable to recognize that spoken words are made up of individual sounds, which is crucial to developing alphabetic principle (Vellutino, Fletcher, Snowling, & Scanlon, 2004). Learners who possess phonological and phonemic awareness skills are able to manipulate, isolate, delete, and blend sounds in spoken language. These skills are essential for developing alphabetic principle, concept of word, and word recognition (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000).

Phonological awareness and alphabetic knowledge. According to the National Early Literacy Panel (2008), research studies that combined phonological awareness training with alphabet knowledge had the greatest effect on reading outcomes. Research suggested that phonological awareness facilitates the development of letter-names and their associated sounds. Learners who possess even shallow levels of phonological awareness are able to take advantage of the phonological information that is contained within the letter names (Burgess, 2006). In a study of 66 preschoolers, Foy and Mann (2006) confirmed phoneme awareness and letter knowledge were a better predictor of

reading in preschool learners than rhyme awareness. Their study confirmed that learning letter names and their associated sounds was influenced by the amount of phonological information contained in the letters' names. There appeared to be a hierarchical order for learning letter names and sounds. Letter names that rhyme, like *b, c, d, g, p, t, v*, were easier for learners to learn the letter sounds because the onset was the phoneme that the letter represented. Learners who could manipulate onset and rhymes within the word were able to take advantage of this kind of information contained in the letter's name. Letters such as *f, l, m, n, s*, and *x*, whose sounds were contained at the end of the letter name, were more difficult for children to learn associated sounds for, but appeared to be a bit easier to recognize. Letters like *a, e, i, o, u, j, k, q, y, h, r*, and *w*, which had little phonological information contained in their names, were very difficult for children to learn and required a deeper level of phonological skills. Teachers can support learners' acquisition of letter recognition and sounds by developing a teaching sequence that takes advantage of the hierarchical order for learning letter names and sounds.

Classroom practices to support alphabet knowledge. According to research by Ehri and Roberts (2006), letters and their sounds can be learned more easily if the letter name and sound can be associated with a visual mnemonic that anchors the letter name and sound. For example, the *Letterland* program (Wendon, 1991) used the name of the *Letterland* character's name to teach letter names and sounds. Information about the letter's sound is found in the character's name. The *Letterland* character associated with the letter *e* is *Eddy Elephant*. The letter is shaped like an elephant to aid in recognition, and the name helps the learner focus on the letter sound by providing alliteration. However, for some English language learners, learning the characters' names and

corresponding sounds can be a challenge. There is an assumption that the learner has prior knowledge of the words that are connecting the letters and sounds. For example, in the *Letterland* program, the letter *q* is associated with *Queenie Quail*. The learners may be required to not only learn the letter's name and sound but also understand a new concept and vocabulary word (Hoover et al., 2016).

Phonological awareness and concept of word. In an 18-month longitudinal study of 102 kindergarten students, Morris, Bloodgood, Lomax, & Perney (2003) investigated the reciprocal relationship between a beginning reader's concept of word and the development of phonological awareness. According to Morris et al., alphabet knowledge is the foundational skill that allows the child to attend to the beginning consonant sounds in words. Beginning consonant sound knowledge allows for the child to establish a stable concept of word. As children develop a stable concept of word, they are able to represent beginning and ending consonants in the spelling of words. This is representational of the boundaries of the word.

Classroom practices to support concept of word. In a study by Bloodgood (1999), the development of concept of word was examined in terms of a learner's name writing ability. Stable concept of word allowed a learner to isolate a word in written language. Once learners held a single word stable, they were able to take advantage of their knowledge of letters and sounds to decode the printed word. Because a learner's name is one of the most meaningful words in print, it could be used to support the acquisition of important literacy knowledge. As learners learn to write their name, they learn important information about the form and function of print. An analysis of name writing samples from 67 3 to 5-year-olds indicated that name production "correlated with

alphabet knowledge (.55), word recognition (.49) and concept of word (.39) for 4- and 5-year-olds” (Bloodgood, 1999, p. 343). There appeared to be a reciprocal relationship between name production and alphabet, sight word recognition and concept of word. Name writing appeared to help children make meaningful connections between the emergent literacy skills that were necessary for later reading.

Promising practice to develop early literacy skills. Phonological awareness skills are essential in learning to read and have also been shown to predict learners’ word recognition and spelling abilities not only in the learners’ native language (L1) but also in their second language (L2) (De Sousa, Greenop, & Fry, 2010; Jongejan, Verhoeven, & Siegel, 2007; Wilsenach, 2013). O’Carroll (2011) examined the effects of an early literacy intervention focusing on oral language skills, alphabet recognition, phonological awareness, concept of print, and emergent writing skills with 196 Reception and Grade 1 learners in two disadvantaged primary schools in Cape Town, South Africa. Though English was the language of instruction, English was not the learners’ native language. Prior to the intervention, her study revealed that over half the learners entering Grade 1 were unable to recognize any letters, which hampered their ability to learn to read. She concluded that a lack of instructional focus on alphabet recognition and sounds in Reception hindered the learners’ knowledge. Her intervention provided direct instruction in letter-knowledge and phonological awareness as well as emergent writing and book reading. During each lesson the learners focused on developing English vocabulary and oral language. The lessons followed the following format:

1. Reading aloud a picture book and focusing on vocabulary, comprehension, and concepts of print;

2. After reading strategies that allowed learners to draw and write in response to the book;
3. Games to support vocabulary development, beginning sounds and letter knowledge, phonological awareness activities focusing on blending and segmenting syllables;
4. Letter-sound knowledge taught through alphabet books, naming objects and pictures with target sound, forming letters with clay, and writing in sand.

Results from follow-up assessments in Grade 1 showed that learners who participated in the intervention began Grade 1 with significantly higher levels of alphabet recognition and sound knowledge and higher levels of concept of print. End-of-year Grade 1 assessments revealed that learners who began Grade 1 with higher levels of alphabet knowledge had higher scores on word recognition and spelling assessments. O’Carroll suggested that the results showed the importance of teaching early literacy skills in Reception and not waiting until Grade 1 to teach early literacy skills. Her study also highlighted the need to ensure that curriculum in Reception focus on early literacy skills and that teachers have the necessary training to teach these skills. Though this is only one study, in terms of promising practices to improve literacy instruction in developing countries, it is clear that instruction matters and early literacy instruction should include instructional practices that focus on the development of early literacy skills.

Phonics. Phonics refers to the systematic correspondence between speech sounds and letters of the alphabet (Moats, 2000). Phonics links speech sounds to their associated letters and orthographic patterns. In some languages, such as Sesotho, the relationship between letters and sounds is transparent. There is an obvious connection between the

letters and sound associations. In other languages, namely English, the relationship between letters and sounds is opaque; the connection between speech sounds and letters may be less obvious or inconsistent. In either case, teaching children explicit skills in decoding the sounds in the printed words supports word recognition skills. Ehri and McCormick (1998) described the phases of word learning children use to recognize words. According to the phases of word learning, as children move along the stages they gain more automatic knowledge of letter-sound correspondences, more advanced decoding skills, and higher levels of orthographic knowledge. Children's ability to identify unfamiliar words changes over time as they acquire greater knowledge of how orthographic patterns represent pronunciation and meaning.

Teaching phonics in Africa. Several recent studies conducted in South Africa and Kenya revealed that teachers spent more time developing oral language than on teaching phonics and word recognition skills (Dubeck et al., 2009; Pretorious, 2014). In a study of 48 Kenyan teachers in Grades 1 and 2, Dubeck et al. found that oral language was prioritized over teaching word recognition skills. Though teachers recognized the need to teach phonics, they attributed the lack of phonics instruction to curriculum that did not teach letter-sound relationships or word recognition skills. Teachers tended to teach phonics from a look-say approach that involved chanting whole words in unison with little focus on letters and sounds or decoding skills. The study revealed that teachers used letter-sound correspondence to teach Swahili, the learners' L1. Learners were able to use their knowledge of phonics to read unfamiliar words in Swahili. The research findings suggested a need for focused instruction on phonics and helping learners connect their decoding skills in Swahili to English.

Pretorius (2014) created an intervention program intended to support the transition to English as the language of instruction for 44 Grade 4 South African Zulu speaking students (16 girls and 28 boys). The original study examined instructional strategies that could be used to support learners as they moved from L1 academic content instruction to L2. Prior to Grade 4, the language of instruction was Zulu. However, assessment data showed that learners were unable to handle transition to English-only instruction in Grade 4. As a means to support the transition, the researchers developed an intervention plan that taught specific reading to learn strategies based on Block and Pressley's (2007, pp. 225-226) instructional principles. Table 3 provides a description of the instructional principles suggested by Block and Pressley to develop reading strategies, vocabulary knowledge, and comprehension skills throughout the reading process. These principles were also used during the intervention study.

Table 3

Suggested Literacy Strategies to Support the Reading to Learn Process

Strategies to support comprehension	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teach before, during, and after reading strategies; 2. Develop comprehension skills by teaching learners to ask questions, make inferences and predictions while reading and looking for evidence in the text to support reasoning; 3. Teach learners to notice when comprehension breaks down and do something about it (e.g., re-read sections of text); 4. Use story grammar elements (e.g., setting, characters, problems and resolution) to comprehend narrative texts; 5. Use text features and genre conventions (e.g., headings, diagrams, tables, font size) to help understand informational texts; 6. Identify main and supporting ideas in informational texts; follow sequence and arguments; 7. Connect ideas in a text to personal experience, background knowledge, and other text information; 8. Summarize a text afterwards; 9. Reflect on the text after reading and discussing it.
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Strategies to support vocabulary development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support word knowledge by helping learners focus on new words and gain meaning from context clues in the text and morphological clues; 2. Teach strategies for learning new words.
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Source: Block, C., Pressley, M. (2007) Best practices in teaching comprehension. In L. B. Gambrell, L. M. Morrow & M. Pressley (Eds.), *Best practices in literacy instruction* (3rd ed., pp. 220-242). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

However, one year after implementing the intervention, the researchers discovered that the intervention needed to be revised. The learners in the intervention failed to show progress on assessments testing decoding skills (syllable identification, phonemic awareness, word recognition) and oral reading fluency. Without knowledge of these early literacy skills, learners were unable to read the Grade 4 curriculum. The researchers concluded that learners needed to take a step back and establish foundational skills in literacy before they could handle the challenge of academic content in English and the switch to English as the language of learning. The intervention model changed to include instructional strategies that focused on phonics and daily reading of sentences and short extended passages to develop reading fluency and automatic word recognition.

Pretorius concluded that despite three years of literacy instruction in the early primary grades, learners were unable to read in English at a Grade 1 level. Though literacy instruction had occurred in the learners' L1, their reading scores in Zulu were equally poor. Their observations showed three interrelated barriers to literacy: (1) a focus on oral language development in lieu of other literacy skills; (2) an absence of systematic phonic instruction, word recognition strategies, and oral reading fluency; and (3) an absence of authentic engagement with text and higher-level thinking. To combat these barriers, the researchers adapted their intervention study to include a balanced literacy diet focusing on alphabetic knowledge, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension; access to books; motivation to read; opportunities to read; and teacher training. The revised model

for literacy instruction provided the necessary early literacy skills to minimize the need for learners to play catch-up in the upper grades (Pretorious, 2014).

Classroom instruction to support phonics. To support phonics instruction, teachers need to help learners understand the English orthographic patterns used to read and spell words. Phonics in the early stages of literacy focuses on initial consonants, short vowels, and word families, blends, and digraphs. Once learners have learned short vowels, teachers can teach common long-vowel patterns within single-syllable words. A few activities known to support English language learners can include sorting pictures by initial sounds and sorting words by similar spelling patterns (word families) or vowel sounds. Teachers can help learners build words with letter tiles. Learners can be given a set of letters and instructed how to manipulate the tiles to build words. For example, learners can be taught to build words from word families and shown how to change the initial consonant to create new words (Barone, 2010).

Fluency. Fluency is defined by the ability to read with appropriate rate, accuracy, and intonation (prosody) (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000; Rasinski & Samuels, 2011). Fluency is the bridge between word recognition and comprehension. Fluency does not guarantee comprehension; however, children who lack fluency sometimes struggle with comprehension. Children who read effortlessly have more cognitive energy to spend on making meaning of the text because they recognize words accurately and rapidly (Verhoeven, Reitsma, & Siegel, 2011).

Fluency in the African context. In a recent study by Piper, Schroeder, & Trudell (2016) on the oral reading fluency of 2,000 Grade 3 learners in Kenya, they found that the learners' ability to read accurate and fluently related to their language of instruction.

Because English was used as the language of instruction in the early primary grades, learners were able to pronounce English words better than in their L1. However, when tested on measures of comprehension, the participants were unable to understand what they had read. The data showed that after three years of English instruction, learners had basic skills in decoding and word recognition; however, they lacked comprehension skills. When learners were assessed in the L1, although their fluency rates were low, their comprehension skills were much higher. The researchers recommended that learners needed reading instruction in both their L1 and L2 to ensure stronger comprehension and vocabulary development. Researchers noted that normal fluency measures used to evaluate words per minute in English were difficult to use with Bantu languages, the native group of languages of East Africa, South Africa, and Lesotho. These languages are syllable-based and are made up of more graphemes (letters) than English words. These words take longer for learners to decode. The researchers found that formulas used to measure rate based on English word reading were problematic because of word length differences between the Bantu languages and English. The researchers also found that the learners' fluency was affected by access to print in both L1 and L2. Because learners were not reading connected text in either language, they failed to develop oral reading fluency in either language. The researchers recommended literacy instruction in the learners' L1 during the primary grades and greater access to printed materials in both languages.

Classroom practices to develop fluency. As a means to support learners' automatic word recognition and prosody, Rasinski and Samuels (2011) created an instructional plan to model fluent reading for students; include assisted reading for

support; have students practice reading, wide and deep; model phrasing words in meaningful groups; and combine practices to create synergy, to make the whole greater than the sum of its parts (MAPPS). MAPPS includes the following practices:

1. **Model** fluent reading: the teacher models fluent reading through read-alouds.

While reading, the teacher discusses phrasing, tone, and expression. The teacher shows how to develop expression and how that aids in comprehension. The teacher can share the role of punctuation to aid in reading with expression and appropriate rate.

2. **Assisted** reading for support: assisted reading allows the learner to practice reading, which develops automatic word recognition and aids in comprehension and vocabulary development. Assisted reading consists of partner reading and choral reading. Through peer support, learners are able to work through the reading process and begin to take control over the reading process. Assisted reading also supports engagement because learners are actively engaged in the reading process.

3. **Practice** reading, wide and deep: wide reading refers to the volume readers read. The more a learner reads the more exposure he or she has to words in meaningful context. Practice reading also includes rereading the text independently or with a partner, which allows the learner to make deeper connections to the story, characters and meaning of the text. For some learners rereading the text supports their comprehension. Practice also supports rate.

4. **Making** repeated reading authentic: learners will be more apt to reread material if they understand why it is important to reading and if rereading serves a valid purpose. Inviting learners to participate in readers' theater plays and reading poetry can improve fluency. Repeated reading supports automatic word recognition but also prosody.
5. **Phrasing** words in meaningful groups: the teacher models for learners how to read phrases in chunks or meaningful phrases to support rate and prosody. Beginning readers often read word-by-word. Teaching learners to read in meaningful chunks help with prosody and rate. The teacher can practice phrases from the text being read or create phrases such as "into the woods" or "by my side" on sentence strips for learners to practice. Phrases can also include high frequency words, which give the learners more opportunities to develop automatic sight word recognition.
6. **Synergy**: combining multiple opportunities for learners to engage in meaningful practice ensures that learners develop automatic word recognition and fluency. Through modeling, assisted reading, and wide and repeating reading, learners develop not only word recognition skills, but comprehension and vocabulary.

Vocabulary. Vocabulary refers to word meanings, either expressed or understood receptively. Vocabulary plays an important role in comprehension. In order to comprehend text, a reader must know meanings of enough words to understand the text. In essence, a child's listening, speaking, reading, and writing vocabulary is a proxy for his or her knowledge, which the child uses while engaging in reading a text. A child's

understanding of words develops over time from a basic understanding of the word to a complex understanding of the word's multiple meanings and nuances (Blachowicz & Fisher, 2015). Poor vocabulary development hinders text comprehension. Making sure learners understand the meaning of basic words while providing continuous review and reinforcement in a meaningful context supports vocabulary development (August, Carlo, Dressler, & Snow, 2005). Learners benefit from multiple opportunities to actively practice new words in meaningful contexts that include listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Beck et al., 2013). In supporting English language learners' development of vocabulary, Helman (2008) suggested teachers provide the following supports:

1. Provide visuals such as pictures, real objects, and gestures;
2. Allow learners ample opportunities to hear new words in context and to ask questions about word meaning;
3. Create personal dictionaries for learners to connect oral forms of words with the written form; allow learners to draw pictures to support word meaning and their own sentences using the new word in a meaningful context.
4. Encourage learners to monitor their understanding of word meanings; allow learners to evaluate their knowledge of a new word by making statements such as "I know this word" or "I have never heard this word before." This is important because learners may not know a word in English; but when teachers reference the learners' L1, they may already understand the concept and just not know the new English representing the concept.
5. Ask questions about word meaning and check for understanding. (p. 17)

Vocabulary research with second language learners. Though not conducted

within the African context, relevant research by Kieffer and Lesaux (2007) examined the connection between vocabulary instruction and comprehension among 87 4th and 5th-grade Spanish-speaking students in a large urban school district in Southern California. They found that vocabulary instruction improved reading comprehension when teachers' instruction made connections between known concepts and new words and provided multiple exposure to new words through activities that required higher levels of thinking, playful interaction, and periodic follow-up to review newly learned words. They also recommended that words should be carefully chosen to reflect words that appear in a variety of texts. Learners need to be given kid-friendly definitions to explain the new words. Words should be taught in meaningful context in multiple settings, and pronunciation, spelling, and syntactic structure of the word should be taught. Whenever possible, the learners' L1 should be used to scaffold the meaning of the new English word.

Comprehension. Comprehension is the understanding of what is read, which is the ultimate goal of reading instruction. Comprehension is a combination of fluent reading marked by the reader's ability to accurately read what is written and to make connections between prior knowledge and the text to gain new knowledge and make deeper connections. Comprehension is a process of extracting and constructing meaning from the text (Sweet & Snow, 2002). Many factors can influence the reading comprehension of second language learners. The learner's oral language proficiency in both L1 and L2, academic content knowledge, word level skills (decoding and automatic sight word development, oral reading fluency, vocabulary knowledge, interest, motivation, background knowledge, cultural understanding, and ability to use

comprehension strategies all affect the learner's ability to comprehend reading material (August & Shanahan, 2006; Hoover et al., 2016). Teachers' questioning strategies can also impact comprehension. Often teachers ask comprehension questions about the text to test the learners' understanding of the material instead of teaching reading comprehension strategies to support comprehension (Hoover et al., 2016). A learner's comprehension can be improved by teaching comprehension strategies. Table 3 (above) contains important comprehension strategies. The underlying purpose for comprehension strategies is to actively involve the reader in the reading process through thinking, questioning, monitoring, and evaluating one's reading to ensure that the material makes sense (Block & Pressley, 2007). Other practices that support comprehension development in native speakers have been suggested as possible instructional supports for English language learners. Smith and Read (2009) recommended the following comprehension strategies:

1. Prediction: Learners access prior knowledge, examine illustrations, book cover, and title of story to predict what might happen in the story. For nonfiction materials, students can examine illustrations, charts, and bold headings to support understanding prior to reading the material. Graphic organizers (e.g., KWL: what I know, what I wonder, what I learned) can be used to support learning and to keep track of ideas as they develop throughout the text.
2. Monitoring and clarifying: Learners monitor their understanding of the material and reread to clarify understanding. Learners can adjust, verify, and confirm their predictions to maintain comprehension.

3. Questioning: Learners can ask questions throughout the reading process and use thinking partners to make connections about predictions and the events. Teachers can also ask open-ended questions to stimulate thinking and engage learners in higher order thinking.
4. Summarizing: Learners can summarize the important details of the story or content by using graphic organizers to support thinking (e.g., Someone, Wants, But, So) or written summaries.
5. Visualizing: Learners can be taught to use mental images to support the meaning of the text before, during, and after reading. Learners can also draw important events from the story (characters, setting, or important details).

English language learners may need extra support in using these strategies. Using think-pair-share or partner and small group conversations allows learners to think about topics and ideas before discussing them whole group. Teachers can use think-alouds during read-alouds to model for learners their own thinking processes and use of the comprehension strategies. Teachers can also use props, pictures, and acting out sections to support comprehension. Providing a variety of ways for learners to respond can ensure that all learners are engaged in the thinking process (Barone, 2010).

Comprehension in South Africa. Much of the debate around literacy skills in Africa relates to language. Often reading problems are thought to be a result of a language problem or lack of language proficiency in the learners' L1 or L2. Language proficiency is clearly important. However, Matjila & Pretorius (2004) found that not all reading problems are a result of low levels of language proficiency. In their study of

Grade 8 learners, they concluded that problems with comprehension were not a result of language but an outcome of lack of reading practice and access to reading materials in L1 and L2. Students were given two reading tests, one in their L1 Setswana and the other in English, their language of instruction. They found that learners read more slowly in their L1 and in English even when accounting for the word length difference between Setswana and English. This suggested that the learners were not practicing reading in their L1. Interview data from the study suggested that learners had few opportunities in school and at home to read and practice reading skills in either language. Though it would be expected that learners would read better in their L1 than their L2, reading levels in both languages were lower than expected. Learners read at a Grade 3 to Grade 4 reading level. Comprehension measures in both L1 and L2 were low. Learners struggled with inferential and higher order comprehension questions. The researchers concluded that knowledge and proficiency in a native language is not sufficient to develop literacy skills. The researchers contended that learners were not exposed to enough reading material. Without a strong culture of reading in the community, home and school, learners will not develop literacy skills. The researchers concluded that schools can mitigate poor educational outcomes through greater access to reading materials by establishing libraries, media centers, and classroom libraries that give ready access to a wide range of printed materials. Instructional practices must emphasize reading in both L1 and L2.

Writing. Writing is a complex process that involves word-level skills, cognitive abilities, and higher order skills (Lesaux et al., 2008). The learner's phonological awareness and alphabet knowledge supports their ability to match the written letters

(graphemes) to sounds in words. Children begin to use invented spelling to match the sounds from their oral vocabulary to the words they are writing. Through writing, a child is able to further develop phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, and spelling. This orthographic knowledge is essential to early literacy skills (Invernizzi & Tortorelli, 2013). A young child's writing develops best in an environment that focuses on expressing ideas and encourages writing for authentic purposes (Tracy & Morrow, 2015). For English language learners allowing them to have opportunities to engage in meaningful writing activities instead of copying materials verbatim from the chalkboard helps them understand the writing process and view writing as a form of authentic communication (Reyes & Azuara, 2013).

Barone (2010) suggests that writing is an important component to supporting comprehension. Learners can use writing to learn strategies to help make connections to fiction and non-fiction text and develop deeper understanding of content material. Graphic organizers can help learners discover text structure elements. For example, learners can use story maps to make connections among characters, setting, problem and solution within the story. Teachers can use written predictions before and during reading to help learners verify and confirm their thinking. Learners can also use writing to learn strategies to help understand informational text. Semantic maps or webs allow learners to organize their knowledge as they read about a given topic and then use that information to write what they have learned. Barone cautions that in order for learners to make deeper connections to reading and writing graphic organizers need to be coupled with discussion and authentic writing. The act of the graphic organizer is only the first step to supporting writing and thinking. The graphic organizer can act as the scaffold or support for

ongoing oral conversations and writing. Teachers can also model the writing process in the learners L1 and L2 to improve the use of English grammar and writing mechanics.

Though there are numerous ways to support writing, one promising method that integrates the development of the learners' oral language (listening and speaking skills), vocabulary, reading and writing in an authentic way is the language experience approach (Stauffer, 1970). The language experience approach (LEA) allows the teacher to work with learners to help them scaffold their oral language to produce a shared writing piece. The teacher can use the LEA to develop both the learners' L1 and L2 literacy skills. Once the learners constructed a written piece, the work can serve as reading material for the learners to choral read in whole group, small group or with partners, which improves access to printed materials. The common steps in the LEA are listed below:

1. The teacher works with learners to use their oral language to share about a common experience. The learners can build upon each other's ideas, which supports receptive and expressive oral language.
2. As the learners share their ideas, the teacher copies the story on the chalkboard, which allows the learners to see how oral language can be turned into written form. The teacher can use a think aloud process to explain how she is using sentence structures and mechanics to write down the shared ideas. The teacher can also ask questions to get the learners to clarify and expand their ideas.
3. The shared writing becomes the text they can be used for fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. The learners can copy down the story and reread the text to support reading skills.

Africa and Initiatives to Support Literacy Instruction

Much of what we know about early literacy in Africa comes from educational policy studies conducted by several large nongovernmental organizations, including United States Agency International Development (USAID), the World Bank, and Research Triangle International (RTI International). These reports focused on literacy initiatives and policies that have been implemented within and across African countries. Though each country may have its own unique sociocultural values and beliefs about literacy and political and economic constraints, according to Gove and Cvelich (2011), there are common findings among the studies that support literacy instruction in developing countries. The following large-scale literacy initiatives share common identifiable classroom factors that influence learning outcomes and quality education practices.

Promising Large-scale Studies. In a recent review of early grade literacy, Trudell, Dowd, Piper, and Bloch (2012) examined current research findings and program outcomes of three large early grade literacy initiatives in Africa. The review focused on the research and interventions conducted by the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) Save the Children, Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa (PRAESA), and Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) International, which are working in dozens of African countries. These large-scale initiatives provide important theoretical and practical knowledge about what works in early literacy instruction. The review identified promising educational practices and offered suggestions for future changes to improve literacy in the early grades. The following section is a summary of the findings from each literacy project described by Trudell, et al.

Save the Children. Save the Children works to improve the health, education, child protection, and family livelihoods for more than 73 million children from more than 120 countries. One of their educational initiatives, a reading intervention known as Literacy Boost, supports the development of reading skills in young children. The program begins with assessments to identify areas of need related to letter name knowledge, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, reading fluency, and comprehension, all of which are key to early literacy development (National Early Literacy Panel [NELP], 2008). The program provides (1) monthly teacher training to ensure teachers have the knowledge and skills to teach reading and writing, (2) curriculum to support literacy in the classroom, and (3) help in the community to develop local language materials to promote literacy outside of school. Teachers learn to use their instructional time to focus on the literacy components known to support reading skills in young children. By improving teacher knowledge and increasing the amount of time children engage in literacy activities, opportunities to learn the skills to improve their reading are increased.

Some of the challenges in implementing Literacy Boost relate to creating and providing books in the local language and supporting literacy outside of school. Many homes lack reading materials in the child's mother tongue, which makes it difficult for children to engage in literacy activities outside of school. Ministries of Education tend to ignore the factors outside of school that could support literacy. Yet, results from Literacy Boost reinforce the need to invest in creating opportunities for children to use literacy within the community and at home. Literacy achievement is enhanced through the development of rich literacy environments for children and their families. Following is a summary of important lessons learned from the Literacy Boost initiative.

School literacy. Bilingual education, which supports oral language and reading and writing in both the child's first and second language, improves literacy. Results from 4th grade end-of-year scores indicated that children who participated in Literacy Boost had higher critical thinking skills, reading fluency, and comprehension in both first and second languages than students who had been in the monolingual program, which is English-only instruction (Vezi, Mokoena, Mkhoma, & Wessels, 2013). Teachers who used Literacy Boost methods in their classrooms noted that more children were actively engaged in reading and writing and eager to use literacy independently.

Home literacy. Increasing the amount of reading done in the community and at home improved children's literacy. The study showed that children with the fewest available resources at home benefited the most from the increase. Children who read at home and whose parents attended Literacy Boost workshops showed higher vocabulary than children who did not. These improvements were higher for parents who were illiterate. Providing literacy environments in and outside the classroom benefits learning, especially for children who have limited access to reading materials (Vezi et al., 2013).

Future direction. Based on the review of Literacy Boost, literacy improvement takes time. When designing a program to improve literacy instruction, children need the opportunity to engage in high-quality literacy activities in and outside of school in order to make progress. Teachers need support in gaining knowledge in how to use best early literacy practices in their classroom. Materials and instruction should be in the child's local language. Future research and literacy initiatives need to consider ways to support the development of the child's language in and outside of school and create culturally appropriate children's literature to ensure children are exposed to a rich literacy

environment.

PRAESA's early literacy unit. PRAESA's Early Literacy Unit (ELU) supports reading and writing development by focusing on how children are instructed in a multilingual school and community in South Africa. At the core of the program is the creation of common collections of stories for adults and children to share in their first language. The program is based on the fundamental belief that if children and adults are to read, they must have materials in a language they can understand. The focus of classroom instruction occurs in Reception through Grade 3. PRAESA seeks to change classroom literacy practices through teacher mentoring programs. Teachers are encouraged to identify language- and literacy-related challenges within their classroom. Teachers are then supported in their attempt to improve instructional practices through weekly visits, classroom observations, demonstration lessons, and monthly workshops conducted by PRAESA researchers. ELU offers a guide for how contextualized transfer of best practice can be used to support early literacy instruction.

Challenges. PRAESA researchers found that teachers need an understanding of developmentally appropriate practices for early childhood and knowledge of how to teach reading and writing in multiple languages. Teachers lacked literacy skills in English and rarely read or wrote in their first language. Classrooms need educational resources, including reading materials in all languages. School libraries were not used and were often kept under lock and key. Library books were in English, but most were not culturally relevant or age appropriate.

Improved practice. The researchers addressed the challenges through meetings and workshops designed to help support language and literacy teaching practices and

classroom management. Through classroom demonstration lessons, researchers modeled best practices that support oral language development and reading and writing in mother tongue and English. Classroom environments changed to provide print-rich spaces to support learning. Teachers learned to explicitly use classroom resources (charts, posters, textbooks, story books) to support literacy development. Teachers were empowered to create their own materials to support literacy.

Teacher training focused on teaching strategies that support reading and writing in mother tongue and English to foster literacy development. Interactive writing with children is a very effective learning strategy to support reading and oral language. Teachers learned to plan and prepare reading materials that allowed them to teach reading skills (phonemic awareness and decoding) in a meaningful context. Reading and writing skills were no longer taught in isolation. Teachers learned reading strategies to keep children actively engaged in the literacy activities. Strategies focused on shared and paired reading, reading aloud, and oral storytelling in both mother tongue and English. To support writing in both languages, teachers were encouraged to have children write for real and authentic purposes, use story frames, and explore a variety of genres.

The focus of change for literacy practice is to ensure that reading and writing instruction includes both mother tongue and English and that teachers have the necessary knowledge and skills to provide quality instruction. These changes help reinforce the importance of the child's own language and culture as a contributing factor in literacy development.

Lessons learned. Teachers improve their instructional practices when they are supported through a mentorship program that invited them to actively participate in the

change process. Teachers learn to reflect on their teaching through carefully planned support. When teachers are invited into the change process and actively supported, they are more likely to use and even adapt the new instructional practices in their teaching because they see the direct impact on the classroom environment.

SIL and multilingual education (MLE). For more than 30 years, SIL has worked to promote bilingual and multilingual education throughout Africa. The programs under SIL focus on supporting bilingual/multilingual education in the early primary grades. The focus is to make sure children are taught in a language that is familiar to them during their first four years of school, Reception to Grade 3. In order to help schools instruct children in their mother tongue, SIL provides instructional material in the child's mother tongue. These programs focus on small language communities where instruction in a child's first language is hindered by lack of materials and resources for language development and educational use. The program also includes teacher training.

Lessons learned. If children are to be successful in the early grades and learn to read and write, they must be instructed in their mother tongue. Children who are instructed in their mother tongue achieve higher levels of literacy in the early grades than children who are taught in an official language. Learning to read and write in the mother tongue supports vocabulary development across the curriculum.

Key to literacy improvement is ensuring that reading instruction is part of the curriculum. Often reading is subsumed under language instruction. Though oral language is important, children will not learn to read if the curriculum does not focus on the specific skills to support reading and writing. Teachers must have the necessary instructional skills to teach reading and writing, and they need adequate support and

training.

Language and literacy must be taught. Children will not pick up language and literacy skills without carefully planned instruction. Mother-tongue instruction is important in the early grades; however, if instruction in the upper grades is in the national or official language, such as English, then adequate measures must be made to transition students to the new language of instruction (Alidou, Brock-Utne, Heugh, & Wolff, 2006).

Taking Stock: Conditions that Support Early Literacy. The initiatives described in the previous section provide a list of recommendations for supporting early literacy instruction. From these initiatives, Save the Children, PRAESA (ELU), and (SIL) International, we know that the following instructional components are important when considering early literacy instruction. In thinking about how to improve literacy instruction at Mountain Kingdom Primary School, these components were important considerations for instructional change.

1. Literacy curriculum: The early literacy curriculum should be integrated with a focus on listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The specific skills necessary for learning to read and write need to be taught and not subsumed under language instruction. Reading instruction should focus on the specific skills relating to phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency and vocabulary, and comprehension. Literacy skills should be taught within the context of authentic reading and writing (Pretorius & Mokhwesana, 2009).
2. Instructional time: Instructional time should be allocated for teaching reading, writing, and oral language to ensure that children engage in reading and writing activities that are authentic and meaningful to them. Instructional

time needs to be carefully monitored to ensure that children are on task and engaged in activities that support literacy (Gove & Cvelich, 2011).

3. Instructional practices based on evidence-based practices in early literacy instruction: Teachers should actively engage learners in the learning process. There should be a focus on higher-level thinking skills that encourage critical thinking and less focus on rote learning. Promising practices in early literacy instruction must be adapted to meet the local context in order to be beneficial. In order for new instructional practices to be effectively transferred to a new context, training and support are key to the transfer and success of the instruction practice. Changes in practice take time and ongoing support (Makeleni & Sethusha, 2014).
4. Language of instruction: The language of instruction fundamentally influences a children's ability to read and learn. In the early primary grades, children should be taught in their first language or mother tongue. As children transition into the upper grades, they need to be supported in the transition from learning in their first language to learning in a second language. Early reading in the primary grades should build on the child's oral language in his or her first language. Children should read in their first language. Reading in the upper grades should focus on both the child's first and second language. During the early years, children need to learn how to use language skills in their mother tongue to support learning in the second language. Multilingualism should be considered an asset and used to support content learning (Goldenberg, 2008).

5. Teacher training and professional development: Teacher quality correlates to student learning. In order to help teachers develop effective teaching practices, ongoing training and professional support must be provided. Training must support the teacher's knowledge of literacy acquisition, pedagogical skills, and appropriate use of learning materials. Teacher training must allow teachers to take control of the teaching process and feel empowered to effect change in their classroom (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman & Suk Yoon, 2001). Ongoing training must be provided to support teachers' knowledge and skills for teaching literacy in both first and second languages (Piper & Miksic, 2010).
6. High-quality literacy materials: Children must have access to an adequate supply of literacy materials that are culturally relevant, high-quality, written in their mother tongue and in English, and support reading for a variety of purposes (Dubeck, Jukes, & Okello, 2008). Material should promote vocabulary development and content knowledge. The focus of literacy should be on higher-level thinking skills that help the child engage with the text to make deep connections. High-quality literacy materials invite children to engage more fully with the text (Sailors et al., 2014).

Promising Solutions

A final question remained: what should best practice in literacy instruction look like in developing countries? If I were to offer support to the teachers at MKPS, what should the action plan include? This last section focuses on two intervention studies conducted within the African context. These studies were foundational to the rationale

for my research design and action plan to improve literacy instruction at MKPS (Currin & Pretorious, 2010; Sailor et al., 2014). The studies were grounded in best practice in early literacy instruction and addressed the problems of practice associated with under-resourced schools facing daunting sociocultural and economic conditions while also highlighting specific changes that can occur within the local context to improve practice. They addressed issues of teacher knowledge, access to resources, and improvement in instruction and provided a road map to address the challenges and instructional needs at MKPS.

Building Access to Resources and Teacher Capacity. Currin and Pretorious (2010) created an intervention plan to improve literacy instruction in a high poverty primary school in Gauteng, South Africa. Prior to the intervention, reading levels in both Northern Sesotho and English were very low. The goal of the intervention was to improve literacy outcomes by building up instructional resources and developing teacher capacity. At the school, Northern Sesotho was the language of instruction from Reception through Grade 3, with English becoming the language of instruction from Grade 4 to Grade 7. Prior to the intervention, the teachers noted that most of their learners could not read in either language in the early grades (Grade 1 through Grade 3). The classrooms lacked environmental print and reading materials such as textbooks and classroom libraries for the learners. Because of a lack of reading materials, there were few opportunities for learners to read at school or at home. Class sizes were also large.

To improve access to print, the researchers established a school library, hired a librarian, and created classroom libraries. Each classroom (Reception through Grade 3) was provided with 120 easy readers in both English and Northern Sesotho for the learners

to read throughout the day. Teachers were encouraged to display more environmental print within their classrooms. To support literacy instruction, teachers were provided with teacher training focusing on strategies to improve early literacy skills, reading assessment, and integration of the classroom libraries into literacy instruction. The researchers used pre- and post-literacy tests and weekly observations of classroom practices, monitoring how teachers used resources and instructional strategies, to evaluate the intervention study.

Results from pre and post data gathered over the three-year intervention revealed that over the course of the school year, learners made steady growth in English reading; surprisingly, however, the learners' L1 comprehension scores lagged behind English. Moreover, their scores were still lower than those for other schools in the district. The authors noted that improving literacy in high poverty schools remains a challenge. However, there were signs of improvement. Over the three years, the school library grew from 200 books in the first year to over 3,500 books by the end of the intervention, including fiction, nonfiction, chapter books, and picture books in both Northern Sesotho and English. The researchers noted that finding materials in the learners' L1 was a challenge. They attributed the lower reading scores in L1 to a lack of reading resources available for the learners. In terms of environmental print, over the three years, Grades 1 through 3 showed marked improvement in classroom print. All rooms had alphabet and number charts, large calendars, book nooks, and labels for common objects in the room.

Prior to the intervention, the teachers lacked important knowledge about the reading process and instructional practices to support literacy development. Besides participating in the teacher training, the teachers visited high functioning schools to see

models of good instruction. At the end of the intervention, the teachers appeared to have a better understanding of the reading process and attempted to apply some of the strategies provided during the teacher training. During post observations, the researchers noted changes in classroom engagement practices. Where classroom instruction had originally focused on rote learning and call and response, teachers were using small group instruction and allowing learners to read with partners. Teachers increased the use of higher level questioning strategies throughout the lessons.

Despite these positive changes, the researchers concluded that larger school challenges relating to school effectiveness hindered the literacy improvement of the learners. These factors were judicious use of instructional time; quality and quantity of textbooks, reading materials and other instructional resources; excellence in teaching; monitoring progress; and creating a standard of excellence within the school. The researchers identified issues with teacher expectations and desire for excellence as possible factors impacting the quality of instruction. They concluded that improvement in literacy instruction in high poverty schools required attention to broader cultural issues relating to poverty and allocation of resources. Yet, the researchers remained optimistic about the merit of small-scale interventions, which they concluded could attend to some of the “broken windows” on the educational train; incremental improvements matter (Currin & Pretorius, 2010, p. 43).

In a study conducted in Malawi, Africa, Sailors et al. (2014) examined the effects of providing teacher training and improving access to teaching and learning materials on teachers’ attitudes about literacy instruction and their instructional practices. The goal of the study was to improve literacy instruction by increasing access to reading materials in

the learners' L1 and L2 and providing teachers with instructional workshops and literacy curriculum focusing on best practices in literacy instruction. The researchers invited the participants into the problem solving process by asking them to identify areas of instructional need and to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention project. Teachers were also allowed to set goals for each coaching session based upon their own personal strengths and weakness. The study worked with 162 teachers (178 in the treatment group and 84 in the delayed control group). Class size on average was 125 to 138 students. The intervention consisted of a 3-day workshop training session in which teachers learned how to use the new reading materials and literacy curriculum. Workshop topics included the following:

1. Organizing and planning for literacy instruction;
2. Supporting oral language development, reading, and writing within classroom instruction;
3. Using shared and guided reading to support vocabulary development and oral reading fluency;
4. Creating a print-rich learning environment;
5. Using read-alouds to develop comprehension skills;
6. Supporting a reading culture within the school.

After teachers participated in the 3-day workshop, they received coaching session over the five-month intervention with a literacy expert who observed the teacher implementing the workshop content and provided feedback. The coaches invited the teachers to discuss challenges to implementing the curriculum. The teachers also set goals for continued instructional support for the follow-up visits. Teachers were provided with 182 leveled

readers to use for reading instruction (120 titles in Chichewa (L1) and 60 titles in English, plus alphabet big books in both languages; English and Chichewa. Teachers received a curriculum guide that suggested how to use the leveled readers for classroom instruction. At the end of the five-month intervention, teachers reported that they were more comfortable teaching literacy in L1 and L2, planning literacy instruction to support vocabulary and comprehension development, using reading materials to support oral reading fluency, and creating a reading culture within their classrooms. However, there was no significant difference between the intervention group and the control group in terms of teaching practice or student engagement. The teachers believed that the coaching model supported their instruction. The researchers identified several challenges to their intervention. The effectiveness of the program required high demands on literacy instruction that was unfamiliar to the participants. The intervention required that teachers implement new strategies, new routines, and new curriculum. Even with instructional support through literacy coaching, the researchers determined that the intervention placed high demands for change. However, for schools with high implementation of the intervention, the researchers found important themes among the participants. The most successful schools were those with teachers who were highly motivated to improve their instructional practices, highly motivated school leaders, and a commitment to excellence. Despite shortcomings in their results, the study highlighted the need to include local stakeholders in the change process and to provide resources to support reading instruction (reading material in L1 and L2, high quality read-alouds, environmental print, reading curriculum designed to support a balanced literacy diet). Providing teachers with ongoing direct literacy coaching supported instructional changes and teachers'

perceptions about their ability to teach.

My examples are by no means conclusive or comprehensive; however, these two studies highlighted important factors to take into consideration when I developed an action plan to support the teachers at MKPS. First of all, I needed to consider ways to invite them into the problem solving process, even if they were unable to fully determine the strengths and weaknesses of their instructional program and identify specific ways to improve practice. I also wanted to offer suggestions that took into account their current practices that might be leveraged to improve practice. As Sailor et al. noted, the instructional practices that require too much change hinder the teachers' buy-in to the change process. As a final consideration, I wanted to focus on instructional components that could be sustained beyond my support and that teachers could continue to adapt and change to meet their needs.

Summary

The literature review examined the existing research on instructional practices in early literacy instruction that supported second language learners' literacy development and highlighted promising literacy initiatives that address the unique conditions in developing African nations. A major problem within early literacy research in the African context is that there is very little evidence of what practices work under what conditions, especially at the local school level. This points out an important gap between the educational context and the research: that is, how do we support early literacy instruction in a resource-poor learning community such as Mountain Kingdom Primary School that lacks teacher knowledge, learning resources, and the economic capacity to change? Unlike the models examined by Trudell et al. (2012), there are no multimillion

dollar NGOs lining up to help individual schools improve literacy instruction. Herein rests the real challenge, which was the goal of this study: what changes could be made at a grass-roots level to support literacy instruction with minimal resources and time? While the duration of this study was too short to expect large changes in educational practices, it was my contention that even a small change in the teachers' early literacy instruction could improve the early literacy skills of the children at Mountain Kingdom Primary School. In the next section, I examine my research design, which allowed me to explore ways to support instructional change within the local context. The design included the stakeholders' input in verifying the challenges and supports within their context that influenced their ability to teach literacy and invited them to help create an action plan to improve their instructional practice.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains the research methodology used for the capstone project. In this section, I share my research approach and provide a rationale for selecting Participatory Action Research for my research design. I explain the research site and participants, the data collection, and the processes of analysis that were used to answer the research questions.

The Purpose of the Study

This research examined the early literacy practices at Mountain Kingdom Primary School in Lesotho, Africa, with the goal of improving early literacy instruction in Reception (U.S. kindergarten) through Grade 3. The purpose of this two-week onsite research project was to help teachers at Mountain Kingdom Primary School identify areas of instructional need and to create an action plan to address their instructional needs. The project grew out of the grass-root efforts by the principal and teachers at Mountain Kingdom Primary School who recognized a need to improve early literacy instruction as a possible solution for later literacy problems associated with low end-of-year test scores and low retention rates in Grades 4 through 7.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this inquiry into the early literacy practices at Mountain Kingdom Primary School.

Research question 1: What are the literacy practices in the home, school and community of children in Reception (U.S. kindergarten) to Grade 3?

Research question 2: How can literacy practices be leveraged to support early literacy development?

Research Approach

As identified in the literature review, changing instructional practices included the following six-step model: (1) examining the local literacy practices in relationship to known best practices, (2) inviting stakeholder input into verifying the problems related to instructional practice, (3) seeking local solutions to those problems, (4) providing professional development to improve instruction, (5) coaching teachers during the implementation stage, and (6) revising the instructional plan (Reimers et al., 2012; Trudell et al., 2012). The research literature emphasized the need for stakeholders to be part of the research process and participate in formulating solutions in order to enable them to take ultimate responsibility for changes in instructional practices and to ensure the success of the project. In keeping with the requirements of a capstone project, I report only on steps one through three, which are described in the remaining chapters. In a second trip, which occurred two months after the initial trip, I returned to Lesotho to enact the remaining steps of the six-step model.

In selecting a research design for this project, it was important to identify an approach that would allow me to work with stakeholders and engage them in the research process from problem identification to a practical solution within the context of their unique setting. In order to acknowledge the unique sociocultural issues confronting the learning community at Mountain Kingdom Primary School and to consider the voices and perspectives of stakeholders, I employed a qualitative participatory action research design. This research design allowed me to work collaboratively with participants, to

gather information about the problems of practice. and to seek solutions to improve the educational setting (Creswell, 2012).

Participatory Action Research

According to Kemmis and McTaggart (2005), participatory action research allows the researcher and participants to examine the educational problem in a natural setting through a self-reflective process. The self-reflective process consists of a cycle of planning change, acting on and observing the process and consequences of the change, reflecting on the processes and consequences of the change, and re-planning in order to start the self-reflective cycle again (Creswell, 2012; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). The goal of participatory action research is to improve the quality of the setting and to empower individuals in schools and the community to effect change (Stringer, 2007). Change occurs through local stakeholder participation and control in the problem-solving process. Success is measured by the stakeholders' "strong and authentic sense of development and evolution in their practices, their understanding of their practices, and the situations in which they practice" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 563). In the context of Mountain Kingdom Primary School, involving the principal, teachers, and school board members in the self-reflective process was key to creating a solution to their early literacy needs and to ensuring shared ownership of the research project and agreed-upon actions (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005).

Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) described seven features of participatory action research that underline the self-reflective processes and complement the conceptual and theoretical framework:

1. Participatory action research is a social process that examines the relationship

between individuals and the social interactions that shape them. Participatory action research allowed the participants in this study to understand how current early literacy instructional practices were shaped by their interactions with each other and within their social context. By working together and examining the social context and interactions, participants could improve teaching and learning in their setting.

2. Participatory action research requires active participation by individuals who seek to examine their situation. Participants would examine their own understanding of early literacy practices, their knowledge and current practices, and the ways in which their knowledge and practices informed or constrained their work with students.

3. Participatory action research is practical and focuses on collaboration. Participatory action research allows participants to work together to examine social practices related to communication and production (ways in which school and home practices support or hinder early literacy) and to seek ways to improve and change practices that are deemed unproductive and insufficient. In this study, I worked to create opportunities for participants to feel that their knowledge and practices were worthy and important to the problem-solving process. This feature may have been the hardest to ensure, since participants in this African village considered Western practices to be superior to local practices. It is possible that participants were not accustomed to being invited into the problem-solving process. In trying to unpack best early literacy practices, the context of Mountain Kingdom and stakeholders' perspectives were key to the solution; helping teachers and parents feel valued was key to their willingness to participate in the problem-solving process.

4. Participatory action research supports the emancipation of stakeholders from

practices and social structures that limit their self-development and self-determination. For Mountain Kingdom Primary School, a careful examination of early literacy practices and language use of Sesotho and English, and the ways in which larger social structures supported and impeded literacy development, were essential to understanding what could be changed and how to best work within the constraints that limited their success. In reality, this research could not change the daunting sociocultural issues facing the Basotho teachers and children of this village. However, I believed that collaborative research with participants would identify ways to legitimately improve early literacy instruction to better support student learning.

5. Participatory action research is critical and supports the participants' role in escaping the constraints caused within their social context. Participants must actively interpret and describe their own context and refute "unproductive or unjust ways of interpreting and describing their world, ways of working and ways of relating to power" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 567). My research design was planned to support participants' endeavors to critically reflect on their own practice and encourage them to question the effectiveness of any solution.

6. Participatory action research is reflexive and seeks to bring about change in practice. Practice is changed through a cycle of critical reflection and action. In this study, I strived to help participants understand the relationship among their practices, their knowledge about practice, and the social structures that shaped and constrained their practices in order to enact change. Through a continuing cycle of action and reflection, participants could examine what was learned and accomplished as a result of their change in practice.

7. Participatory action research seeks to transform theory and practice. In this context, best practices in early literacy, coupled with the need to examine literacy through a sociocultural lens, formed the basis of the theoretical framework. Much of what is known about best practices comes from work within developed countries such as the United States. Though these practices are foundational to early literacy, it was important to carefully examine how best practices in early literacy could be utilized with respect to the actual needs and practices within the school setting at Mountain Kingdom Primary School.

Ethical Considerations

The nature of participatory action research requires collaboration between participants and the researcher. The ethical challenge for researchers is how to maintain an intimate and open-ended relationship with participants that does not become coercive (Creswell, 2012). Creswell highlighted four important aspects of an ethical relationship between participants and the researcher: “open and transparent participation, respect for people’s knowledge, democratic and nonhierarchical practices, and positive and sustainable social change among the action research community” (p. 588). My underlying goal for doing this research was to remain true to the best interests of participants who faced difficult challenges in their attempt to provide adequate early literacy instruction for their learners. Throughout the study, I obtained feedback from the participants in order to define the purpose of the study and identify the problems of practice and determine how the results of the study could be used to improve literacy practices. The goal was to involve the participants in as many phases of the research process as possible (Creswell).

Research Process

This study was conducted at Mountain Kingdom Primary School, which is located in the foothills in a small, remote, agrarian village in Lesotho, Africa. I selected this research site for the capstone project because the principal asked me to help her investigate the early literacy instruction at her school.

Background on School Organization and Administrative Structure

The Lesotho Evangelical Church owns MKPS. Within Lesotho, the primary schools are divided into four categories of ownership: church-owned, government, community, and private. Over 90% of the schools are church-owned, consisting of the Roman Catholic Mission, Lesotho Evangelic Church, Anglican Church of Lesotho, and African Methodist Episcopal. The government built schools in remote mountainous areas to serve the learners who were underserved by church-owned and community-run schools. Schools in the mountainous regions faced challenges that were not indicative of MKPS, which was located in the foothills. The schools in the remote regions suffered from higher teacher student ratios: 1:70; fewer classrooms (4-room schoolhouses) due to difficult building conditions; multi-aged classrooms; and a high number of unqualified teachers because qualified teachers wanted to teach in better resourced schools with access to modern amenities. Schools in the urban settings and near small towns in the foothills were better resourced and had access to better-qualified teachers.

Church ownership in Lesotho began in 1883 with the establishment of missionary schools. In church-owned schools, the church was responsible for the physical maintenance of the school and governed the school through an advisory committee (school board). As a means to encourage parent and community involvement in the

management of the church-owned schools, the government required that each school create an advisory committee consisting of the following members: two church members; one teacher representative; four community members selected by the parents of the school; the chief; and the school principal. The committee supported the school and offered advice and guidance on all education matters. Partly because of the lack of resources, the advisory boards across all schools have been criticized for poor management and oversight and failure to fully understand the needs of the schools. However, at MKPS, I found the advisory board active and open to supporting the school. During my visit, the advisory board met to elect new members and agreed to meet with me to provide information about the needs of the school.

The advisory board had limited power in the assignments and regulation of the teachers. The teachers were under the authority of the Ministry of Education and Training, which recruited and assigned all teachers. At MKPS, governmental oversight impacted the school's ability to provide education for the learners in Reception. After the death of their Reception teacher, MKPS was without a Reception teacher for almost 8 months while waiting for the government to approve and assign a teacher to their school. The school was unable to provide instruction for the learners during this time. During my observations, the Grade 1 learners were the ones affected by the lack of instruction during their Reception school year. The government also allowed schools to have additional personnel if the community could raise the necessary funds. The community at MKPS raised enough funds to build a nursery school for 3- and 4-year-olds. The parents paid the nursery school teacher's salary. The nursery school provided an important educational resource to the community through daycare and early literacy skills for those

children who could afford to attend.

Site Description

Even though MKPS was in a rural area of the foothills in Lesotho, it appeared to have basic resources similar to the better resourced schools in the more populated areas such as the capital city of Maseru. MKPS was located approximately 15 miles from a small township that had several grocery stores, banks, a post office, and a small hospital. Most of the children lived in the village, which was approximately three miles from the school. MKPS shared the site with a large NGO established to support no-till farming practices.

According to data from SACMEQ III, all schools in Lesotho lacked important human and material resources (Jopo et al., 2011). Most schools lacked school halls, libraries, teachers' rooms, and school head's offices and provided inadequate toilet facilities for the pupils. MKPS, in contrast, possessed these general facilities. However, like in other schools, these facilities were run down and the provision of toilet facilities far from satisfactory. In the section below, I describe the school setting at MKPS in greater detail.

The 124-year-old school served approximately 354 children who ranged from 4.5 to 12 years old in grades Reception (U.S. kindergarten) through 7. Table 4 provides class-size information, number of teachers assigned to each room, and information about the teachers' qualifications. The teachers appeared to be well qualified. Of the 12 teachers MKPS, 10 held teaching certificates with teaching experience that ranged from 8 to 31 years.

Table 4

Class Size and Teacher Qualifications for Mountain Kingdom Primary School

Grade Level	Class Size	Teacher	Teaching Experience
Reception	12 Girls 8 Boys Total: 18	One Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8 years teaching experience Grades taught: Reception only First year at MKPS Teacher's technical school (high school plus 2 years of technical training)
Grade 1	28 Girls 36 Boys Total: 64 Taught whole group all day	Teacher A (taught all subjects except Sesotho)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 25 years teaching experience Teacher's technical school (high school plus 2 years of technical training) Grades taught: Grade 1, 3, 6 and 7 (at three different schools)
		Teacher B Sesotho only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 30 years teaching experience No teacher training or degree Grades taught: data not available
Grade 2	21 Girls 20 Boys	One Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 20 years teaching experience Grades taught: Grade 2,3,4,5,6 and 7 Advanced degree in special education
Grade 3	20 Girls 28 Boys	One Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 27 years teaching experience Grades taught: Grade 3,4,5,6 and 7 Bachelor's Degree in Primary Education
Grade 4	16 Girls 19 Boys	One Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8 years teaching experience Grades taught: Grade 1,2, 3 and 4 Bachelor's degree in Primary Education
Grade 5	31 Girls 34 Boys	One Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 20 years teaching experience Grades taught: Grade 3, 4, and 7 Bachelor's degree primary education
Grade 6	23 Girls 32 Boys	Teacher A (Vice principal and English, math and science teacher)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 30 years teaching experience Grades taught: all grade except Grade 1 Bachelor's degree in primary education
		Teacher B (health, social studies)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 21 years of teaching experience Grades taught: Grade 5 and 7 Secondary School Diploma
Grade 7	13 Girls 22 Boys	Teacher A (Principal and English)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 31 years teaching experience Grades taught: Grade 2 through 7 Bachelor's degree in primary education
		Teacher B (math, science, health and agriculture)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 14 years of teaching experience Grades taught: 4, 5, 6, 7 Bachelor's degree in primary education

		Teacher C (math, science, health and agriculture)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 17 years of teaching experience • Grades taught: 4, 5, 6, 7 • Bachelor's degree in primary education
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The school had eight classrooms, a teachers' room and the principal's office. There was a large dirt courtyard for morning assembly that also served as the playground. The learners also used a large dirt field between the village and school for soccer. The playground had one swing set with four seats; however, the ropes that attached the seats were six feet off the ground. Marigolds were planted in the flower beds around the buildings. Though the playground lacked equipment for the learners to play on, the general feel of playground and school was inviting and tidy. Every day the learners would sweep the courtyard with tree branches. At the end of each day, the learners swept out their classrooms and straightened the desks before going home. Overall, there was a general sense of ownership in care of the school shown by the teachers and the learners.

In terms of the eight classrooms, four of the classrooms were relatively new (20 years old) and each contained newer desks and benches for the learners, a large chalkboard at the front of the room, and one bulletin board. The rooms were constructed from sandstone and concrete block, with concrete floors and large windows on two sides, allowing for natural light to brighten the rooms. The rooms were also painted in a light orange color, which helped with light. The community members had within the last 10 years built a Reception and Grade 1 wing. The Reception classroom had a large rug for the children to sit on during instruction time. There was a play kitchen and writing center with four small tables and child-size benches. The room also had environmental print attached to the walls (alphabet chart, days of the week, numbers, and months in Sesotho

and English). The Grade 1 classroom had 20 desks for 65 learners, one chalkboard across the front, and two teachers' desks. A large mural depicting a young boy leading a cow to a large tree covered one wall. There were large windows running along the remaining two walls, along with a set of bookshelves that contained stacks of old workbooks and teacher-made workbook pages. The remaining two classrooms were in seemingly poor condition. The rooms had broken doors and windows and desks and benches that lacked desktops or bolts to keep the tops secure. The concrete floors and walls were pitted. Because the rooms were painted in a deep blue, they appeared very dark. Each room had two rough and pitted chalkboards at one end of the room. The rooms each had one cupboard and a bookshelf; however, cupboards and shelves were broken.

In terms of instructional materials, the government issued one pencil and one exercise book per learner for the school year. Though the teachers had literacy curriculum, there were not enough books for each learner. On average, three to four learners shared each book. The school had no running water or electricity. The latrines and drinking well were about the length of a football field from the school.

Participants

For this study I used purposeful sampling to select participants. In order to understand early literacy instruction, I chose participants with firsthand knowledge of literacy instruction at MKPS: classroom teachers, the school principal, and school board members. The school principal also taught seventh grade; the teachers included five early primary grade teachers from Reception through Grade 3 and seven upper elementary teachers from Grade 4 through Grade 7 (see Table 4 for teacher

qualifications). At the invitation of the principal, three school board members were interviewed to share their insights into community and school factors that influenced literacy at MKPS.

Access to Participants

An ethical concern in this research related to gaining access to participants. The principal's invitation to me to work with her teachers with the goal of improving literacy instruction in the early primary grades not only gave me credibility with participants, but indirectly put pressure on them to participate in the study. I was concerned throughout the study that I was not seeing the real day-to-day instruction at MKPS. Because of my position of power and the teachers' desire to tell me what I wanted to hear and show me their very best teaching, I questioned the accuracy of my interview data and classroom observations. In order to address this limitation and ensure accuracy, I looked carefully at the data and reviewed the findings from studies within the literature review to triangulate the findings across multiple data sources. I also recognized that my interactions with the participants were impacted by cultural traditions of power and respect. Participants at this site trusted their principal, and, out of respect to her, they were open to participating in the study. I also invited a colleague and his wife to join me on the trip to act as my translators. Their participation was key to ensuring that participants understood the goals of the study, their role, the confidentiality of the data, and the voluntary nature of their participation in the study.

Data Collection Methods

Data collection followed the participatory action research steps of questioning, investigating and developing an action plan (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). Research

questions and data collection methods engaged stakeholders throughout the research process. The data sources for this research included semi-structured interviews, open-ended interviews, focus groups, classroom observations, and document review including grade-level syllabi, textbooks, and student exercise books. I had hoped to gather data about the opportunities for learners to use literacy outside the school setting. However, I had few opportunities to engage with the learners and their parents beyond the school setting. A data log of all the interview data is presented in Appendix A; and classroom observations for the study are presented in Appendix B. I collected all data; however, two colleagues from the United States assisted me during the time in Lesotho. These two colleagues spoke Sesotho and had traveled extensively in the country. They had worked with the school in previous years to incorporate a school-wide restorative justice discipline plan. The two colleagues helped me communicate more effectively with the participants and translate data that occurred in Sesotho. Though most of the data was collected in English, on a few occasions I needed their assistances to use Sesotho to clarify questions and content, especially when I interviewed the teachers.

Interviews. One of the primary sources of data collected for the study was semi-structured and open-ended interviews. Over the course of the 11-day research project, I conducted five semi-structured interviews with teachers and the principal and one interview with three school board members. I also conducted three informal interviews with the primary grade teachers and one focus group interview with all teachers (Reception through Grade 7). The purpose of the interviews was to engage stakeholders in the research project and to assess participants' perspectives, beliefs, values, and knowledge about early literacy instruction within the school and home environment. The

interviews also provided information about the teachers' years of teaching, perspectives about their own ability to teach literacy, factors that influenced students' early literacy skills, instructional choices, and ways in which current practices and conditions might be changed to support early literacy instruction. In order to minimize language barriers, the translator was present during the interviews to help extend and clarify questions in Sesotho. At the end of each day, I created analytic memos to capture my initial ideas about the data and to create follow-up questions to ask the teachers during informal interviews that occurred at the end of my classroom observations (see Appendix C for interview questions for teachers). I also conducted three open-ended interviews with the teachers in Reception, Grade 1, Grade 2, and Grade 3. These informal interviews were spontaneous and occurred at the end of the day or after classroom observation.

Focus group. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), focus groups encourage conversations from multiple perspectives and promote discussion and an extension of ideas that might not occur during individual interviews. On the last day of my visit at MKPS, I invited all 12 of the teachers to a focus group (luncheon and ceremony). The focus group format provided the opportunity for participants to draw on the collective knowledge of the group in order to engage in deeper, more thoughtful discussions (Creswell, 2012). In keeping with the participatory action research process, the focus group allowed participants at Mountain Kingdom to work together as a community to identify and solve their own problems. Focus group allowed the teachers to share their insights about the current literacy practices in all grades, identify areas of need, and create a preliminary actions plan to improve instruction (see Appendix D for focus group questions).

Observations. Erickson (1986) recommended that researchers spend an extended amount of time in the field to as a means to gain firsthand knowledge of the phenomenon of interest. Prior to my visit, I hoped to observe literacy instruction on a daily basis in all four primary classrooms. However, due to issues with teacher absenteeism, school board luncheons, and school-wide assemblies, classroom instruction was interrupted. During my two-week visit, I observed literacy instruction in Reception through Grade 3 (see Appendix B for log of classroom observations). Classroom observational data were gathered each day during literacy instruction in both Sesotho and English in Grades 1 through 3. In Reception, because literacy was integrated throughout the day, I observed instruction during morning circle time, which focused on early literacy skills, and during science and social studies. However, during observations in Reception, much of the instruction was in the learners' L1; therefore, my observations were limited in terms of my own understanding. The classroom teacher explained her instruction and the learners' responses throughout the lesson to aid in my understanding.

During my observations, I digitally recorded all classroom lessons. This allowed me to translate Sesotho instruction used to support English instruction as well as to capture data that I missed during my initial observation. Though I tried to maintain an unobtrusive presence in the classroom, my presence created a bit of a spectacle on several occasions. The teachers were eager to engage me in the lesson and invited me to work with the learners. During those times, my observations were affected. Because there was no electricity, I took observational notes with paper and pencil. When I had originally proposed my capstone project, I created an observation protocol to use to focus my observations and to ensure I captured data specific to early literacy (see Appendix F).

The protocol followed an adapted version of the Classroom Language Arts Systematic Sampling and Instructional Coding (CLASSIC) system (Scanlon, Gelzheiser, Fanuele, Sweeney, & Newcomer, 2003). However, once I arrived at the research site, I quickly realized that trying to use a formal protocol limited my ability to observe the interactions between the teachers and the learners. The lessons in all classrooms focused primarily on oral language development through call and response. Though I think the protocol would be well suited for a primary classroom setting in a developed country like the United States, it failed to match the instruction at MKPS. Therefore, I abandoned the format and opted to take detailed notes of everything I noticed during the teacher and learner interactions during the lessons and within the classroom environment.

Community literacy practices. In order to understand how the community outside the school setting used literacy, I planned to interview parents to get their perceptions about their children's use of literacy within the home and community. I had hoped to visit a few families in their homes. Once I arrived, my observations were limited to observing literacy practices at local church services in the small towns near MKPS, and these observations were supplemented by obtaining school board members' perceptions of literacy outside the school setting. Therefore, when defining literacy opportunities in terms of the local context, my data focused heavily on the school setting. My ability to evaluate the challenges and supports to literacy acquisition was limited to the context of the classroom and the insight provided by the teachers and school board members.

Documents and artifacts. Digital images of the classrooms and school site were gathered to help assess the quantity and quality of resources for early literacy instruction.

Grade-level syllabi, the newly adopted Integrated Literacy Curriculum for Grades 1 through Grade 3, and other types of print material, including the school library and student exercise books, were examined to determine the goals and objectives of early literacy instruction and the access to and quality of materials in Sesotho and English. Data relating to teachers, school enrollment, and other school information was gathered to supplement the demographics of the research site. All documents were stripped of all personal identifiable markers to preserve confidentiality.

Data Analysis

Creswell (2012) recommended a six-step analysis and interpretation cycle for qualitative data. The six-step process includes preparing and organizing the data for analysis, engaging with the data to create preliminary codes, developing a general picture of the data through descriptions and themes, representing the findings through narratives and visuals, making an interpretation of the meaning of the results by personally reflecting on the impact of the findings and on the literature that informs the findings, and finally conducting strategies to validate the accuracy of the findings.

Data analysis is a cyclical process that allows conclusions to be drawn and changed as the data are revisited and alternative hypothesis are tested and eliminated (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I used Nvivo 10, which is a computer software program to organize and code the written text data. Because I started the analysis with preliminary codes identified from the research, I used a deductive process. However, I moved to a more inductive process as I examined data that did not appear to fit within the initial codes. Throughout the data analysis, I reviewed the data in order to refine and confirm emerging codes and themes. I began the analysis using a provisional list of codes derived

from current research on best practices in early literacy instruction (Hoadley, 2010; Trudell et al, 2012). The provisional codes were divided into categories relating to school, classroom, and home factors that support early literacy presented in Table 5. These categories were identified as having an impact on the instructional practices in developing countries.

Table 5

Provisional Coding List for Data Analysis

School Environment	
Theme 1: Teaching and Learning Environment	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom conditions • Print-rich vs. print-poor • Materials • Class size • Age of learners • Classroom management • Student engagement • Allocation of time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parental involvement • Absenteeism (pupils) • Absenteeism (teachers) • Monitoring and support • Teacher errors • Teacher-student relationship • Grouping for instruction
Theme 2: Lesson Content	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balanced diet supporting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phonemic awareness Phonics Fluency Vocabulary Comprehension • Genre selection • Addressing child's ZPD • Difficulty of tasks • Clarity, order, and depth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oral language support (Sesotho, English) • Reading (Sesotho) • Reading (English) • Scaffolds – L1 to L2; strategy use; modeling, guiding: language experience approach; guided reading • Writing process • Writing to learn • Culturally relevant • Opportunity for use of literacy
Theme 3: Instructional Methods and Pedagogy	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lesson structure • Lesson coherence • Child-centered learning • Active thinking vs. active doing • Teaching and learning materials' quantity and quality • Pupil engagement strategies • Teaching and learning strategies • Teacher actions (storytelling, demonstration, questioning) • Direction vs. instruction • Lack of explanation • Look-and-say • Whole class vs. group instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group leaders • Lack of direction in groups • Writing pace • Authentic writing vs. copying • Writing mechanics • Motivation • Addressing the needs of all learners • Assessment and revision • Definition of learning (memorization, matching, reproducing) • Task difficulty • Input and output opportunities for literacy use

Home Environment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to reading materials (English and Sesotho) • Access to resources (paper, pencil, desk) • Time set aside for learning • Use of English in the home • Goals for education • Parental support for learning

However, once I began to code the data, I recognized that not all the categories were relevant to my data; consequently, I needed to adjust the codes and categories to match the context of MKPS. These adjustments are summarized in Table 6. After my initial round of coding, I eliminated and combined codes to better fit the emerging categories. These codes and categories led me to my findings and allowed me to identify areas of need and to create an action plan to support the teachers at MKPS. Based upon my analysis the codes were grouped into categories that aligned with challenges within the learning environment that influenced literacy instruction; instructional practices and community practices and participant attitudes that could be leveraged to improve literacy practice; and the focus of instruction and teaching methods that influenced the development of early literacy skills. I will discuss my assertions and findings based upon the data in Chapter Four.

Table 6

Identified Codes, Categories, and Themes for Data Analysis for Phase One

Codes	Categories	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to print • Class size • Classroom discipline (student engagement) • Use of resources • New integrated curriculum for English and Sesotho instruction (not enough development of either language) 	Challenges within the teaching and learning environments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community level factors • School level factors • Classroom level factors 	Access to literacy

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value of literacy and books • School-wide literacy goals • Teacher attitudes towards improvement • Focus on oral language 	Instructional supports to be leveraged	Improving instructional practice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early literacy diet <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ABC knowledge • Phonemic awareness • Phonics • Fluency • Vocabulary • Comprehension • Writing • Oral language emphasis 	Focus of literacy instruction	Opportunities to develop literacy skills

Starting with a provisional list of codes prior to fieldwork allowed me to focus specifically on the research questions and reduced data overload (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As data were coded, the provisional list was revised and adapted as new codes emerged from the data through a process of reading and rereading the data (observations, interviews, and document summaries). As I read, reread, and continued to code the data, new codes were added into NVivo 10 to match the observational data. Codes and categories were compared and contrasted until no new categories were found. Based on the frequency of codes, I regrouped and reduced the data into reoccurring themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The themes identified through the data analysis helped create working assertions about the factors contributing to the early literacy practices at Mountain Kingdom Primary School. I created analytic memos to make sense of the data and connect the codes with assertions and the research questions. I continued to revisit the interview data, classroom observations, and documents to ensure that I had evidence to support my assertions. As I reviewed the data, I looked for evidence to confirm whether or not that my conclusions were supported by the data. According to Erickson (1986), it is important to “test the evidentiary warrant for an assertion the researcher

conducts a systematic search of the entire data corpus, looking for disconfirming and confirming evidence, keeping in mind the need to reframe the assertion as the analysis proceeds” (p. 146). I created visuals to present my working assertions and examined how the evidence supported my findings.

The final goal of the analysis was to interpret the data in such a way as to “attach significance to what was found, making sense of the findings, offering explanations, drawing conclusions, extrapolation lessons, making inferences, considering meaning, and otherwise imposing order” (Patton, 2002, p.480). Interpretations of the data in terms of my working assertions are discussed in Chapter 4.

Validity Criteria

In interpretive research, validity related to the validation of the assertions and the inferences the researcher makes during analysis (Vrasidas, 2001). “Interpretive accounts should be judged on groups of coherence, plausibility and, whether they help us gain better understanding of the phenomena under study,” (Vrasidas, 2001, p. 23). According to Erickson (1986), there are five threats to validity: inadequate amounts of evidence, inadequate variety in kinds of evidence, faulty interpretive status of evidence, inadequate disconfirming evidence, and inadequate discrepant case analysis. I used a variety of evidence, observational field notes, analytic memos, interviews, and document analysis to provide the data set for the study. I used the data to provide support for my assertions. The assertions that are presented in the Results section are those that had strong enough evidence (both confirming and disconfirming) to support them. I used peer debriefing to support the credibility of my codes, themes, and assertions. I invited a reading research professor from University of Virginia to examine my coding and analytic memos to

confirm the reliability of my findings. We met and discussed the codes and themes and agreed that my coding process and themes were valid.

Researcher as Instrument

Participatory action research requires that my role change over time. Over the course of this study, my role changed from observer and listener to designer, synthesizer, teacher, and coach. Each of these roles created inherent issues relating to my own bias and assumptions about early literacy instruction at MKPS. At the beginning of the study, I started as a nonparticipant observer. However, throughout the process, my role changed to that of a participant observer. I was asked on many occasions to support the teachers as they tried to address problems of practice during their teaching. The participants routinely asked me for my opinion and support in finding solutions to their early literacy instructional problems. I served as the primary data collection instrument. It was important, therefore, that I identify my own values, assumptions, and biases. I have been working in the field of literacy for the past 25 years as a classroom teacher, reading specialist, and professor of reading instruction. My knowledge base about best practices was informed by my experiences in working with teachers who are knowledgeable about literacy instruction and teach in well-resourced classrooms. Because of this, I had to be careful not to view the setting at Mountain Kingdom from a deficit model. This was especially difficult because I had no experience working with schools or teaching in developing countries. Though I had worked as a reading specialist in a Title One school in the United States, my experiences were nothing like those at MKPS. I routinely had to carefully examine my own bias and assumptions. While collecting data, I carefully analyzed my reflection journal and reflected upon my data collection decisions and

interpretations, and reviewed to confirm my findings to make sure I was not imposing my own judgments on the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

In this chapter, I describe the results from the Participatory Action Research project conducted with the teachers at Mountain Kingdom Primary School (MKPS), which was created to explore ways to improve literacy instruction in the early primary grades. Participatory Action Research (PAR) allowed the participants to be actively involved in the problem solving process. I hoped that inviting the stakeholders to partner in the research process would develop solutions unique to their instructional context that they would want to enact. For this capstone project, the teachers and I focused on Phase One: Verifying Areas of Instructional Need and Phase Two: Creating an Action Plan to Improve Instruction. The PAR project focused on the following research questions:

Research question 1: What are the literacy practices in the home, school and community of children in Reception (U.S. kindergarten) to Grade 3?

Research question 2: How can literacy practices be leveraged to support early literacy development?

I begin Chapter Four by presenting the overall findings from the research project (see Table 7) and reviewing the coding structure used to analyze the data (see Chapter Three Tables 5 and 6). In the remainder of the chapter, I describe Phase One and present the evidence verifying the sociocultural, community, school, and classroom level challenges that influenced the teachers' ability to provide early literacy instruction. In Chapter Five, I discuss Phase Two, the action plan and site recommendations that were created to improve the instructional practices at MKPS.

Table 7

Summary of Findings for Research Questions One and Two

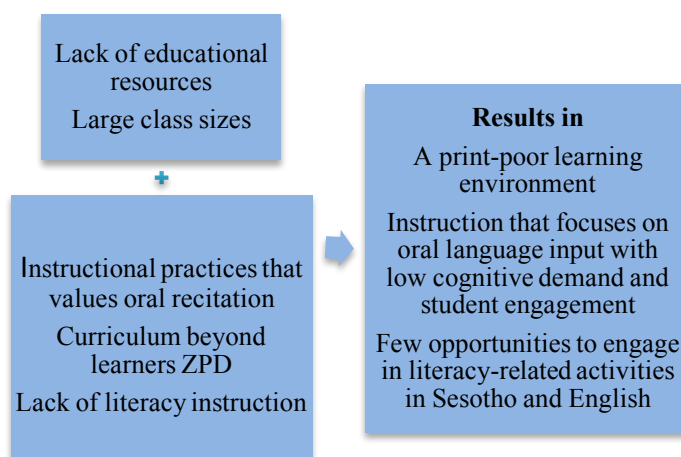
Verifying Problems of Practice
Finding 1: Learners had few opportunities to engage in literacy activities within the community, at home, and at school. Participants identified a lack of access as the reason for their inability to engage in literacy activities.
Finding 2: Due to school level factors relating to overcrowded classrooms, a lack of educational resources and underutilized classroom space and personnel, teachers struggled to maintain classroom discipline, group for instruction, meet the needs of their learners, and provide access to educational materials for the learners.
Finding 3: The newly adopted primary grade curriculum focused on academic language and content area knowledge and failed to align with the learners' level of language proficiency. The learning objectives did not actually address phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary, which are necessary skills for learners to become proficient readers and writers of English and Sesotho.
Finding 4: Teachers focused their literacy instruction on oral language. Teachers used oral language and oral repetition as a means to support classroom management and to ensure comprehension of lesson content. Literacy instruction focused on English oral language fluency and English oral language comprehension at the expense of other literacy skills. Due to the teachers' instructional preference for call and response and rote learning, learners participated in lessons with limited cognitive demand and low-level language output. Consequently, learners appeared to be disengaged and passive learners.
Finding 5: The early literacy instructional practices seemed unsuccessful in systematically teaching and providing opportunities for learners to practice skills in phonemic awareness, word recognition, oral reading fluency, and writing, which are important to developing reading in the early primary grades. Factors that impeded early literacy skills acquisition related to lack of access to print and opportunities to engage in meaningful practices to develop the necessary skills for literacy.
Instructional Practices to Leverage to Support Early Literacy Instruction
Finding 6: Despite the lack of a reading culture, the teachers and children valued literacy and wanted to become more literate. Their desire to read and have access to materials could be leveraged and used as part of the action plan to improve literacy instruction.
Finding 7: Teachers were committed to the academic achievement of their learners and desired to improve their instructional practices to ensure their learners' success. Teachers recognized areas of need; and though they lacked the knowledge and skills to improve instruction they were eager to learn and try new ideas.
Finding 8: Learners appeared to be actively involved in literacy when given opportunities to use their literacy skills for authentic literacy purposes. Literacy instruction and classroom management could be improved by finding more ways for learners to authentically engage in the learning process.
Finding 9: The teachers set aside time each day to teach literacy. By leveraging current instructional practices and providing training relating to evidence-based early literacy instruction, teachers should be able to improve their current instruction.

From my data analysis discussed in Chapter Three, I verified three main categories that influenced instruction at MKPS (see Table 6 in Chapter Three), which will be discussed later in this chapter. The categories are organized by (a) factors within the community, school and classroom environments that influenced opportunities to engage with literacy; (b) current instructional practices as well as attitudes and values of the

learning community that could be leveraged to support literacy acquisition and instruction; and (c) the focus of early literacy instruction and instructional methods that influenced the development of literacy skills. Within each of these categories, I verified the challenges and supports relating to literacy instruction, which are important considerations when thinking of ways to improve instruction. These codes and categories led me to two major themes, which related to access to literacy and opportunity to develop literacy skills. Based upon my analysis of the data, a working theory emerged from the data about the relationship between the factors influencing early literacy conditions at MKPS and specific literacy outcomes (see Table 8). It is my assertion that the focus on oral language development at the expense of reading and writing, adopted primarily to cope with lack of educational resources and large class sizes, combined with the difficult academic-content-based curriculum to foster instruction that created passive learners by limiting their opportunities for practicing literacy skills in cognitively demanding activities. In the remainder of the chapter, I present the findings and data analysis that led me to this working assertion.

Table 8

Assertion 1: Underlying Interpretation and Conclusions of Factors Influencing Early Literacy Instruction



Phase One: Verifying Areas of Instructional Need

Research question 1: What are the literacy practices in the home, school and community of children in Reception (U.S. kindergarten) to Grade 3?

Sociocultural Challenges to Literacy

Because of the complex cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic conditions at MKPS, the study was framed by the sociocultural learning theory. Though the focus of the study was to improve classroom instruction, an examination of outside factors showed that sociocultural issues and resulting educational policies created obstacles for the teachers as they tried to create a positive learning environment and instructional conditions necessary for literacy development. If classrooms “operate within a cultural context which to a large extent determines not only what is to be learned, but also how it is to be learned” (McKay, 1992, p. 47), then understanding the sociocultural and socioeconomic conditions that influenced literacy practices at MKPS is necessary to explain the challenges teachers faced when providing literacy instruction to their learners. These sociocultural and socioeconomic issues included human trafficking, HIV/AIDS, poor nutrition, and a lack of basic resources. In the next section, I share observational data from my visit to illustrate the difficult conditions at MKPS.

Violence towards children. On my first day at MKPS, the teaching schedule was changed in order for the learners to attend an assembly. I observed:

Today literacy instruction was interrupted for an assembly conducted by the district police for children ages 8 and older. Several children from neighboring districts had been abducted and several young girls had been raped on their way to school. To combat the violence, the police were here to discuss the issues and to

share tips with the children on how to be safe. The assembly alerted the children to the problem and provided clear goals to help the children. They focused on the value of girls and . . . the responsibility of the boys to protect them. The police recommended that the children look out for each other on the walk to school and never travel alone. (Field notes, April 29, 2015)

HIV/AIDS. As noted in Chapter 1, Lesotho has the third highest incidence of HIV/AIDS in the world; however, I had not realized how important HIV/AIDS education and prevention would be in the daily lives of the children. Over the course of my stay, I came to realize the impact of HIV/AIDS. In the middle of the schoolyard in the flowerbed was a large tire that had the sentence “Know your status” written around the edge in large white letters. I looked at that flowerbed every day and never gave it much thought until a conversation I had with one student during a morning assembly:

Today during morning assembly, as I stood beside a 6th grade student, I asked her what the saying on the tire meant, “Know your status.” She said, “We must know our HIV status so that we don’t make others sick. Do you know your status, ‘Me Tracy?’”³ (Field notes, May 5, 2015)

As an outsider, I was astounded by the seriousness of the health-related issues these children faced on a daily basis, which negatively impacted their wellbeing and educational futures. Yet the school and community took responsibility for the care and wellbeing of all their learners.

Poor nutrition. While waiting for the children to finish their snacks before reading started, the Grade 1 teacher said:

³ *‘Me* is a sign of respect and means *mother* in Sesotho. When the participants called me *‘Me*, it was an indication that I was accepted and respected by the teachers and learners at MKPS.

Many of our children are hungry. They come to school because we feed them.

The government started a new feeding program this year that provides the children with two meals a day. The children have a morning snack of sour porridge and lunch of papa and some sort of vegetable. The morning snack helps the children who take HIV medicine. The medicine makes them sick to their stomach. I wish they could have their porridge first thing instead of now [10:00 a.m.]. For some children, this is all they will eat today. (Grade 1, Classroom observation April, 28, 2015)

The school board members were concerned that the government might stop the feeding program, as indicated in an interview:

The government has said we need to start supplementing our school-feeding program. We need to do more gardening. There is not enough food. The government supplies maize, but there is not enough to last. We get beans but they run out. We hire the cooks to cook for our children but they run out of food. We need to create a true garden. (School board member 3, School board interview, April 27, 2015)

By feeding the children two meals a day, the government and the school contributed to the overall health of the children. The daily feeding program was vital to the children's very survival and provided an incentive for them to come to school. However, the school board recognized that they needed to think of ways to care for their children without governmental support.

Lack of water and electricity. The school lacked running water, electricity, and flushing toilets. Instructional time was used to haul water from the spring and to visit the

outhouses, both of which were quite a distance from the classrooms. It usually took the children 20 minutes to walk to and from the latrines during morning bathroom breaks. The lack of electricity made the classrooms dark, so it was difficult for the learners to see, and made it impossible for teachers to work before and after school. The teachers prepared for instruction during class time. In a typical lesson, the teacher spent the first 5 to 15 minutes preparing to teach the lesson while the children sat and waited. The lack of electricity also made the classrooms very cold and damp.

Every morning, the teachers congregated outside their classrooms talking to each other while the children were unsupervised in the classrooms. School was scheduled to start at 8:00. However, on most mornings class didn't begin until 8:45 or later. While the teachers stood outside the classrooms, the children were in the rooms running around the room, yelling and throwing things. On the third day of my visit, as I was talking to the principal outside the third grade classroom about my observation scheduled for the day, I stood beside the building and started to feel the warmth from the sandstone. It was so cold (28 degrees) and the heat on the building felt so warm. I immediately realized why the teachers didn't start teaching first thing in the morning. They were waiting for the classrooms to warm up. I also noticed more children beginning to arrive. The third grade teacher, who was standing near me, said, "Those children travel the furthest each morning. They can't leave until it is daylight; so they are always late. We must wait for all the learners to arrive, otherwise they miss the lesson." (Field notes, April 29, 2015)

Contextualized Transfer of Best Practice

In creating an action plan to improve the literacy instruction at MKPS, the larger sociocultural issues could not be ignored. In my review of the research focusing on effective schools, at times the recommendations appeared to be incongruent with the reality of challenges teachers faced in schools that were poorly resourced as a result of larger sociocultural challenges. For example, within the school effectiveness research, schools in developing countries were often criticized for not using instructional time wisely, which negatively impacted student learning (McEwan, 2015). Based upon the observational data from MKPS, it would indeed appear that teachers failed to use instructional time wisely, which could hinder student learning. However, from a sociocultural perspective, the lack of basic necessities created challenges for the teachers that caused interruptions in instructional time. From the teachers' perspective, waiting provided an important solution to ensure that all learners received instruction and that the classroom conditions were conducive to learning. The teachers' instructional decisions were responsive to the unique sociocultural context at MKPS. In reality, the larger socioeconomic and sociocultural issues impacting MKPS were beyond the scope of this project. However, in designing an action plan that addressed the unique sociocultural context at MKPS, it was important to understand the broader conditions that impacted the learning environment and, consequently, early literacy instruction. The theory of contextualized transfer of best practice used to guide the study explains that the very reason research fails to improve literacy instruction in developing countries is a lack of understanding of the context in which the instructional change takes place (Reimers et al., 2012). Though the sociocultural challenges at MKPS were not likely to change, through

the PAR cycle, teachers could identify the community- and school-level challenges that negatively impacted early literacy skills and create an action plan that addressed their unique context.

Community Challenges to Literacy Development

When considering the literacy practices within the context at MKPS, I discovered four constraining conditions within the community, school, and classroom that influenced the teachers' ability to provide literacy instruction: access to print, class size, classroom discipline, and inadequate and underutilized resources. In the following section, I describe and analyze how the challenges within the teaching and learning environments hindered the learners' ability to engage in literacy practices.

Finding 1

Finding 1: Learners had few opportunities to engage in literacy activities within the community, at home and at school. Participants identified a lack of access and reading culture as the reasons for the learners' inability to engage in literacy practices.

Access to print. In all contexts (the community, the home, and the school), there appeared to be few opportunities for the learners to engage with print in either English or Sesotho. Vital to reading in any language is access to reading materials. Learners cannot learn to read in any language if they do not have access to reading material (Pretorius, 2014). Other than the Bible, there was little material in Sesotho or in English for the learners and adults to read. In the towns, I noticed environmental print in the form of billboard signs, which were mostly written in English and were meant to advertise goods and services. In the nearby towns, the only billboards written in Sesotho were those promoting AIDS/HIV awareness or translating or extending the meaning of

advertisements. It appeared the teachers and adults who could afford cell phones texted each other. English appeared to have value in that the teachers needed to text in English because their phones autocorrected the Sesotho. Even during the church services, there was little opportunity for the community members and children to engage with print. The worship service relied on call and response and memorization to recite Bible passages and to sing hymns. Though Bibles were available, few parishioners used them. During my interview with the school board, one member stated:

We don't have books. There is no money for books. Books sometimes come home from school. But there are not enough to go home and come back to school. We don't even have enough books at church. Children are not able to read often. There is no practice. (School board member 2, April 27, 2015 School board interview).

School board members and teachers all talked about the lack of a reading culture in Lesotho: "We do not have a culture of reading. We don't have materials to read outside of school. We can read the Bible at church, but we don't read" (Grade 3 teacher, April 26, 2015 interview).

Print-poor classroom conditions. The children lacked access to reading material not only at home and within the community but also at school. The school library had approximately 150 books, which were stored in a locked cupboard. The teachers wanted to read aloud to their students and to allow students to take books home; but, because there were so few books, the teachers did not give the children access to the books for fear that the children would not take good care of them. All the teachers asked

for more books to help them teach reading. In Grades 5, 6 and 7, the children read one chapter book for all three years. A Grade 6 teacher explained:

I feel that this book is too hard for my learners. The themes are meant for older learners, like in secondary school. We only have 35 copies of the book for all learners to share for all three grades. It would be good to have a variety of chapter books for our learners to read. (Conversation after classroom observation, Grade 6 teacher, April 29, 2015)

None of the classrooms had reading corners or libraries. There was very little environmental print in the classrooms. During my interviews, all the teachers asked for help in adhering environmental print to the concrete walls. Over 100 instructional posters had been donated for the teachers to use to support learning, but they were kept in the storage closet due to the difficulty in mounting them. The instructional posters would have provided rich visuals to support both content knowledge and English vocabulary. The only materials available for the learners to read were their textbooks, which were based on the new integrated curriculum for literacy instruction. The new materials were not well matched to the literacy needs of the learners and had to be shared among the learners.

School and Classroom Level Challenges to Literacy Development

Because *Education for All* made education free for all children in Reception through Grade 7, more children were able to attend school. However, the influx of children due to the new policy caused strains on existing resources and the teachers' ability to provide the best instruction for all learners. In the following section, the school-level factors that hindered learning are explained. These factors related to large

class sizes, poor classroom conditions, overcrowded classrooms, a lack of educational resources, and underutilized resources.

Finding 2

Finding 2: Due to school-level factors relating to overcrowded classrooms, a lack of educational resources, and underutilized classroom space and personnel, teachers struggled to maintain classroom discipline, group for instruction, meet the needs of their learners, and provide access to educational materials for the learners.

Large class sizes. Though the government tried to keep class sizes to a ratio of 1:40, the classes exceeded this number. The number of learners within the classroom ranged from 18 to 65 (see table 4 in Chapter 3). However, I did not observe the teachers complaining about large class sizes. Their comments related to the problems created by large class sizes: insufficient instructional materials for all learners, behavior management, loss of student engagement, and the ability to group for instruction and to meet the needs of individual learners. The large class sizes put a strain on classroom management and allocation of instructional resources.

Problems with classroom management. The Lesotho government had recently adopted a new school discipline policy that required schools to adopt child-friendly disciplinary measures, which meant that corporal punishment could no longer be used. The new discipline policy aligned with the new curriculum initiative, which focused on child-centered learning. However, rooted in the Lesotho culture was the notion that children must obey their elders and that their elders had the right to punish them if they did not listen (Ntaote, 2012). The Grade 1 Sesotho teacher believed that the child-

friendly policy went against the Basotho culture and infringed upon the power relationship between adults and children. She told me on several occasions,

‘Me Tracy, you do not understand our culture. You don’t see that the only way children will behave is if you beat them with the stick. The stick makes them behave. The children are lazy. They want to play. Take away our stick and the children will not listen. (Field notes, April 30, 2015)

Most of the teachers at MKPS, however, recognized that children learned better in an environment that was free from coercion and fear. The Reception teacher shared her concerns about disciplining her own son, who was in her class:

‘Me Tracy, I don’t know how to make my son behave. He causes so many problems in class. During my lessons, he roams the room and won’t stay in his spot. He willfully hits the other children. When we are home, I beat him with the stick when he won’t listen. But, I can’t do that here. He knows that. If I beat him with the stick, the other children will be afraid of me. I want the children to know I care for them. I want them to trust me. I tell him every day, if he misbehaves at school, I will beat him once we are home. (Informal conversation with Reception teacher, May 4, 2015)

Classroom discipline issues. The child-friendly school was understood by teachers as a tool to develop trust between the teacher and learner and to provide a positive classroom climate. Yet, this new policy had unintended consequences. The teachers did not have the classroom management skills required to keep children on task and engaged. Without classroom management techniques, the teachers were unable to

create a positive learning climate. Consequently, they felt frustrated by the children's lack of respect.

'Me, Tracy these learners give me a headache. It is so hard, so very hard to teach this year's learners. They don't listen. They can't even do one math problem. They have had an hour to do one math problem and look at them. They are so noisy. I can't make them behave. (Conversation after Grade 3 math observation, May 4, 2015)

In this case, the learners' behavior was related not only to classroom management issues, but also to the curriculum pacing and the learners' time on task. The children spent an hour doing one math word problem. Many of the children were finished within the first 30 minutes of the lesson and spent the rest of the class period waiting for something else to do. In observing the Grade 3 classroom, I started to formulate the connection between classroom behavior and engagement. However, there was a general feeling from the teachers that the children's behavior got in the way of learning. One teacher was so frustrated that she regretted her decision to teach:

'Me Tracy, I wanted to be a nurse. I didn't want to be a teacher. Teaching is so hard. There is so much need and the children don't respect me. My father was a teacher. He told me 'being a teacher was noble.' I became a teacher for him. I didn't know this would be so hard. It is hard to be a good teacher when the children don't listen. (Informal conversation with Grade 1 teacher after school, May 4, 2015)

Based on my conversations and observations, I recognized the need to give the teachers tools to manage their large class sizes and to allow learners to be more actively engaged in the learning process.

Need for discipline strategies. In several instances, the teachers resorted to coercion to get the children to behave. During several observations in Reception and Grade 1, I noticed the teachers directed the pointing stick at the learners when the class was noisy. The children immediately quieted down. In one instance, the teacher smacked a child on the back of the head when he was not paying attention. The rest of the children immediately focused on the teacher and began to participate in the lesson. In another situation, the teacher threatened to call the police if the children did not behave. The lack of classroom management strategies was a barrier to instruction. The unintended consequence of a child-friendly policy was that teachers were unable to create a safe and orderly learning climate because they lacked the knowledge and strategies to keep children engaged in the learning process. All four primary grade teachers said that they needed help with discipline and engagement. From my perspective, poor classroom behavior could be improved by allowing the learners to be more actively engaged in the learning process. In thinking about the teachers' comments, I realized that part of the tension between the child-friendly policy and the underlying relationship between the teachers and learners dealt with respect and obedience. In order to support the teachers, I needed to consider ways to provide teachers with simple classroom management strategies that supported engagement and promoted respect by the learners towards learning and the teachers (Field notes, May 2, 2015).

Inability to meet needs of learners. The large class sizes made it difficult for the teachers to group for instruction and for the learners to work. The Grade 5 teacher commented that it would be nice to roam the room while she taught to check in on individual students. She also wanted to group her learners so that they could help each other. “I know that some of my learners need extra help. I wish I could help them, but I can’t get to the students while they are working independently.” I suggested spreading out the students’ desks to utilize all the classroom space. The desks were crammed together against one wall leaving a large swath of space around the perimeter of the classroom. She laughed and said, “Me Tracy, if I spread the desks out the children will fall onto the floor. I have to push the desks and benches together to accommodate all the learners. There aren’t enough desks and benches for everyone; so we must sit at least 4 or 5 to a bench” (Grade 5, Classroom observation, May 4, 2015). It was at that moment, I started to think differently about my participants. This encounter showed that the teachers were problem solvers and thought deeply about the learning process. Our exchange reminded me to think more carefully about my own bias regarding their ability to improve instructional practice. These teachers were thinkers and problem solvers. I needed to think more openly about the strengths they brought to the research process. Clearly, I did not have the answers to address the problems unique to their context (Field notes, Grade 5, May 4, 2015).

Inadequate teaching resources. The school lacked the necessary supplies and resources to handle the number of learners in each classroom. The classrooms were small and did not have enough desks and benches for the learners. The government did

not provide enough pencils, exercise books or textbooks to meet the needs of all the learners. The principal explained:

The government only sent one pencil and one exercise book per child for the school year. We have new curriculum, but the government didn't send enough books for each learner. Everyone has to share. In some grades three to four learners must share one book. I worry every year that we will not get the supplies we need from them [the government]. We try to ration our supplies so they will last. We try to stockpile our extra supplies left over from each year, just in case we don't get any more. (Field notes, May 6, 2015)

Under-utilized resources. During my visit, I observed that classroom space and personnel appeared to be under-utilized. The school had a large classroom that had been designated as the school library. However, with the exception of Grade 1, teachers did not use the library during the eight days I observed. The library was used for special events and teachers' after-school meetings. Moreover, library resources were under-utilized: library books did not appear to circulate, though on one occasion, a sixth grade learner got a handful of books from the library to take back to her class. The collection was kept under lock and key. The use of personnel also seemed inefficient. During any given instructional period, there were four teachers who were not teaching. In Grade 7, three teachers were assigned to teach 34 students. While one teacher taught content, the other two teachers graded papers or did administrative work. On one occasion, the Grade 7 math teacher slept at the back of the room while the Grade 7 English teacher taught her lesson. The government had provided an extra teacher to help teach the 65 learners in Grade 1. However, instead of dividing the children into two classes or working together

to create smaller groups, one teacher taught all 65 learners. One teacher appeared responsible for most of the teaching, while the other teacher taught Sesotho for 30 minutes each day. The rest of the time the Grade 1 Sesotho teacher helped the cooks prepare food or sat at her desk watching the other Grade 1 teacher teach. The lack of teacher support in Grade 1 made it difficult for the children to receive any differentiated literacy instruction. The under-utilization of personnel and classroom space seemed like a missed opportunity to address the challenges of overcrowded classrooms and to provide more individualized instruction to meet the needs of all learners.

Classroom Instruction to Develop Literacy

In order for English language learners to develop literacy skills, they must engage in meaningful activities that systematically teach oral language development and early literacy skills: phonemic awareness, word recognition and oral reading fluency and writing (Goldenberg, 2010). In analyzing the data, I noticed three factors that influenced the development of literacy skills: the use of the newly adopted curriculum; instructional methods that favored an oral orientation to schooling; and a focus on oral language fluency and comprehension with few opportunities to engage in lessons focusing on reading and writing skills. In the next section, I discuss the instructional components that were the focus of instruction and explain how instructional practices created challenges for the development of early literacy skills and limited the opportunities to learners to engage in literacy activities.

Finding 3

Finding 3: The newly adopted primary grade curriculum focused on academic language and content area knowledge. Due to the level of academic vocabulary, the new

curriculum failed to align with the learners' level of language proficiency. The learning objectives did not systemically teach phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary, which are necessary skills for learners to become proficient readers and writers of English and Sesotho.

Newly Adopted Integrated Curriculum. The new curriculum was the driving force behind how teachers taught literacy in English and in Sesotho. The principal stated, “We are not allowed to change the curriculum. We must follow it; but we would be allowed to add to it. But we must follow the grade-level syllabus” (Focus group interview, May 5, 2016). The Ministry of Education had adopted a new curriculum in 2009 as a means to help prepare citizens to compete in a global economy, to maintain the cultural values of the Basotho people, to provide learners with the necessary knowledge and skills, and to combat and overcome difficult economic and health issues relating to unemployment, climate change, food insecurity, the devastation of HIV/AIDS, and the growing number of households headed by children (Raselimo & Mahao, 2015). In order to ensure that fundamental literacy skills in Sesotho and English were covered, separate outcomes for each subject were created within each of the four units. However, close examination of the curriculum syllabus for English in the Grade 2 unit, *How I Relate to Others*, showed that the objectives seemed focused on basic conversational skills and discrete syntax/grammar skills (see Table 9). In the example from Table 8, over the course of three months, the instruction focused on basic greetings, common nouns (animals, objects, plants, and body parts), verb tenses for five verbs (*buy, play, work, sing, read*), articles and basic grammar and punctuation skills. The unit introduced four phonics patterns, which were the only patterns covered during Grades 2 and 3.

Table 9

Summary of Grade 2 Unit 2 Learning Objectives

Focus of Instruction	Learning Objective
Oral Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use correct greetings and responses at different times of the day: <i>good morning, good day, good afternoon, good evening</i> Follow directions-<i>left, right, up, down, backwards, forward</i>
English Grammar Nouns Indefinite and Definite articles Personal pronouns Verbs Present tense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Classify common and proper nouns: proper nouns: names of people, places, days of the week, and months of the year common nouns: animals, objects. plants, and body parts. Write proper names using capital letters Learners fill in missing articles (<i>a, an, the</i>) in a given text Learners will use personal pronouns (<i>I, you, he, she it, we, they, me, him, her, it, us, them</i>) correctly in sentences orally and fill in missing pronouns in sentences. Act out action words (<i>buy, play, work sing, read</i>) Identify changes in verbs with <i>he/she/it</i> (<i>buys, plays, works, sings, reads</i>) Role play different actions which happen regularly
Phonics Form different words using two-letter sounds <i>oo, ee, ch, sh</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners will blend, list and identify in sentences words containing two-letter sounds <i>oo, ee, ch, sh</i>
Writing Punctuation: Use lower-case and capital letters in words and sentences and use a full stop accurately	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners will write words and sentences using both upper and lower case letters correctly. Learners will fill in words in sentence using capital letters and small letters appropriately Learners will write proper nouns in sentences and punctuate sentences properly.

The objectives of the new curriculum focused on important knowledge and skills to help learners cope with challenging social, economic, and health issues. However, it did not appear to systematically teach the important components of reading and writing in English or Sesotho. Though English language learners benefit from direct explicit instruction in the elements of English (vocabulary, syntax, conventions) and social conventions such as greetings and conversational conventions, the objectives focused on discrete skills, and instruction lacked enough exposure and practice with oral language,

reading, and writing to help the learners become proficient speakers, readers, and writers (Goldenberg, 2009).

Academic content challenges to literacy development. Because the curriculum contained advanced academic language and content that were beyond the learners' language development, the teachers spent much of their instructional time teaching language pronunciation and language comprehension. The Grade 2 teacher stated:

My learners are not able to read the words in the passages. The English vocabulary seems hard for them. I have to read the passages aloud to them. I repeat the phrases until they can say the words correctly. I focus on the pictures so they understand the meaning of the passage and the English vocabulary. When I finish the lesson, I ask my learners to summarize what they have read but they can't. (Field notes, April 29, 2015)

The Grade 4 teacher commented, "We don't have a good enough English vocabulary to teach some of the concepts in our curriculum" (Grade 4 teacher, Interview April 26, 2015). One of the issues teachers faced with the new curriculum was the need to teach academic content and vocabulary while still teaching Basic English proficiency (Coleman & Goldenberg, 2010). Since many of the learners were at an emergent level of English language development, they were not ready to handle the curriculum's advanced academic content and higher order thinking skills. For the Grade 1 teacher, the lack of resources, the learners' limited English vocabulary and the difficulty of the text made teaching the curriculum difficult. She stated:

Our new curriculum is okay. There are good pictures to support the concepts.

However, I have 65 learners so everyone must share because there are not enough

books for everyone. The learners do not really understand the concepts because the English vocabulary is hard. The sentences are too hard for my learners to read on their own. I try to model the ideas, but I don't have enough visuals to help them understand the material. (Grade 1 teacher, Interview April 28, 2015)

Difficulty with reading passages. Because the teachers noted that the text seemed too hard for their learners to read, I checked the readability level of one of the passages, *Manure and Composting*, in the Grade 2 unit *How I Relate to Others* (see Appendix G). Though the text supported the learners' knowledge about composting and its use in gardening, the text was written at a Grade 5 reading level. For emergent English language speakers, this passage was too difficult to read and to understand even if the teacher read it aloud to them. The format of the material made it difficult for teachers to teach comprehension skills. For this particular lesson, the instructions for the lesson required that the learners read the text only; there were no follow-up questions to support and extend their learning. The passage seemed to be a how-to manual for composting. However, the material failed to address the living conditions of the learners, based on my observations within the community, and the teacher was unable to show the learners how to apply the knowledge within their own context. I noticed the community members dried the manure on top of their stone fences to burn for fuel. The host family I stayed with used the leftover table scraps to feed their chickens and pigs. The host family was very careful to not leave extra food outside because the scraps might attract wild dogs and other animals that could kill their livestock. Though the text was designed to improve soil to support gardening, it failed to address the lived experiences of the learners.

Overall, a review of the curriculum for Grades 1 to 3 showed very few opportunities for the students to make meaningful connections to their personal lives or extend their understanding of the content through follow-up questions, meaningful discussions, or written reflections. Even if children were required to write or orally reflect on the lesson, there was not enough practice to master the content. In order for these English language learners to make meaningful connections to the text and understand what they were reading, they needed to read text that was within their level of proficiency and that matched their interests and background knowledge (Eskey, 2005).

Lack of phonics instruction. The new curriculum did not provide a systematic approach to teaching phonics for any of the primary grades. In Grade 1, the curriculum guide focused on three-letter words. However, the vowel pattern sequence seemed haphazard and did not follow the typical sequence for beginning readers of English. For example, during the first lesson introducing three-letter words, learners isolated and blended phonemes in the following words: *leg, toy, hat, net, dog, man*. Because these words did not focus on common rhymes or word families, it was hard for learners to see how spelling patterns could be extended across new words. In Grade 2, the learners were to blend words containing two-letter sounds: *oo, ee, ch, sh, ng, th, er, oi, ao, ie, ai ph, ar, or, and ou*. During my examination of a sample Grade 2 workbook page, I noticed that the children were not asked to use the phonics features (*ie, ai, ph, ar, or, ou*) to read the new words. The phonics work became a matching or copying activity that did not develop their ability to think about the letter-sound relationship. The Grade 3 curriculum guide did not teach any phonics features. While the learners read *The Lion and the Mouse* from the chalkboard, the Grade 3 teacher focused on memorization to support

learners when they were unable to read unfamiliar words. For example, when a learner was unable to read the word *wakened*, the teacher told the child to reread the sentence to see if she could remember what was written (Grade 3, Classroom observation, April 29, 2015). The lack of phonics instruction created a barrier for learners to increase their word knowledge and gain the necessary skills to read unfamiliar words. According to the National Reading Panel (2000), early, explicit, and systematic instruction in frequently found sound-spelling patterns could increase knowledge of the correspondence between the sounds (phonemes) and letters or combinations of letters (graphemes) in English. A systematic approach to phonics can help develop the learners' automatic decoding skills, which are necessary for fluent reading. The phonics features covered in the primary grades were insufficient to develop learners' ability to decode or spell unfamiliar words or develop automatic word recognition. Children who do not establish a solid connection between sounds and spelling patterns are unable to take advantage of "the regularities and redundancies characteristic of an alphabetic writing system" (Vellutino et al., 2004, p. 5). Teachers at all levels expressed concerns about learners' understanding of phonics. The Grade 2 teacher worried about the phonics program: "I need more support with teaching phonics. My learners have difficulty with spelling" (Field notes, August 5, 2015). The Grade 3 teacher said, "Me Tracy, my son [in Grade 5] cannot read. He does not know how to decode words in English. He was never taught phonics in the primary grades" (Field notes, August 5, 2015).

Lack of Sesotho instruction. During my visit, I did not see any of the primary grade teachers teaching the children to read in Sesotho. Though there were written passages within the curriculum in Sesotho, the teachers focused on Sesotho oral language

development. In Reception and Grade 1 the teachers used oral storytelling and drama to support the development of Sesotho. For example, the Grade 1 Sesotho teacher told the children a story about a visit to the city, where a man was stabbed. She invited the children to come up and act the story out for the class (Field notes, May 4, 2015). Grade 2 and Grade 3 teachers focused on Sesotho grammar skills. During my observations in Grades 2 and 3, the learners did not appear to engage in authentic reading and writing in Sesotho. If they wrote in Sesotho, it was to copy verb tenses and other grammar rules. In the Grade 3 classroom, a list of syllables (*ba, be, bi, bo, bu: ma, me, mi, mo, 0mu*) was used to build words in Sesotho. The children chanted these syllables each day; however, the teacher made no connection between these syllables and how they could be used to build words or decode words (Grade 3, Classroom observation, May 4, 2015). Research shows that learning to read and write in a second language can be supported by the development of those skills in the learner's first language (Goldenberg, 2008; Grabe, 2009). However, in the case of MKPS, literacy skills in both languages were limited; therefore, any chance for literacy skills to extend across languages was unrealized. The learners could not transfer skills that had not been developed (Piper & Miksic, 2011).

Finding 4

Finding 4: Teachers used oral language and oral repetition as a means to support classroom management and to ensure comprehension of lesson content. Literacy instruction focused on English oral language pronunciation and comprehension at the expense of other literacy skills. Due to the teachers' instructional preference for call and response and rote learning, learners participated in lessons with limited cognitive demand

and low-level language output. Consequently, learners appeared to be disengaged and passive learners.

Oral language to support instructional needs. During my observations, I noticed that teachers used oral language and call and response as coping mechanisms to handle their large class sizes and the lack of instructional materials, to prepare for instruction, to keep children engaged in the learning, and to ensure that children comprehended the material and used the language accurately.

Classroom management. The Grade 1 teacher started each reading lesson by reciting the days of the week: “Monday, I go to school.” The children repeated, “Monday, I go to school.” The teacher continued, “Tuesday, I go to school; Wednesday, I go to school; Thursday, I go to school; Friday, I go to school.” The children repeated each sentence in unison. The teacher said, “Saturday, I wash my clothes,” using her hands to make the motion for washing clothes. The children rubbed their hands together to show washing clothes. The teacher finished the days of the week with “Sunday, I go to church” (Grade 1, Classroom observation, May 5, 2015). The children repeated the days of the week approximately 10 times. The teacher used repetition to ensure children could pronounce the English sentences accurately and as a classroom management technique to keep children focused and busy while they waited for everyone to return from the restroom break.

Accuracy. During a lesson on participles, the Grade 2 teacher used repetition to support oral language accuracy. The teacher wanted the learners to say the sentence, “The children are going into the classroom.” The children struggled with the phrase “into the classroom.” Some children repeated, “in the classroom,” while other children said,

“to the classroom.” The teacher repeated the correct sentence, “The children are going into the classroom.” Each time she repeated the phrase, she would emphasize the word “into” in order to draw attention to the learners’ mistake. She used repetition of the phrase or recasting to correct the learners’ error. However, the learners did not realize they were not saying the target word “into” correctly. Though the children had the printed text in front of them, the teacher never had the children point to each word in the sentence to help them anchor their speech to the text and the correct word. She also did not provide enough explicit corrective feedback for the children, which she could have provided by saying, “Some of you are saying ‘in’ and some of you are saying ‘to.’ I want you to say ‘into.’ The word is ‘into.’” She could have also written the word on the board. Instead, the children incorrectly repeated the sentence 17 times (Grade 2, Classroom observation, April 29, 2015).

The principal recognized how important it was to encourage learners to use English in school because they did not speak English at home:

Our learners in Reception to Grade 3 need to talk more freely and not worry about grammar but to just talk. Learners don’t talk because they don’t know what to say and they are afraid of not using language properly. We need them to just play with language. I think we need to demand more English. If we don’t require them to speak in English, they will never learn. School is the only place they get to use and learn English. (Principal, Interview, April 24, 2015)

The principal’s concerns pointed to an overall lack of learners’ ability to use English for basic conversational communication. From her perspective, the current instructional practices gave children the impression that if they were to speak, their speech must be

perfect. She recognized that language develops through use and a low-risk environment. The only opportunity for MKPS students to engage in English oral language, reading, and writing was at school. Therefore, encouraging students to use language and providing explicit teaching in meaningful and authentic low-risk context were key elements for their language development (Coleman & Goldenberg, 2009; Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

The Grade 4 teacher explained:

I teach whole group because I want to make sure everyone is learning. I will call on the children that appear to be faking it or not understanding. However, I don't know what to do to help those learners who really don't understand what we are learning. We do a lot of repeating of the material. I tell them what to say in English and they repeat the information. They seem to be able to repeat what I tell them; but when I ask them questions they repeat what I said. I ask them to summarize the story or tell me the main idea and they retell the whole story.

They cannot think for themselves. (Grade 4 teacher, Interview, April 26, 2015)

Her comments reflected an understanding of the role of responding in unison as a means to make sure learners pronounced the material accurately; however, she recognized that this kind of teaching allowed some learners to “fake it.” In reality, although the instructional practices helped develop receptive language, the repetition did not ensure that all learners understood the meaning of their words or that their ability to express ideas and thoughts was developing.

Oral language to develop language fluency and comprehension skills. The teachers appeared to use oral repetition and call and response to develop language pronunciation and comprehension. Most lessons, regardless of the grade level or subject,

followed the same format: the teacher provided the target language or response and the children orally repeated the content back to the teacher. However, in all classroom observations, the interactions and responses between the teacher and learners during call and response required low levels of thinking. The following classroom observation, which took place in the Grade 2 classroom, was indicative of the instructional practices in Grades 1 through 3.

The teacher wrote vocabulary words for the lesson on the chalkboard: *shopkeeper*, *teacher*, *miner*, *nurse*, *doctor*, and *farmer*. After writing the words on the board, the teacher passed out the books; however, there were not enough books for each learner. The learners shared. The learners stood up in their seats and leaned across the desks to look at the book. As they looked at the pictures, they spoke to each other in Sesotho. The two pages had pictures and text that identified common occupations in their workplaces. The teacher began the lesson by saying, “Look at the pictures. What do you see?” Before the children could answer, she said, “People who—these people, uh, shopkeeper. We have a shopkeeper here. What else we have?” The learners responded in unison, “Teacher.” The teacher repeated the learners’ response and repeated her question: “We also have a teacher. What else?” The learners did not respond. The teacher then continued, “Farmer.” The learners in unison said, “Farmer.” The teacher repeated their response and her question: “Farmer. What else?” The learners responded, “Nurse.” The teacher repeated, “Nurse. What else?” The learners in unison said, “Doctor.” The teacher repeated, “Doctor. What else?” Several learners said, “Miner.” The teacher repeated, “Miner. So, we have a teacher, a

shopkeeper, a doctor, a nurse—.” She paused for the learners to fill in the remaining occupations. Several children said softly, “A farmer and miner.”

When not all the learners responded, she repeated the list of occupations again, but this time she said the names of the occupations in Sesotho. Then in English she said, “We have a teacher, shopkeeper, doctor, nurse, farmer, and a miner.”

The children all responded, “Yes, teacher.” (Grade 2, Classroom observation, April 29, 2015)

In the observation above, the teacher’s dialog with the learners was a bit confusing to follow, as her own usage was incorrect. She confused the pronouns throughout the lesson, referring to the printed text as “he.” Several times throughout the lesson, the teacher’s sentence structure was incorrect. The teacher prompted the students to respond with the correct answer. The lesson proceeded with the children chorally reciting the sentences from the page with the teacher. However, throughout the whole lesson, the teacher did not focus the learners’ attention on the printed text. The learners focused their attention on the pictures and the teacher’s talk.

Oral language instruction issues: low cognitive demand and disengaged learners. In the classroom observation of Grade 2 described above, oral language was restricted and controlled by the teacher. The learners repeated what they were told and were validated or affirmed by the teacher as she restated their responses. At times, the teacher left out the final phrase of the sentence, which invited the learners to complete the sentence from memory. This kind of discourse required a low-level exchange between the teacher and learners. The response from the students required repeating or recalling a sentence or one- or two-word phrase presented by the teacher. Because the learners

focused on memorized responses, the talk did not stimulate thinking and was limited to producing the target language provided by the teacher. Though the teacher used oral repetition to develop language comprehension or receptive language, according to Lightbown and Spada (2013), lessons that focus on receptive language in order to comprehend the material fail to develop the learners' expressive language. Instruction must go beyond comprehending teacher-talk or receptive understanding. An important consideration for improving instruction at MKPS would be to find ways to improve language output by the learners.

Though large class sizes hindered the teacher's ability to manage classroom behavior, the instructional practice, which relied on call and response and rote memorization, also impacted the learners' behavior. In most lessons, the learners began the lesson ready to learn and participated fully with the content. However, within the first few minutes of the lesson, the constant repetition of lesson content and the low cognitive demand of the responses caused the children to tune out or disengage in the learning process, which resulted in behavior problems. During a Grade 2 lesson, I observed one boy near me sucking on a small plastic bag of sugar. Another boy pulled the bag away and sugar spilled all over the desk. The eight children at the table began to lick the sugar off the table. Up to that point in the lesson, the teacher had reviewed orally the names of the occupations by having the children look at the pictures on the page and repeat the names in unison. The children had been repeating the names of the occupations for over 8 minutes (Grade 2, Classroom observation, April 29, 2015). Although choral responses kept the learners busy, the level of cognitive engagement was shallow and the children were not actively engaged in reading or writing activities. The

lack of active engagement caused the learners to be disengaged in the lesson, which seemed to lead to their misbehavior. If the teachers at MKPS wanted learners to use literacy skills independently at high levels of proficiency, then their instructional practices needed to include opportunities for learners to develop expressive language. Receptive language can help the learners comprehend the lesson; however, expressive language helps the learners develop speaking and writing skills. In order to develop expressive language, learners must be given opportunities to generate their own ideas, participate in discussions and answer open-ended questions (Coleman & Goldenberg, 2009).

Instructional Practices to Develop Reading and Writing Skills

In the next section, I examine how early literacy skills were developed during classroom instruction and describe how instructional practices created challenges to the development of early literacy skills. I believe learners' struggles to develop early literacy skills in English and Sesotho related to infrequent opportunities to engage in literacy activities that are necessary to develop skills in reading and writing. The early literacy skills required to become a reader and writer were limited because of the focus on oral language development and the lack of access to printed materials. According to Pretorius (2015), oral language proficiency is a necessary but not sufficient condition to learning to read and write in a language, whether it is the child's L1 or L2. Children must be explicitly taught to read and write and given ample opportunities to practice literacy skills in extended texts and writing activities in order to become skilled readers and writers.

In thinking about the action plan to support the literacy instruction at MKPS, I wanted to use these findings and provide teachers with strategies that would develop

early literacy skills in both languages. Because instruction focused on oral language with repetitive whole class choral responses, early literacy skills relating to reading and writing were not explicitly taught.

Finding 5

Finding 5: The early literacy instructional practices seemed unsuccessful in systematically teaching and providing opportunities for learners to practice skills in phonemic awareness, word recognition, oral reading fluency, and writing, which are important to developing reading in the early primary grades. Learners had few opportunities to engage in meaningful activities with literacy.

Organizing literacy instruction across the grade levels. Though the new curriculum played an important role in classroom literacy instruction, the teachers' goals for literacy instruction also influenced instructional practices. According to the Grade 1 teacher,

When we teach reading, in Reception our learners are taught to recognize the alphabet letters and their sounds, in first grade we focus on single-word reading mostly three-letter words, then in second grade we focus on reading sentences; and finally in third grade we focus on reading whole paragraphs. For me, I want to make sure the children can say the sounds in each word correctly and blend them together. (Grade 1 teacher, Interview, April 28, 2015)

Classroom observations of the hierarchy of skills utilized for classroom instruction revealed how teachers approached literacy. In the following section, I begin by describing how emergent literacy skills were taught across the primary grades.

Instruction in Reception. Instruction in the Reception class was conducted

primarily in Sesotho. The teacher used repetitive chants and rhymes each day to support the learners' literacy in both languages. Throughout the day the children chanted rhymes whenever they became restless and sang songs about the weather and the days of the week. The teacher used storytelling, songs, chants, and hands-on activities to teach the integrated literacy topics similar to the units covered in Grades 1 through 3. During my visit, the children were learning about the three kinds of soil: clay, loam, and sandy soil. The teacher took the learners to the river's edge on a mini field trip to examine the different soil types. Upon their return, the teacher read a story about soil from an old Grade 6 textbook about a woman who used clay to make pottery. The children used the clay soil gathered on their field trip to make coil pots and miniature figurines. The teacher created a song about the different soil types, which the learners sang. Though the teacher's instructional practices focused on many important emergent reader skills, much of the work was oral, with very little focus on print and word recognition. The learners drew pictures, but they did not try to use emergent writing to explain what they had drawn (Field notes, May 4, 2015).

Concept of word. The children participated each morning in an hour-long circle time devoted to English and emergent literacy concepts. During my eight-day visit, the Reception children began their day with the same routine. For the first 30 minutes of the literacy hour, the children went individually to the front of the class and pointed to charts with the numbers 1 to 10, days of the week, months of the year, and seasons and then to another set of charts at the back of the room, which had the five letters they had learned so far: *a, b, c, d, and e*. The days of the week and months of the year were in both English and Sesotho. As each child pointed to the number or word, the child said the word

associated with the print. When the child had difficulty pointing to the print on the chart, another child would come up and offer support. As the children worked, the teacher prepared her literacy lesson for the day. She was unable to offer corrective feedback when the children struggled to match print to speech. While each individual child pointed to the words, the rest of the 18 children followed along by pointing to the board with their fingers and saying the words in unison. However, midway through the morning routine, most children were not paying attention. They were looking out the window or playing with the person beside them. This routine was supposed to allow the children to match their speech to print and help develop their concept of word. However, when the children pointed to the information on the chart, they did not appear to understand that what they were pointing to on the chart matched their speech. Thus, the act of pointing did not help them develop a concept of word, which is a fundamental emergent literacy skill to support reading. Throughout the day the children sang songs and recited nursery rhymes. During my visit the children were working on the number 10, so they learned the nursery rhyme “1, 2, Buckle My Shoe.” The teacher recited the nursery rhyme orally and invited the children to act out the nursery rhyme as they recited each line. All songs and nursery rhymes were done orally without any reference to print. Having the opportunity to track songs, chants, and nursery rhymes could enhance the learners’ concept of word. During our interview, the Reception teacher asked for more books so that she could read aloud to her learners. She said:

I need picture books to read aloud to the children to help teach them about the content. I tell stories orally to them; but I think pictures will help them understand the story and the English vocabulary. I have the children retell stories;

but they can't always remember the story. I need pictures to help with sequencing. I'd like to have more nursery rhymes and ABC books to help the children learn more words for each letter. (Informal conversation with Reception teacher, May 4, 2015)

Alphabet knowledge. Every day the learners in Reception and Grade 1 practiced the letter names and sounds of the alphabet with the teacher. The Reception and Grade 1 teachers struggled with the pronunciation of the letter names and sounds. For example, "The children recited the alphabet using the *Letterland* characters. There was some confusion about the English sounds. For example, Y was pronounced 'wah' even though the *Letterland* friend is Yellow Yoyo Man" (Grade 1, Classroom observation, April 28 2015). As the teachers in both classes pointed to the letters at the front of the room, the learners pointed to the alphabet and repeated the names and sounds for each letters.

In the Reception classroom the learners pointed to an alphabet poster that ran across the wall at the front of the room. The poster represented the *Letterland* alphabet characters, from an alphabet program developed to provide learners with a visual mnemonic to represent the sounds and letters of the alphabet (Ehri & McCormick, 1998; Wendon, 1991). For example, for the letter *S*, the *Letterland* character was Sammy Snake. The letters were drawn to resemble the characters associated with the letter, so for *S* the visual was an *S* shape like a snake. The alliteration in the name, *Sammy Snake*, helped the child recognize the sounds associated with the letter. When children said the name of the *Letterland* character, the sound and letter name were reinforced. The *Letterland* program was also used in Grade 1 to reinforce the learners' ABC knowledge. However, though the Reception teacher pointed to the *Letterland* poster as she recited the

alphabet with the children, she used a completely different mnemonic system. Instead of saying “Bouncing Benny says /b/,” she pointed to B and said, “Beautiful Butterfly, buzz, buzz, buzz,” and the learners flapped their arms like butterfly wings when they said, “Buzz, buzz, buzz.” By pointing to the *Letterland* characters as she recited the new mnemonics, the teacher denied learners the opportunity to use the visual support/picture to help them learn the alphabet letter names and sounds. The Reception teacher told me,

I use all the materials from the previous teacher. You know I am new this year.

The previous teacher taught here for over 30 years. I use the posters, but I was taught in college to use a physical response for each letter to help children learn the letter names and sounds. (Informal conversation after lesson, April 30, 2015)

The learners in Reception used the physical response for the letters they had learned thus far, which were letters *a*, *b*, *c*, *d*, and *e*. School had been in session for over four months and they had focused on five letters of the alphabet; it is possible that the children will not learn all the letters before the school year ends. As the learners in Reception recited the alphabet, the teacher would give the children additional words that started with each letter. For the letter *e*, the children learned the words *emergency*, *elephant*, and *Ebola*. Because there was no picture support to go along with the words associated with the sounds, I was not convinced the children understood the meaning of these words. When the learners had difficulty with a particular letter sound, the teacher would pass out little pocket mirrors for each learner to practice making the sound of the letter in the pocket mirror. The learners could feel and see how the letter sound was formed in their mouths.

Alphabet knowledge in Grade 1. The Grade 1 teacher used the *Letterland* program each day to review the letters and sounds. However, she did not have the *Letterland* characters displayed in her room. The children pointed to the large black letters running across the top of the chalkboard and recited the mnemonics associated with each letter. The *Letterland* character names and sounds are presented in Table 10.

Table 10

Letterland Character Names and Corresponding Sounds.

Annie Apple says /a/	Noisy Nick says /n/
Bouncy Ben says /b/	Oscar orange says /o/Peter Puppy says /p/
Clever cat says /c/	Quarrelsome queens says /qu/
Dippy duck says /d/	Red Robot says /r /
Eddy elephant says /e/	Sammy snake says /s/
Firefighter Fred says /f/	Talking Tess says /t/
Golden Girl says /g/	Uppy Umbrella says /u/
Harry Hat man says /h/	Vicky Voilet says /v/
Impy ink says /i/	Walter Walrus says /wa/
Jumping Jim says /j/	Fix-it Max says /ks/
Kicking King says /k/	Yellow yo-yo man says /ya/
Lucy Lamp light says /l/	Zig zag zebra says /zzz/
Munching Mike says /m/	

After a classroom observation, the Grade 1 teacher handed me a magazine from the *Letterland* Company showing the *Letterland* characters on the back and asked,

Can you get me more copies of this back page? I have 30 copies of the magazine and could use 35 more. I think it is very hard for my learners to point to the letters above the chalkboard. I think if they could touch the letters as they recite the alphabet, it will help them remember the letter names and sounds. (Grade 1, Classroom observation, April 28, 2015)

The teacher understood the need for learners to have their hands on print. However, the lack of resources made it difficult for her to support her learners. Her awareness of their needs and possible ways to solve the problem reinforced my observation that the teachers

at MKPS were knowledgeable and had insights into how to teach literacy. The instruction was limited due to poor access to instructional materials and a reliance on oral recitation with little opportunity to engage with actual printed materials.

Across both grades, the words used to support the sounds of each letter may have been confusing for the learners. In Reception, I was surprised that the teacher chose to use *Ebola* for the letter *e*. I am not sure the learners understood the meaning or importance of the word *Ebola*. During my visit, there had been an Ebola virus outbreak in Eastern Africa. However, there were no reported cases within South Africa or Lesotho. In another example, for the letter *t*, the children said *tennis* and then moved their head from side to side as if watching a tennis match. Within the local context, there were no tennis courts. In Grade 1, the *Letterland* character names offered a connection between the letters and sounds through alliteration. However, because the characters had English names (e.g., *Annie Apple*, *Harry Hat*, and *Vicky Violet*), these names were unfamiliar and perhaps confusing to the learners. Many of the anchor words used to support the letter-sound correspondence appeared culturally irrelevant to the learners and may not have been meaningful to them since the words were not a part of their daily lives or oral vocabulary.

Because the Reception teacher used a different program to teach the ABC sounds and letters, there was a disconnect in the instructional practices between what the learners studied in Reception and in Grade 1. During an afterschool meeting, the two teachers and I discussed the mismatch. The Reception teacher said, “We respect each other and know that our learners will learn what they are taught. The two of us can decide which system to use.” I suggested that they use one system consistently in order to limit

confusion for the learners and give them more support over the two years (Field notes, May 4, 2015).

Phonological awareness and beginning sound knowledge. The Grade 1 teacher devoted 60 minutes each day to reading and writing in English. During her lessons she reviewed ABC recognition and sounds, beginning letter sounds and single word recognition. The teacher used songs to support the learners' knowledge of the beginning sounds in words. For example, while teaching the letter and sound for *h*, she taught the children a song.

“The carpenter is hammering, hammering, hammering. The carpenter is hammering, hammering the nail.” She invited the children to make a hammer with their hands and hammer an imaginary nail. All 65 learners began to hammer on the desk to the rhythm of the song and sang, “The carpenter is hammering, hammering, hammering. The carpenter is hammering, hammering the nail.” (Grade 1, Classroom observation, May 5, 2015)

During this same lesson, she taught the learners how to isolate the beginning sound /h/ in the words they were learning.

She said, “This book has the picture of our words for today. These words start with the *h* sound /h/.” She pointed to the first picture. “You will see a picture of a hammer. Children, look at the hammer. Hammer starts with *h*. The next picture is a picture of a hand. Hand starts with the *h*. Children, look at the hand. The third picture is hen. Hen starts with *h*. Children, look at the hen.” She said, “Repeat after me, hammer, hand, hen.” The children repeated the words three times each. She then told the children, “Get out your exercise books and in your

exercise books I want you to write the three words and draw the pictures to go with the letter *h*. (Grade 1, Classroom observation, May 5, 2015)

Decoding three-letter words. The Grade 1 teacher concentrated her instruction on reading and writing three-letter English words. The words were selected from the newly adopted curriculum. The following observation showed the instructional practices the teacher followed for teaching the words for the week. During the lesson, the Grade 1 teacher used phonemic awareness activities to help learners isolate and blend the phonemes within the three-letter words. However, the learners were not really focused on print, so it was unclear if they were actually reading the printed words from the chalkboard.

On the board were the words from the previous day's lesson—*toy*, *cup*, *sun*, *leg*—and the letters *b f h j k l m n p q r s t*. The children reviewed the words they had learned the day before. Pointing to *toy*, she said, “This word is /t/o//ya/. We say the sounds first, then the words.” She helped the children isolate the individual phonemes in the word and then blended them together to create the word *toy*. The children repeated after her, “/t/o/ya/,” then repeated “/t/o//ya/” four more times. By isolating the individual sounds in *toy*, the children mispronounced the *oy* diphthong, saying long *o* and /ya/ for /oi/. She moved on to the word *cup* and said “/c/ /o/ /p/, but the word is *cup*.” The children said “/c/ /o/ /p/” as individual phonemes in the word, repeating the individual phonemes four times; however, they did not blend them into the word *cup*. Though the teacher pointed to the phonemes in the word, the children were not watching her as she pointed to the letters. The chalkboard was too far away from some of the learners for them to see

the words. She continued to teach the words *net*, *leg*, *hat*, and *sun*. With each of these words she isolated the phonemes and blended the sounds together to create the word. The teacher and children repeated each word at least five times. The classroom management appeared to deteriorate the longer children sat and repeated the words written on the board. After learners had read the list row by row, the teacher invited all the children to read in unison. (Grade 1, Classroom observation, April 28 2015)

The Grade 1 teacher focused on important emergent literacy skills like alphabet recognition, letter sounds, phonemic awareness (isolating and blending phonemes in three-letter words). However, the lesson focused on whole-group recitation and not on developing a deeper connection to the sounds and letters within the words. The allocation of time and amount of literacy content covered in the lesson were also matters of concern. During the one-hour lesson, the children learned seven words. In their exercise books, the learners copied the words from the board. Though the teacher demonstrated important phonemic awareness skills like isolating and blending the phonemes in words, she did not help the learners develop their own awareness of sounds in words. The children were not actively engaged in reading or writing activities using the new words.

Oral reading fluency. In Grades 1 through 3, the teachers' instructional practices failed to develop oral reading fluency because the learners lacked the opportunities to engage in reading activities with actual printed text. In Grade 1, the learners attempted to read three-letter words by focusing their attention on isolating and blending the phonemes in the words. However, because the children were reading words from the chalkboard,

their word recognition skills were not developed (Grade 1, Classroom observation, April 28 2015). For Grade 2, although the reading material had several sentences written in the workbooks for the learners to read, the teacher focused the learners' attention on the meaning of the pictures and not on the text. The learners repeated the sentences orally numerous times, but the teacher routinely focused their attention on the picture and did not specifically help them make the connection to their oral speech and the printed text.

Oral reading fluency in Grade 3. The Grade 3 teacher appeared to be the only one who integrated oral reading fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary development while focusing the learners' attention on printed text. The instructional practices in Grade 3 aligned with the teacher's beliefs about how reading should be taught.

I write a story on the chalkboard and then I read it to the children. I try to act out the story and help them understand the unfamiliar words. I explain the hard words in Sesotho and in English. We will reread the story 10 to 15 times during the week. We choral read the sentences over and over until they can say the sentences correctly. While we read, I try to ask questions to make sure they understand the story. At the end of the story, I will ask more questions. After I think the students know the story, on another day, I will call children up individually to come to the chalkboard and read the story to the class. The other learners will follow along and read aloud with the student while the student points to the words on the board. However, this is a problem. The other students will not follow along with the story. They do not pay attention. They get noisy and misbehave. I also spend a lot of time teaching English grammar. We focus on writing the correct verb tenses. (Interview, April 26, 2015)

Instructional concerns with oral fluency. During my eight-day visit, the Grade 3 students read the Aesop's fable *The Lion and the Mouse*. My classroom observations confirmed the Grade 3 teacher's own description of her reading instruction. She began the lesson by reading the fable aloud to the children. They choral read the whole story line by line, repeating each sentence several times. During her one-hour lesson, the children repeated the story at least 10 times. She also supported fluency by allowing the children to come up to the chalkboard one at a time and read the story aloud to the whole class. As the learners read one at a time from the chalkboard, the others were supposed to follow along. By the time the first few children had read the story, the rest of the class was noisy and not paying attention. At first I thought the teacher used reading from the chalkboard as a means to assess the learners' reading ability and offer support if they struggled; however, when learners made mistakes, the teacher did not offer other fix-it-up strategies other than inviting the learner to reread the sentence. Because the learners lacked phonics knowledge, they were unable to decode the words they did not know. Memory of the text was really their only strategy for word recognition. Because the children read the material from the chalkboard, even though they had copied it into their exercise books, they were not really engaged in reading the printed text.

Comprehension development. During my observations in all the primary grades, I noticed the teachers develop the learners' comprehension and vocabulary by using picture support, acting out the story and focusing their attention on the meaning of unfamiliar words. These activities helped develop the learners' word knowledge, comprehension of the text and overall engagement. The teachers used a similar question-and-answer format to support the learners' comprehension throughout their lessons. For

example, the Grade 3 teacher would pause during her lesson and ask the children a question. While reading *The Lion and the Mouse*, she said, “Our story is about the lion and the mouse. It is about--?” The children repeated, “The lion and the mouse.” The teacher repeated, “It is about the lion and the ----,” and paused, and the children said, “mouse.” She repeated, “It is about the ____ (lion) and the ____ (mouse). At times she used a sentence frame to ask questions. She said, “The little mouse ran____ the little mouse ran____”, and asked, “Where?” The learners said, “In the forest.” The teacher said, “She was looking for food in the _____, where?” The learners replied, “In the forest.” The learners filled in the blank with the correct answer. The sentence frame supported their oral language and comprehension. To support the learners’ vocabulary, she used picture support, verbal expression and exaggeration and gestures to convey the meaning of the story. She showed a picture of the lion trapped in the net to support the learners’ vocabulary. She said, “Net, net, net,” while showing the picture. When she read, “The lion roared and roared,” she used a loud voice to exaggerate the roar. She ran around the room acting like the mouse and said in a very small, high voice, “I’m coming, I’m coming.” She invited the children to repeat the line with her, using their high, small voices. When the mouse bit the rope, she used motions to show biting the rope. The children acted out biting with her. Throughout the week, the children were invited to act out the story in small groups and then share their performance with the whole class. Unfortunately, due to the large class size, by the time several groups had performed, the rest of the class was bored and not engaged with the performances (Grade 3, Classroom observation, April 28, 2015).

Read-aloud. The Grade 1 teacher was the only teacher I observed read aloud a picture book to her class. She took the children to the library once a week to read to them. During my observation, she read a story called *Peace* to the children. She used similar comprehension strategies as the Grade 3 teacher to help the learners comprehend the story. This particular story followed the format: “Peace is...” Throughout the story, she acted out phrases, used picture supports, and asked a few open-ended questions to help learners stay engaged. For example, she allowed the learners to hug each other as she read the sentence, “Peace is hugging a friend.” As she read, “Peace is taking a nap,” the learners began to snore. Because she was reading aloud to 65 learners, at times the children were very restless. She asked questions and had the children act out parts of the story to keep them engaged in the learning. She pointed to a picture on the page and asked, “What is this?” She walked around the room and all the children repeated the word. On occasion, she asked open-ended questions which allowed the learners to come up with answers on their own. She allowed the children to use Sesotho to support the meaning of the English word. At the end of the story, she summarized the story for the children by saying, “We must have peace.” However, at the end of the lesson, the teacher commented to me, “That was a hard book for the children. I should have picked a different book. That was the first time I read it. I don’t think the children understand Peace in the book (Grade 1, Classroom observation, April 30, 2015).

Issues with comprehension. Though some attempt was made by the teachers in Grades 1 through 3 to support their learners’ comprehension, the learners were not taught strategies to help them make meaning from the text. Across all grade levels, the teachers did not use before, during, and after comprehension strategies to support the learners’

understanding of the story such as accessing and assessing prior knowledge, making predictions, verifying and confirming, or making personal connections. After the lesson, the learners did not extend their thinking, discuss the story's meaning or share their own insights about the story. Comprehension questions focused on low-level cognitive skills requiring only one-word answers or repeating sentences the teacher had provided. The teachers did all the thinking for the learners. They did not relinquish control to the learners so that the learners could begin to use comprehension skills independently of the teacher. Across all primary grade levels, I found no evidence of the learners' reading printed material on their own, which hindered the development of oral reading fluency, vocabulary and comprehension (Coleman & Goldenberg, 2009; Eskey, 2005). Without these fundamental reading skills, learners do not become proficient readers (Pretorius, 2014).

Access to culturally relevant material also impacted comprehension. Many of the picture books in the school library were donated from the United States and Australia. Some of the library books contained themes and concepts that were culturally unfamiliar to learners, which made it difficult for them to draw upon their prior knowledge and experiences to make meaningful connections to the text. I discovered that even the teachers struggled to make meaning from the picture books. I shared an Eric Carle picture book called *Does a Kangaroo Have a Mother Too?* with the Reception and Grade 1 teachers. They both believed the kangaroo was an imaginary animal. The teachers had never heard of a kangaroo before. Their lack of knowledge underscored the importance of using culturally relevant materials that draw from familiar experiences of the learners and teachers to ensure comprehension. However, as a means to extend the learners' and

teachers' knowledge within a more global context, it could be useful to provide access to knowledge that goes beyond their cultural context.

Vocabulary development. Evidence from all classroom observations showed that teachers focused on vocabulary development. The teachers used gestures, repetition, and picture support to enhance the learners' understanding of unfamiliar words. Within the lesson, learners were invited to act out the meaning of the new words and asked to repeat the target word numerous times. For example, during a lesson on participles, the Grade 2 teacher taught the following words: *ringing*, *going*, *crying*, *falling*. The teacher used gestures, props, and picture clues within the text to develop the learners' understanding of each word. The teacher began the lesson by ringing the class bell. As the bell rang, the children chanted in unison, "Ringing, ringing, ringing." For the participle *crying*, they all started to sob and rub their eyes as they chanted, "Crying, crying, crying" over and over again. They stood up and walked around the room while they chanted, "We are going; we are going," over and over again. They all stood up and fell to the ground while chanting, "We are falling; we are falling" over and over again. The actions supported the learners' understanding of the new words.

Potential issues with vocabulary instruction. According to Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2013), learners develop vocabulary through "a robust approach to vocabulary that directly explains the meanings of words along with thought-provoking, playful, and interactive follow-up" (p.3). In all primary grades, the teachers focused on direct explanation of word meaning and allowed learners to act out the meaning of new words. However, the instruction in all the primary classrooms focused primarily on oral repetition. The learners had few opportunities to engage in meaningful, interactive

follow-up activities that reinforced word knowledge. Without time to read and write these new words, the learners' vocabulary development was limited to listening and speaking. For learners at MKPS, vocabulary instructional practices needed to be expanded beyond oral repetition and include opportunities to use newly acquired vocabulary knowledge in meaningful reading and writing activities (Anthony, 2008).

Writing. During my observations, I saw very little writing instruction. In Grades 1 and 2, writing occurred at the end of the lesson and typically involved copying single words from the chalkboard. For example, in Grade 1, the teacher drew a hat on the board and wrote *h_t* beside the picture. She asked, "What vowel goes in here?" and pointed to the space for the missing letter. In unison children said the letter "a." On the other side of the board the words were still written, so the children looked to see the missing vowel. There was no focus on sounds. The teacher wrote the letter *a* in the space in the word. The board had a picture of a hat and the word *hat*. The teacher drew pictures on the board for each of the seven words. Beside each picture she wrote the words but left out the vowels. She told the learners that they were to fill in the missing vowel in each word. She invited them to copy the seven words in their exercise books and draw the pictures to go with them. It was unclear if the children actually knew the missing vowels in the words or if they were just looking at the words on the board and telling her the names of the letters (Grade 1, Classroom observation, April 28, 2015).

If the curriculum required writing, the focus was on writing single words or labeling items in a picture. The curriculum provided learners with few opportunities to extend their knowledge or share personal insights about the content through writing. However, in Grade 3, the teacher appeared to provide opportunities for the learners to

write. During my observation in Grade 3, the teacher conducted a writing lesson that allowed the learners to create a birthday card. On the board she wrote *Dear _____*, followed by a list of words the children were to use in their sentences: *morning, afternoon, birthday, my, invite, celebrate, party, will, From your friend*. She said, “Do you see some of the words on the chalkboard? I have written these words on the board for you to use. Who would like to tell us what they will write in their invitation?” One boy stood up and said, “I invite you to my birthday party, which will be on the 25th of January 2016. Eating will start at 10:00 in the morning.” The teacher affirmed his response and then invited the learners to write their own cards. She did not extend the learner’s oral response to support the writing process. Even with the word list, the learners struggled to create an invitation that made sense. The teacher did not appear to model how to use the word list to construct sentences or explain the structure of an invitation (date, time, location). Without instruction, it was difficult for the learners to create the invitation. As the children worked, she roamed the room offering support. The teacher used environmental print to support the learners’ ability to figure out their birthdays. She pointed to the list of months on the wall and said, “Here are the months of the year. You know when you were born. Now use the words to help you write your birthday.” In watching the learners write, I noticed that some learners just copied the list of words from the chalkboard. Some learners had difficulty with the correct order of the words to create meaningful sentences, as shown by this example: “Dear Thabang, I invite to my birthday party celebrated will 18th July 2015 in the afternoon.” Another student blended Sesotho with English: “Dear Lehlohonono I invite you to my birthday party will celebrated 5 November 2016 to Ha-Ntseno ta will ta 2:00 oclock afternoon Fith Hiokomelany” (Grade

3, Classroom observation, April 30, 2015). In the second writing example, the learner used words in Sesotho to help support writing in English. Allowing learners to use their L1 to support their writing in L2 enhances their development of writing in both languages. However, the teachers need to help learners construct their ideas by modeling and guiding them through the writing process.

Overall concerns with reading and writing instruction. The literacy instruction in all classrooms included some aspects of early literacy skills: awareness of print, ABC recognition and sounds, phonological awareness, and vocabulary development. However, classroom instructional practices rarely focused on decoding skills, comprehension strategies, and oral reading fluency. Learners seldom focused their attention on print or actually held reading materials in their hands; therefore, they had few opportunities to develop and practice reading-related skills. Learners rarely engaged in writing as a process or writing to construct knowledge. Writing was relegated to copying words and sentences from the board. If learners are to become literate in English, they must have opportunities to engage in reading and writing activities that help them acquire literacy skills (Goldenberg, 2010). Based on the constraining factors that influence literacy instruction at MKPS, the problem of practice related to access to print and teachers' knowledge of instructional practices to support literacy.

Enabling Conditions to Support Literacy Instruction

As a means to create an action plan specifically designed to meet the conditions at MKPS, I needed to take into consideration the challenges to literacy instruction and examine the current instructional conditions at MKPS that could be leveraged to improve literacy instruction. In the following section, these enabling conditions are examined and

used to answer Research question 2. The findings are organized around practices that could be used to improve access to print and teachers' knowledge of literacy instruction.

Research question 2: How can literacy practices be leveraged to support early literacy development?

I observed four enabling conditions that appeared to support literacy instruction (see Table 11). Specifically, the participants valued literacy and wanted to become literate in English, the teachers were committed to excellence and the academic achievement of their learners, the learners wanted to be actively involved in the learning process, and instructional time was set aside each day for literacy instruction.

The findings for Research question 2 are presented in Table 11 and reflect current practices and the teachers' and learners' actions that could be leveraged as part of the action plan to improve literacy.

Table 11

Summary of Findings for Research Question 2

Instructional Practices to Leverage to Support Early Literacy Instruction
Finding 6: Despite the lack of a reading culture, the teachers and children valued literacy and wanted to become more literate. Their desire to read and have access to materials could be leveraged and used as part of the action plan to improve literacy instruction.
Finding 7: Teachers were committed to the academic achievement of their learners and had a desire to improve their instructional practices to ensure their learners' success. Teachers recognized areas of need; and though they lacked the knowledge and skills to improve instruction, they were eager to learn and try new ideas.
Finding 8: Learners appeared to be actively involved in literacy when given opportunities to use their literacy skills for authentic literacy purposes. Literacy instruction and classroom management could be improved by finding more ways for learners to authentically engage in the learning process.
Finding 9: The teachers set aside time each day to teach literacy. By leveraging current instructional practices and providing training relating to evidence-based early literacy instruction, teachers should be able to improve their current instruction.

Finding 6

Finding 6: Despite the lack of a reading culture, the teachers and children valued literacy and wanted to become more literate. Their desire to read and have access to

materials could be leveraged and used as part of the action plan to improve literacy instruction.

Current practices to leverage to improve access to print. The school board members, teachers, principal and learners valued reading. The school board members wanted to build a community lending library to provide books for children to read at home. One school board member informed me,

A goal for us is to get books at home. Learners need to be taught how to take care of the books. The teachers fear that if books are sent home, the learners will not take care of them. We have to teach the adults to supervise and help with caring for the books. But, we have to have books first. We need a community library. There are other communities that have a community library in the church and on Sunday's books can be exchanged. But, if we have a parent help check out books, they would expect to be paid. We would have to have rules in how to take care of books and be responsible. (School board member 1, School board interview, April 27, 2015)

The school board and teachers recognized that access to books was an important step in creating a culture of reading. Though they focused on a solution to a more systemic cultural issue, a lack of a reading culture, their ideas supported the need for access to books. I also felt that their desire for a community library offered hope and showed their aspirations to make MKPS a better place for literacy. Because the books were valued and the need for access was understood, I believed that any recommendation to improve practice needed to address ways to get more books into the hands of children. Based on their concerns about the care and respect of books, it was clear that learners would have

to be taught how to handle and respect books.

Motivation to read. The learners were eager to read. During my visit to the Grade 1 classroom, when the teacher passed out the textbooks to the learners, many of them began thumbing through the pages and looking at the print and pictures on the page. They talked to each other in Sesotho about the images they saw on the pages (Field notes, Grade 1, April 28 2015). While the Grade 2 learners were waiting to begin their reading lesson, I suggested to the teacher that she allow the learners to reread the lesson from the previous day. The learners all began to reread the material (Grade 2, Classroom observation, May 5, 2015). In the Grade 6 classroom, I noticed a young man secretly reading his Bible while his classmates chorally read a paragraph from their chapter book (Grade 6, Classroom observation, April 29, 2015). Throughout my observations, learners' behavior was influenced by their engagement in the lesson. Giving learners access to books before, during and after a lesson could be an important solution to improving classroom behavior and providing more opportunities to practice literacy skills.

Finding 7

Finding 7: Teachers were committed to the academic achievement of their learners and had a desire to improve their instructional practices to ensure their learners' success. Teachers recognized areas of need; and though they lacked the knowledge and skills to improve instruction they were eager to learn and try new ideas.

Current practices to leverage to improve teachers' knowledge of literacy instructional practices. To support teacher capacity, I identified two important dispositions that could be leveraged to improve instruction: the teachers' commitment to

excellence and their desire to improve their knowledge and skills. According to effective school research within developing countries, schools that have a focus on teaching and learning and on academic achievement and teachers who are committed to excellence are more likely to provide instruction that supports high quality teaching and learning and the academic success of the children (McEwan, 2015; Pretorius, 2014). Review of the school's mission statement showed a commitment by the school board and teachers at MKPS to provide a learning environment that was conducive to learning. The following section highlights the policy and commitment to learning at MKPS.

Unified policy and commitment to learning. MKPS's school vision statement, mission statement and objectives focused on teaching and learning and the academic success of their students. The statements below provided high expectations for all learners through quality education. Three large posters in the teachers' room read:

Our Vision [*sic*]

Mountain Kingdom L.E.C. Primary School's vision is to establish a Christian life style, which will lead learners to the achievement of high academic standards.

Our Mission

It is the mission of this school to ensure excellence in the education we offer. We make every effort: to cultivate a culture of learning; to nurture and develop the pupils in our care; to maintain discipline for the effectiveness of the school; to uphold the highest moral values in all of our activities.

Our Objectives

Accordingly Mountain Kingdom LEC Primary School undertakes:
 to exercise punctuality in every activity; to ensure cooperation in every activity; to promote a high standard of learning in every class; to produce all first class passes on the class 7 exams at the end of the year; to promote kindness and patience in guiding and counseling the pupils throughout their school life; to instill respect and obedience in every member of the school.

These statements provided a clear, uniform belief about the goals and aim of education at MKPS. The school vision statement focused not only on academic achievement goals but also on important aspects of becoming good citizens and productive members of the community. The school's uniform belief about learning provided a strong foundation for teaching and learning; the vision and mission statement and objectives were the driving force for the school (school board, principal, and teachers) and informed their instructional practices and their desire for change.

Commitment to excellence. The teachers and the school board were very proud of their learners' achievements and MKPS's reputation in the community:

We are very proud of our teachers and our principal. We have test results that show our children are learning—our test results show we are getting better. We are very proud of our school and how well our children do [test]. When we meet with other school board members from other schools, we are proud to tell them of our learners and their test scores. People all over Lesotho know that our school is very good. MKPS has a good reputation. (School board member 3. School board interview, April 27, 2015)

Their desire to improve instruction reflected their strong commitment to the reputation of MKPS and the learners. One reason the principal had visited the United States and created our partnership was to provide her teachers with the tools necessary to meet the needs of all learners. Her teachers understood the importance of ensuring that all learners pass their end-of-year Grade 7 exams, which gave learners the opportunity to pursue secondary school. The principal also recognized the school's role in meeting governmental mandates. During a meeting with the school board, the principal told the members:

In a survey conducted by World Vision, our students were not able to read. Our government has asked that we improve literacy instruction. Our goal this year is to meet that challenge. Tracy has come from the United States to help us improve our literacy instruction. (School board interview, April 27, 2015).

Desire to improve instructional practice. The teachers' commitment to improving their knowledge and skills in teaching and learning was evident. In a meta-analysis analyzing the effects of school-based interventions on learning in developing countries, McEwan (2015) concluded that the skills and will of the teachers were important factors for school effectiveness and school improvement. Teachers who have the will to improve instruction are more apt to seek the necessary skills to ensure success and to reflect upon their own teaching practice. The teachers at MKPS reflected upon their teaching and learning conditions and openly shared their instructional concerns with me. One teacher told me:

I have learners who get the work done quickly. My slower learners need my help to understand the lesson. But I can't help them. If I try to help my slow learners,

my fast learners get bored and misbehave. What should I do? (Grade 1 teacher, Interview, April 28, 2015)

The Grade 2 teacher stated, “I need help supporting one of my slower learners. He really doesn’t understand and I don’t know how to help him” (Conversation after lesson, April 29, 2015). The teachers were very open to change. When I offered support, the teachers eagerly tried my suggestions. On one occasion, as I left the school, I came upon the Grade 1 teacher working in her classroom by candlelight, and she told me, “Me Tracy, I took your advice. I want to move my desks into groups so that the children are not as crowded at each desk. I think that will help them see the board and help them focus on the lesson.” I knew there were extra desks in the Grade 2 classroom, so she and I hauled the five desks from the Grade 2 classroom into her room, enabling her to make pods of three desks. Prior to that, she had had four long rows facing the chalkboard with 15 learners sitting parallel to the board. The children were very crowded, causing many of them to misbehave, and the children in the back of the room were unable to see the chalkboard. This rearrangement addressed several of the teacher’s concerns (Field notes, May 4, 2014).

Finding 8

Finding 8: Learners appeared to be actively involved in literacy when given opportunities to use their literacy skills for authentic literacy purposes. Literacy instruction and classroom management could be improved by finding more ways for learners to authentically engage in the learning process.

Leveraging oral language to improve engagement. Based on my analysis relating to the challenges to instructional practices, teachers appeared to favor an oral

orientation to learning because it kept the learners together, supported oral language fluency, and supported comprehension. Therefore, any additions to instructional practices had to leverage the use of oral language. However, the consequences of an oral language orientation to learning were lessons with low cognitive demand and few opportunities for learners to actively engage in learning and acquiring early literacy skills. As a means to counter these issues, I noticed two possible behaviors that would be leveraged: the teachers' desire to involve the learners more actively and meaningfully in lessons and the learners' eagerness to participate during the lessons.

During our focus group, the Grade 7 math teacher stated that he would like help with getting the learners to be more active during the lessons. The principal recommended he create more opportunities for the learners to be engaged in the lesson. He liked the idea of the learners being allowed to think and generate their own ideas. However, he needed strategies to involve learners (Focus group interview, May 5, 2015). In thinking about why the teachers at MKPS used their current instructional methods, I felt that the reliance on teacher-directed talk and low-level comprehension questions might be a result of not knowing other methods for teaching the content. The Grade 7 math teacher's awareness of the importance of actively engaged learners led me to believe that engagement was a valued learning behavior. His reflection supported my belief that the MKPS teachers had the will to become better teachers and needed the skills to enact instructional change.

When learners were given the opportunity, they appeared eager to engage meaningfully with the content and to express their own knowledge. The learners wanted to be involved in the learning process and share their own ideas. On several occasions,

the teachers allowed the children to develop and share their own ideas about the lesson. When learners were allowed to respond freely, they were engaged and excited to share their thoughts about the lesson. In Grade 2, although the teacher asked the learners just to raise their hands to answer her question, all learners were eager to engage in the learning, rising from their seats and snapping their fingers to get her attention (Grade 2, Classroom observation, April 29, 2015). The overall classroom engagement and behavior improved when children were allowed to engage personally with the content:

The children were looking at a picture of a miner who was digging in the dirt. The teacher said, “Yes, now let’s look at number six, Number six there, look at the picture. Go look at the picture. Number six. I think this is my father. This is my father. I have a father who works in the Republic of South Africa.” The teacher made a personal connection to the picture and explained how the picture related to her own life. A few students responded, “Yes, teacher.” The teacher continued, “He is digging up the whole day.” The students responded, “Yes, teacher.”

In Sesotho the teacher asked, “Who has a father who worked in the mines?” The children became animated and started to raise their hands to respond to the teacher. The children started to snap their fingers at the teacher. They stood up and leaned forward to get her attention.

The teacher, amidst the noise, said, “Who got your hand? Who got your hand? Who got your hand? Who got your hand?” Despite the incorrect grammar structure of the teacher’s sentences, the children knew she was asking them to raise their hands to share their ideas. “Your father. I’m talking about your father.

Who has a father is working across the Republic of South Africa?” The children raised their hands so she knew they had fathers working in the mines. “What about the ones that, uh, whose brothers work across the—put up your hand if your brother is working across—maybe I also have a brother who works in the Republic of South Africa...Is it all the time?” The teacher started to call on the children to share the names of their family members who worked in the Republic of South Africa (Grade 2, Classroom observation, April 29, 2015).

Throughout the lesson, the learners appeared to be genuinely engaged. As well as getting up from their seats and snapping their fingers at the teacher to get her attention, all the learners spoke to each other in Sesotho and seemed to be making personal connections. They were eager to share these personal connections with the teacher. Prior to this moment, the lesson had focused on rote learning, requiring low cognitive demand and shallow use of language. However, when asked to make a personal connection to the text, the students appeared to be authentically engaged in the learning process and made deeper connections to the text. When learners were given a chance to engage personally and independently of the teacher’s choral responses, they used the oral language authentically to express their own ideas (Field notes, April 29, 2015).

Finding 9

Finding 9: The teachers set aside time each day to teach literacy. By leveraging current instructional practices and providing training relating to evidence-based early literacy instruction, teachers should be able to improve their current instruction.

Classroom instructional practices to leverage. The early literacy instruction in Reception through Grade 3 contained important foundational skills for emergent readers:

oral language development in L1 and L2, ABC knowledge, concept of word, beginning sound awareness, word recognition, oral reading fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary development. The teachers allocated approximately 30 to 60 minutes each day to teach early literacy skills in English and Sesotho. Part of the action plan recommendations would include teacher training in more efficient and effective use of instructional time to ensure that their learners were engaged in the learning and instructional practices that developed the learners' literacy skills.

Summary of Chapter Four

Based on the observational and interview data, there appeared to be few opportunities for learners to engage in literacy-related activities within the community and at school. The teaching and learning environment, curriculum, lesson content, and instructional methods at MKPS limited the teachers' ability to provide learners with quality literacy instruction. The main contributing factors that limited early literacy instruction were overcrowded classrooms, a lack of instructional material, and an instructional focus on oral language instead of reading and writing components. Though teachers focused on the development of oral language fluency and language comprehension, the instructional method of oral recitation limited opportunities for learners to engage in meaningful discussions about the printed text, to construct their own ideas orally or in writing, or to demonstrate comprehension of what they spoke or read. Teachers appeared to focus on oral recitation to address issues relating to classroom management, accurate English language pronunciation, and the complexity of the new academic curriculum. Document reviews of the newly adopted curriculum revealed that the curriculum focused on academic content that was beyond the learners' level of

language proficiency and did not systematically teach oral language development and early literacy skills: phonemic awareness, word recognition, and oral reading, fluency, and writing. The content knowledge within the new curriculum focused on improving the economic and socio-cultural conditions of the learners. Without classroom discussion and opportunities for learners to make connections between the content and their own context, the goals to improve the lives of the learners through literacy and the use of the new curriculum might not be realized.

The results of data analysis for Phase One led to my assertion that the lack of educational resources, large class sizes, and instructional practices that favored oral language development at the expense of reading and writing and the academic-content-based curriculum resulted in a print-poor learning environment with few opportunities for learners to engage in cognitively demanding literacy instruction to develop and practice literacy skills in either language. The larger themes emerging from the data appeared to be ones of opportunity and access. In order to develop an action plan to support the early literacy instruction at MKPS, solutions were needed to improve access to resources and increase teachers' use of early literacy activities that engaged learners and promoted their development of literacy.

Through the analysis of the observational data, I identified four enabling conditions that could be leveraged to counter the challenging conditions at MKPS that interfered with literacy instruction: the community's valuing of literacy and participants' desire to become literate; the teachers' commitment to learners' higher achievement and a desire to improve their own knowledge and skills; the learners' desire to be engaged in the learning process; and time devoted to literacy instruction. Though the focus of my

research was to identify the sociocultural, community, and school factors (extrinsic factors) that influenced the ability of teachers to teach literacy and to create a plan to address those areas of need, I believed there are intrinsic factors unique to these stakeholders that are important in supporting the learning at MKPS. These intrinsic factors or dispositions included *desire* for literacy, *motivation* to learn, and *commitment* to improvement. The logical next step to support change at MKPS would be to help the teachers create an action plan that leveraged current practices and took advantage of the participants' motivation to gain literacy and improve practice.

CHAPTER FIVE: ACTION PLAN AND SITE RECOMMENDATIONS

In Chapter Five, I describe Phase Two of the PAR cycle: the action plan, which includes three recommendations to address the problems of practice at MKPS. The action plan focuses on two main themes: access and opportunity. The goal of Phase Two of the PAR cycle was to create an action plan designed to address the areas of instructional need.

Guiding Principles

Four guiding principles were at the core of the plan. First, teachers needed to be trusted to identify their areas of need. Secondly, they should be allowed to decide on ways to address the problems of practice; and third, the solutions created must acknowledge the unique challenges to instruction at their school and finally, leverage the current instructional practices. Research suggests teachers are more likely to adopt a new practice when they believe their current instructional practice is valued and the change in practice addresses their teaching and learning environment (Tomlinson, 2005).

Teachers' Identification of Instructional Needs

Key to developing the action plan was inviting the teachers into the problem-solving process. As a means to understand the teachers' goals for improving the instructional practices, I conducted a focus group interview with all 12 teachers. The focus group interview allowed the teachers to share as a whole group their concerns about instruction. The teachers were open to sharing their ideas with each other and me. I compared the data gathered from the focus group interview with my previous classroom

observations and interviews to see if new areas of need were identified. During our focus group, we discussed the following questions: (a) what makes teaching literacy difficult for you? and (b) what would you like to focus on as a means to improve instruction?

All 12 teachers agreed that a lack of reading resources and the learners' inability to understand English were major concerns. They believed getting reading material into the hands of the learners was necessary for the learners to become readers. The teachers felt they needed more strategies to teach vocabulary, comprehension and writing.

While discussing specific areas of need, the upper grade teachers stated that they wanted to know "everything" about teaching literacy because they never knew from year to year what grade they would teach. I explained that we would need to narrow our focus for improvement within our action plan because there was not enough time to teach "everything." As I thought about how to promote change at MKPS, their desire "to learn everything" reinforced my belief that one of the most important teacher dispositions for me to leverage during this study was their desire and will to improve their instructional practices. In the end, the teachers identified the following areas of need to focus on during Phase Two of the PAR process:

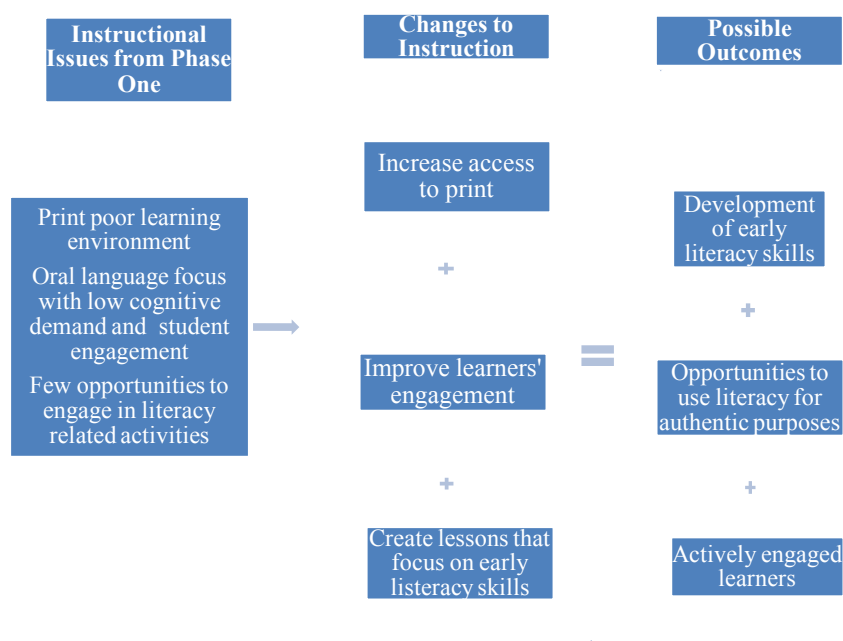
- Classroom level needs: increase access to printed materials and learn classroom management strategies to improve student behavior and engagement (participation).
- Learners' needs: improve instruction to help learners think critically, speak fluently, understand English vocabulary, and use language to express ideas.
- Instructional needs: learn strategies to support the development of comprehension, vocabulary, reading, and writing skills. (Focus group interview, May 4, 2015)

Relationship between Area of Need and Action Plan

Based upon the teachers' input from the focus group interview and the findings from Phase One, I developed a working theory to explain the relationship between the identified areas of need and a possible action plan. To conceptualize the factors influencing the action plan, I created Table 12 to represent the problems of practice and possible changes to the curriculum that could be used to improve the print-poor conditions, student engagement, and opportunities to engage in meaningful literacy activities.

Table 12

Assertion 2: Underlying Interpretation and Conclusions of Area of Need and Possible Action Plan



It is my assertion that the instructional challenges identified in Phase One could be improved by providing greater access to print and classroom management strategies that increase student engagement in the learning process and developing teachers' knowledge

of instructional strategies to focus on early literacy skills (ABC knowledge, concept of word, phonological awareness, oral reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension). Table 13 describes the three recommendations that formed the basis for the action plan created to improve practice. The three recommendations were designed to create opportunities for the learners to develop the necessary skills to become readers, use literacy skills for meaningful and authentic purposes, and actively engage in the learning process.

Table 13

Recommendations for Supporting Early Literacy Development in the Early Primary Grades

Recommendation 1: Increase access to printed material by creating classroom libraries, organizing current literacy curriculum by reading levels, developing teacher-made materials in order to provide more reading practice during whole-group and small-group instruction and independent reading, and allow greater opportunities to read outside of school.

Recommendation 2: Develop the teachers' knowledge of engagement strategies to improve learners' active participation and thinking throughout the lesson.

Recommendation 3: Develop teachers' knowledge of instructional practices that develop early literacy skills relating to ABC knowledge, concept of print, word knowledge, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, and writing.

The recommendations focused on the teachers' needs that were identified during the focus group and interviews. Recommendations 1 and 2 addressed the classroom-level needs identified by the teachers: increase access to print, improve student behavior, and require active participation and critical thinking of each learner. Recommendations 1 and 2 supported the needs of the learners by providing more opportunities for learners to use English as a means to improve oral fluency and expression and increase vocabulary and comprehension. Recommendation 3 focused on the teachers' instructional needs to improve their teaching practices in order to support early literacy acquisition. Though to a

lesser degree, by providing strategies for teachers to engage learners and improve classroom discipline, the recommendations addressed the unintended consequences of large class sizes due to the implementation of free *Education for All* and teacher-learner issues of respect and authority caused by abolishing corporal punishment in the classroom.

Developing the Action Plan to Address Areas of Need

To ensure that the recommendations transferred to the unique sociocultural context of MKPS, I revisited the literacy intervention studies conducted in Malawi and South Africa. When I designed my study, I referred to the theory of contextualized transfer of best practices. The goal was to look to research studies that showed promising interventions within contexts similar to that of MKPS and adapt those practices to meet the needs in this setting. These intervention studies improved literacy instruction by building up resources and developing teacher capacity (Dubeck, Jukes, Booker, Drake, & Inyega, 2015; Pretorius, 2014; Sailors et al., 2014). Resource building involves providing learners with a print-rich environment and access to books inside and outside of school. Access to print is the vehicle for literacy, and without print it is impossible to become a reader and writer. However, literacy initiatives in developing countries have been criticized for focusing solely on providing physical materials and not on developing teachers' knowledge as a means of support. An important element of support is to build teacher capacity or knowledge of instructional strategies that provide higher levels of learner engagement during teaching and the knowledge and skills of instructional practices to teach literacy. These instructional strategies and instructional practices have been shown not only to improve learners' motivation to learn but also to support literacy

development (Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2013).

Recommendation 1

Recommendation 1: Increase access to printed material by creating classroom libraries; organizing current literacy curriculum by reading levels; developing teacher-made materials in order to provide more reading practice during whole-group instruction, small-group instruction, and independent reading; and allow greater opportunities to read outside of school.

Resource building: providing access to print. According to Pretorius (2014), learners will not become readers unless they have easy access to books and spend time inside and outside the classroom reading. Classrooms must be print-rich environments that stimulate reading. Books are essential regardless of the language of instruction and the socioeconomic status of the nation. As noted in Finding 1, the learners at MKPS lacked access to print and a culture of reading and therefore were unable to acquire the necessary skills to become proficient readers and writers of English and Sesotho. However, the teachers and learners valued literacy and wanted to become more literate.

Suggested supports to increase access to print. In Finding 6, I concluded that teachers wanted to develop a culture of reading and that learners seemed more engaged during the lesson when they were invited to use print. Therefore, providing greater access to print emerged as an important aspect of support. When selecting books for classroom and instructional use, the books should be selected to increase the learners' exposure to English language vocabulary and grammar structure and academic content knowledge. As a means to provide greater access to print, I made the following

recommendations to build resources and increase the learners' opportunities to read stories inside and outside of school:

Classroom libraries

1. Increase access to print by creating classroom libraries, distribute current library books into the classroom to provide learners with reading materials, provide crates to store and protect the books, and model for learners proper care of books;
2. Write a grant to African Library Project to get more books for classroom libraries;
3. Request that the researcher bring 750 books to distribute into classrooms to further develop classroom library titles;
4. Ask volunteers from developed countries to bring books based on the criteria to support language and literacy skills.

Adaptation of current instructional materials

1. Adapt textbooks and reading materials to meet the instructional level of the learners by allowing upper grades to use the textbooks from the lower grades, since the readability of the material is above the primary grades' reading level, and rewriting content area material through a Language Experience Approach (LEA) experience, which would use the learners' own language to explain the content and better match their level of language and reading proficiency (see Table 16 under Writing for more details);
2. Copy current stories used during reading lessons from the chalkboard into exercise books and have learners reread stories during free time and for homework.

Teacher-created materials

1. Incorporate the LEA to create reading materials based on the learners' personal experiences and shared knowledge; invite learners to copy LEA writing into exercise books; illustrate the material and reread during free time and for homework;
2. Write stories in both Sesotho and English and use as reading material;
3. Seek donations from MKPS's sister school in South Africa that include extra exercise books and blank drawing books to use for teacher-made reading material for learners in English and Sesotho;
4. Adapt picture books and folktales into reader's theater plays for learners to read.

Increased environmental print

1. Label classroom items: especially label mural in Grade 1 classroom with Sesotho and English words; provide adhesive to allow teachers to hang instructional posters in all classrooms;
2. Increase print for instruction to improve concept of word: create charts with nursery rhymes, songs, and chants; add words to days of the week and weather charts in Reception and Grade 1.

Book selection to support literacy instruction. Book selection should take into consideration the following:

- Picture books for read-alouds that allow for teachers to develop comprehension skills: sequencing, summarizing, main idea, and inference;
- Books to support oral language development: pattern books with repetitive refrains and development of vocabulary;

- Books at a variety of reading levels in order to address the learners' independent and instructional reading levels;
- Nonfiction and fiction that relate to African experiences and culture: African folktales, magazines like *Zoobooks*, easy nonfiction at a beginning reader level;
- Nonfiction books to develop general knowledge and support the development of academic vocabulary;
- Books that show learners who are thinkers and problems solvers: the Akimbo series (*Akimbo and the Lion*; *Akimbo and the Crocodile*) and the Precious series (*The Great Cake Mystery*; *The Mystery at Meerkat Hill*) by Alexander McCall Smith; *Number 1 Car Spotter* by Atinuke;
- Picture books that are translated into both Sesotho and English;
- ABC books to develop vocabulary and sound knowledge;
- Visual dictionaries to support vocabulary development and spelling.

Building teacher capacity. Providing access to print or literacy resources is not enough to ensure improvements in literacy instruction. Teachers need training to develop specific knowledge relating to effective literacy instruction and engaging learners in the learning process (Dubeck et al., 2015; Pretorius, 2014; Sailors et al., 2014). An important aspect of teacher training is to allow teachers to be learners themselves. If teachers are to help their learners use a new strategy or skill, they must themselves become aware of the thinking processes involved in acquiring the new skill. It is the act of learning and understanding the thought processes involved in learning a new strategy that allows the teacher to encourage those skills in the learners (Ireson, Mortimore & Hallam, 1999).

Though teachers at MKPS identified their instructional needs, they lacked the knowledge of how to improve instruction.

My role as the researcher was to help the teachers design an action plan that provided specific strategies to increase their knowledge and skills in teaching reading. Based on Finding 7, I concluded that teachers were committed to the academic achievement of their learners and had a desire to improve their instructional practices to ensure their learners' success. Teachers recognized areas of need; and though they lacked the knowledge and skills to improve instruction, they were eager to learn and try new ideas. Because they desired to improve their own practice and their learners' literacy achievements, I believed they would be open to changes in their instructional practices, especially if those practices leveraged current teaching practices and improved the learning conditions at MKPS. To improve instruction, I recommended the school provide the teachers with training that would (a) develop their ability to engage learners more meaningfully in the teaching and learning process and (b) increase their knowledge of the reading process. During the teacher training, teachers would learn how to implement Recommendations 2 and 3. Teacher training would be part of Phase Three of the PAR cycle and occur during a later trip by the researcher.

Recommendation 2

Recommendation 2: Develop the teachers' knowledge of engagement strategies to improve learners' active participation and thinking throughout the lesson.

Suggested supports to increase engagement and active learning. Literacy input alone is not sufficient to help learners become proficient users of language (Swain, 2005). Learners must have opportunities to use language through meaningful interactions

in order to develop literacy skills in a second language. Engagement strategies can support literacy development when they take the form of language output, which intentionally allows learners to use language in collaborative conversations during reading and writing instruction (Anthony, 2008). During my classroom observations, I noted that learners were eager to engage in the lesson, especially when the teacher allowed them to share their own personal experiences. These observations led to Finding 8, which highlighted the desire of learners to engage in learning, a desire that resulted in improved classroom behavior. During the focus group interview, teachers expressed the need for their learners to be critical thinkers who could speak fluently, understand English vocabulary, and use language to express ideas (Focus group interview, May 5, 2015). However, classroom observations showed that learners had few opportunities to actively participate in the lesson, which influenced learners' use of language and literacy skills, engagement, critical thinking, and classroom behavior.

As a means to allow learners to actively participate throughout the lesson, I recommended three strategies: think-pair-share; thumbs up, thumbs down; and one, two, three, eyes on me. These three strategies supported active thinking and classroom management. Think-pair-share is a strategy that allows learners to engage with their peers to discuss responses to questions together before answering questions as a group. According to Hollingsworth and Ybarra (2013), the benefits for think-pair-share include: increased use of oral language, listening, and speaking; more student talk versus teacher-dominated talk; rehearsal of answers; ability to revise thinking and language before sharing with class; active participation and increased motivation; and built-in wait time to support language translation. When students are given more opportunities to use and

successfully produce language, their confidence increases along with their willingness to take risks with language. Classroom management improves because instruction is more interactive and interesting for the learners.

Thumbs up (yes) and thumbs down (no) is another strategy that allows children during whole group to share their opinions and understanding about the ideas being presented by the teacher. The strategy keeps learners motivated and engaged during the lesson. The teacher can also quickly assess whether or not learners understand the concepts, allowing the teacher to clarify or reteach the content.

In all classrooms, the teachers struggled to get the learners' attention and redirect behavior. Teachers felt learners did not listen. To support classroom management, I recommended a simple classroom technique that quickly focused the learners' attention back on the teacher. By clapping and saying, "One, two, three, eyes on me," teachers could quickly get all learners to focus on the teacher and be ready for instructions.

For the teachers, an important goal for instruction was to develop the learners' critical thinking skills. The three strategies allowed learners to be actively engaged in the learning process and invited them to think critically about their learning. However, the strategies were based on the assumption that learners had the capacity to think critically about their learning and to understand what was expected of them when they were asked to make connections and think for themselves about a topic. Because learners had experienced classroom talk that was teacher-dominated, freedom of thought might be foreign to them. Providing learners with the opportunity to engage and think might not be enough to improve critical thinking and engagement. Learners needed models and examples of how to engage with one another more freely and openly about their own

personal ideas and connections.

Redistribution of resources. The allocation of personnel and classroom space could also be examined to support student engagement. To support classroom management and address overcrowding, learners could be divided into smaller groups by encouraging all teachers to teach throughout the day. In Grade 1, where 65 learners were taught as a whole group, the teachers could divide the learners into two groups, which would allow one teacher to teach English while the other teacher taught Sesotho. The smaller groups could increase access to literacy materials, alleviate classroom discipline issues, and support differentiated instruction. The conditions were similar in Grade 6, with 54 learners in the classroom and two teachers who taught the whole group. I was concerned that the teachers would be resistant to having to work more; however, when I asked the Grade 6 health teacher if he would be willing to teach a reading class or teach health twice a day in order to create smaller class sizes, he folded his arms and replied, “Why, ‘Me Tracy, we are all reading teachers. Of course, I will. If the learners are better readers, it will make teaching health easier for me in the long run” (Field notes, May 5, 2015). The Grade 6 teacher highlighted an attitude of desire and will to improve instruction by grouping for instruction. The Grade 6 teachers asked for my help in creating a schedule that would allow them to group for instruction and share classroom space.

Realistic appraisal of the recommendations. In order to use personnel more efficiently, the teachers needed to buy into the plan, adhere to a schedule, and understand how to divide the learners into smaller class sizes. Without accountability, support and guidance, this recommendation might be unrealistic. The situation in Grade 1 proved to

be more challenging. Based on my observations, I realized that the Grade 1 Sesotho teacher failed to buy into the restructuring idea. During my visit, she disappeared during the scheduled time created to simultaneously teach Sesotho and English and to allow the teachers to work with smaller classes for two 45-minute periods. In thinking through the situation, I believed her hesitation related to power. When I first met her, she called me her *ausi*, or sister. I thought this was a sign of acceptance and respect. However, after further conversations with my translator, I realized *ausi* meant *little sister* or *underling*. If she respected me, she would have called me *Me*, or by my Sesotho name, Palasa. Because she appeared not to respect me and seemed to believe that I did not understand her culture (as noted in an early observation), she did not value my recommendations or view them as valid. She continued to use corporal punishment and to rely on her authority to control the learners. Therefore, smaller class sizes to improve learning and classroom behavior were not valued or needed to support her teaching. When I consulted with the principal about the situation, she merely said, “This is a problem” (Conversation with Principal, May 6, 2015). I sensed that because the Grade 1 Sesotho teacher was the chief’s sister, the principal had little authority over her.

Recommendation 3

Recommendation 3: Develop teachers’ knowledge of instructional practices that develop early literacy skills relating to ABC knowledge, concept of print, word knowledge, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, and writing.

Developing specific literacy instructional strategies to improve early literacy.

The evidence from Phase One emphasized the difficult sociocultural and economic factors that the teachers at MKPS navigated as they provided instruction for the learners.

Though these issues relating to poor health conditions, poverty, and inadequate resources made instruction very difficult, teachers were in the position to improve their learners' literacy achievement. Good instruction matters. Equipping teachers with the necessary skills to teach literacy is fundamental to improving the literacy achievement of learners in the early primary grades (Dubeck et al., 2011; Dubeck et al., 2015; Pretorius, 2014; Sailors et al., 2014). Therefore, the final goal for the PAR action plan was to determine which early literacy skills should be addressed and how to provide greater opportunities for learners to engage in meaningful literacy activities. Potential supports are described below under each literacy component. The goal of additional supports was to offer simple adaptations to current literacy instruction that were rooted within known practices to support early literacy instruction.

In the following section, I recommend ways to leverage current practices to improve literacy instruction, described more fully in Tables 14 through Table 16. The suggestions are divided by practices for Reception and Grade 1, which focused on concept of word, ABC recognition and sounds, phonemic awareness, and decoding, and Grades 2 and 3 which focused on comprehension, oral reading fluency, vocabulary development, and writing, which could be adapted for use in Reception and Grade 1. Tables 13 through 16 provide detailed description of the current literacy practices that could be leveraged to improve instruction along with recommendations of specific strategies to enhance current instruction. In Reception and Grade 1, the teachers focused instruction on developing ABC recognition and sound knowledge along with concept of word. In both grades, teachers used an alphabet recognition program that used alliterations to support letter recognition and sounds. In Grade 1 the focus of literacy

instruction was on recognizing basic three-letter words. The teacher used phonemic awareness activities to develop the learners' ability to decode unfamiliar words. The teachers used songs, chants, and oral storytelling to develop the learners' early literacy skills. In all grades, the teachers used Sesotho to support the learners' understanding of new English vocabulary. In Grade 2 and Grade 3, teachers focused instruction on developing oral language fluency and language comprehension. Learners memorized sentences and paragraphs that were the focus of instruction. Teachers used picture support, gestures, and drama to increase learners' understanding of vocabulary and story comprehension.

Suggested supports to improve instruction in Reception. Reflecting upon my observation in Reception, I wanted to build upon the practices the teacher was currently using to develop ABC recognition and sounds, beginning sounds in words, and concept of word. The following list includes additional practices to consider for improving instruction:

1. Use of games and manipulatives to support ABC recognition and sounds; use of reading rods to support ABC order and build the child's name for name recognition; provision of pictures to support the vocabulary words and encouragement to use more culturally relevant and common words to support letter recognition and sounds and vocabulary development;
2. Use of ABC books to support vocabulary and letter-sound knowledge;
3. Use of read-aloud books to support language development, comprehension skills, and vocabulary; attention to beginning letter sounds in words;

4. Development of concept of word by copying current nursery rhymes, songs, and chants onto sentence strips for learners to practice matching memorized speech to print; utilization of current forms of environmental print to support concept of word;
5. Creation of word cards to match speech to print for current instructional charts (days of the week; weather; colors).

(Barone, 2010; Bloodgood, 1999; Lennox, 2013; Morris, Bloodgood, Lomax, & Perney, 2003)

Table 14

Current Instructional Practices in Reception with Additional Instructional Supports

Literacy Component	Current Practices to be Leveraged in Reception
ABC Recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pointing to ABCs on chart at the front of the room.
	Additional Instructional Supports to Add to Existing Practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Underutilized resources: access reading rods locked away in storage closet: use reading rods to put letters in ABC order. Play games with reading rods. Provide learners with individual sentence strips with the ABCs; as they recite the alphabet or sing the ABC song, point to the letters on the sentence strip. Play alphabet recognition games.
Literacy Component	Current Practices to be Leveraged
ABC Sounds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing letter sounds through mnemonics and actions to match letter names and sounds through alliteration: <i>beautiful butterfly, buzz, buzz, buzz</i>. Using hand-held mirrors to see and feel the way sounds are made within the learner's mouth.
	Additional Instructional Supports to Add to Existing Practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use pictures to support letter identification and sounds (a picture of a butterfly to go along with the action <i>beautiful butterfly, buzz, buzz, buzz</i>). Suggest Reception and Grade 1 use the same mnemonics and actions to teach the letter names and sounds (Reception—total physical response; Grade 1—<i>Letterland</i> characters). Continue to use hand-held mirrors to focus on the look and feel of letter sounds within the learner's mouth; add isolating initial sounds at the beginning of words.

Literacy Component	Current Practices to be Leveraged
Beginning sounds in words	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of alliterations to support letter-sound knowledge. • Mnemonic support through the use of alliterations and body motions.
	Additional Instructional Supports to Add to Existing Practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus learners' attention on initial sounds in target words to support letter sounds. • Increase knowledge of beginning sounds by providing learners with common words that begin with the letter sound (more examples besides <i>emergency</i>, <i>Ebola</i> and <i>immediately</i> with careful attention to make sure target words match the letters and sounds and are common words reflecting the learner's everyday life experiences). • Provide ABC books to support vocabulary and ABC recognition and sounds. Taking care to ensure vocabulary words are relevant to the learners prior knowledge and experiences. • Instead of focusing learners' attention on the action to go along with the mnemonic, help learners isolate the initial sound of the alliteration. Help them recognize that the alliteration matches the letter sound (<i>Beautiful</i> and <i>butterfly</i> start with the letter <i>b</i>-; the sound for <i>b</i> is at the beginning of each word: <i>beautiful butterfly</i>, <i>buzz</i>, <i>buzz</i>, <i>buzz</i>).
Literacy Component	Current Practices to be Leveraged
Concept of Word	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pointing to days of the week chart, months of the year, seasons, and numbers 1 to 10.
	Additional Instructional Supports to Add to Existing Practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transfer daily songs, nursery rhymes, and chants to sentence strips and allow children to practice matching speech to print. • Learn to write first name and build name with reading rods. • Draw and label pictures and use emergent writing to share ideas about drawings.

Realistic appraisal of the recommendations. As I examined the recommendations for Reception, I believed the ideas aligned with the teacher's knowledge and skills and utilized existing practices to improve instruction. The recommendations addressed the instructional goals for emergent readers and aligned with the goals for teaching learners in the preproduction stage of language development. As noted in the literature review, English language learners in the preproduction stage of language development are able to point to pictures and words, follow simple directions and match objects to words and spoken language. For reading instruction, emergent readers needed to match speech to print and identify letters and sounds. For writing, the learners drew and labeled pictures and used pictures to convey meaning and express

ideas. The Reception teacher appeared to have better training than the other teachers. She had graduated from the Lesotho Teachers college approximately 8 years previously. Her teacher training allowed her to create lessons that appeared more engaging and more focused on important early literacy skills. Her class size appeared more conducive to teaching and learning. In terms of challenges, she had recently joined the staff at MKPS and had just started to create the classroom-learning environment. In order to cut down on travel time and costs, she had moved her family to the nearby village, but adjusting to the move seemed difficult for her. She shared several stories with me about how the village children harassed her all night by throwing rocks onto her metal roof, which made it impossible for her to sleep (Informal conversation with Reception teacher, May 4, 2015). Her struggles highlighted the real difficulties these teachers faced and the impact of the circumstances of their basic existence on their ability to teach.

Suggested supports to improve instruction in Grade 1. Reviewing the instructional practices and classroom challenges facing the Grade 1 teacher, I determined that the following instructional practices needed to be addressed in order to improve literacy instruction:

1. Overcrowding in the classroom: to be addressed by utilizing the additional Grade 1 teacher during literacy instruction, checking whether the class could be divided in half, one teacher teaching Sesotho and the other teaching English and then switching groups;
2. Connection between phonemic awareness activities and decoding through push-and-say activities with letter tiles;

3. Extension of three-letter words from the curriculum to include other words that share the same rhyme (word families);
4. Use of pictures and word cards to support vocabulary development and word identification;
5. Use of writing with phonemic awareness activities to support the relationship between the graphemes and phonemes (letter-sound correspondence) within the three-letter words;
6. Inclusion of writing simple sentences, using sentence frames, to support word recognition and whole sentence reading;
7. Use of environmental print to support word recognition;
8. Use of read-alouds to support oral language development, comprehension, and oral language vocabulary;
9. Use of engagement strategies like think-pair-share, thumbs up, thumbs down, and one, two, three, eyes on me to support oral language output and classroom management.

(Barone, 2010; Bear, Invernizzi, Johnston, & Templetonm 2015;

Hollingsworth & Ybarra 2013; Johnston, 1999; Neumann, 2014)

Table 15

Current Instructional Practices in Grade 1 with Additional Instructional Supports

Literacy Component	Instruction to Leverage or Add to Create an Action Plan for Phase 2
ABC Recognition and sounds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pointing to ABCs on chart at the front of the room.
	<p>Additional Instructional Supports to Add to Existing Practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write ABCs across the top of each desk with permanent marker; as learners recite the alphabet or sing the ABC song, they point to the letters at the top of their desk. Play alphabet recognition games. Provide ABC letter tiles for each learner: put letters in ABC order; play games with letter tiles. Provide the teacher with an additional set of <i>Letterland</i> charts to support letter recognition and sounds. Continue to focus on <i>Letterland</i>

	<p>character name and sound connection (<i>Sammy Snake says /s/</i>). Evaluate the relevance of English names within the alliteration to determine cultural relevance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review daily ABC chart in Integrated Curriculum or the ABC chart at the back of the <i>Letterland</i> Magazine. Play games to support alphabet recognition and sounds.
Literacy Component	Current Practices to be Leveraged
Phonological awareness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial sounds in words Alliteration Phonemic awareness (isolating and blending phonemes in three-letter words)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Repeating daily the <i>Letterland</i> characters and their letter-sound correspondence to support alliteration/beginning sounds (<i>Sammy Snake says /s/</i>). Isolating and blending phonemes in three-letter words provided in the Integrated Curriculum.
	Additional Instructional Supports to Add to Existing Practices
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support letter-sound recognition by making an explicit connection between the <i>Letterland</i> character's name and the letter sound. Focus the learners' attention upon the alliteration within the character's name. Develop metalinguistic skills in learners by helping them move beyond just repeating the sounds identified by the teacher. Help children isolate and blend phonemes on their own through building words with letter tiles and writing words. Suggest Reception and Grade 1 use the same mnemonic alphabet program to teach the letter names and sounds. Address the mismatch between mnemonic and actions between Reception and Grade 1 letter-sound programs (Reception--total physical response; Grade 1—<i>Letterland</i> characters) by meeting with teachers to discuss options.
Literacy Component	Current Practices to be Leveraged
Concept of Word Word Identification and Decoding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phonics: isolating and blending phonemes and graphemes in three-letter words. Reading three-letter words from the chalkboard in unison. Copying words from the chalkboard into exercise books (drawing pictures to illustrate the meaning of three-letter words).
	Additional Instructional Supports to Add to Existing Practices
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transfer daily songs, nursery rhymes, and chants to sentence strips and allow children to practice matching speech to print. Create word and picture cards to match three-letter words focused on each week. Play games to match words to pictures. Increase the use of environmental print to support word identification. Practice reading words that have been copied in exercise book. Provide plastic letter tiles to use with push and say to build and read word family words that are presented in integrated curriculum (extend the three-letter words by focusing on the spelling pattern). Provide a list of words according to word family patterns to teach more

	<p>words each week related to the word family words presented in the integrated text.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read the sentences associated with the workbook pages, going beyond single word reading. • Write simple sentences using three-letter words in exercise books: reread sentences created in exercise books.
Literacy Component	Current Practices to be Leveraged
Writing for sounds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copying words from chalkboard.
	<p>Additional Instructional Supports to Add to Existing Practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw and label pictures and use emergent writing to share ideas about drawings. • Write simple sentences using sentence frames and incorporating three-letter words. • Play phonemic awareness games that isolate and blend phonemes to write three-letter words. (“I’m thinking of a word that has the sounds /d/ /o/ /g/. What’s the word? Write /d//o//g/.”) • Hold up a picture of a three-letter word, and ask children to write the word by encoding the phonemes.

Realistic appraisal of the recommendations. The recommendations listed above address important issues relating to the acquisition of early literacy skills and managing classroom behavior to support the learners’ engagement and behavior. The recommendations are intended to support the challenges within the classroom context: access to print, classroom engagement and strategies to support literacy. However, while creating an action plan, I found tension between the teachers’ own perceptions of early literacy in the primary grades and my recommendations that focused on best practices in literacy instruction. The Grade 1 teacher noted during our interview that the focus of English was to teach the ABCs in Reception, single word reading in Grade 1, reading of simple sentences in Grade 2, and reading of paragraphs in Grade 3. Though my recommendations built upon the Grade I teacher’s part-to-whole perception of oral language and reading acquisition, I encouraged her to begin reading and writing simple sentence in both Sesotho and English. The goal was to use more complex English oral language and written expression in a more meaningful context. Yet I am not sure the

teacher valued or recognized the need to teach words beyond isolation or to move toward printed text that included complete sentences. The recommendations might be beyond the learners' language proficiency and the teachers' understanding and knowledge of how to teach reading and English oral language.

Suggested supports to improve instruction in Grade 2 and Grade 3. In Grades 2 and 3, the instructional issues related to (a) access and engagement with actual print and (b) whole-class instruction that limited the learners' thinking and practice with reading and writing activities. In analyzing the observational data, I selected the following instructional practices to address in order to improve literacy instruction:

Fluency

1. Copying stories from chalkboard into exercise books and rereading text from exercise books throughout the day (during whole group reading and free time, before school, and for homework);
2. Grouping for instruction: small group and partner reading;
3. Introduction of reader's theater to extend current use of storytelling and drama (Rasinski, 2009; Young & Rasinski 2009).

Comprehension for all grade levels

1. Modeling and guiding reading comprehension skills through an interactive read-aloud supporting high-quality discussion of text meaning;
2. Development of reading comprehension skills by teaching before, during, and after comprehension strategies to build comprehension throughout the story (access prior knowledge, make predictions, verify and confirm, identify explicit and implicit questions);

3. Use of graphic organizers to support comprehension (specifically summarizing and retelling).

(Giroir, Grimaldo, Vaughn & Roberts, 2015; Shanahan et al., 2010)

Vocabulary for all grade levels

1. Use of graphic organizers to extend word meaning;
2. Introduction of vocabulary during read-alouds;
3. Use of picture support during read-alouds to improve meaning of unfamiliar words;
4. Creating personal dictionaries in exercise books, using drawings, labels, and learner-friendly definitions to support word meaning.

(Giroir, et al., 2015; Shanahan, et al., 2010; Wasik, Hindman, & Snell, 2016)

Writing for all grade levels

1. Extension of grammar work with verb tenses to include writing sentences;
2. Modeling use of sentence frames for written reflections and summaries;
3. Use of Language Experience Approach (LEA) to support writing.

(McCabe, 2013; Reutzel, 2015)

Engagement strategies for all grade levels

1. Incorporation of think-pair-share; thumbs up, thumbs down; one, two, three, eyes on me.
2. Rereading activity for learners who finish early.

(Hollingsworth & Ybarra 2013; Rasinski, 2009; Young & Rasinski 2009)

Table 16

Current Instructional Practices in Grade 2 and 3 with Additional Instructional Supports

Literacy Component	Current Practices to be Leveraged
Comprehension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking questions during the lesson that support the literal meaning of the story; questions focus on what, where and when. • Using gestures, acting out, and pictures to support story meaning and to enhance recall. • Focusing on after-reading strategies to test understanding: strategies taught retelling, summarizing, and main idea.
	Additional Instructional Supports to Add to Existing Practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use read-alouds to guide the learners' comprehension process by asking before, during, and after questions that focus on accessing prior knowledge about the story, making personal connections about the characters and plot, making predictions and inferences about the text, reading to confirm or adapt predictions in order to encourage learners to be active and thoughtful readers. • Discuss story structure of fiction and nonfiction to support comprehension (e.g., characters, setting, problem and solutions, compare and contrast) and use text features and genre conventions (e.g., heading, diagrams, tables, font size) to help understand informational texts. • Assess and access prior knowledge and make personal connections to experiences and background knowledge with literacy lessons and content area lessons. • Identify main idea and supporting details; summarize and reflect on text after reading; extend comprehension through written summaries and graphic organizers to enhance meaning. • Use stories to offer ideas for writing topics. • Model how to use before, during, and after strategies while reading material independently.
Literacy Component	Current Practices to be Leveraged
Fluency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rereading stories from chalkboard as a whole class and individually (Grade 3 only).
	Additional Instructional Supports to Add to Existing Practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reread to improve word recognition: copy stories from the chalkboard into exercise books and encourage students to reread the material multiple times each day: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Whole group: instead of pointing to the chalkboard, point to the words in the exercise book as students choral read; when individual students come up to the chalkboard, have students follow along with their own copy of the story and whisper read while the student at the chalkboard reads. ○ Partner read: once the learners have choral read the story whole group, have students pair up and partner read to each other. If the room is too noisy, have half the class partner read and the other half reread independently or do an independent activity like a written summary. If weather permits, take class outside and partner read on the playground. ○ Independent reading: invite learners to reread the current

	<p>story as well as previous stories throughout the day. Material can be reread from the curriculum, the classroom library, and teacher-created stories and Language Experience stories. Learners can reread material from exercise books before school, during whole-group reading lesson, during free time, during activity time after lunch, and for homework.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce reader's theater: after reading the picture book that goes along with the reader's theater play, have learners break up into small groups and practice parts. Reread the plays until students are fluent with their assigned parts. Plays can be acted out for other grades. New scripts can be created from reading material in use (folktales and stories from the new reading curriculum). • Focus on the print within the curriculum instead of just the pictures. Learners must be taught to read the actual print on the page. Once the story from the reading curriculum has been introduced and learners understand the pictures and have orally reviewed the written text, have learners read the written text on the page. Learners can reread material with partners and individually throughout the day. • Create stories for learners to read in both Sesotho and English. The learners can create stories with the teacher as a shared writing prompt, a Language Experience Approach or during writing time with teacher support. Stories can be modeled from the example provided, i.e., <i>The Sun and the Wind</i>.
Literacy Component	Current Practices to be Leveraged
Vocabulary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using gestures to act out vocabulary words from stories. • Oral repetition of new word to support pronunciation of the word. • Using pictures to enhance the learners' understanding of unfamiliar words. • Inviting learners to act out the meaning of new vocabulary words. • Using props to support word meaning.
	Additional Instructional Supports to Add to Existing Practices
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce new vocabulary before lesson; invite learners to share with talking partners the meaning of the word in English and Sesotho. • Extend the meaning of the word to go beyond pronunciation of the word; discuss synonyms and antonyms of the word. • Write learner-generated sentences using the new words. • Copy graphic organizers into exercise books to extend word meaning (Frayer model, concept map). • Invite learners to create kid-friendly definitions of words and write the definitions along with the graphic organizer in exercise book. • Create a personal word dictionary in exercise book: use, draw and label and create simple kid-friendly definitions to support word meaning. • Invite learners to use talking partners to talk about words and use them orally in student-generated sentences. • Review new vocabulary before, during, and after the lesson.
Literacy Component	Current Practices to be Leveraged
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copying teacher-generated sentences from the board. • Creating sentences from list of words provided by teacher based on the topic.
	Additional Instructional Supports to Add to Existing Practices

	<p>Language Experience Approach (LEA) to support writing and reading.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the Language Experience Approach (LEA) to scaffold writing by modeling how oral language can be turned into writing, which can be copied and read to provide more reading material. The LEA writing can be used to support the difficult content vocabulary of the newly adopted curriculum. The teachers and learners can work together to write a version of the content that is at the learners' instructional level. <p>LEA Process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Discussion: generate a topic to write about. The topic can be a shared experience, a topic from the newly adopted curriculum, or an extension from a read-aloud; ○ Construct the story with the learners. Learners orally share sentences aloud about the topic. The teacher writes the sentences down as the learners share their ideas. ○ The teacher reads the story to the learners. The story can be read whole group several times. ○ The learners copy the LEA writing from the chalkboard into their exercise books and reread it throughout the day individually or with partners. Learners can draw pictures to go with the story. ○ LEA story can be translated into Sesotho for extra reading. ○ LEA stories can be generated in Sesotho instead of English to provide writing scaffolding and reading materials in Sesotho. <p>Grammar Work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use graphic organizers to create a word map to extend the meaning of verbs. • Use word map or other graphic organizers provided in the strategies manual to write sentences to extend vocabulary and provide more practice with verb tenses. <p>Sentence Frames</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model sentence frames to support writing; support comprehension through written reflections, e.g., a written summary using the graphic organizer and strategy: <i>someone, wants, but, so</i>. See strategies manual for more support (Appendix G). <p>Draw and Label</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite learners to draw pictures about topics of interest and then label or write sentences about the drawing. Writing can be done in English and/or Sesotho.
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Realistic appraisal of recommendations. Two areas of concern with the recommendations above were teacher knowledge and the learners' oral language proficiency to support literacy in Sesotho and English. First, though the recommendations were intended to support the underlying needs of the teachers and the acquisition of important literacy skills, the recommended teaching strategies required teacher knowledge. To use these strategies effectively, the teacher must understand when

to use these strategies and how to model and guide the learners through the thinking process. Teachers needed to reflect on their own practice and their learners' responses and to adjust their teaching throughout the learning process. The teachers' current knowledge and pedagogical skills might limit their ability to adjust the recommended strategies to meet their needs. Secondly, the recommendations focused on the development of reading and writing skills alongside oral language development in L2. This recommendation requires the ability to use oral language to support reading and writing as well as high-order thinking skills in both Sesotho and English. The learners' oral language proficiency and their ability to think and construct ideas in their L2 could limit their ability to engage during instruction. For example, with the Language Experience Approach, the students would need basic oral language proficiency to express their ideas in either language. However, because the learners appeared to be at an emergent stage of English proficiency, their oral proficiency might limit their ability to express their ideas about the topic.

Across all grade level recommendations, the teachers' ability to make instructional changes in the absence of models and experiences that supported the use of these new techniques was questionable. Reflecting on the sociocultural context at MKPS, I concluded that the teachers' instructional practices were in keeping with common beliefs held by most of the teachers. Although they acknowledged the value of more child-centered learning, critical thinking, and active engagement, the community of practice at MKPS involved teacher-directed learning through call and response. There were no other models within the teaching community to help the teachers improve their instruction. Despite the general consensus in the research community that teaching

literacy involves social practices that provide meaningful contexts for learning to take place, it is very difficult to change instruction when teachers' own community of practice does not offer such models for learning (Lave & Wenger, 2007).

Implications

Implementing the Action Plan: Phase Three of the PAR Cycle

In the following section, I describe future actions the teachers and principal at MKPS can take in order to implement the action plan described in Tables 13 through 15 and recommended throughout the chapter. Without support in implementing the recommendations, the participants might be overwhelmed in choosing priorities from the action plan described throughout the chapter and within the Action Communication written for Chapter 6. Though Phase Three is not included in this capstone project, the researcher supported the participants through the action plan during a second trip, Phase Three of the PAR cycle. The initial professional development workshop offered during Phase Three was envisioned as a starting point for implementing the action plan and for providing teachers with models and guided practice to support change in their instructional practices. Appendix H presents a five-day workshop outline, describing the instructional focus and specific strategies used to improve the teachers' knowledge and skills of early literacy.

To begin the implementation process, I suggested the following steps:

1) Increase access to print by doing the following:

- As a means to provide greater access to print, the teachers need to meet to determine how to distribute current reading materials among the classrooms to create classroom libraries.

- Model for learners how to care for classroom library books to ensure materials are well cared for by the learners.
- Level the older reading curriculum, which is no longer used and in storage, and distribute among the classrooms to provide more print for reading.
- Write a letter to the principal at the high school in South Africa, which is a feeder school for some graduates, and ask for a donation of materials. Materials can include more exercise books and drawing tablets to be used for teacher-made reading materials.
- Donated materials can be used to create teacher-made books to provide easier content material for learners to read; material can be written in both English and Sesotho. The teacher-created material can be sent home for extra practice. Teachers may be less worried if the teacher-made materials sent home were accidentally damaged or not returned.
- Provide access to reading materials throughout the day. Teacher-created material can be used throughout the day to provide more practice with reading: classroom libraries can be accessible while learners wait for school to start, between lessons, or when learners finish their work. Teachers need time to prepare for lessons while learners are present, if learners are allowed to read independently or with partners during lesson preparation time, classroom management can improve and learners have more opportunities to read.
- Level the newly adopted Integrated Literacy Curriculum and distribute among the grade levels to match the reading level of the students. (I recommend the teachers consult with the teacher from Australia, who visits three times a year, to help with

leveling the materials and distributing them among the grade levels. The Australian teacher is a former Kindergarten teacher trained in Reading Recovery, who understands book leveling.)

Providing access to reading material will provide learners with more opportunities to read and practice their newly acquired reading skills, supporting fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary development and improving classroom engagement.

- 2) To support classroom management and to engage learners, teachers can incorporate instructional strategies that go beyond an oral language focus of instruction.
- Use think-pair-share before during and after lessons to allow learners to connect prior knowledge with new knowledge, to develop new knowledge, to confirm and verify predictions, and to extend learning opportunities throughout the lesson.
 - Use one, two, three, eyes on me to management classroom behavior.
 - Use before, during, and after teaching strategies to support learners' engagement and thinking throughout the lesson, (see Table 17 for a description of strategies to teach during the professional development workshop).

Table 17

Before, During, and After Instructional Strategies to Teach During Phase Three of the PAR Cycle.

Before Reading	During Reading	After Reading	Engaging learners
1. Look at the title; access prior knowledge. 2. Ask questions: what do you know? 3. Look at the pictures. 4. Make a prediction.	1. Ask more questions. 2. Show pictures. 3. Explain difficult words: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Act out • Pronounce • Use a synonym • Use Sesotho • Look at the pictures • Look for context clues • Go back to predictions, verify and confirm and adjust. 	1. Ask more questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Character • Setting • What is the problem? • Summary (written or oral)- somebody, wanted but, so 2. Act out the story. 3. Sequence the plot. 4. Confirm predictions. 5. Use pictures. 6. Revisit new words.	1. Ask questions. 2. Use thinking partners. 3. Write and draw. 4. Choral read, echo read, partner read. 5. Use reader's theater plays. 6. Act out

		7. Write sentences using sentence frames. 8. Compare and contrast. 9. Do you have any new ideas? 10. Make connections. 11. Draw while reading.	stories.
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Inviting learners into the learning process not only improves engagement, it increases the cognitive demand of the lesson. Engagement strategies could be the focus of the teacher-training workshop as described in Table 17.

3) Develop teachers' knowledge of specific instructional practices to create lessons and classroom environments that support early literacy skills: concept of word, ABC recognition and sounds, phonemic awareness, and decoding, comprehension, oral reading fluency and vocabulary development, and writing.

- Invite teachers to the weeklong teacher-training workshop during the winter break, which will occur during Phase Three of the PAR cycle. Teachers will be provided with free materials to implement strategies taught during the conference. Strategies covered during the work will include the instructional practices listed in Tables 13 through 15.
- During the teacher training, the teachers will be given a strategies manual that contains before, during, and after literacy strategies to support instruction (Appendix H).
- Following the teacher workshop, teachers will have support while implementing new strategies through a one-week mentoring program offered by the researcher.
- The manual can be used as a guide for further professional development. The recommendations and strategies manual can also be shared with the newly

appointed literacy coach, appointed by the government to offer literacy support to MKPS and the aligning elementary schools within the school district.

- The principal can invite the teacher volunteers who routinely visit from the United States and Australia to help implement other reading strategies explained in the manual. The two teachers who visit are seasoned teachers, who understand before, during, and after reading strategies. During my visit, the teacher volunteers expressed a desire to offer specific support in helping the teachers develop reading knowledge. As a staff, the teachers and principal can select strategies from the strategies manual to work on as a group. While working through new strategies, teachers can share ideas about strategies that appear to be working and offer ideas to address newly identified areas of need.

Support beyond Phase Three

Beyond Phase Three of the PAR cycle, the participants could decide as a team how to best implement further improvements over time. Because several teachers from the United States and Australia visited MKPS regularly, I recommended the principal share the professional development manual with them and seek their support in implementing other instructional strategies. The participants were given stamps and stationery to write letters to me after completing Phase Three to discuss issues relating to implementation of instructional strategies. Over the course of the next few years, I will continue to work with the teachers through our correspondence. I will also correspond with the teacher from Australia to offer recommendations for further support and use of the professional development manual.

Implications for Future Research

An assumption regarding the use of Participatory Action Research is that inviting teachers into the problem solving process increases willingness to change their instructional practices. Further research at MKPS could examine the following questions: (a) what is the evidence of change in practice at MKPS and what factors support or hinder instructional change? And (b) what evidence is there that Participatory Action Research influences change in practice? (c) What specific strategies did the teachers use to improve practice and how were the strategies adapted to match the unique teaching and learning environment? My study focused on verifying the extrinsic factors that created challenges and supports for literacy instruction in a small rural school in Africa. Yet, through my analysis, I uncovered important intrinsic behaviors among all participants (desire, value, and motivation) that appeared to be important conditions to leverage to improve literacy and instructional practice. It is my conjecture that change in practice is a combination of both extrinsic and intrinsic factors and that the conditions at MKPS were special because of these factors. Future research could examine the relative roles of extrinsic and intrinsic factors that support literacy instruction and contribute to instructional change.

Challenges to Implementation

Much of the success of the recommendations relied on the teachers' willingness to leverage and adapt their current instructional practices. Though the teachers actively participated in the PAR process and current instructional practices were leveraged, the solutions created to address their areas of need may have required too much change. The teachers might not see how the recommended changes improved their teaching situation.

For example, I recommended the principal utilize existing personnel to support overcrowded classrooms. The recommendation came from concern about the Grade 1 classroom, where all 65 learners were taught at once, despite the fact that the government had provided an extra teacher to address overcrowding. I recommended the teachers co-teach and work together; however, the suggestions could be perceived as more work for them. I am not sure the teachers were ready for co-teaching or dividing the classes into smaller groups.

Another concern was my recommendations about using the existing library. I suggested that the current library books, which were under lock and key, be distributed among the classrooms. By putting books into the learners' hands, the principal and teachers were trusting that their highly valued books would be respected and cared for by the learners. I worried that I might have made a mistake in asking the teachers to turn their library space into another classroom and distribute the books. I knew that the school valued having the library even if the teachers rarely used the space as a library. I wasn't sure of the role or symbol for literacy the library had for the school or community.

Many of the challenges to instruction derived from sociocultural and economic conditions that negatively impacted student achievement. Until these large issues are addressed, it will be difficult for teachers to improve their students' learning. The intervention studies in Africa that appeared to offer improvement in student achievement and instructional change used teacher training and mentoring as means to help teachers gain knowledge about reading instruction (Dubeck et al., 2015; Pretorius, 2014; Sailors et al., 2014).

Issues of Trustworthiness

There were several issues of trustworthiness with my study, related to time in the field and data collection and research bias. Because of unexpected circumstances relating to time and access, I was unable to ask as many interview questions or conduct as many interviews as I had originally planned. As a result, my data set was not as rich or detailed as anticipated and may lack other confirming or disconfirming evidence. Because I started the analysis with preliminary codes identified from the research, I may have jumped too quickly to my categories and may have failed to develop a complete understanding of the context. Important categories may have been missed.

During my visit, it is possible that the teachers were sharing their very best teaching with me. My translator, who had spent 10 years living in Lesotho and South Africa, informed me:

You are seeing their very best teaching. Typically, teachers provide good instruction for about one hour a day. While you have been here, the teachers are working very hard to make sure you are seeing their best instruction. If you were here for several months, you would start to see that teacher absenteeism and use of instructional time interferes with the learners' instruction. (Debriefing with translator, April 28, 2015)

It is also possible that the classroom observation schedule resulted in my missing other literacy instruction that was conducted throughout the day. Despite these limitations, based on my review of the literature on literacy challenges and supports in developing countries, my findings align with the conclusions of other studies. Because the PAR process allowed the teachers to be active members in the problem-solving process that

affirmed that their views were valued, they provided insight into the challenges for the literacy instruction at MKPS. Their insights seemed to corroborate my own observations.

My study focused on the instruction during the early primary grades and the enhancement of literacy instruction from Reception to Grade 3. By focusing just on the early primary grades, I may have missed how literacy skills are developed across the grade levels and over time. While allowing the teachers to be a part of the research process appeared to empower them, the action plan focused on the skills they identified and could implement with minimal resources and knowledge. Nevertheless, changing the literacy practices and improving the literacy proficiency of the learners will take (a) a carefully planned comprehensive literacy-focus instructional diet implemented over time and (b) more depth of professional knowledge of reading development. The study, by its nature, merely planted the seeds for these changes. It will be up to the teachers at MKPS to seek further support and instructional resources to continue to improve their instructional practices.

Throughout my study, I used my existing knowledge of best practices from developed countries to improve literacy instruction. My own bias for what constitutes best practice could have impacted by observations and assertions. It is possible that my recommendations failed to consider the unique sociocultural conditions within the Lesotho context.

Transferability

My research project was grounded in the belief that in order to improve literacy, it was necessary to carefully examine the local context and verify the challenges and supports unique to the setting. The recommendations were aligned with the unique

conditions at MKPS. Therefore, any transfer of the findings from the study would be limited to settings with similar supports and challenges to literacy instruction. However, general ideas relating to access to literacy and building teacher knowledge appeared to be systemic issues across the research findings and could be relevant to other settings.

Using PAR was an important strength of my capstone project and increased the potential for findings and recommendations to transfer across research settings, particularly if stakeholders have the desire and will to improve their instructional practices. The PAR cycle actively engaged the participants in the research process, supported their buy-in to the action plan, and helped them feel valued and knowledgeable. The action plan aligned with their instructional goals and needs. The PAR research cycle acknowledged issues of power and ensured that the stakeholders' knowledge of the context was valued.

Reflecting on the Research Process

Several important factors impacted my ability to improve the instructional practices at MKPS and should be taken into consideration when doing this type of research. I valued the participants as important sources of funds of knowledge and I invited them into the problem-solving process. I created an action plan that addressed the knowledge and skills needed to meet their instructional needs within their particular context. Nevertheless, there are caveats to consider when working in a cultural context outside of one's own.

Being a searcher. To begin with, I adopted the stance of a searcher instead of a planner, which allowed me to think more openly and critically about the conditions that influenced literacy instruction at MKPS. As discussed in Chapter 3, Easterly (2006) challenged researchers who worked in developing countries to approach literacy

initiatives from the perspective of a searcher, to examine the problem of practice with an open mind, devoid of preconceived solutions about what should be done to improve literacy practices, and to invite the local stakeholders into the problem-solving process. He argued that many literacy initiatives in developing countries have failed because researchers planned solutions without addressing the needs within the local context.

In preparing for my trip to Lesotho, I examined the current research on literacy instruction in developing countries to create a framework to access the problem of practice. I noticed the existing research presented literacy instruction and outcomes from a deficit model, one of student failure, high teacher absenteeism, wasted instructional time, low teacher professionalism, and low expectations for learners (Hoadley, 2010; McEwan, 2015; Taylor, 2009; Trudell et al, 2012). The conclusions focused on the end results of literacy interventions and not on the possible causes of specific outcomes. The deficit view appeared to blame the stakeholders for poor literacy achievement.

During my visit to MKPS, it was difficult to maintain my searcher perspective. I observed the very conditions revealed within the research. I wanted to jump to solutions to address the deficits instead of examining the possible causes. As I observed the teachers and examined their lived experiences, I found important sociocultural, economic and health-related issues that provided a context and explanation for the seemingly low student achievement and teacher performance. Given the fact that teachers at MKPS taught in classrooms with few resources, high student-teacher ratios, and no running water or electricity, I found the teachers to be courageous and committed to their work and the needs of their learners. The lived experience of these teachers challenged my Western perceptions and critical point of view. My searcher stance allowed me to look

beyond the research and examine the complex nature of the problem. I was forced to reflect critically upon the existing research and identify the factors or conditions that influenced literacy within the local context. I concluded that any solutions to support literacy must recognize and address the challenges caused by the larger sociocultural issues.

Valuing and respecting the stakeholders. As an outsider, I was unsure about my ability to improve literacy within a context that was foreign to me. However, through the use of PAR, I was able to maintain my stance as searcher and use the insights and expertise of the stakeholders to create an action plan to improve practice. Because participants were invited into the research process, they felt like valued colleagues who possessed important knowledge about teaching and learning within this unique setting. Most of teachers had taught at MKPS for over 20 years. Their insights into the challenges as well as the necessary conditions to support literacy ensured that our instructional action plan met their needs and created an incentive for them to buy into the recommended changes. Because I honored and valued them as experts in their own context, they showed initiative to change their instructional practices.

Based on the conclusions from several African intervention studies, I recognized the importance of teacher buy-in to the success of any action plan. As I reviewed my study, I realized that mutual respect was a key component in the power of our working partnership and in the teachers' willingness to implement the action plan. On one occasion, I witnessed the drawbacks, and perhaps the arrogance, of assuming outsiders can know the needs within the local context. Several days before my departure, a missionary group from Australia arrived to conduct a four-week Bible study. They asked

the principal and teachers to stop their normal instruction so that the learners could attend their Bible school at the church near the school. Out of respect for the missionaries, the teachers and principal complied. Yet I knew that the time away from instruction worried them. They were preparing for end-of-year exams and were even holding Saturday school to help prepare the learners for their examinations. One afternoon after one of the missionaries left the principal's office, I said, "I am sure you will be happy to have me leave so things can get back to normal." She smiled and said, "Oh Tracy, you are always welcome here. My teachers have already asked when you plan to return. You and Nate Mokete⁴ are the only people who visit and give us knowledge we need" (May 6, 2015). As researchers and outsiders who come with the intent to offer help, knowing what our recipients need and want is key to the sustainability of any action plan or support. In this case, I wondered if the missionary workers realized that the learners regularly attended the church beside the school and had just participated in a two-week Bible camp at their church during their winter break. I was disheartened by the missionaries' disregard of the community's knowledge and power and the learners' immediate needs.

Recently, I received a letter from the Grade 6 math teacher, who wrote, "Me Tracy, I hope you will return to MKPS. I want to learn more strategies that make my work easier" (Correspondence with Grade 6 teacher, December, 2015). I know that my willingness to listen to the teachers, to hear their stories, to carefully evaluate their needs, and then to offer support within the context of their own teaching gave me a special and unique perspective, which was valued by my stakeholders. Our work together allowed us

⁴ Nate Mokete is the Sesotho name for my translator, who had worked at MKPS to train teachers in restorative justice discipline techniques.

to create an action plan containing specific strategies that made instruction easier for the teachers because it directly aligned with the needs of their learning community.

A sociocultural framework. For a searcher, any plan to support literacy instruction needed to look at literacy in broad terms beyond the classroom setting. I adopted a sociocultural learning theory to frame my study because it required a careful examination of the community practices and values for literacy. However, because of time and lack of opportunity to observe how literacy was used outside of school, I struggled to understand the nuances of the culture and to fully understand the Basotho people's perceptions and values of literacy in Sesotho and English. My classroom observations, interviews, and trips into the community led me to believe that English and literacy were valued as a form of currency. Within the community, people who had higher levels of literacy in Sesotho and English were highly regarded. The church leaders, school board president, and tourist guides used literacy to gain access to leadership roles in the community and economic opportunities. One school board member told me, "Parents want children to speak English at school. Not Sesotho. English is very important. Without English, our children will not be able to get jobs in the Republic of South Africa" (School board member 1, School board interview, April 27, 2015). Parents valued English language proficiency as a means for economic opportunities. During my interview with the school board, one member stated, "I am happy you have come. Our children need to hear the correct English. They do not hear good English. You must make sure they speak proper English" (School board member 1, School board interview, April 27, 2015). From my observations, Sesotho and English served different purpose within the community. I witnessed English as a prized

economic commodity, yet Sesotho was the dominant language for communication. The use of a sociocultural framework identified the value and need for English and literacy and highlighted challenges to access within the community practices.

As I examined the learning environment and witnessed how larger cultural issues impacted the learners, I was struck by the immensity of the task and my own inadequacies to address the daunting sociocultural, economic, and health issues. I wanted to abandon the sociocultural conceptual framework and adopt a more fixed view of literacy, which focused on the cognitive process of literacy and stages of literacy and language development. Yet I knew that if I disregarded a sociocultural framework, I would fail to acknowledge the complexities of the issues and miss important opportunities to support the teachers. I accepted Easterly's (2006) perspective that we must address the needs within the local context; however, his perspective provided little guidance as to how to focus my support. I was still troubled by the immensity of the task.

Focusing on a plan. Gaining input from the local stakeholders was an important factor in narrowing the focus for the study and creating an improvement plan that took into account the challenges created by the sociocultural conditions and classroom level needs. The teachers' insights were valuable in helping to define the problem of practice from a sociocultural perspective as well as a community of practice. The teachers and school board members identified a lack of reading culture and access to print as an important challenge to literacy. Though this challenge appeared beyond the scope of my project, I realized that a change at the classroom level could support a change at the community level. Providing access to print within the classroom setting appeared doable and an important first step to improving literacy. The stakeholders also recognized a lack

of knowledge and skills within their own community of practice. As a means to support her teachers, the principal stepped outside her community to find more support to improve her teachers' current instructional practices. The stakeholders' desire to improve instruction was at the heart of our working partnership and supported our goal to develop teacher capacity.

Taking on the role of planner. Deciding how to address the challenges to literacy and leverage current practices and conditions at MKPS caused tension throughout my project. Though PAR actively involved the stakeholders in the research process and my searcher stance allowed me to look at the challenges and supports for literacy within the local context, I eventually had to take a more active role in creating the action plan. As I moved toward offering support, I abandoned my role as searcher and adopted the role of planner. The teachers lacked the knowledge and skills to improve instruction, and therefore they needed my expertise in literacy to make recommendations to improve their instruction. I had to create conditions that would allow the teachers to gain the necessary knowledge to improve their instructional practices. At the heart of our plan was teacher mentoring through a professional workshop during Phase Three of the PAR cycle.

Common solutions within the research. In order to ensure that my recommendations aligned with best practices within the African context, I examined our current understandings about ways to improve practice. I returned to the research to see how other researchers had handled the nuances and complexity of the problem. Across the studies including my context, the following factors were essential to improving literacy:

1. Support the grass-roots efforts from stakeholders: The stakeholders recognized the need to improve their current instructional practices and had the desire and will to try new instructional strategies. I am convinced that the stakeholders' desire and will for change was key and unique to our partnership;
2. Build on existing practices: Adding to existing practices ensured that recommendations were within the teachers' skill set and supported buy-in;
3. Develop a mentorship program: Teachers used the literacy skills within their own community practice. To improve instructional practices, teachers needed to be mentored or apprenticed to learn new instructional practices that addressed the instructional challenges and barriers to literacy. Supports needed to be maintained until the stakeholders felt confident in using strategies without support;
4. Implement incremental steps: Not all areas of need could be addressed. Goals for support should include the stakeholders' immediate needs but also be doable within the context of the study. In my study, supporting access to literacy and building engagement and comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary strategies seemed the most manageable;
5. Trust teachers to adapt instructional practices: Over the course of the study, as the teachers tried out the recommendations, they reflected on the outcomes of their learners and adapted the strategies to meet their unique needs. For example, the teachers realized that choral reading with 64 learners was very

difficult; so they adapted the practice to meet their needs by allowing the readers to go outside and read in the courtyard;

6. Trust teachers to continue to change and grow as professionals: In deciding what areas to address within the action plan, some important challenges were not addressed. I wondered whether teachers would look beyond the strategies we addressed in our action plan. However, as the teachers started to use specific strategies, new needs became apparent. For example, as the teachers encouraged the learners to read connected text, they recognized a new need relating to phonics instruction across all grade levels. The teachers reached out to me through their letter correspondence during Phase Three of the project, seeking ways to help their learners decode unfamiliar words and recognize English spelling patterns. Throughout my study, I worried that the needs for improvement were too big for my small study. The teachers showed their own initiative and forward thinking in addressing and reevaluating their instructional needs over time. However, they recognized the need to seek instructional support over time, which was the impetus for Recommendation 7;
7. Offer support over time: Providing teachers with the knowledge and skills to improve, maintain, and extend instructional strategies will require ongoing professional development or a mentor to offer support for an extended period of time. Finding ways to offer support beyond the scope of the research project is key to sustainability and further growth. Prior to any intervention, engaging all stakeholders and existing supports could ensure extended help

over time. During my study, I realized I had missed an important opportunity to support the teachers beyond my study. On my last day at MKPS, the district resource teacher arrived. She had been hired by the Ministry of Education to support local schools within the district with literacy instruction. She asked why she had not been invited to participate in our research study. The principal quickly replied, “I didn’t know you existed. I was not informed by the Ministry of Education that there were any district resources in our area. If I had known you about your position, I would have invited you” (Field notes, May 6, 2016). Unfortunately, I realized, I had missed an important aspect of potential support because I failed to examine the administrative structure within the educational system at MKPS. However, I also realized that the district resource teacher’s presence highlighted the Ministry of Education’s commitment to improving instructional practice.

8. Sharing the action plan with others: The action plan was shared with other volunteers who came to MKPS to offer support. The missionary worker who routinely visited MKPS reported to me that she and the teachers were trying other instructional practices that were part of the teacher’s manual created for the teacher workshop during Phase Three of the PAR cycle. A unified plan addressed short-term and long-term goals and provided important guidance for instructional support for an extended period of time exceeding the scope of the capstone project.

Final thoughts. After my work with the teachers at MKPS, I felt humbled by the experience and felt guilty for not doing more to help them as they tried to improve the

literacy conditions at their school. As I witnessed the difficult teaching conditions within Lesotho, I realized solutions to improve literacy instruction were very complicated and required more than good instruction. I trusted in the knowledge and insights of the stakeholders in identifying their areas of need and designing an action plan to improve literacy within their context. Though our project started with small steps, the focus of improvement aligned with their needs and wants. The stakeholders appeared motivated to use and adapt their new literacy practices to address their instructional goals. As researchers, our role in effecting changes comes from our ability to be on the lookout for those stakeholders who have the desire, will and commitment to develop a new set of community practices that will transform their existing knowledge about how to best teach literacy within their local context. Ultimately, the solutions to improve literacy will come from the stakeholders who create new models for teaching literacy tailored to address their own cultural needs and not from outsiders like me.

CHAPTER 6: ACTION COMMUNICATION

To: The Principal
Mountain Kingdom Primary School
Lesotho, Africa

From: Tracy Hough
Doctoral Candidate
University of Virginia
P.O. Box 97
New Hope, VA 24469

Dear Principal of Mountain Kingdom Primary School,

I am writing to share with you the findings from the 10-day Participatory Action Research project you and your teachers participated in during April of 2015 as a means to improve the literacy instruction at your school. During your visit to the United States in 2014, you asked for support in providing your teachers with professional development designed to enhance their knowledge about reading instruction. We agreed that before designing a professional workshop, an exploration of current practices was needed to ensure that our support suggestions matched your instructional needs. Allowing the teachers to be a part of the research project helped ensure that the solutions were ones that would make their work easier and address the literacy needs of your learners. The findings in Table 1 come from interviews with you and your teachers and from my classroom observations. Within Table 1, I describe the challenges and supports to early literacy instruction at MKPS. The opportunities for learners to engage in early literacy practices within the community and at school are examined in Findings 1 through 5. The

current literacy practices that are used by your teachers and can be leveraged to improve instruction are highlighted in Findings 6 through 9.

Table 1

Summary of Findings from classroom observations and interviews with Teachers at MKPS

Phase One Findings: Verifying Problems of Practice
Finding 1: Learners had few opportunities to engage in literacy activities within the community, at home, and at school. Participants identified a lack of access to resources as the reason for their inability to engage in literacy activities.
Finding 2: Due to school-level factors relating to overcrowded classrooms, a lack of educational resources, and underutilized classroom space and personnel, teachers struggled to maintain classroom discipline, group for instruction, meet the needs of their learners, and provide access to educational materials for the learners.
Finding 3: The newly adopted primary grade curriculum focused on academic language and content area knowledge and failed to align with the learners' level of language proficiency. The learning objectives did not actually teach phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary, which are necessary skills for learners to become proficient readers and writers of English and Sesotho.
Finding 4: Teachers focused their literacy instruction on oral language. Teachers used oral language and oral repetition as a means to support classroom management and to ensure comprehension of lesson content. Literacy instruction focused on English oral language fluency and English oral language comprehension at the expense of other literacy skills. Due to the teachers' instructional preference for call and response and rote learning, learners participated in lessons with limited cognitive demand and low-level language output. Consequently, learners appeared to be disengaged and passive learners.
Finding 5: The early literacy instructional practices seemed unsuccessful in systematically teaching and providing opportunities for learners to practice skills in phonemic awareness, word recognition, oral reading fluency, and writing, which are important to developing reading in the early primary grades. Factors that impeded early literacy skills acquisition related to lack of access to print and opportunities to engage in meaningful practices to develop the necessary skills for literacy.
Phase Two Findings: Instructional Practices to Leverage to Support Early Literacy Instruction
Finding 6: Despite the lack of a reading culture, the teachers and children valued literacy and wanted to become more literate. Their desire to read and have access to materials could be leveraged and used as part of the action plan to improve literacy instruction.
Finding 7: Teachers were committed to the academic achievement of their learners and desired to improve their instructional practices to ensure their learners' success. Teachers recognized areas of need; and though they lacked the knowledge and skills to improve instruction, they were eager to learn and try new ideas.
Finding 8: Learners appeared to be actively involved in literacy when given opportunities to use their literacy skills for authentic literacy purposes. Literacy instruction and classroom management could be improved by finding more ways for learners to authentically engage in the learning process.
Finding 9: The teachers set aside time each day to teach literacy. By leveraging current instructional practices and providing training relating to evidence-based early literacy instruction, teachers should be able to improve their current instruction.

The findings from the initial visit helped us create an action plan to improve instruction that would be implemented during a later trip. The teachers identified classroom level, student level, and instructional level needs to address within the action plan.

- Classroom level needs: Increase access to printed materials and learn classroom management strategies to improve student behavior and engagement (participation).
- Learners' needs: Improve instruction to help learners think critically, speak fluently, understand English vocabulary, and use language to express ideas.
- Instructional needs: Learn strategies to support the development of comprehension, vocabulary, reading, and writing skills.

As a means to improve literacy instruction, I recommend the following:

Recommendation 1

Recommendation 1: Increase access to printed material by creating classroom libraries; organizing current literacy curriculum by reading levels; developing teacher-made materials in order to provide more reading practice during whole-group instruction, small-group instruction, and independent reading; and allow greater opportunities to read outside of school.

I believe increasing access to print would be an important first step in improving literacy at MKPS. The teachers and students both appeared eager to engage with print. The school board and teachers recognized the need for developing a culture of reading and that, without access to print, it would be difficult to create readers. When students were given the opportunity to read material on their own or as rereads, they were involved and engaged. However, since the learners lacked access to print, they were unable to develop the necessary literacy skills to become readers and writers of English and Sesotho. I recommend the teachers provide greater opportunity for students to engage with print. The teachers could increase the learners' access to print through daily

read-alouds of high quality picture books, encouraging learners to read material during the lessons, and creating classroom libraries within each room for learners to read independently or in small groups. According to research, access to quality reading material provides learners with greater exposure and models of English language. Learners at MKPS did not have sufficient exposure to English inside and outside of school; therefore, access to books would provide the opportunity to improve English vocabulary and learn English language syntax structure and opportunity to interact with language.

Increasing access to print could also improve classroom behavior, allowing teachers to group for instruction and meet the needs of their learners. Teachers noted that when they tried to offer small-group instruction or address the needs of individual learners, classroom behavior became a problem. Allowing learners to reread materials on their own would give them extra practice with reading and occupy their time while the teacher addressed the needs of other children. If books were carefully selected based upon the reading level of the learners and academic content knowledge, challenges presented by the new Integrated Literacy Curriculum could be addressed. Another problem with current instructional practices was the reliance on call and response. Encouraging the learners to read materials during classroom instruction would engage them and invite them to use their literacy skills for more meaningful purposes and require higher levels of thinking beyond oral language input and output (Anthony, 2008).

Recommendation 2

Recommendation 2: Develop the teachers' knowledge of the reading process and engagement strategies to improve learners' active participation and thinking throughout the learning process.

Findings from the classroom observations showed that the learners at MKPS appeared to be disengaged and passive learners with few opportunities to genuinely engage in meaningful literacy activities. To develop higher levels of student engagement and build upon the learners' desire to be actively involved in the learning process, I recommended that teachers change their lesson plan format and classroom management techniques to allow learners to be actively engaged in the learning process. Based upon the findings, the lesson format relied heavily on teacher talk and call and response. This resulted in few opportunities for learners to access their prior knowledge, make personal connections with the material and go beyond basic understanding of the material.

As part of the professional development workshops offered during my second trip, teachers will be trained to use specific strategies to increase learner participation and learning. For the lesson plan format, teachers can change their instruction by including before, during, and after strategies that allow the learners to develop knowledge throughout the lessons. Teachers can model how to use graphic organizers as a scaffold to support learning and thinking throughout the lesson. Learners can use graphic organizers after the lesson to write paragraphs about what they learned. Teachers can also use questioning strategies to keep learners engaged and thinking throughout the lesson. Allowing learners to respond with talking partners will increase their use of language and make personal connections throughout the lessons. With high engagement throughout

the learning process, learners will be more actively involved in the lessons, the cognitive demand of the lesson will be increased, learners will use language more freely and meaningfully, and classroom behavior will improve.

Creating smaller class sizes is another way to increase the learners' engagement and opportunities to engage in meaningful lessons. Looking at ways to distribute your personnel to create smaller groups during literacy time, especially in classrooms where the government has allocated two teachers, can address issues related to overcrowding. If you create classroom libraries and distribute the library books among the classrooms, the library space can be used as a classroom space for teachers to use when they divide classes during literacy time.

Recommendation 3

Recommendation 3: Focus literacy instruction on early literacy skills relating to ABC knowledge, concept of print, word knowledge, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, and writing.

During my observations, I noted your teachers recognized the area of need for support strategies to improve early literacy instruction. They had a desire to improve their instruction. Teachers noted that they had not been given the necessary professional development to teach the new integrated curriculum and other skills in literacy. To develop the teachers' capacity, I recommend the teachers participate in a weeklong workshop designed to support their knowledge and skills for teaching early literacy skills. As part of my second trip to MKPS, I will provide your teachers with professional develop designed to teach early literacy skills relating to phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, and writing. A strategies manual, which

includes explanation of how to use all the strategies taught during the weeklong workshop, will be given to each teacher and can be used for continuous professional development after our initial training (see Appendix G). In the section below, I outline possible topics and support suggestions to cover during our professional workshop. The list can also be used beyond the initial workshop to support further professional development.

Suggested supports to improve instruction in Reception. Reflecting upon my observation in Reception, I recommend supports to build upon the practices the teacher was currently using to develop ABC recognition and sounds, beginning sounds in words, and concept of word. Following is a list of additional practices to consider for improving instruction:

1. Use of games and manipulatives to support ABC recognition and sounds; use of reading rods to support ABC order and building the child's name for name recognition; provision of pictures to support the vocabulary words and encouragement to use more common words to support letter recognition and sounds;
2. Use of ABC books to support vocabulary and letter sound knowledge;
3. Use of read-aloud books to support language development, comprehension skills, and vocabulary; attention to beginning letter sounds in words;
4. Development of concept of word (ability to accurately match speech to print) by copying current nursery rhymes, songs, and chants onto sentence strips for learners to practice matching memorized speech to print; utilize current forms of environmental print to support concept of word;

5. Creation of word cards to match speech to print for current instructional charts (days of the week; weather; colors).

Suggested supports to improve instruction in Grade 1. Reviewing the instructional practices and classroom challenges facing the Grade 1 teacher, I determined that the following instructional practices need to be addressed in order to improve literacy instruction:

1. Overcrowding in the classroom: to be addressed by utilizing the additional Grade 1 teacher during literacy instruction, checking whether the class could be divided in half, one teacher teaching Sesotho and the other teaching English and then switching groups;
2. Connection between phonemic awareness activities and decoding through push-and-say activities with letter tiles;
3. Extension of three-letter words from the curriculum to include other words that share the same rhyme (word families);
4. Use of pictures and word cards to support vocabulary development and word identification;
5. Use of writing with phonemic awareness activities to support the relationship between the graphemes and phonemes (letter-sound correspondence) within the three-letter words;
6. Inclusion of writing simple sentences, using sentence frames, to support word recognition and whole sentence reading;
7. Use of environmental print to support word recognition;

8. Use of read-alouds to support oral language development, comprehension and oral language vocabulary;
9. Use of engagement strategies like think-pair-share, thumbs up, thumbs down, and one, two, three, eyes on me to support oral language output and classroom management.

Suggested supports to improve instruction in Grade 2 and Grade 3: In Grades 2 and 3, the instructional issues related to (a) access and engagement with actual print and (b) whole-class instruction that limited the learners' thinking and practice with reading and writing activities. In analyzing the observational data, I selected the following instructional practices to address in order to improve literacy instruction:

Fluency

1. Copy stories from chalkboard into exercise books and reread text from exercise books throughout the day (during whole group reading and free time, before school, and for homework);
2. Group for instruction: small group and partner reading;
3. Introduce reader's theater to extend current use of storytelling and drama.

Comprehension for all grade levels

1. Model and guide reading comprehension skills through an interactive read-aloud supporting high-quality discussion of text meaning;
2. Develop reading comprehension skills by teaching before, during, and after comprehension strategies to build comprehension throughout the story (access prior knowledge, make predictions, verify and confirm, identify explicit and implicit questions);

3. Provide graphic organizers to support comprehension (specifically summarizing and retelling).

Vocabulary for all grade levels

1. Use graphic organizers to extend word meaning;
2. Introduce vocabulary during read-alouds;
3. Use picture support during read-alouds to improve meaning of unfamiliar words;
4. Create personal dictionaries in exercise books: draw and label and create learner-friendly definitions to support word meaning.

Writing for all grade levels

1. Extend grammar work with verb tenses to include writing sentences;
2. Model the use of sentence frames for written reflections and summaries;
3. Use Language Experience Approach (LEA) to support writing.

Engagement strategies for all grade levels

1. Incorporate think-pair-share; thumbs up, thumbs down; one, two, three, eyes on me.
2. Provide rereading activity for learners who finish early.

Working with your teachers through the Participatory Action Research process has been a meaningful experience for me. Our partnership helped me explore the benefits of using research to improve literacy instruction in schools that are faced with difficult and challenging sociocultural and economic conditions. The insight from your teachers into specific ways to improve instruction at MKPS and their desire to become better teachers are important teacher dispositions that make your school special. As a

school, you want the best for your learners and recognize the importance of good teaching as a means to improve early literacy skills. You and your teachers are open and willing to try new strategies to improve instruction. I hope the knowledge and skills the teachers learned during our partnership will improve the early literacy skills of your learners. I hope you will continue to correspond with me through letters and let me know how your teachers are using and adapting the new literacy practices to improve their instructional practices. As a researcher, I want to know which strategies appeared to support your learners and how your teachers adapted them to meet the needs of their learners and the unique conditions at MKPS. The insight from your teachers can help other teachers improve their instructional practices.

Sala Hantle,

Tracy Hough ('Me Palasa)

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Appendix A: Interview Log

Date	Participant	Activity	Location	Duration
4/26/2015	Principal	Semi-Structured Interview Questions	Principal's House	45 minutes
5/4/2015	Reception	Informal- discuss classroom discipline issues	Classroom	10 minutes
4/28/2015	Grade 1	Semi-Structured Interview Questions	My House	30 minutes
5/4/2015		Informal- Teacher rearranging desks after school- discuss phonics, difficulties with behavior	Classroom	20 minutes
	Grade 2	Informal Interview- after 4/29/2015 lesson She is unable to come for Semi-Structured Interview due to Taxi issues and absenteeism	Classroom	10 minutes
4/26/2015	Grade 3	Formal- Interview Questions	Principals House	45 minutes
4/28/2015		Formal- Interview Questions	My House	30 minutes
4/26/2015	Grade 4	Formal- Interview Questions		45 minutes
5/5/2015	All Grades	Focus Group	My House- luncheon celebration	60 minutes
4/26/2015	School Board 3 members	Formal- Interview Questions With Luncheon Celebration	Library	60 minutes

Appendix B: Log of Classroom Observations

Date	Grade Level	Activity	Duration
4/28 (teacher absent 4/27, 4/29)	Reception	Morning circle time- sing ABC, individually point the ABC chart, the numbers 1-20, days of the week in Sesotho and English, months and season. Learn the number 9- string 9 beads on a shoe lace, teacher reads a story about maize and talks about vegetables they eat.	90 minutes
4/30/2015 Teacher is late	Reception	The teacher is late- but the learners start the morning carpet time without her. Each child goes up to the board and begins to point to the ABC chart, days of the week, number, months and seasons. 20 minutes pass before she arrives. When teacher arrives lesson is reciting the ABC with mnemonics. Teacher focuses on the letter N- she passes out mirrors and has the learners make the letter N and see the shape of their mouth as they make the sound /n/.	75 minutes (some observations without teacher)
May 4, 2015	Reception	Field trip down to the river to gather sand Return to room, read a story about soil, make clay objects, draw pictures of different kinds of soil	90 minutes
May 5, 2015	Reception	ABC morning routine: Learners continue work with soil- read a story about soil, orally tell each other about things they make out of soil, act out One, Two Buckle My Shoe.	90 minutes
4/27/2015	Grade 1	Math- copied number one to ten from chalkboard	30 minutes
4/27/2015	Grade 1	Reading: recited <i>Letterland Abc</i> The lesson focuses on the individual phonemes of the following words: toy, cup, dog, hat, leg, rat and sun: blend and isolate phonemes in words: copied 7 words in exercise books	60 minutes
4/28/2015	Grade 1	Reading: recited <i>Letterland Abc</i> Sings a song about family members: The lesson focuses on the individual phonemes of the following words from previous day: toy, cup, dog, hat, leg, rat and sun: blend and isolate phonemes in words: children write missing vowels in words (teacher writes on the board h _ t, c _ p,- write the 7 words in exercise book and draw a picture	60 minutes
4/29/2015	Grade 1	Sing song about the says of the week. Point and say the <i>Letterland ABC</i> Teacher new words: Today she has pictures to go with the words. A children blend phonemes for 7 words: leg, pen, cat, boy, man, sun, hat 7 learners come up and match picture to print on chalkboard, learners copy words in exercise books.	60 minutes
4/30/2015	Grade 1	Teacher takes children to library to read aloud the story <i>Peace</i> by Todd Parr	30 minutes
4/29/2015	Grade 2	Learner are reading about jobs from their English book- learners never look at the actual	40 minutes

Teacher was absent: 4/27/2015 4/28/2015 5/4/2015		page with the written words. Children call and respond approximately 10 times to each noun/occupation. Teacher, shopkeep, farmer, nurse, doctor, miner: They repeat simple sentences orally with each word- never looking at print.	
5/5/2015	Grade 2	Math lesson adding tens and ones	20 minutes
5/5/2015	Grade 2	Lesson on Participles- ing words Teacher allows children to act out the story with ing words- the teacher has the learners read the words- as small groups the rest listen: story- jumping, swimming, floating, going,	40 minutes
5/6/2015	Grade 2	Participle lesson continued- crying, falling, ringing, running- children act out the words. Learn individual words and repeat orally simple sentence. Repeat the words 16 times on one occasion.	40 minutes
4/28/2015	Grade 3	Only ½ the class- others are at assembly with Police. Teacher writes the fables <i>The Lion and the Mouse</i> . The children choral read and echo read from the chalkboard the story. The teacher acts the story out to support meaning.	60 minutes
4/29/2015	Grade 3	The teacher rereads the <i>Lion and the Mouse</i> from the chalkboard- focusing on vocabulary and acting it out. Learners come up one at time and point and read the story. The whole class follows along. Children copy the story in their exercise books.	35 minutes
4/30/2015	Grade 3	Children reread <i>Lion and the Mouse</i> children come up to the chalk board and read story aloud- rest of the class sits at their seats and points to the board. Teacher moves on to writing- learners write an invitation to a friend to come to their birthday party.	60 minutes
5/4/2015	Grade 3	Teacher and learners recite Sesotho syllables for about 5 minutes- Mo me ba bo le ma se di ho Today is a math lesson- learners complete ONE word problem- adding three items (money)	75 minutes
5/5/2015	Grade 3	Children in small groups act out the <i>Lion and the Mouse</i> for the class- and stand up in front of the class and summarize the story	45 minutes

Appendix C: Semi-Structured Teacher Interview Questions

1. What grades have you taught and for how long?
2. What makes teaching reading difficult for you?
3. How do you teach reading?
4. You know that I will be coming back in July to do a workshop with you. What would you like me to do to help you teach reading?
5. Do you send books home with your children to practice reading?

Appendix D: Focus Group Teacher questions

1. What makes teaching literacy difficult for you?
2. What would you like to focus on as a means to improve instruction?

Appendix E: *The Classroom Language Arts Systematic Sampling and Instructional Coding System* (Scanlon, Gelzheiser, Vellutino, Schatschneider, & Sweeney, 2008)

		Relatively Stable Features				Relatively Dynamic Features		
Slice #	Verbatim Record	Class Structure	Lesson plan Context	Materials Context	Instructional Group	Specific Instructional Focus	Teacher Activity	Student Activity
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
#1								

Appendix F: Sample Reading Passage from *How I Relate to Others*

Integrated Curriculum Grade 2

Manure and Compost

There are some things that help plants to grow. **Manure** is what is call animal waste (droppings). It is often full of things that help plants grow well. **Compost** is made from things such as vegetable peels and other kitchen leftovers. You can build up a compost heap by putting waste in the same place. Dried corn and leaves can be added to the compost heap. Chicken and horse manure can also be added to compost. Do not use dog, cat, pig or cow manure in a compost heap, though. When you use manure and compost, you must wear gloves. Wash your hands well after working with manure and compost

Appendix G

Table of Contents for Professional Development Strategies Manual for the
Mountain Kingdom Primary School Teacher Training Workshop

Before Reading Strategies	
List of Reading Comprehension Strategies	P 3
Tips for Before During and After Reading of Informational Text	P 5
Tips for Before During and After Reading of Literary Text	P 7
Directed Reading Thinking Activity	P 9
Prior Knowledge Map	P 11-12
KWL	P13-15
Making Predictions Chart	P 17
Preview and Predict	P 19
Pop the Question	P 20
I wonder	P 21
Making Predictions SENTENCE FRAMES	P 22
Hooked on a Book (title, cover picture connections)	P 23
Picture This (Drawing the setting)	P 24
Vocabulary Strategies	
Vocabulary Word Maps	P 25-27
What I know about Words	P 28
Tackle difficult Vocabulary: Use a Word Map (upper grades)	P 29
Concept Map (Upper Grades)	P 30
During Reading and After Reading	
Events Chain	P 31 32
Sequencing	P 33
Follow the Guide (who, what, problem solution)	P 34-35
Once I (making connections)	P 36
Making Predictions (continued from Before P 17)	P 37
Summary Chart	P 39-40
Summarization Narrative frame sentences	P 41
Drawing Conclusions from information in the story	P 42
Drawing Conclusions I read, I think, Therefore	P 43
Compare and Contrast	P 44
Sum it up with a storyboard (draw and write)	P 45
Map it Out (setting, character, problem, outcome)	P 46
Someone wants but do (summary chart)	P 47
Main Idea (Identifying Significant Details- upper grades)	P 48
Main Idea paragraph sentence frame	P 49
Retelling a Nonfiction Passage	P 50-51
Five Finger Retell chart	P 52
Favorite part	P 53-54
Interview	P 55-56
Character Map Paint a portrait	P 57
Character Development Beginning to End	P 58
Character change (cause and effect)	P 59
What a Character	P 60
Connection to Prior Knowledge, Read, respond, write it down (upper grades)	P 61
Sentence starters (responding to text through writing)	P 62
My Reading Log A Record	P 63
Reading Log Journal Topics	P 64
Visualize create a story strip	P 65
Narrative story questions- responding orally or in writing	P 66-68
Confirming our predictions	P 69

Appendix H

Tentative Schedule for Phase Three: Teacher Workshop to Support Literacy Instruction

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Organizing for Learning	Writing	Comprehension	Nonfiction and Vocabulary	Using Current Resources
Rotation 1	Rotation 1	Rotation 1	Rotation 1	Rotation 1
Topic: Whole Group 1) Read Aloud Directed Listening Thinking Activity <i>Anansi and the Talking Melon</i> 2) Think aloud and making predictions	Topic: Language Experience Approach Based on Curriculum and nonfiction	Topic: DLTA and LEA <i>Herdboy</i> Sesotho/English Strategies: LEA With Nonfiction (mentor text) Writing about own experiences (creating a model or sentence frame to support this) Use for rereading Some wants but so Sequence Compare and contrast (the story and what I know)	Word knowledge Phonics page Other pages to help with thinking	Topic: Using resources Drawing and labeling Cloze
Rotation 2	Rotation 2	Rotation 2	Rotation 2	Rotation 2
Topic: Small Group Reader's theater <i>Anansi and The Talking Melon</i> Supporting small group reading: paired reading, choral, echo, independent reading	Topic: Writing to Learn Sentence frames and quick writes 1) accessing prior knowledge 2) reviewing previous learning and 3) summarizing lessons	Topic: Small Group Reading Before, during, and after: comprehension and vocabulary Materials: Teacher-created materials; <i>Akimbo and the Lion</i> and <i>No 1 Car Spotter</i>	Topic: Small Group Reading Before, during, and after: comprehension and vocabulary Materials: Teacher-created materials; <i>Akimbo and the Lion</i> and <i>No 1 Car Spotter</i>	Topic: Oral Retelling Writing as retelling (rereading) Fables: <i>Crow and the Pitcher</i> <i>Lion and the Mouse</i> Other books Drama to support retelling
Rotation 3	Rotation 3	Rotation 3	Rotation 3	Rotation 3
Topic: Independent Work Activities: Brainstorm activities Independent activity to do without teacher instruction or	Topic: Writing 1) Free writing to express ideas in Sesotho and English 2) Drawing and writing	Topic: Supporting Content Reading Materials: Using <i>Zoobooks</i> Grouping strategy: Working in pairs Learning strategy: KWLR Sentence frames Graphic organizers	Topic: Graphic Organizers to Teach Vocabulary Frayer Model Dictionary of kid-friendly definitions Drawing and labeling Creating a word wall in the	Topic: Classroom Discipline 1) Discussion about ways to improve management and discipline. What challenges do you face with

when finished with assignments. 1) what possible choices to Do when finished (teachers share) 2) Extension of workbook or lessons – rereading lessons (model ideas of how to extend the workbook) 3) Model how to use the classroom libraries		to aid with research	classroom	implementing the Child-Friendly Policy? 2) What's working? 3) What are your challenges?
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Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Schedule Opening Session 9-10:15 Church or Library Who are we? Why are we here? KWLR (What do you want to learn about literacy?) Rotation 1 10:20- 11:20 Rotation 2 11:30- 12:30 Lunch 12:40-1:40 Library Rotation 3 1:45-2:45 Reflection within the room of last rotation 2:45 to 3:00 <i>Quick Write:</i> What have I learned? What can I see myself using in my classroom? You could help me by . . .	Schedule Rotation 1 9:00-10:30 Rotation 2 10:40-12:10 Lunch and Songs and Worship 12:10 to 1:10 Session Three 1:20 to 2:50 Reflection within the room of last rotation 2:50 to 3:00 <i>Quick Write:</i> What have I learned? What can I see myself using in my classroom? You could help me by . . .	Schedule Rotation 1 9:00-10:30 Rotation 2 10:40-12:10 Lunch and Songs and Worship 12:10 to 1:10 Session Three 1:20 to 2:50 Reflection within the room of last rotation 2:50 to 3:00 <i>Quick Write:</i> What have I learned? What can I see myself using in my classroom? You could help me by . . .	Schedule Rotation 1 9:00-10:30 Rotation 2 10:40-12:10 Lunch and Songs and Worship 12:10 to 1:10 Session Three 1:20 to 2:50 Reflection within the room of last rotation 2:50 to 3:00 <i>Quick Write:</i> What have I learned? What can I see myself using in my classroom? You could help me by . . .	Schedule Rotation 1 9:00-10:30 Rotation 2 10:40-12:10 Lunch and Songs 12:10 to 1:10 Hand out Certificates Session Three 1:20 to 2:50 Reflection within the room of last rotation 2:50 to 3:00 <i>Quick Write:</i> What have I learned? What can I see myself using in my classroom? You could help me by . . .