INCORPORATING THE AFFECTIVE TO ENHANCE THE COGNITIVE: 
A CASE STUDY OF EXEMPLARY TEACHING

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Incorporating the Affective to Enhance the Cognitive: A Case Study of Exemplary Teaching

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Abstract

This thesis is a case study of exemplary teaching. It is an interpretive inquiry that aims to understand the teaching practices of one teacher who teaches students who have multiple disabilities. It is an inquiry that seeks to recognize, understand, and learn from the multi-faceted dimensions that underlie an experienced teacher’s practice with students who have complex multiple disabilities and learning needs. In this inquiry, I worked as a participant-observer with Maria over five months as she taught six primary-aged students who have multiple disabilities, are non-speaking, and use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) to express themselves. My interpretations and understandings of Maria’s teaching practices are filtered through my experience as a special educator and a consultant in the field of AAC and developed in consideration of the research literature on teacher knowledge, beliefs, and practices. I convey my understanding of Maria’s teaching by sharing anecdotal details of the teaching events in her classroom which I witnessed, and Maria’s own explanations of her practice. In sharing my understanding of Maria’s teaching practice, I confirm the interdependent and interactive nature among Maria’s knowledge, beliefs, and teaching practices. Further, I highlight the role of the unanticipated and seldom-researched affective dimension of teaching. I propose several implications arising from this inquiry. These implications serve to broaden our understanding of the construct of exemplary teaching and to inform the teaching practices which are necessary to meeting the diversity of learning needs in today’s special education and inclusive classrooms.
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We can no other answer make but thanks, and thanks and ever thanks.

William Shakespeare

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Preface

I begin this thesis in a rather unconventional way with a vignette of an event which I witnessed at the start of each day in Maria’s classroom. This particular event continues to stand out for me and as will be revealed in my analysis in Chapter 1, it holds a great deal of information about what underlies Maria’s teaching. The event provides a preview of the nature of Maria’s knowledge, beliefs and instructional practices.

Throughout the vignette, I provide comments which appear in italics to highlight instructional sequences which I want you to pay particular attention to as you are reading the vignette. These sequences are important to understanding Maria’s teaching. In general, I’d like you to pay attention to the nature of Maria’s instructional moves: the prompts and cues she provides her students, her explanations and questions, and her strategies for completing the activity. I will refer to these moves in my subsequent analysis of Maria’s teaching practices.

The Undressing Routine

Today is April 16th. It’s 8:40 a.m.

As with most school days, Sarah is the first student to arrive by bus and, as I set up my videocamera, is already sitting with her teacher, Maria, beside the bookcases that divide Maria’s desk and work area from the rest of the bright, sunlit classroom. A three-ring binder bulging with laminated black and white and coloured picture symbols lies open on the large, round classroom table that dominates the classroom. Straddling a low, wheeled stool, Maria is seated at Sarah’s eye level and looking directly at her. Smiling, she turns her attention to the open binder and pages through it, searching for symbols to attach to a strip of Velcro which is affixed to a 2” x 14” piece of foamcore – the ‘Velcro strip’, as she calls it. Joan, the other communications classroom teacher with whom Maria works closely, appears in the doorway and softly knocks. Maria looks up, assuring Joan that it’s okay to come in. They exchange a quick conversation about the large pot that Joan has in her hands – a prop for today’s joint cooking activity which is part of their week-long Australian theme for Education Week. Another student, Dana, arrives and is cheerfully greeted by Maria and Sandra,
the educational assistant who had been working at the computer. Sandra promptly wheels Dana to Maria’s desk area behind the bookcase.

Reaching for a small mirror from the top of the bookcase, Maria smiles and looks at Sarah, asking, “Okay, Sarah, what do we need to do?” She holds the mirror in front of Sarah pausing to enable the curious, smiling youngster to look in the mirror and see the front of her spring jacket which has snaps and a zipper. “Take a look at your jacket.” Next, she places the mirror in Sandra’s outstretched hand across the top of the bookcase and shows Sarah the Velcro strip displaying two picture symbols about 6 inches part. Pointing to each symbol, in turn, Maria asks, “Unbutton your coat?” Or “Unzip your coat?” What do we need to do?”

Sarah looks at each symbol as Maria points to them. Her head begins to move to the left, then the right, then the left, looking beyond the Velcro strip. Her left arm is bent at the elbow and raises off her lap tray towards her open mouth. Her head turns towards the right and her eyes fix on the bookcase.

“Sarah?” [Pause] “Sarah?” Still holding the strip of symbols, Maria gently pulls Sarah’s wheelchair forward.

At once, Sarah turns her head towards the Velcro strip, fixing her gaze on the ‘unzip my coat’ symbol.

Tapping the unzip symbol and nodding, Maria replies, “Unzip, unzip, unzip. Unzip! Okay.” Maria places the Velcro strip on the table, stands up, and with a nurturing touch, begins to unzip Sarah’s coat, all the while smiling and looking at the child.

“You don’t have your snaps done up. They’re all undone! Mom didn’t do them up. Mom didn’t do up your snaps. But we probably don’t do them up either. She’s probably in a hurry in the morning and we’re always in a hurry at night to get everybody in their coats and out the door with everything they need, right?”

Sarah gazes up at Maria, then a broad smile lights up her face.

“Okay. So, we unzip your jacket.” Standing back from the child, Maria places both of her hands on Sarah’s shoulders giving her a gentle nudge. She then replaces the symbols with two different ones.

“You’re getting really fast at this! Alright, what’s the next step?” Maria presents the Velcro strip with new symbols to Sarah. Sandra’s quiet words mixed
with Dana’s delighted vocalizing can be heard from the other side of the bookcase.

Pointing to each symbol in turn, Maria asks, “Take my left arm out or my right arm out”.

Sarah looks at each symbol as they are being pointed to, then fixes her eyes on the ‘Right arm out’ symbol.

Tapping the symbol, Maria replies, “Right arm, right arm, right arm. Which is your right arm?”

Sarah looks down and to the right.

“Alright!” Maria tugs on the cuff of the girl’s right sleeve, raising Sarah’s right hand in the air. “If you can pull your arm out it would be a big help! Can you do that?” Maria pauses.

Sarah beams and begins to slowly pull her arm down.

“Good!” Maria takes the loose arm of Sarah’s jacket away from her arm, revealing the child’s colourful, short sleeved T-shirt and frees the sleeve and jacket from Sarah’s back, resting it on her left side.

“This is a nice new jacket. Is it a new one? Is it a new one? It looks like a good one for taking to summer camp. Is it for summer camp?”

Sarah grins, her eyes squinting in delight.

Maria presents Sarah with the Velcro strip. “Okay. Now what shall I do?”

Sarah fixes her eyes on the ‘take my left arm out’ symbol.

“Left arm, left arm, left arm.” “I’ll just hold your sleeve and you can pull your arm out.”

Slowly, the child manages to free her left arm from the coat sleeve. Maria gently tugs on the sleeve from behind.

Finally, Sarah has her coat off.

Maria bundles the coat and places it on Sarah’s lap tray. Looking at the binder to replace the symbols, Maria asks, “Which comes next?” Maria looks up, towards the back door of the classroom. I hear activity behind me: a door opening. A matron wheels Patty just past the student cubbyholes and into the classroom, positioning her on the periphery.

I hear Patty’s excited voice, “Hi!”

Maria looks, smiling towards Patty, “Hi, Patty! I’ll be right with you.”
Turning her attention back to Sarah, Maria presents the Velcro strip. “What comes next?”

Again, I hear activity behind me. Maria’s eyes are once more diverted to the back door. “Hi, Bethany.” A matron wheels Bethany into the classroom, positions her beside Patty, then quietly closes the door behind her. The open doors of the classroom allow the increasingly intense sound of hallway chatter to fill the room. Sarah turns her head to the right behind her, straining to see the activity. Maria gets up from the stool, closes the front classroom door, then returns to her seat in front of Sarah, showing her the Velcro strip.

Sarah fixes her eyes on “Hang up my coat.”

“Hang up my coat, my coat, my coat. Would you like to wait for the other girls?”

Patty squeals in delight.

[Pay attention to this next bit of dialogue. It speaks to Maria’s expectations and goals for her students.]

“Swap like we did yesterday? Would you like to swap coats this morning?”

Patty exclaims, “Yeah.”

Sarah beams.

Bethany looks intently at her teacher, her wide eyes expressing affirmation.

“Okay! Good! Help each other! Remember we passed our coats in a circle and everyone got a different coat! Everyone got a different one they had to hang up.”

Maria closes the symbol book and puts it back on the bookshelf. “And everyone did it well!” She looks at Sarah, gently pushing her wheelchair back. “That means you can read the names of your friends!” Maria approaches Patty and Bethany at the back of the classroom.

“Can you read them all, Patty?”

Patty nods her head, smiling.

“Bethany, do you think you can read all the names of everyone in the class?” Maria pulls Bethany’s communication strip from her laptray, presenting it in front of her.

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Bethany fixes her eyes on the word, ‘yes’ printed in green at the opposite end of the red ‘no’ on the thin strip.

"You think so? Yeah. I think you girls can!"

"Me!" Patty exclaims.

Maria bends and reaches to release the brakes on both girls’ wheelchairs. As she simultaneously wheels them closer to the classroom table beside Sarah, she asks them the beginning sounds of the names of each of the students in the class. Patty softly vocalizes them all except one, which is offered by Bethany.

"That’s right, Bethany!"

Maria comments on a small rash she has noticed on one corner of Bethany’s mouth.

Looking at each child, Maria explains, “Okay girls, how should we do it this morning? Yesterday we had one person choose a step and I did it for everyone who was here and then we had the next person choose a step and we did it for everyone who was here because we had lots of kids. Shall we do it that way today?"

Everyone smiles.

“It will speed it up. How about we start with Bethany.”

Maria moves Bethany closer, to face Patty. Pointing to the front of Patty’s coat, she advises, “Take a look at Patty because she’s a little different than you.”

Maria picks up Bethany’s large, thick communication book from her laptray and, still standing in front of her, shows her the index page.

Immediately, Bethany’s eyes fixate on a block of picture symbols on the display.

Maria confirms, “Dressing and undressing.” Then she quickly flips through Bethany’s communication book, finds the appropriate page of symbols, and holds it open and upright in front of Bethany at eye level.

“What is the first step for both you and Patty?”

Bethany looks at her teacher, then looks at the page of symbols before her. She fixes her eyes on a group of symbols and smiles.

Holding the book in one hand, Maria points with a finger of her free hand to a group of symbols on the page and asks, “This group?”

Bethany softly vocalizes and looks at her teacher.
Maria points to the top row of symbols in the group. “Top row?”
Bethany vocalizes.
Maria points to the first symbol, “Take off my vest. [pause] Is that right?”
Bethany smiles at her teacher.

[From this point to when Meagan opens the door, Maria provides explanations and converses with her students.]

Maria looks at Bethany and explains. “Or straps because Patty’s not wearing a vest, but straps.” Smiling and glancing at all three girls she continues to explain in a matter-of-fact tone, “You’re wearing them both for the same reason. They help you to sit up straight.” Maria straightens and stiffens her body. “They keep you from falling over.” Maria exaggerates a bend in her upper body to the side. Next she proceeds to undo Patty’s strap and asks a volunteer who has just arrived, to do the same with Bethany. Sarah continues to watch intently.

Once Patty’s straps are undone, Maria looks at her and asks, “Patty, can you tell us the next step?” She reaches behind Patty to retrieve her communication book from her large school bag that hangs heavily on the back of her wheelchair.

“You have a big new bag!”
Smiling, Patty replies, “Yeah.”

“Wow! Everything fits! That’s great! Rose did your homework for you. Got it all ready.” Having retrieved Patty’s communication book, Maria takes a step back, looks at the child, raises her eyebrows, and states, “So you have homework.” Next, Maria looks to Sarah and glances briefly at Bethany, while pulling her chair closer into the conversation. She looks back to Sarah.

“Sorry, Sarah, you’ve got homework.” Maria pauses, looking at each of her students. “She said yesterday, that she didn’t like homework.” Maria looks at Sarah, “I know you don’t like it, huh? But we have the Australia story to read for homework. Is that okay? That’s the big thing. To read the Australia story to whoever will listen.” Maria looks back to Patty. “Okay, Patty?”
Patty replies with the name of her brother, prompting Maria to ask if Patty’s brother will listen.
Patty responds by nodding her head.
Maria faces Patty holding her open communication book upright on her laptray. “Where do we go in your book?”

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Meagan, a volunteer, enters the room.

"Hi, Meagan. We're just getting our coats off. Meagan's here, Bethany!"

Bethany attempts to turn her head to see Meagan. The two greet each other with smiles.

Maria turns her attention back to Patty.

Patty points to a block of symbols.

A matron wheels Mark into the room. Maria turns her head to see him.

"Hi Mark!"

Meagan wheels Mark farther into the room to join his classmates in the semi-circle around Maria at the round table, positioning and braking his chair beside his classmate, Bethany.

Maria turns her attention back towards Patty who is struggling to point a finger of her right hand to a block of symbols in her communication book, "Here?"

Patty looks up to her teacher and nods her head, her fingers sliding down the glossy page of symbols.

"Undress?"

Patty nods again.

"Okay!" Maria picks up Patty's communication book, scans the tabs along the side of the binder and flips several pages to the 'undressing' page of symbols. Again, Patty says her brother's name and, after glancing around the room, Maria warmly reminds Patty that she'll have an opportunity to talk about her brother when the coats are off.

Maria adjusts the page of symbols to allow Patty to reach them. "Okay. What do we do?"

Patty slowly points to a symbol.

"Unzip your coat?"

Patty looks at her teacher and nods.

"Okay." Then speaking louder, she prompts Meagan, "Does Bethany have a zipper?"

Meagan unzips Bethany's coat.

Maria unzips Patty's.
A barely audible vocalization can be heard from Mark as he intently watches the actions of both adults.

Maria turns to Bethany. “Okay! Let’s get these coats off!” With one hand she gently re-positions Bethany’s head upright in her headrest while picking up her communication book with the other. “Alright, so what happens next?”

Bethany softly vocalizes while scanning the page of symbols before her. She fixes her gaze on a group of symbols.

Pointing to the group of symbols, Maria asks, “This group?”

Bethany’s head falls forward.

“Bethany?” Maria waits. Then she places Bethany’s head back in the headrest, moving Bethany’s long bangs away from her eyes.

Bethany vocalizes, looks at the symbols, and smiles.

Maria points to the top row of symbols. “Top row?”

Bethany turns her head trying to see Meagan who is standing behind her.

“Bethany, what comes next?” Maria waits. “Come on, Meagan’s waiting for you.” She continues to wait, looking at Bethany.

Bethany turns her head to face Maria. Again, her head falls forward.

Maria gently places Bethany’s head back in her headrest so that she is facing the page of symbols.

Maria points to the bottom row of symbols. “Bottom row?”

Bethany smiles, still looking at the symbols.

Pointing to each symbol in turn, Maria asks, “Put on my coat?” Maria pauses, waiting for the child to respond. “Take my right arm out?”

Bethany smiles.

“Take right arm out.” Placing Bethany’s book on the table, Maria asks, “Where’s your right arm?”

Again, Bethany turns her head as far as she can to the right, attempting to see Meagan.

Looking patiently at the youngster, Maria asks, “Where’s your right arm, Bethany?” She gives Bethany’s sleek, dark ponytail a gentle twirl. She softly taps Bethany’s left arm. “Bethany?”

Bethany lifts her right arm towards her teacher, still contorting her face and neck to see Meagan.
“Here we go.” Maria grasps Bethany’s right arm and begins to free it from the coat sleeve and the coat from around Bethany’s back, stopping the procedure at her left arm.

Maria turns towards Patty asking, “Right arm?”

Mark vocalizes louder. Maria looks behind at Mark and calls out, “Should we help Mark, too? We have . . . if you take his vest off and unzip his jacket and take his right arm out he’ll be caught up with everybody. Okay.”

Meagan proceeds to take off Mark’s coat.

Maria explains to all, “We’re doing it as a group today. Friday is group day. Okay. Alright.”

She presents Patty with her communication book. “Patty, what comes next?”

Patty begins to point to symbols in her book.

“Use your finger. Okay.

Patty rests her finger on a symbol.

“Left arm?”

Patty nods.

“Where’s your left arm?

With a smile, Patty promptly looks at her left arm, raising it towards Maria who begins to tug on the coat sleeve.

“Great!” Maria proceeds to do the same with Bethany and looks towards Mark. “Okay. You can take his left arm out.”

The coats are off.

Maria presents Bethany with her communication book. “Bethany, what happens next?”

Bethany looks attentively at a group of symbols displayed before her.

Maria points to a group of symbols, “This group?”

Bethany smiles, vocalizes, then looks at her teacher.

Maria nods and points at the top row of symbols in the group. “Top row?”

Bethany smiles.

Pointing to each symbol in turn, Maria asks, “Take coat off?” She pauses and waits for Bethany’s response. “Put vest on?”

Bethany smiles and looks at Maria.
"Put vest on. Okay! You need to put his vest back on. The girls are the leaders this morning." Maria re-adjusts and buckles each of the girls' vests and straps.

Then, standing back from her students, she explains and demonstrates, "Okay! Let's pass the coats in a circle to the left. Mark gets Patty's coat. Bethany gets Mark's coat. Sarah gets Bethany's coat. Patty gets Sarah's coat. We'll let Mark and Bethany go first because people are waiting for them."

[Pay attention to the prompts Maria provides her students in the final steps of the routine.]

Maria wheels Bethany and Mark to the student cubbyholes at the back of the class. Meagan follows with Patty and Sarah. Each student's first name is displayed in large, bold letters above their respective cubbyhole. One-by-one, Maria asks each student to find the name of the person whose coat they need to hang up. She watches each child, intently, adjusting her cues and prompts accordingly. For Mark, she says the name of the student whose coat he is to hang up. For Bethany, she says nothing. For Patty, she says the name of the student, re-emphasizing the first letter.

Bethany, Mark, and Patty are successful in identifying the appropriate cubbyholes.

Maria exclaims, "You guys are so good at reading each other's names! I need to make it harder! We could do the last names. Is that a good idea? You could learn each other's last names!"

Squeals of laughter and a loud "No" are heard from Patty.

Bethany and Sarah grin broadly.

As the speech language pathologist who has been waiting for the activity to finish, slowly wheels Mark out the back door, he continues to vigorously shake his head.

Meagan takes Bethany to a corner of the classroom to have a chat, using her new communication book.

Maria asks another volunteer, Mae, who has come to the class once each week for a number of years, to help Patty choose the kind of library book she would like to borrow in preparation for the upcoming library period.
Afterwards, Mae and Patty will have time to talk about Patty’s brother, as Maria had promised.

Maria works with Sarah to identify Bethany’s cubbyhole so that she can hang up her coat. Distracted by the different activity in the class, Sarah has difficulty focussing on her task. Maria prompts Sarah and patiently waits for her to choose a cubby.

Finally, Sarah focusses and proudly chooses a cubbyhole, by looking at it. It’s Bethany’s cubbyhole.

Maria confirms Sarah’s choice by having her look at either the yes or no symbol on the mini communication strip attached to her laptray.

“Good job, Sarah!”

Maria overhears the nearby interaction between Mae and Patty. She looks up, reminding Mae that Patty has a page in her communication book which is dedicated to talking about her brother.

The coats are hung up.

In preparation for the library period, Maria wheels Sarah to the classroom table to choose the kind of library book she would like to borrow.

It’s 9:05 a.m.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The essence of what it means to be human is not to be found in the individual human being but in the personal relation which exists between two human beings (Martin Buber as cited in Geering, 1983, p. 15).

This thesis is an interpretive case inquiry that aims to understand the teaching practices of one teacher who teaches students who have multiple disabilities. It is an inquiry that seeks to recognize, understand, and learn from the multi-faceted dimensions that underlie an experienced teacher’s practice with students who have complex multiple disabilities and learning needs. In this inquiry, I worked as a participant-observer with Maria over five months as she taught six primary-aged students who have multiple disabilities, are non-speaking, and use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) to express themselves. My interpretations and understandings of Maria’s teaching practices are filtered through my experience as a special educator and a consultant in the field of AAC and developed in consideration of the research literature on teacher knowledge, beliefs, and practices. I convey my understanding of Maria’s teaching by sharing anecdotal details of the teaching events which I witnessed, and Maria’s own explanations of her practice. In sharing my understanding of Maria’s teaching practice, I confirm the interdependent and interactive nature among teachers’ knowledge, beliefs, and teaching practices. Further, I highlight the role of the unanticipated and seldom-researched affective dimension of teaching. I propose several implications arising from this inquiry. These implications serve to broaden our understanding of the construct of exemplary teaching and to inform the teaching practices which are necessary to meeting the diversity of learning needs in today’s special education and inclusive classrooms.

I chose the vignette which prefaces this thesis because each day during my five months in Maria’s classroom began with a similar scenario, and because, out of all of activities and interactions I observed, the undressing routine remains one of the most significant. In most public classrooms, the removal of outside
apparel in preparation for the school day is a routine task. But in Maria's class it's a different matter. This "routine" task becomes an event. Even more striking is the length of time it takes: on April 16th, twenty-five minutes! And, if the students are wearing hats and mitts, the activity takes even longer. In the early days of my research, as I observed from behind the lens of the videocamera, I wondered about this activity: Why does Maria spend so much time doing this? Why not just take off their outdoor wear, hang up their coats, and get on with the day? Maria is an experienced, knowledgeable, and well-respected teacher. She must have reasons. What are her reasons and, further, what is the basis for those reasons? Why has this seemingly mundane task become such an important event in Maria's classroom?

In this chapter I begin to answer these questions by analyzing the undressing routine. I realize that this initial analysis is somewhat unconventional in a thesis. However, my reason for beginning the analysis so soon is to provide a preview of what underlies Maria's teaching practice. But first, you may be already wondering: Why this study? Why Maria? Thus, before my analysis of the undressing routine, I explain the context for this study, the reasons for my inquiry, the reasons for selecting Maria, and my particular research questions.

**Context for the Inquiry**

Sandelowski (1993) reminds us that

Researchers never enter any project tabula rasa but, rather, with the general perspectives of their discipline, with their own research interests and biographies; and with certain philosophical, theoretical, substantive, and methodological orientations (p. 215).

In this research I interpret and develop meaning about teaching students who have multiple disabilities and use AAC by observing and participating in one teacher's practice. Therefore, it is important to understand something of my perspective and the political context in which this study takes place.
The Researcher

I am a special educator. For 20 years I have worked with students for whom learning is a challenging enterprise. For the past nine years, I have worked at an Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) service which is part of a provincial children’s rehabilitation centre. AAC refers to the “supplementation or replacement of natural speech and/or writing” (Lloyd, Fuller, & Arvidson, 1997). The goal of my AAC service is to provide specialized AAC services to children and their families and schools that cannot be accessed within their local community.

I work not as a teacher, per se, but as a ‘fly-in’ deliverer of ‘expertise’. I am a consultant. I consult with families, educators, and community professionals concerning the communication needs of children who have physical and/or neurological disabilities. Many of these children are like Maria’s students. They have multiple disabilities with consequent physical, sensory, cognitive, communication, and/or social and emotional needs. They are very often dependent on others for mobility and activities of daily living, such as eating, dressing, toileting, and bathing. Further, the children to whom I provide consultation are unable to speak with their voices or use their hands to manipulate tools for writing and learning. They rely on using AAC. AAC systems may be unaided such as manual signs and gestures or they may be aided involving external aids beyond the user’s own body such as communication boards, voice output communication aids (VOCAs), and computers. These children are dependent on other people for many daily essential activities of daily living, including communicating and learning.

Because of the multiple needs of these children, my consulting is conducted within a team approach. At the communication service, I work in conjunction with an occupational therapist, speech language pathologists, and technologists, in meeting the communication needs of the children on my caseload. Together with the child’s caregiver(s), school personnel and community professionals, we determine how children who are unable to use
their voices and hands can communicate in conversation and in writing and actively participate in interactions with people and their environments.

Much of my knowledge and skill in AAC has been gained on-the-job. My introduction to the field of AAC nine years ago was a gradual one. I have vivid and fond memories of my initiation into the field. I was mentored by a highly skilled, experienced clinician who was (and continues to be) passionate about her profession, the field of AAC and in particular, the children. My working environment was one of warm, supportive collegiality: a fertile ground for learning. While we worked in small teams serving particular geographic areas, as a large department we developed a vision, a mission statement based on our collective beliefs. Thus, through my daily work and in interactions with colleagues, children and families, I have gained much knowledge and skill in AAC: assessment and communication strategies, materials, and devices; adaptive technology; consulting; and the characteristics of the clients and their needs.

Now, I am considered to be an ‘expert’ in AAC. I am responsible for providing AAC services to a designated region of the province. Parents, teachers and speech language pathologists in my designated region call me to have a child assessed. I join school teams to provide my ‘expert’ advice. I know about communicating in other ways besides one’s voice. I know about using pictures and words and how to organize them on various displays in order that individuals can use them to communicate. I know about the range of computer and voice output technology and the enabling role it can play in an AAC user’s life. I know about how to set up the home or classroom environment so that these individuals have opportunities to actively participate. I have attended, developed, and conducted countless workshops on a range of topics related to AAC. I have kept up with my professional reading in the area of AAC and teaching and learning. Thus, in my nine years in the field of AAC, I have learned a lot of “stuff” – the stuff of AAC. Yet, when I say I know about all these things, there is “something”, some rather significant thing, which seems to be missing. I will return to this point shortly. But, for now I will describe the broader context:
the provincial education and health policy context in which this study takes place.

**Policy Context**

This research study takes place during a time of unprecedented change in both the education and health sectors of the Province of Ontario. The current government was elected in 1995 promising lowered taxes, greater public accountability, and a commitment to balanced budgets. In the education sector, standards-based reforms have been implemented, including a standard format report card, centrally prescribed curriculum, and province-wide standards-based testing.

With regard to special education, a series of reforms to the delivery of special education in the province were introduced under the Ontario Education Amendment Act of 1980, popularly known as Bill 82. Among the reforms which have been implemented are a revision of the procedures for providing special education programs and services, a categorically-based funding structure for students with special educational needs, and a standard format Individual Education Plan (I.E.P). Further, Regulation 181/98 affirms the previous government’s position that integration into the regular classroom is the preferred placement of students with disabilities, provided this placement is requested by parents and that it meets the student’s needs. Thus, more and more students who experience learning difficulties including those who use AAC, are being educated in regular classrooms in their neighbourhood schools.

Similar reforms have taken place in the health care sector with facilities being down sized and amalgamated. On January 1, 1996 the rehabilitation centre at which I work merged with another centre to become a single organization. As in education, there has been an increased focus on accountability to the public, based on measured outcomes. In my organization, a role study was conducted to identify who the “new” organization should serve, what services should be provided, and how these services should be delivered. Following extensive consultation with consumers, staff, and community stakeholders the centre’s role
and recommendations were outlined in a final report (Bloorview MacMillan Centre, 1997). The study recommended "continued development as a specialized centre of expertise in children's rehabilitation and habilitation, and a greater role in working with communities to develop appropriate resources for children with special needs and their families" (p. i). In keeping with the recommendations of the role study, our service would continue to develop as a specialized resource, providing consultation, education and direct service to clients across the province. We would also "take an active role in assisting local communities to develop services for clients closer to their own homes, and to increase awareness of disability issues" (p. ii).

The Problem

While much of the impetus for change in the education and health sectors has been fiscal restraint, the magnitude of the change process itself has been dramatic and the impact appears to have been largely unforeseen. Recent years have seen wide spread school closures and program cancellations. As programs and services in the education sector have been down-sized or eliminated altogether, and with the newly required documentation for funding equipment, our AAC service has received a dramatic increase in the number of requests to provide AAC service. A recent proposal for funding to meet this need bears witness to the increased service demands (Bloorview MacMillan Children's Centre, 2001). Our service "has played an increasingly important role ....given that School Board and Community Care Access Centre therapists are often not able to provide the specialized services required by many clients in the community"(p. 4). Since 1998, our service has experienced a 30% increase in new AAC referrals and the waiting list for AAC services has doubled to six months. Further, the service requests for clients with Pervasive Development Disorders /Autism has grown from 3 clients in 1996 to 197 in 2001. The client caseload growth in the region of the province I serve has been 273% since 1997.

Having described the changes within the broader context in which I work, I return to my role within this policy context. A significant portion of my time is
spent consulting with the team of adults with whom I work. At any given time, I have approximately seventy clients on my caseload with many more waiting for service. I have managed a file cabinet drawer full of client ‘data’ – thick, well-worn file folders identified by names and chart numbers. Many clients have several folders banded together, each identified by different coloured ink and handwriting, a testament to their complexity and the length of time in the system, the time they have been followed by our service. I have been one of several consultants gathered around a table at team conferences, listening to the details of a child’s life and their needs, synthesizing the information, and providing my opinion and advice on what may or may not work with that child.

I have always believed that I have had limited opportunity to observe the child in the classroom or their home, even less to spend time with them myself. As I continue to reflect, I believe I have spent more hours in my car travelling to schools and homes than in the company of the school personnel, the parents, or even the children I am serving. Indeed, in an attempt to meet the increased demand for service, I have decreased the number of visits for intervention. This solution has proved to be unsatisfactory as my clients often cannot secure appropriate local resources to support them (Bloorview MacMillan Children’s Centre, 2001).

The needs of students who use AAC are multiple and complex. Further, their needs are continuous; that is, they persist and they require continuous support. Meeting their needs is very resource intensive.

A child’s ability to participate in school in an effective and meaningful way is severely affected without communication....Clients often require blocks of intervention throughout their child and teen years and into adulthood.

(Bloorview MacMillan Children’s Centre, 2001, p. 5)

The multiple and complex needs of these students demands a continuous, intensive, collaborative multi-disciplinary team approach.

While some students who use AAC continue to be educated in self-contained classrooms and special schools, increasingly, they are being educated alongside their peers in regular classrooms in their neighbourhood school. Many
of these students already come to the classroom with their special needs determined, usually by a team of health professionals. However, most teachers are unprepared to support students who use AAC in the regular classroom (McGhie-Richmond & McGinnis, 1996; McGregor & Pachuski, 1996). It is estimated that a large proportion of school-aged individuals who use AAC experience serious deficits in their literacy development (Koppenhaver and Yoder, 1992a, b; 1993). Students with severe disabilities and communication impairments also frequently experience difficulties in actively participating in academic and social activities in the classroom (Beukelman & Mirenda, 1998). A survey of teachers who were responsible for teaching literacy within eight Ontario school boards supports these research findings. The results indicated that children who use AAC systems have restricted opportunities and access to academic activities in the classroom (McGhie-Richmond & McGinnis, 1996). Further, if they are involved they tend to be passive rather than active. These research results confirm my clinical experience. Many teachers are unprepared to support students who use AAC in their classrooms. Moreover, with inclusive education practices, there is often a need to support new classroom teams from year to year. The implications have been increased numbers of clients on consultant case loads, waiting lists for service, and pressure to continue to provide an effective level of service to increasing numbers of clients.

With the trend toward inclusive educational practices, the research literature has focussed on the effectiveness of a student's placement (Carlberg & Kavale, 1980; Epps & Tindal, 1987; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994). There has been a lack of research on the particular instructional characteristics which support effective inclusive education. This has lead some researchers to speculate that effective integration is similar to effective instructional practices, in general (Bickel & Bickel, 1980, Brophy & Good, 1986, Englert, Tarrant & Mariage, 1992, Larrivee, 1982, 1985, 1986).

Recent large scale, longitudinal research investigating the instructional characteristics of integrated education is shedding light on the role of teacher beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, and teacher efficacy on teaching behaviours and
student outcomes in inclusive classrooms (Jordan, Lindsay & Stanovich, 1997; Jordan & Stanovich, 1996, 1998; Stanovich, 1994; Stanovich & Jordan, 1998). This research program asks: What characteristics of individual teachers’ beliefs and practices might contribute to more or less effective instruction in inclusive settings?

Research indicates that the multi-faceted beliefs that teachers hold about teaching, the subject, and their students influence their teaching practices (Pajares, 1992; Jordan, Lindsay & Stanovich, 1997). It has also been demonstrated that teaching behaviours are influenced by the internal skills and abilities a teacher feels s/he possesses (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; DeForest & Hughes, 1992; Jordan, Kircaali-Iftar & Diamond, 1993; Stanovich, 1994). In addition to beliefs, teachers’ knowledge influences their practices. Shulman (1986, 1987) presents several types of knowledge required for effective teaching. Researchers have extended the types of knowledge further to include teachers’ personal, practical knowledge as a dimension of knowledge contributing to a teacher’s practice (Elbaz, 1983; Connelly and Clandinin, 1988). Finally, a teacher’s epistemological stance or understanding of the way in which knowledge is acquired also contributes to their teaching practices (Englert, Tarrant, & Mariage, 1992; Englert & Mariage, 1996; Fenstermacher, 1994; Hillocks, 1999).

I was introduced to this body of research in my graduate education coursework and I began to consider its implications for teaching students who use AAC and for providing consulting support in the midst of drastic change in education and health services. I haven’t taught students who use AAC. While I do have some opportunity to observe in the classrooms in which I consult, I do not have firsthand knowledge about teaching students who use AAC. Further, I have had limited opportunity to really get to know the characteristics of each of the students I am serving and the teachers to whom I am providing recommendations for practice.

My knowledge is somehow ‘generalized’ knowledge. I have a store of this generalized knowledge about students who use AAC and teaching from which to provide recommendations to teachers. In my observations, I see the physical
things -- the curriculum, the materials, the strategies used by teachers. But, what I do not know is the thinking behind their practice, the reasons for their actions, the decisions they make and what they believe about teaching and their students. Somehow I am never able to be certain that what I recommend will be effective for this particular child, this particular teacher, this particular parent in this particular context, at this particular time. It is these significant, contextual particulars that seem critically absent in my deliberations and recommendations.

I admit to being ignorant of a teacher’s beliefs before I make recommendations. I hadn’t even considered the importance of beliefs to teachers’ teaching practice. I began to wonder: How can I, as a consultant, ask teachers to implement strategies without knowing about their particular knowledge and beliefs and how they might influence their practices, including the strategies I have recommended? Do the recommendations I make to teachers make sense in light of their existing knowledge, beliefs, and teaching practices? How do I know if what I am recommending to a teacher is going to work for that particular teacher? Ultimately, then, how might the teaching context of each client conspire to augment or negate my recommendations?

I believe that it is the particular, especially given the characteristics and needs of students who use AAC, that is becoming increasingly absent with the administrative push to ‘service’ the growing number of clients waiting to be seen. My knowledge is broad, but shallow for the particular. My knowledge is being shared broadly, but shallowly. And yet, I believe it is essential to understand the particular in order to address the needs of these students. Eisner’s (1998) comments ring true for me,

So much of what is suggested to teachers and school administrators is said independent of context and often by those ignorant of the practices they wish to improve. If qualitative inquiry in education is about anything, it is about trying to understand what teachers and children do in settings in which they work. To achieve this aim ... it is necessary to ‘get in touch’ with schools and classrooms we care about, to see them, and to use what we see as sources for interpretation and appraisal (p. 11)
The more I read about teacher knowledge and beliefs and their influence on teaching practices, the more I wondered about the various knowledge a teacher needs in order to teach students who use AAC. What specific knowledge, beliefs and practices are effective, indeed requisite, to teaching students who use AAC? What might we learn about teachers who are considered to be effective in teaching students who use AAC? Indeed, what makes them effective? How might this knowledge be useful to other teachers and consultants?

The problem this study deals with concerns the lack of research which carefully documents effective teaching practices related to teaching students who use AAC. I am not just referring to accounts of the specific materials, tools, and strategies a teacher might use, but detailed accounts that include their reasons for doing what they do; the particular teacher characteristics that lead to particular teaching practices with students who use AAC. Thus, for the reasons I have argued above, I believe there is a need for in-depth accounts of teaching practice and teacher characteristics in the context of teaching students who use AAC.

In order to gain insight into the relationship among teacher knowledge, beliefs and practices, I believed I needed to spend prolonged time with a teacher in her classroom, getting to know the details of and the reasons that underlie her teaching practice with these students. I also believed that I might learn more about this relationship by studying the teaching practices of an experienced teacher of students who use AAC. I approached Maria, a teacher who I know on a professional basis and who is regarded by her teacher colleagues and my fellow consultants to be an effective, indeed “exemplary”, teacher of students who use AAC. Maria has significant experience in AAC, in teaching, and in teaching students who use AAC. I will provide a more complete description of Maria in Chapter 3.

I was interested in understanding the particulars of Maria’s teaching practice; not only the moves she made with her students, but the thinking and beliefs that guide her moves. I wanted to stay awhile in Maria’s classroom, observing her teaching practice. As Greene (1986) states, I wanted to “hold a lens
close to the actualities of practice” (p. 80). Further, I wanted to engage Maria in conversation about her teaching practices.

Research Questions

My research question can be broadly stated as follows: What does Maria know and believe that leads her to teach her students as she does?

Specifically, I am interested in answering the following questions:

- What knowledge does Maria have that is essential to her teaching?
- What beliefs does Maria hold about teaching?
- What principles guide Maria’s practice?
- How does Maria organize her practice to fulfill her beliefs?
- How did Maria acquire her knowledge and beliefs?

Understanding the Undressing Routine

I began this thesis research with an additional expectation of learning about the particular teaching approaches, strategies, and materials that Maria uses with her students. As I now reflect, perhaps my initial thinking and purpose was because of the way I conduct my own consulting practice – always searching for new ideas, materials and strategies that I can share and implement with my clients; not unlike most practitioners, I suspect. I admit I was interested in learning more about the “stuff” of teaching these students, the tangibles. Many of these tangibles, the strategies and materials for teaching students who use AAC, are outlined in now readily available “how-to” texts. But, I believed that by observing Maria’s teaching practices I might learn something new, something I had yet to discover in my nine years as a consultant in AAC. After all, I had referred a number of inquiring teachers and consultants to Maria for advice about teaching students who use AAC. Thus, during the initial few weeks in Maria’s classroom, I eagerly focussed my attention on capturing the stuff. I documented the learning environment Maria creates for her students: from the materials and strategies she uses to her every move.

Indeed, I gathered a lot of stuff during my time in Maria’s classroom. I could showcase the materials and strategies Maria uses with her students by
highlighting them, bringing them to the foreground in this thesis. However, I believe that telling a story in this way would be a mere, flat rendering of what I witnessed and experienced in Maria’s classroom – a description of the context, the resources, the techniques and strategies. Like so many “how-to” texts, the story would be devoid of underlying meaning.

More than learning about the stuff of teaching students who use AAC, I intended to uncover Maria’s reasons for doing so. In seeking her reasons for her teaching practices, I discovered meaning that resides at the very heart of her teaching and have come to understand its central nature in defining her teaching practice.

The longer I stayed in Maria’s classroom, watching, attending to her actions, participating in and, further, exploring her reasons for her moves, the sharper my vision and the deeper my understanding of her teaching became. Both the surface details, “the stuff” was more readily apparent. But, the underlying motives of Maria’s practice began to emerge. It was in the luxury of staying awhile that I was able to recognize and understand the significance of those details and develop meaning from them based on Maria’s reasons. I began to understand the intricate connections among Maria’s knowledge, beliefs, and practices with her students. As promised at the beginning of this chapter, I will now provide a preview of these connections by analyzing the undressing routine that prefaces this thesis.

I return to my earlier question related to the undressing routine: Why has this seemingly mundane task become such an important event in Maria’s classroom? Knowing Maria’s reasons for this activity provided me with a broader and deeper context for understanding what I observed in her classroom each morning.

In one of our many conversations, Maria articulated her reasons for the activity:

They need to be able to direct people. They come in the door, we pull their coats off. And granted you can do something else. I could have done something else with that time. I could have worked on the Ministry curriculum, but by gosh, for someone who’s using
AAC, if they can't learn to direct a caregiver when are they ... when will they ever get that skill?! And it's never too late to work on that and that's something parents can understand. So that's a way to get the communication into the home environment.... It's looking for ways to get them to be assertive and take control and to take command (interview, April 26).

Maria's rationale for turning this routine task into a teaching event in her classroom extends far beyond a provincially prescribed curriculum. A closer examination reveals that at the foundation of her rationale and the moves I witnessed lies her multi-faceted and interrelated knowledge and beliefs, that combine to inform, shape, and define her teaching. What follows is a brief analysis of each of these dimension of Maria's teaching practice.

**Knowledge**

To understand the nature of Maria's knowledge, I have adopted the categories and types of knowledge proposed by Shulman (1986, 1987). Shulman proposes seven categories of knowledge that teachers hold: (a) content or subject matter knowledge, (b) general pedagogical knowledge, (c) curriculum knowledge, (d) pedagogical-content knowledge, (e) knowledge of learners characteristics and needs, (f) knowledge of educational contexts, and (g) knowledge of educational ends, purposes and values.

In addition to the specific categories of knowledge, Shulman (1986a) describes three *forms* of knowledge: propositional, case, and strategic.

"[Teaching] practice requires at least three different forms of knowledge: These are knowledge of rules or principles, knowledge of particular cases, and knowledge of ways to apply appropriate rules to properly discerned cases" (p. 31).

Fenstermacher (1994) further explains, "Strategic knowledge appears to be the skilled adjudication of conflicts between the rules or principles (developed out of propositional knowledge) and the specific instances encountered in practice (cases or case knowledge)" (p. 16).

Maria's teaching practices attest to the interactive, interrelated and interdependent nature of these categories of knowledge in informing a teacher's
practice. The undressing vignette illustrates the dynamic relationship among several of these categories of teacher knowledge. They include Maria’s (a) knowledge of each of her students, (b) general pedagogical knowledge, (c) knowledge of content or subject such as language, communication, and literacy; (d) pedagogical content knowledge; and (e) knowledge of educational ends, purposes, and values to support learning in her students.

Maria has chosen a functional, daily, meaningful activity that provides the students with an opportunity to interact one-on-one with different people, learning to direct their own care. Several of her students’ goals are being targetted through this activity. They are learning, using, and consolidating their communication, literacy, and physical abilities. What’s more, whether they realize it or not, they are also learning to advocate for themselves and become more independent.

As Maria explained,

The goal is for every kid, you know, no matter what they’re communicating with, are they communicating with more than one partner effectively so that the message is getting through? And then a way to extend it is to bring the literacy in and the interaction. You know, when we’re doing things we’re doing more than one thing at a time. There’s more than one goal very often at play there and I think that’s the art of it is when you can see a way to weave in more than one goal into this sort of thing. So when four of them show up at the door and you’ve got one helper, okay, so then you think, alright, how am I gonna speed this up? So this is the kind of problem solving I have to do all the time. So I thought, okay, well when there were two, let’s get them to interact and help each other. When there are four, well then let’s have them all participate and take a turn. But we need the speed, so let’s do it for all of them and then let’s have them all swap coats so they’re all reading a different name every morning and it does take a long time, but it’s important (interview, March 31).

Maria knows her students. For example, she knew when to wait and when to prompt Sarah, who has difficulty focussing and, on this particular day, can handle only two symbols on a Velcro strip. She knew that Bethany and Patty need practice in using their individually designed communication books. Rather than using the Velcro strip with symbols, Maria had them use their books to
complete the task even though the communication took longer. From providing physical prompts and supports to her expectations for each, Maria knows how to support her students in using their communication books. For example, she adjusted Patty’s book to ease the child’s pointing to the symbols. She placed Bethany’s head in an upright position in her headrest to enable Bethany to see the symbols in her book and communicate the next step in the activity. Rather than turning to the undressing routine page, Maria expected her students to use their indexes to direct her to the appropriate pages in their books. She affirmed Bethany’s choice of symbol by repeating it (i.e., ‘Take off my vest.’) and then asked her for confirmation (i.e., ‘Is that right?’).

Maria draws on her general teaching knowledge. She knows that praise, encouragement, and prompts motivate her students and support their developing confidence and sense of self-efficacy: ”And everyone did it well!”; ‘I think you girls can!’ ‘That’s right!’; ‘Come on, Meagan’s waiting for you!’; softly tapping Bethany’s left arm; pulling Sarah’s wheelchair closer. She provided visual and verbal cues to support her students’ attention and learning to communicate. For example, she tapped the picture symbol while she said the name of it (“unzip, unzip, unzip”).

Maria knows that open-ended questions support her students’ communication and learning. They also support Maria’s understanding of her students. Maria asked open-ended questions: ‘What do we need to do?’; ‘What’s the next step?’ ‘Now what shall I do?’; ‘What happens next?’. Maria knows that open-ended questions will take longer, but they require her students to think through the steps of the activity, rather than simply responding, ‘yes’ or ‘no’. Open-ended questions actively engage her students in the thinking process of taking off their coats. They also give her students an opportunity to learn to use their communication to direct others in their own care. Maria also knows when to involve the students in the physical act of taking their arms out of their sleeves, thereby supporting the development of their physical abilities: ‘I’ll just hold your sleeve and you can pull your arm out. ‘Where’s your right arm?’
Maria holds a variety of content or subject knowledge, which combine to allow her to integrate, support and reinforce each student's communication and literacy skills. She has knowledge of the specific content of the curriculum, in this case literacy. She has knowledge of language development and of AAC. Further, she knows how to teach skills within these content areas to each of her students. In the undressing routine, she provided each student with appropriate symbols, the "visual words" they used to direct the activity: 'Unzip', 'Left arm', 'Hang up my coat'. Maria integrated literacy concepts and skills into the task. For example, she asked her students to hang up each other's coats by identifying the correct name on the cubbyhole, providing prompts or scaffolds which were appropriate to each student's capability. Bethany was to find the cubbyhole without a verbal prompt. Hearing the name of the student assisted Mark. Patty had the benefit of hearing the student's name with an emphasis on the first letter sound. Maria has knowledge of her individual students, a critical point which I will return to later in this thesis.

Maria is aware of the educational context, the classroom context: the time the activity takes and she adapted accordingly by having the student's remove each other's coats. She explained to the students: 'It will speed it up.' She chose Bethany to begin the process because she knew that Bethany is fairly adept at using her communication book. Maria directed the volunteers to work with each student, freeing herself to provide Sarah with the additional support she required to be successful in identifying Bethany's cubbyhole.

Maria is committed to moving her students towards independence and assertion, speaking for themselves, advocating on their own behalf: 'They need to be able to direct people.' Maria allowed her students to direct the activity, to have control over classroom events. She knew how to get their coats off. She knew the symbol that was the 'correct' choice. But she relinquished her control to her students, thereby supporting their independence and assertion. Maria's goals for her students are not just for today, in this undressing routine, but for tomorrow in their ultimate, yet-to-be-realized independence, which also speaks to her beliefs.
Beliefs

Maria’s beliefs are multi-faceted. She holds beliefs about her students, her role as their teacher, and the nature of teaching and learning processes. These beliefs are reflected in the undressing routine. Her beliefs about her students become particularly apparent in her rationale for the activity: ‘It’s looking for ways to get them to be assertive and take control and to take command.’ Maria believes in the developing capabilities of each her students. She is optimistic about her students’ potential (Hillocks, 1999). Her optimism plays out in the activities in which she engages her students: “You guys are so good at reading each other’s names!” Maria’s believes her students can learn to communicate and read. Maria has hope for her students: ‘It’s never too late to work on that.’ Maria’s beliefs about her students reveal her broader belief in human potential: the potential that resides within humans regardless of myriad barriers which exist or may develop.

Maria believes that teaching is a cooperative venture among her colleagues. As far as possible, the students’ various goals (i.e., physical, communication, literacy, etc.) which have been established by members of the classroom team, are integrated into classroom activities. For example, in addition to directing the removal of their outdoor clothing, the students physically assist as far as possible. In the task of hanging up their coats, they worked on literacy goals by reading each other’s names. Maria believes that parents, too, are a necessary and critical link to the achievement of their child’s goals: “That’s something parents can understand. So that’s a way to get the communication into the home environment.” The undressing routine, the integration of various goals into the routine and asking open-ended questions reflect Maria’s beliefs about teaching and learning. She believes that teaching supports learning when it is couched within functional, meaningful activities and when learners are actively engaged in constructing their knowledge. She also believes that for her students, communication and literacy are key to realizing their independence.

Maria’s beliefs about her role in her students’ learning are also inherent in what I witnessed during the undressing routine. She believes in her
responsibility and capability as their teacher. Maria’s actions are dictated first and foremost by the needs of her students rather than a prescribed curriculum, or the constraints of the school day: the time and schedule. Her focus is on supporting her students. Their challenges are her challenges. But Maria’s attitude toward the challenge is not negative. It is not a responsibility imposed from outside her beliefs. Rather, she views her challenge positively. It comes from within Maria. In seeking ways of teaching her students, she is growing as a teacher, as a human being. As she reflected during one of our last interviews,

> When I stop feeling motivated to learn new things, then that’s the time I should leave. That’s the time....I must say I do enjoy all of the vastness of this job where you’re having to be creative and you’re collaborating with colleagues and coming up with new things. So, I still enjoy it” (interview, June 14).

Indeed, Maria ‘feels very privileged’ to teach students who use AAC. (interview, June 14).

In the foregoing analysis of Maria’s instructional practice during the undressing routine, I have provided a glimpse of what underlies Maria’s teaching practice. My more in-depth analysis in the chapters which follow will further reveal that the categories of knowledge Maria brings to her teaching are not static. Neither do they exist as distinct entities. Rather, they are interactive, interrelated and interdependent in informing her teaching practice. They are what Maria has in her mind as she plans and executes her teaching practice (Hillocks, 1999). Additional analysis will also confirm that Maria’s multi-faceted beliefs play a significant role in defining her teaching practice. Moreover, her beliefs influence the very nature of her knowledge. But, there was much more to Maria’s teaching practice.

**An Emerging Dimension**

Aside from Maria’s knowledge and aside from her beliefs, there was another dimension of her teaching practice which I had not anticipated at the outset of this research study. This dimension emerged slowly. Ever so gradually it appeared in my line of vision until it became quite conspicuous in Maria’s
teaching practice. I found myself compelled to define this dimension and investigate its role in Maria’s teaching practice. I read deeper in the literature, trying to understand this particular dimension of teaching, a dimension which perhaps is taken for granted in today’s focus on the technique, the “stuff” of teaching.

As the title of this thesis indicates, there was an affective dimension of Maria’s teaching practice which I began to notice in her every action and interaction. Jackson, Boostrom, and Hansen (1993) speak of a ‘moral expression’ of events and actions. The moral expression to which they refer defines the affective dimension of Maria’s practice that I believe comes closer to capturing her practice than the tangible stuff of her practice. I call this affective dimension of Maria’s practice, ‘caring’.

I discovered that caring is the very heart of Maria’s teaching practice. It is fundamental to what she chooses to do as a professional and how she conducts her teaching practice each day, each moment in the classroom. Caring is the essence of Maria’s teaching practice. Moreover, as I will reveal in the coming chapters, caring shapes Maria’s knowledge, beliefs and teaching practices in fundamental and significant ways. Indeed, this affective, caring dimension is wholly pivotal in defining Maria’s teaching practice and that is what this thesis is about.

**Putting It All Together**

“The expressive meaning of what we can see and experience resides in the surface of a thing, rather than on it” (Jackson, et al, 1993, p. 35). It is this expressive meaning in what I witnessed and experienced that I intend to convey to the reader: from the layout of Maria’s classroom to the curriculum to the particular activities and events to the minute particulars of her interactions with her students. All of these elements have an underlying expressive quality that, when taken together, define an affective dimension, the heart of Maria’s teaching that is caring.
In the chapters that follow, I will tell stories of events and interactions I witnessed in Maria's classroom. I have chosen experiences and events which stood out as being particularly significant to me and thus, illustrate my understanding. I will draw on the writings of many authors throughout my analysis of Maria's practice in order to support my interpretations and convey my understanding.

The intent in writing this thesis, therefore, is to reveal each of the components which I came to understand make up the complex nature of Maria's teaching practice: her knowledge, her beliefs, and her caring and how they interact to inform and shape her teaching practice. I wasn't prepared for this affective, caring dimension of Maria's teaching practice. In fact, it 'wowed' me and took over my thoughts and observations. It stands out for me. I have come to realize that it is easy to overlook and dismiss this caring aspect in teaching and in consulting practices. Therefore, my aim is, as Fox (1995) puts it, "to readjust slightly the direction of our questioning away from the over-researched brain towards the unattended heart" (p. 15). My experiences in Maria's classroom over the long term, compelled me to turn an evaluative eye on my own understandings and beliefs about teaching and supporting students who use AAC. In focussing on the affective dimension of what I witnessed and experienced, it is my hope that this thesis "will come closer to capturing the humanly significant attributes of classroom life than. ... the bare facts alone" (Jackson, et al, 1993, p. 255).

Summary

This study is an inquiry into the relationship among a teacher's knowledge, beliefs, and practices. I examine the way one experienced teacher of students who have multiple disabilities and use augmentative and alternative communication systems (AAC), creates, modifies, and interprets her work with her students. My interpretations of her practice are framed within the research literature on teacher knowledge and beliefs and the affective dimension of teaching. This study is about discovering the universal in the particular. While
my attention and analysis are focussed on the particular, a particular teacher with particular students in a particular context, I argue that the essence of Maria’s teaching practice is caring and that this essence, this caring is fundamental to exemplary teaching.
Chapter 2: Research Paradigm

Thus far, I have provided a context for understanding the reasons for this inquiry. This inquiry became a time for me to pause in my career to develop new understandings about teaching and learning and to reflect on how this understanding might influence my consulting practice.

My aim in this chapter is to situate my particular study within the field of educational research. First, I will explain the research paradigm in which I set about answering my questions. Later in the chapter, I explain the decisions I made in telling the story, that is, in writing this thesis.

Qualitative Inquiry

To depend upon generalized formulas and quantitative measures, to limit our concern to student success and failure in the assimilation of curriculum materials and the mastery of skills, is (more often than not) to distance the particularities of classroom life. It is to act as if the classroom were indeed an “object-in-general”, not an unstable, unpredictable human situation identical to no other in the world (Greene, 1986, p. 80).

A Case

This research is a qualitative study of a particular ‘case’. My aim is to provide an interpretive account of a complex and dynamic state of affairs: teaching students who have physical disabilities and use AAC. I develop an understanding of the teaching practices with students who use AAC by focussing on one teacher, Maria, as an exemplar of this practice. Thus, this study is an interpretive inquiry into one teacher’s teaching practice with students who use AAC. I explore the organic character of Maria’s teaching. While I acknowledge that Maria works collaboratively with a host of people who are essential to her practice, my focus is on understanding Maria, the teacher, in the classroom.

This thesis is a study of “teaching as it unfolds in the classroom” (Eisner, 1998, p. 115). I move in close to Maria’s teaching, in order to experience her teaching. By moving in close, I capture and develop an understanding of the
details, the particularities of her classroom life and teaching practice, and develop meaning from what lies beneath what I witnessed in her classroom: her knowledge, beliefs, and caring, and their connections to her teaching practice. Thus, I come to know and understand the essence of Maria’s practice, by settling in to her classroom, by staying awhile, by watching, listening and, at times, participating, and by engaging her in discussion related to her teaching practice.

Bolgar (1965) states, “Most investigators believe that the power of this method [case study] lies in its ability to open the way for discoveries” (p. 35). When I proposed to undertake this research, one of my intentions was to determine the stuff of Maria’s practice: the teaching materials and strategies she used with her students. Therefore, part of my focus was pragmatic. As I stated in Chapter 1, I anticipated obtaining ideas that I could then share with others through my consulting. Indeed, for the first few weeks, I fought to remain objective, to forget my knowledge about students who use AAC and teaching. I wrote numerous questions in my field notes concerning what I observed: Why do you use the picture symbols with the students? Why do you point to the words as you’re reading them? What curriculum do you use with the students? What is the purpose of jobs or helpers in the class? Why don’t you use communication books with all of the students? These were some of the questions I asked and as I explain later in the methodology chapter, these questions along with many others were subsequently categorized and formed the basis for my interviews with Maria.

Jackson, et al (1993) states, “How morally complicated teaching becomes when your gaze is brought down to within inches of its warp and woof” (p. 128). As I stayed longer in Maria’s classroom, the focus and angle of my gaze began to change and I started to see and subsequently understand the various threads that are intricately interwoven to make up the fabric of Maria’s practice. The expressive, affective thread of her practice took on a greater prominence and I discovered its connection to her teaching practice. Thus, this inquiry provided me with an opportunity to develop an understanding of teaching on a different
level, not just an operational, technical, how-to level, but an affective level, as well.

The affective quality of Maria's actions represents a dimension of her practice that is readily overlooked, that is not so easy to identify, analyze, and ultimately, as is my task, to convey in text to the reader. As Eisner, (1998) states, "it is not a matter of checking behaviours, but rather of perceiving their presence and interpreting their significance" (p. 34). I believe that to experience this expressive quality requires staying awhile in classrooms and coming to see and understand and ultimately know it. As Jackson, et al (1993) argue,

...an effort to determine what a teacher expressively communicates to students in moral terms goes far beyond trying to figure out what his or her posture and facial expressions convey at any given moment. It takes in patterns of actions whose shape and contour can only be discerned through repeated visits and possibly over a long period of time (p. 36).

*Developing an Understanding*

"Qualitative researchers are interpreters who draw on their own experiences, knowledge, theoretical dispositions, and collected data to present their understanding of the other's world" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 153). My understanding of Maria's teaching practice and my portrayal of that understanding is filtered through my lens. As I discussed in Chapter 1, there were many teaching episodes to choose from in conveying my understanding of Maria's teaching practices. The episodes I chose to tell in this thesis reflect ones which stand out and hence, hold meaning for me. As Eisner (1998) states, "It is usually not the incidence of an event that gives it significance, but its quality and its relationship to the context in which it functions" (p. 178). The incidents that I present are those that I perceive to be qualitatively significant to understanding Maria's teaching. They are exemplars of Maria's teaching which reveal connections among her knowledge, beliefs, and caring. The account I present is based on an interpretation that I have constructed in consideration of my knowledge and beliefs and is framed by the research literature. Further, Maria has reviewed my account in order to validate my interpretation.
The teaching episodes that caught my attention and that I chose to examine and present as exemplars of Maria's teaching, reflect my experiences and, therefore my perspective. Eisner (1983) states, "The theoretical windows through which we peer circumscribe that portion of the landscape we shall see" (p. 7). I chose the theoretical windows of teacher knowledge, beliefs, practices, and caring to assist me in developing an understanding of Maria's teaching. My understanding and account reflect this theoretical disposition.

Jackson, et al (1993) states, "everything in classrooms has the potential of conveying expressive meaning if it is viewed from a certain angle" (p. 38). My interest in determining Maria's reasons for her practices lead me to see her teaching from a different angle; to discover an unfamiliar expressive meaning, an affective dimension of her teaching. By highlighting the affective dimension, one might argue that I am narrowing my way of looking and reflecting on her practice. However, ultimately, my growing interest and focus on the affective dimension of Maria's teaching broadened and deepened my understanding of teaching students who use AAC well beyond my original expectations. It has caused me to "think about fleeting events and commonplace objects that [I] would have ordinarily ignored" (Jackson, et al, 1993, p. 229). It has caused me to attempt to determine the nature of the role of the affective dimension of teaching in defining a teacher's practice.

Just as Maria comes to know and understand the qualities of her students by being attentive to them, I began to understand and come to know Maria's practice by staying in her classroom and being attentive to the details of her practice and allowing them to be experienced. My understanding developed from listening to, exploring and reflecting on the deeper meaning inherent in Maria's actions, in the words she spoke and her interactions with her students, from watching closely and at length, from focussing on the details, and from probing and constructing meaning with her. My understanding of the affective expression or dimension of Maria's practice came from prolonged, close observation in her classroom. It came from our many discussions and reflections. It came from searching deeper into the research literature, and re-reading and
reviewing my 'data': the field notes, interview transcripts and audio and video recordings of interviews and classroom events. It came from writing and thinking, and re-writing, and thinking some more.

As Jackson, et al (1993) state,

> We must also reflect on what we have seen and persist in turning events in our mind’s eye long after they have disappeared from sight, drawing from our memories of them and from reflecting upon those memories whatever moral significance the events may be found to contain (p. 45).

Reflection played a role for both Maria and me in developing an understanding about teaching students who use AAC (Schon, 1983,1987). For Maria, this research provided her with an opportunity to step back from her teaching and talk and think about its myriad issues with a colleague, to clarify the significance of various events and actions which serve to guide her future practice. For me, reflection played a role in thinking deeply about my consulting practices in consideration of what I witnessed and experienced in Maria’s classroom. It provided me with an opportunity to immerse myself in her teaching over an extended period of time; to compare and contrast my current understandings and beliefs which are reflected in my current practices with new, developing understandings and beliefs. Peshkin (as cited in Eisner, 1998) states,

> When I disclose what I have seen, my results invite other researchers to look where I did and see what I saw. My ideas are candidates for others to entertain, not necessarily as truth, let alone Truth, but as positions about the nature and meaning of a phenomenon that may fit their sensibility and shape their thinking about their own inquiries (p. 48)

Thus, reflection will play a role for you, the reader. As you read this thesis, you will reflect on your own experiences, in an attempt to make sense of what I have written.

**Telling the Story**

I share my discovery, my understanding of Maria’s teaching through narrative. I convey the qualities and textures of her teaching by telling detailed stories and anecdotes from my experiences in Maria’s classroom. Eisner (1998)
states, "Thick description is an effort aimed at interpretation, at getting below the surface to that most enigmatic aspect of the human condition: the construction of meaning" (p. 15). In this thesis I provide a thick or rich description of a series of stories and interpretive accounts that represent my understanding of Maria's teaching. Through rich description my aim is to convey the context of my experience and reveal the meaning in what I witnessed, my understanding of the deeper significance of Maria's teaching.

It is in the details of what we see and hear that the expressive most often surfaces concretely . . . . Moreover, it is through the depiction of details that we are most likely to convince others of the expressive significance of what we have seen or heard (Jackson, et al, 1993, p. 255).

I weave into the teaching accounts, the research literature on teacher knowledge, beliefs, and the notion of care to assist and support my interpretations and understandings of Maria's practice. In this way, I endow the stories and anecdotes with the meaning that I developed from them. The writings of several authors are used to interpret and articulate what I witnessed in Maria's teaching. I use the categories of knowledge proposed by Shulman (1987) to analyze and understand the intellectual aspect of Maria's teaching; that is, the knowledge that she draws on as she goes about her teaching. Maria's beliefs are analyzed according to Pajares (1992), Hillocks (1999), Jordan, et al (1997), and Gibson and Dembo (1984). I develop and convey my understanding of the significance of the affective dimension of Maria's teaching practice, through the writings of many authors. Chief among them are Buber (as cited in Geering, 1983), Noddings (1984, 1987, 1992), and Mayeroff (1971). Elbaz (1992), Peck (1978), Fox (1993, 1995), Jackson, et al (1993), Hult (1979), Palmer (1998), and Goldstein (1999) are also used. While their definitions are derived in different settings, the constructs of relating and caring are common to each. Their constructs share similarities which are applicable to developing a complete understanding of Maria's teaching.

The expressive significance of what we are looking at can never be fully appreciated or understood apart from the thing itself; a
portion of its meaning always has to be left behind whenever we try to describe it to others (Jackson, et al, 1993, p. 35).

I have struggled considerably with the structure of this thesis: how to organize and convey my interpretation of Maria's teaching into a format that is required of academic writing: the themes and chapters, the vignettes and interpretations and supporting literature, the headings and sub-headings. My struggle somewhat parallels the challenge I faced in understanding Maria's teaching practice. I began with a whole, an event, a significant situation, and pulled the elements apart in order to develop understanding. Now, I must share my understanding, the underlying bits and pieces of what I witnessed, while at the same time maintain and convey the wholeness, the seamlessness of Maria's practice.

From Particular to General

Pedagogic situations are always unique. . . . what we need more of is theory not consisting of generalizations, which we then have difficulty applying to concrete and ever-changing circumstances, but theory of the unique; that is, theory eminently suitable to deal with this particular pedagogic situation, this school, that child, or this class of youngsters (Van Manen, 1997, p. 155).

By offering an explanation of one teacher's practice, I convey an understanding of the nature of teaching students who have physical disabilities and use AAC. However, as Eisner (1998) states, "The usefulness of studies of particulars, whether schools or people, is located in descriptions and interpretations that go beyond the information given about them" (p. 59). While this inquiry is concerned with what is unique and particular to Maria in her classroom with her students, I argue that it also speaks to what is general and universal to the development of exemplary teaching practices.

The paradoxical thing about anecdotal narrative is that it tells something particular while really addressing the general or the universal. And vice versa, at the hand of anecdote fundamental insights or truths are tested for their value in the contingent world of everyday experience (Van Manen, 1997, p. 120).
Thus, in developing an understanding of the essence of Maria's teaching practices, I further substantiate the research literature on teacher knowledge and beliefs and their role in defining teaching practices. Moreover, I believe that this study reveals the central role of the affective dimension in defining teacher knowledge and in developing exemplary teaching practices.

Eisner (1998) reminds us that taking various perspectives is a way of examining situations from different angles. It is a matter of being able to handle several ways of seeing as a series of differing views rather than reducing all views to a single correct one (p. 49).

I chose to examine Maria's teaching from a holistic perspective. I wanted to understand what lies under the moves she makes in her practice. I chose to take a qualitative angle in understanding Maria's teaching practices. Others may well have chosen to focus on a different aspect of Maria's practice or have arrived at another interpretation. As Peshkin states,

If, somehow, all researchers were alike, we would all tell the same story (insofar as its non-denotable aspects are concerned) about the same phenomenon. By virtue of subjectivity, I tell the story I am moved to tell. Reserve my subjectivity and I do not become a value-free participant observer, merely an empty-headed one (as cited in Eisner, 1998, p. 48).

Thus, I, Donna, the consultant, the teacher, the researcher have arrived at a particular meaning that is based in part on who I am, what I chose to focus on and with the support of the research literature that supports the development of meaning. I am aware that my understanding and the text of this thesis may be open to various interpretations. For as Umberto Eco contends, "the process of understanding is an evolving one and one that has no proper terminus" (as cited in Jackson, et al, 1993).

Summary

In this chapter I have situated my study within a qualitative research paradigm. I have provided a rationale for how I approached my investigation into understanding Maria's teaching and how to convey that understanding in
this thesis. In the next chapter I provide the details of the context for my study: Maria, Maria’s school, her students, and her classroom program.
Chapter 3: The Context

The content of a student's experience is shaped not only by the explicit curriculum, but by the kind of place any particular school is. And that is influenced by the way the school is organized, by the way teachers' roles are defined, and by the way students are rewarded, and by the priorities that the school sets (Eisner, 1997, p. 339).

In the introductory chapter, I discussed one context, which is relevant to understanding this thesis. That context is Donna, the researcher, and my reasons for undertaking this study. In this chapter, I broaden the context of this study to include a description of the subject of my study, Maria. I also describe the nature of Maria's school, her students, and her classroom program. This chapter is rather long reflecting the richness and importance of the context. This context shapes in critical ways the experiences of the Maria, her students, and me during the period of this study. I begin by describing Maria.

Maria

Maria has been a teacher for 21 years. She has worked in the field of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) for 25 years. She has taught in regular classrooms and schools and in specialized schools and congregated classrooms for students with physical disabilities who use AAC. She has been a teacher at her current school for 9 years. While she has become highly specialized, she believes her roots in teaching regular education provided a good foundation for her subsequent work in special education. She explained,

I think you need to know what's going on in the regular school. I think you need to know the abilities of a range of thirty kids, . . . the range of abilities you're going to encounter in a particular classroom. I think it gave me a good foundation. I think it gave me a good foundation for knowing different types of parents and different parental attitudes. So, it was a very good beginning (interview, April 19).

Maria was drawn to teaching at an early age. For her it was a "calling". She recalled a few significant incidents in her past which ground her interest in teaching students with exceptional learning needs,
Actually, there have been times in my life when I've had very significant things happen like just . . . and the time I knew I wanted to be a teacher was when I was about . . . I certainly probably was a young teen and I was at the corner waiting to cross the street and the light. I was waiting for the light to change and it was right near my school. I could have been in junior high because I wasn't near my high school, so I could have been early teens. And, I looked. I heard this little voice and this little girl was there and she looked up at me and she said, 'Would you help me?' And she was obviously afraid to cross the street and I said, 'Sure I would.' and I just felt sort of like I was drawn to this child in this role. So I helped her across the street and it was just like, Bang! This is, this is a calling, so to speak. And so, then, then I knew it. I mean, I never looked back.... So I always loved school.... and there was never a doubt in my mind as to what I wanted to do (interview, April 19).

I remember in high school there was a man like a consultant from one of the boards came and he was talking about special education. I didn't know what he was talking about. I didn't know what special education was. I had no idea. I remember sitting through his whole talk and not knowing what that was because there was absolutely no integration. We had no exposure and I had never even seen kids with special needs. In fact, I have one memory of getting polio shots when I was seven years old and they always gave these polio shots in the schools as part of our school day and someone brought in a little boy in a wheelchair and he had cerebral palsy. I didn't know what he had at the time. I remember being shocked at this little boy and also wondering, 'Well, where did he come from?' I knew he didn't go to my school. So that kind of struck me and I remember, as a little girl, um we had a family friend who was in a wheelchair. She wasn't a, she wasn't a close family friend. We were at a wedding or something and there was this lady in a wheelchair and her name was Katey and I remember just being intrigued by her. She was an attractive woman and I remember just being intrigued by this woman. I remember asking lots of questions of my parents. I don't remember their answers. But I remember and I must have been really young at that time so there were just those couple of things. But, as an elementary teacher, they were just starting in [my teaching district] to integrate children with learning disabilities. They had apparently identified kids with learning disabilities and what I.... My last year in [the teaching district] they asked if I would mind having a couple of children with learning disabilities integrated into my class and there would be a special education teacher they also had their own teacher, but they were integrating them. So, I said fine. So these children were integrated and you know that worked well. I don't
remember any particular problems around that at all. I was as helpful as I could be and there was also their teacher to relate to and uh.... But, I remember at the school in Chicago, inner city Chicago in the [name of school] .... also in [my teaching district], I always, my heart kinda went out the kids who really had a hard time. There were a couple of little girls in particular who had language delays or problems and were really struggling and I remember wanting to give them extra help and kind of, you know, wanting to bring them along or having this idea that they needed a little extra. So there was that kind of motivation and interest, but where [that came from], I have no idea why (interview, April 19).

Maria’s experience was, in the words of Noddings and Shore (1984), a sense of rightness and of appropriateness, what might even be called a sense of mission or a ‘calling’ that teachers have often felt through the ages. Some individuals sense intuitively....they can be effective, inspiring teachers; they have known that working with children or adults would be rewarding and meaningful (p. 158).

Maria’s teaching seems to arise from a strong sense of identity and integrity (Palmer, 1998). She explained this in a conversation wherein she shared the experiences of one of her former colleagues whose workshop presentation had gone rather poorly,

I remember Isabel saying, ‘You know, it wasn’t one of [the occupational therapist’s] best.’ And [the occupational therapist] said, ‘I’ll never do that again. I have to teach the things I live’. And I thought that I agree with that philosophy 100%! I have to live this in order to teach it (interview, April 19)!

Maria has been fortunate to have a few people in her life who have served as mentors. She reflected on the significant role of mentors in her career:

Well, certainly [head of philanthropic organization] was, you know, a tremendous influence just in terms of, you know. She’s an inspired leader and just in terms of developing empathy for the person who uses augmentative communication. For her role in advocating for AAC users. Isabel was my mentor when I worked for The Foundation and in fact, I think she was one of the most admirable individuals that I have ever encountered.... She’s a very thorough person. The role I had at The Foundation was much more academic....I was really kind of taking the reins from Isabel. But I think that really, the pioneering work.... She had been really on the ground floor and I was continuing to do the kinds of things she did
and I think that I did a good job of pulling people together and getting people to collaborate on the symbols and being organized and following through and everything. She taught me a lot in that way, but just even a human being.... Just a great human being. I think, she would, if I ever had to point to a mentor she would be.... I mean, [head of philanthropic organization] was an inspiration. Isabel was a mentor. Not until I actually got into that role, but she prepared me to assume from her. She was a mentor for that role (interview, April 19).

I remember talking just philosophically with Isabel one time about all the problems in the world and how you cope, when you look here and here and here and it’s just overwhelming. And she said, ‘Well, just look to your own backyard. Look to your own life. Look at where you can make a difference in your environment.’ And I think I’ve been influenced ... she’s just a wonderful mentor and I think that when it comes to what I choose to do professionally in terms of AAC, that’s why I like where I am right now because it is my own backyard. I don’t feel so dispersed. Whenever I go to the AAC organization conference, I never enjoy it. I feel like I run from one thing to the next. I’ve given up going to them because I’d come to the end of that expensive conference and I’d say, ‘Now what have I learned that I can take back and use?’ And I would just feel like I’d been running from one thing to the next and not really able to absorb. I wanted to focus more in-depth on certain issues (interview, June 14).

All these leaders who ... and having sat through lots of discussions with them, having shared presentations with them, having worked closely with them, it’s been very rich. I mean if I look upon my career path how lucky I was and how lucky I was to find the work that satisfies me and it really does. It stretches me in every way possible, maybe sometimes a little too much. I really wish it weren’t so all consuming and it has to be. I don’t see any way it can’t be (interview, June 14).

Maria’s School

Maria teaches at a specialized school that is situated within a provincial rehabilitation centre. The school exists to meet the educational needs of the children who are receiving treatment at the centre, because they have a physical disability and/or a complex medical disorder. Most classrooms are multi-aged and several educational models are provided within the school. Included among
them is a program whose underlying philosophy and approach is to integrate each student's education and therapy needs within the classroom setting as much as possible. Approximately sixty students ranging in age from four to nine attend this program. Most of the students attend the program for a maximum of three years. The goal of the program is to provide early, intensive, integrated therapy and education in order to equip the students to function in their community schools.

There are two 'communications classrooms' within the school. In addition to having complex physical needs, the students who attend the communications classes are, for the most part, nonverbal. They are learning to communicate in ways other than through speech. As explained in Chapter 1, these other ways are referred to as augmentative and alternative communication (AAC). The mandate of the communications classroom is to provide intensive support in determining, establishing and developing each student's communication skills so that they are able to express themselves and be understood by other people. One of the communications classrooms is designated as 'entry-level'. In this classroom the students are assessed and taught early communication skills, such as initiating communication, sustaining attention, making choices, using picture symbols to communicate, and taking turns. The entry-level students very often go into the second communications classroom or are integrated into the other classrooms in the school. The second communications classroom focusses on assessing and further developing each student's communication skills. Most of the students will leave this classroom with well-developed communication books, some with computer systems for writing and learning, and a very few with electronic voice output communication aids (VOCAs) for conversation. In addition to the primary emphasis on communication, there is an academic focus on early literacy and numeracy skills. Maria is a teacher in this more "senior" communications classroom.

Maria explained the mandate of her school and classroom by reflecting on her observations of one of her previous students, Laura. Laura attended a congregated classroom in her community school with some opportunity for
regular classroom integration with her age-appropriate peers. Maria happened to see Laura when she was visiting her classroom.

I don't believe in keeping the kids forever in an AAC class. I think though, there is a role. There is a place for giving parents that, as an option because I firmly believe that you need to do something intensely. It's like immersion. ... It's immersion for awhile to get it started. ...Now even Laura in the group, I saw her the other day. There was a Grade 7 student sitting next to her and he was reading her book so that she could participate in circle. Well, that's terrific! That's perfect! That's just what you want! The child is clear enough and knows what she wants to say, very definite about it, which she was by the time she left [my class].... So I guess that's the kind of foundation. When she first came in, she went into a class that wasn't all AAC users, but they kept bringing her in here to show her Mom about show and tell and all of that. And then when she came in [my class], she really consolidated her skills. She had a [communication] book....and she wasn't using it. And [her teacher] said she didn't want to use it. [Her teacher] and mother both said she didn't want to use it. She wasn't interested in using it. So, in her case she needed to see other children using it. ...That's the point of the immersion, is that I'm not the only different one, that there are other people. And it's also an avenue for learning which is what we really try and tap on. [It's] also using the symbols to teach concepts....And literacy and all of those things. ... So I see a lot of positives, especially at a young age, for having an immersion, but then sort of going out in the world. (interview, June 7).

This is not segregation for life. This is a different model.... It's to get the kids started. (interview, June 7).

Thus far in this chapter, I have provided information about Maria and the school in which she teaches. You likely have some idea of the nature of Maria students since I introduced them indirectly in the undressing routine and in the context of describing the nature of my consulting. In the next several pages, I provide a more complete description of Maria's students both as a group of students who share similar characteristics and needs and on an individual basis which reveals their uniqueness.
Maria's Students

The precise routes of development involve considerable variation from child to child, from culture to culture, and from community to community (Levine, 1987, p. 3).

Maria teaches six students who range in age from five to nine years: two boys and four girls.

She described her students in terms of their needs,

The children in this class generally tend to be the more severely disabled children. They're hard to serve in the community. If they were to just go at age four or five into a community school they could be hard to serve out there. They would probably require a lot of different resources and they have needs around seating. They need custom seating. They have needs around orthotics. A lot of them wear splints. They need to be out of their chairs and moving around and a lot of times the therapy out in the regular schools is met on a consultative basis. And they have high communication needs. They're non-speaking and they're going to require some sort of augmentative communication (interview, March 31).

All of Maria's students have cerebral palsy, a non-progressive motor impairment resulting from brain damage. They are not able to use some of the muscles or joints in their body. The location and severity of the brain injury determines which of their muscles are affected by the impairment. Thus, the impairment has varying effects on their motor abilities. For example, they may be unable to control unwanted movement, to make a muscle move on command, and their muscles may be too tight or too loose or a combination.

All of Maria's students use manual wheelchairs for mobility. Except for Ricky, who has a visual impairment, each student is being taught to use other mobility devices such as a walker or a tricycle where he or she can be more independent in moving about. While two of the students have limited use of their hands, for the most part, the students are dependent on adults for activities of daily living such as eating, drinking, dressing, bathing, and going to the toilet. Most of the students wear splints on their legs and feet.

The students are not able to control their oral-facial muscles and, thus, are not able to use speech to communicate. This inability to spontaneously speak,
also significantly impacts their independence. They are learning to use AAC to communicate. Maria's students are being taught to point to symbols such as, Picture Communication Symbols (PCS), Blissymbols, photographs, and words as their means of communicating. These symbols represent the vocabulary or words the students need in order to communicate a variety of functions. For example, to communicate a basic need such as thirst, the student might point to a photograph or a PCS of a glass which is accompanied by a sentence such as, “I’m thirsty.” or “I need a drink.” or “Please get me a drink.” To communicate wanting to read a book or listen to music, the student might point to symbols representing those activities. Determining what kind of symbol representation to use depends upon the student’s understanding of the representation. Maria’s students are using PCS and some Blissymbols accompanied with words. Of course, people such as family members, friends, therapists, teachers, and classmates, are typically represented by small photographs, accompanied by the person’s name.

Each of Maria’s students has a communication book of symbols and words which has been designed considering their unique cognitive and physical capabilities and needs. Each student also has symbols on their wheelchair laptrays which provide them with a quick means of communication without having to retrieve and flip through their communication book (i.e., “Yes”, “No”, “I need a drink.”, “I need my communication book”, etc.).

Maria has also developed many theme books that hold vocabulary relevant to her students’ classroom and school experiences. The symbols provide a means for the students to actively participate by communicating in the various classroom activities (i.e., playing, reading, classroom jobs, calendar, show and tell, singing, school assemblies, field trips, etc.). Vocabulary items which are relevant to the activities are taken out of the theme books and affixed to a Velcro strip. In fact, Velcro strips are used a lot in Maria’s class. A Velcro strip is a 2” x 14” piece of foamcore with a single strip of rough Velcro attached horizontally across the length of each side. The individual symbols, which have the soft, fuzzy Velcro affixed to the back, can then be appropriately attached in terms of number
and distance apart, to the Velcro strip and presented to each student to use to communicate and participate in the activities.

Each student's physical capabilities dictate how they will access or point to the symbols to convey their messages. For example, Patty is able to point with her finger to symbols which are of a certain size and arrangement on a page. The other students use their eyes to look at symbols that have been optimally arranged on a page to support this method of pointing.

I said earlier that being unable to speak significantly impacts the students' independence. While they are able to independently point to a symbol to express themselves, they rely on a communication partner, that is, someone who can see the communication display materials and verbalize the communication by reading the symbol that the student is pointing to. For students who use their eyes to point to symbols in conveying their messages, this means that the communication partner must be able to determine which symbols the student is looking at. The communication partner typically sits directly in front of the student at their eye level, holding the communication materials up in front of the student. In this way, they are able to watch the student's eyes to determine which symbol or group of symbols they are looking at. Then the partner verbalizes the symbol or group of symbols and confirms with the student whether or not it was what they intended to say. An example of this method of communication will be provided in Chapter 5.

Voice output communication aids (VOCA) provide the student with greater independence in communicating. VOCAs are electronic devices which range from very simple, one message devices, to very complex, computerized multi-message devices. As with communication books and theme displays, how a student activates the message on a VOCA will depend upon their physical abilities. Patty can use one of her fingers to activate a VOCA which has just a few keys. The other students who do not have the ability to use their fingers, can activate a VOCA by using their whole hand or their head to touch a single switch which is connected to the VOCA. When touched, the single switch sends a message to the VOCA and activates whichever key is highlighted. While none of
Maria’s students have their own VOCA, all have been introduced to using a very simple VOCA. This provides them with some experience in having a voice in activities, such as eating snack, reading books, singing songs, and playing with their peers. For example, they might use the VOCA to direct someone as in, “I want more.” when eating their snack or “Turn the page.” when reading a book, or to comment, “That was fun!” when playing a game.

None of the students are able to use traditional drawing and writing tools, such as pencils, pens, or crayons. Each student will eventually use computer technology for drawing and writing purposes. Therefore, in the communications classroom another goal for the students is access to and control of computer technology for writing, drawing, and learning. Just like with the VOCA, the students will touch a switch, which will then activate the computer. Each student uses a voluntary body movement to activate the switch. Most of the students in Maria’s class move their head in a lateral motion in order to activate a switch which is securely mounted on specialized hardware and placed by the right or the left side of their head. The students are also being taught to interact with computer software by a method called ‘scanning’. In scanning, items which appear on the computer screen are highlighted one at a time. When the item that the student wants becomes highlighted, then the student selects the item by touching an external switch which is connected to the computer. This activation of the switch causes the item on the computer screen to be selected.

Scanning as a method of access is quite complex. Students who rely on scanning as a method of independently operating a device need to be systematically taught how to scan before they can independently use and benefit from a VOCA for communication or a computer for writing and learning. Maria is teaching her students to operate a computer through the method of scanning.

Since the students had been in Joan’s entry-level communications classroom in the school for one year, they came to Maria’s classroom with some, but varying, foundation skills in communication. These skills included being able to sustain their eye gaze; indicate a preference from between two objects or picture symbols or items which are offered through auditory means (that is,
through speech); and the ability to pay attention for a length of time. During this study, Maria had taught Ricky, Bethany, Sarah, Mark, and Patty for two years and Dana for one year. For all of the students, except Dana and Patty, this was their final year in the school.

While Maria’s students share a number of disabilities and capabilities, each student has unique characteristics. This is important. Their uniqueness emerges from knowing them. As will become apparent, knowing the students individually is critical to Maria’s teaching practice. What follows is a description of each student. I also met with the parents of each student in order to give them an opportunity to reflect on the their child’s goals and their experiences and progress is the Centre school and in Maria’s classroom. For each child, I describe their parent’s expectations and goals and progress. I also include Maria’s reflection on each student’s progress.

**Ricky**

At nine years, Ricky is the eldest student in the classroom. He’s a boy with a quick, broad smile and devilish laugh. Ricky enjoys school and participates very willingly in all activities. He loves talking about his family and home experiences. Ricky is very involved and included in his family and community activities. He helps his older brother deliver newspapers and regularly attends hockey practices and games. He travels a considerable distance by bus to attend his school.

Ricky has a visual impairment which impacts his learning and communication. His eyes are often directed upwards. Just last year, Maria was instrumental in obtaining a visual assessment for Ricky at a specialized vision clinic. The results indicate that Ricky has some vision which, with appropriate correction and support, he can learn to use. During the period of this study, Ricky used a less-than-ideal, borrowed pair of prescription glasses, while his were being ordered. He receives weekly vision therapy at school from an itinerant vision specialist.
Ricky relies on his hearing to compensate for his visual limitations. But, he also has difficulty filtering environmental “noise” and maintaining attention on whoever is speaking to him. Therefore, a Phonic Ear Personal Listening System device is being used on a trial basis. Ricky wears an unobtrusive headphone while whoever is speaking to him wears a microphone and transmitter. Team members maintain that this device supports Ricky’s ability to focus his listening attention on whoever is speaking to him. Its use becomes particularly essential in supporting Ricky’s attention if there is a lot of ambient conversation or noise in the classroom.

Ricky is able to vocalize in a limited way and initiates conversation through vocalizing. He has an understandable and fairly reliable ‘yes’ and ‘no’ vocal response. For conversational communication, he relies upon listener-assisted auditory scanning. In this type of communication, the communication partner first directs Ricky to listen to what his choices are; tells Ricky his choices; then says ‘Now you may choose.’, and repeats the choices slowly, waiting for Ricky to indicate his preference, by vocalizing, “yah” after he has heard his choice.

During this study, Ricky was being introduced to 4” x 4” picture communication symbols to represent familiar objects. He was also using a simple VOCA called a Cheap Talk. By touching two switches which were placed on his laptray near his right and left hands, he was able to access four recorded messages. Ricky used this device during snack time to direct whoever was feeding him to either give him a drink or something to eat. Ricky’s conceptual understanding is quite limited, due in large part to his undiagnosed visual limitations and hence, his limited visual and compensating experiences. His communication by means of auditory scanning was most successful when the choices related to basic needs and wants (i.e., food, drink, familiar activities, etc.). Maria used a multi-sensory approach in teaching and interacting with Ricky, whereby he was provided with opportunities to see, hear, smell, and touch actual objects. Similarly, Maria and the classroom team used a lot of language with Ricky, describing objects and events in detail to support his understanding.
Like his classmates, Ricky was learning to access the computer. He used an Ablenet Slim Armstrong mount with a small jellybean switch attached to the left side of his headrest. The switch was positioned at his left temple. He moved his head laterally to contact the switch. He was positioned very close to the computer monitor to facilitate his vision. As with his conversational communication, he was learning to use auditory scanning as a way of interacting with software on the computer. The sequence of items presented was identical to that of auditory scanning in conversational communication. The first cue told him to first listen. Next, a sequence of three items was presented, followed by the verbal cue, "Wait". The same sequence of choices was repeated, and Ricky was able to make a choice by activating his switch.

My meeting with Ricky’s mother took place at their suburban home after dinner one evening. Ricky’s sister was watching television. Ricky and his father were out in the neighbourhood delivering catalogues. During our interview, Ricky’s mother articulated their goals for their son:

When Ricky first went to the [the school], I think my most important [goal] was Ricky’s independence, because when I went to see [the Centre] that’s one thing I saw was that the kids could be very, very independent, right? So that was the most important thing. But really, from looking at the teacher’s [perspective], Ricky’s biggest independence [that] he’s going to have is looking at the communication, right? ... There’s a lot of things he’s always going to be dependent on others for. But,... So the communication is something that does give him his independence.

Ricky’s mother went on to say, “Communication is really important. Keeping his level of learning is important.” (interview, June 7).

She reflected on the progress her son had made: “He’s grown from being there. He has. He’s grown.” When I asked in what ways, she went on to explain,

Over the last three years he’s been trained to use his communication or that he can communicate and he can ask what he wants.

Because he’s independent. ... Over Christmas time this year, he was sitting beside my sister and he started getting cranky and my sister said, ‘Do you not want to sit beside me anymore?’ And he
said, ‘No.’ And never before would Ricky make that type of
decision, that he no longer wanted to sit where we put him to sit.
He wanted to go somewhere else... And before if I said, ‘Do you
want milk or pop?’ he would just choose one. Now, if that’s not
want he wants he keeps saying, ‘No’ until you get what he wants
and that’s, to me, that’s great because before he would have taken
one or the other. He won’t just sit there and go, ‘I’ll just have
whatever you give me’. He wants to choose what we’re having for
dinner and he likes to help [with] cooking.... He wants to make
decisions now which before he wouldn’t want to do it.

The benefits have been that for everybody, especially for everyone
else, they can now communicate with him, and they know what his
likes and dislikes are. They use the book with him. With myself, it’s
trained me also on how to communicate with Ricky. The big benefit
now is like he, well, you can see he’s just come in and he’s decided,
while he was at the door, I guess, that when he got in, what he
wanted, right, because he got his drink, he said he wanted
something to drink, but that wasn’t enough, he wanted also a piece
of bread and butter (interview, June 7).

Indeed, Ricky had returned with his father from his deliveries and after
greeting me with a smile, became quite vocal about wanting not only a drink, but
something to eat. His mother verbally offered Ricky numerous choices, two at a
time, in the manner in which I had observed Maria ask him in the classroom. He
settled on milk and bread with butter. As I made the long drive back to the city, I
reflected on my discussion with Ricky’s parents and my observations of their
interactions with him when he had come home from delivering the catalogues.
They seem to me to be an ‘ordinary’ family who treat Ricky just the same as their
other children. Being in their home felt comfortable.

Over the time she has taught Ricky, Maria has been very concerned about
determining his visual capabilities. She has been frustrated with the length of
time it has taken to determine an effective way of communication, which is just
beginning to happen.

Three years is not enough time with someone as complex as Ricky.
We’re just beginning to figure him out....I feel a sense of
satisfaction for Ricky and I wish I could keep him another year, but
I didn’t ask to do that. I didn’t fight for that because he’s just so
much older. I mean there comes a point where you can’t . . . I’ll have five year olds and he would be nine. (interview, May 31).

Maria was pleased with the work they have done to support Ricky. As she reflects,

I feel a sense of satisfaction for Ricky because I think we’ve done a good work up on him. I feel we’ve gotten him to the right person for the visual assessment” (interview, May 31)

In terms of a communication book, I kind of feel we’re handing him off with something we’re gonna work very hard on which is . . . to get the symbols that are gonna be the right ones for teaching him, you know, the right sort of configurations and going for things as opposed to abstract concepts, like things to represent concepts. Like a cup for drinking because we know he can identify a cup. And trying to . . . teaching them auditory scanning and then trying to encourage them to use the pictures with the auditory scanning whenever possible (interview, May 31).

Ricky will attend a congregated rather than inclusive classroom in a public school near his neighbourhood in the fall. As with all of the parents, I asked Ricky’s mother to share her thoughts and the factors that contributed to their decision regarding his classroom placement. She explained,

It’s [inclusion] not a huge importance to me. Ricky has a brother and sister. Ricky goes everywhere with us. He’s not excluded out of anything. He knows and is friends with all of [his brother’s] hockey team. So he gets that constantly. There are other things that are more important for Ricky to get at school. Because I feel he’s going to be lacking in things he should be getting, you know, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy (interview, June 7).

I would choose that Ricky have everything that he needed, than integration . . . to meet his needs! Like, that’s my thought on it. Maybe like that’s if at school he could have everything that he’s getting right now and not be integrated, I’d be happier than having him integrated into a school program right now and not get what he needs (interview, June 7)

Bethany

Bethany is a slender seven-year old with large, dark eyes and equally dark, silky, straight, shoulder-length hair, which is often tied up in a ponytail. Bethany’s physical features are characteristic of those of a ballet dancer. Her
physical disability is further complicated with frequent chest congestion and aspiration of foods and liquids. She requires high calorie snacks and foods to be pureed, and drinks to be thickened.

Bethany lives in a tiny, one bedroom, apartment in the heart of downtown with her younger brother and her mother. Although able-bodied, Bethany’s brother also has exceptional learning needs. Since coming from Brazil a few short years ago, Bethany’s mother has become a very strong advocate for her daughter. She has been instrumental in seeking and receiving private funding outside of government support for Bethany’s home computer system. Bethany is involved in all aspects of her family life and enjoys numerous and varied community experiences that living downtown affords. Maria sees her often on Saturdays at the local market. Bethany’s mother takes Bethany to numerous cultural celebrations and events offered in the city.

Bethany is strongly motivated to communicate and mostly enjoys one-to-one interaction where she can use her communication book. She is a competent communicator. She has a comprehensive communication book which contains well over 300 vocabulary items in categories such as people, places, verbs, describing words, academic subjects, etc. The vocabulary, represented by 3/4” picture communication symbols and words, is displayed on each page in 5 or 6 inch blocks of nine vocabulary items. Her book includes an index. Bethany uses her eyes to communicate her message. That is, she looks at a block of vocabulary items on the page, then her communication partner will point to the block to confirm; then point to each row in the block; and finally each item in the row. Bethany will confirm by making a sound that means, ‘yes’ and/or by smiling. During my observations it became obvious to me that Bethany’s favourite activity is using her communication book. It was at these times when she became most attentive and animated. I witnessed Bethany losing her patience with people quickly and complaining loudly or crying when people did not understand or misinterpreted what she was saying.

Bethany loves sharing her news and seeing it displayed on chart paper. She is often the last person to volunteer in class activities. She is beginning to
construct simple sentences with a subject, verb, and object. She enjoys stories and has very definite preferences that are influenced by her favourite television shows and videos (i.e., Barney, Big Comfy Couch, etc.). She enjoys being independent and is motivated to use a walker.

Bethany also loves to use the computer. She accesses the computer by touching a Zygo Lever Switch that is positioned at her left temple. She is learning to use scanning to interact with computer software. On the computer screen, items are sequentially highlighted and Bethany touches her switch with her head to select the one she wants when it is highlighted. She can hit a switch to operate a taperecorder, battery-operated toys, and appliances, such as a blender. She is learning to attend for longer periods of time during group activities such as calendar and reading and mathematics instruction.

I met with Bethany’s mother at their home just after dinner one afternoon. Bethany watched TV during our talk and her brother played in his bedroom. English is a second language for Bethany’s mother. This is reflected in parts of the transcripts. During our interview, she proudly shared her daughter’s history, recounting that she had someone working with her in Brazil from the time Bethany was 15 months old. In Bethany’s mother’s words, her goals for Bethany are “to continue to help with her communication system. I didn’t want to break process that [the nursery school] started” (interview, June 16). Thus, the first priority was communication, followed by Bethany’s physical development. “More actually, you know to get her developed mentally. I knew that she could learn more, so I didn’t want to stop that” (interview, June 16).

Bethany’s mother reflected on the progress her daughter has made in Maria’s classroom:

Last year, she was there, she was not so interested in learning things, you know. She just, you know, having fun. She didn’t want to do it. She was crying a lot and Monday was hard. And just since this last year, now she just [clicks her fingers]. I don’t know what happened, but she wake up! She’s learning and she’s happy.

[Maria] focussed on communication and I think Bethany learning a lot and she’s growing … I think we can see [her progress] right
away because if I ask her something and she answered something and we have that dialogue then I know we’re doing the right thing . . . Before I was the only one who could communicate with her. Now anyone can communicate with her.

The toilet training – I never imagined Bethany, could be toilet trained. Never! Never! I’d say, ‘Well, how?’ You know when [the OT] talked to me, I said, ‘What are you talking about? What do you mean? She can’t! How’s she going to tell me that she wants?’ . . . ‘Well, we’ll get there and you’ll see.’ And she’s [Bethany] amazing! She almost ready. So it’s things that I never imagined she could get at that point. She’s growing more. Even more responsible for things around her. She wants to know (interview, June 16).

As I waited in the dimly lit hallway for the elevator that would take me to the ground floor, I was filled with deep admiration for Bethany’s mother “Wow! This is one courageous, strong lady to fight in a positive, grateful way on her own and to have come so far in her expectations for her daughter”.

Maria has been very pleased with Bethany’s progress in communication and literacy. She is concerned that Bethany continues to progress and learn to use her formal communication system, rather than emotion (crying) to express her frustration. After reviewing her most recent report card, she reflected on the progress Bethany has made,

I feel a sense of satisfaction with Bethany. She’s made significant gains in two years. She’s made gains in communicating, in her emotional, in the way she handles herself emotionally and academically. In all [of] these. Academic skills, I think she’s made great progress. . . . She’s ready to go out. And the area I would want to liaise, if I have an opportunity to liaise, is to make sure that they are comfortable using her book; the same with Mark. Are they comfortable using their books? And I’d like to give them background on their emotional, the way they handle themselves emotionally. Make sure they understand about the strip [a visual reminder of the steps to follow when she becomes upset that is affixed to Bethany’s laptray] for Bethany. Make sure they understand about negotiating with Mark. . . . because that’ll ease the way for the children (interview, May 31).

Bethany attends an integrated after-school care program in her neighbourhood. In the fall, she will attend a congregated school for students with
physical disabilities. Bethany's mom feels 'sad that Bethany has to leave her current school'. She also comments that social skills are important goals for Bethany.

"You know, like it's um I think more ...the special school I don't think it give her a lot [of social skills]. I think like the daycare because the kids interact with each other in the day care.
(interview, June 16).

Sarah

Sarah is a tomboyish, very good-natured seven years old who has a quick, bright smile for everyone and a well-developed sense of humour. She is very observant, listens in on conversation around her, and seldom protests at school. She lives with her parents and a younger sister. Sarah's parents are strong advocates for her and she is very involved in family and community activities, particularly the church.

Sarah has frequent, involuntary movements that occur spontaneously and for undetermined reasons. The movements cause her head and upper body to twist and turn laterally. The team refers to this movement as, 'thrashing'. This involuntary thrashing severely prohibits Sarah from sustaining her full attention and concentration and significantly impacts her learning and communication. She has tested a variety of medications to control these movements, but none have proved entirely effective. She also has great difficulty screening out extraneous movement and sound around her.

Sarah communicates primarily and most effectively by looking at picture communication symbols (PCS) which are presented to her. The number of PCS that can be presented varies depending upon her ability to focus. If she is calm, up to four symbols can be presented. However, if she is thrashing and unable to focus, only two symbols can be presented. She has a communication book that holds her symbols. The symbols are taken out of her communication book and placed on a foamcore strip. Velcro is used to affix the symbols to the strip and to her communication book. When Sarah experiences the thrashing movement, the communication partner very often needs to stabilize her hands and arms by
holding them down on her lap tray. Sometimes, it helps to present the symbols above and a little behind Sarah’s head. She is often able to stop the movement in this position and sustain her eye gaze on the intended symbol. Sarah is often taken to a quiet area in the room to decrease the distractions and facilitate her attention. When calm, she attempts to point to the symbols by reaching with her hands. She also has used a Cheap Talk VOCA to direct people when she is eating and to participate in classroom activities. She touches a switch with her left hand to activate the Cheap Talk and desired message.

Sarah is learning to use the computer. She is able to control the computer with a switch that is placed at the left side of her head. While her attention to the screen fluctuates, she appears to understand what she is doing and has demonstrated accuracy in selecting intended items on the computer screen about 50% of the time. During the time I spent in the classroom, there was some issue concerning Sarah’s qualification for a government-subsidized computer. It was eventually approved.

I met with both of Sarah’s parents late one evening at their home. Their youngest daughter was still up and about and at times competed for their attention. Sarah’s mother had experienced a particularly hectic day and appeared tired. She actually cried at one point during the interview. They spoke candidly, reflectively, and passionately about their daughter, Sarah, and their experiences at the school. They commented on their goals for their daughter and their reasons for having her attend the communications classroom in the school. They indicated that the program “best meet her needs”; that “they could concentrate on communication as that’s the most important thing”. As Sarah’s mother says,

she was showing all the signs of understanding and the desire to communicate, so that was their [the school’s communications class] big emphasis . . . They’re preparing them to learn academically and they encourage parents to be involved”.

Sarah’s mother goes on to explain,

We’re also very big in the conductive education as a family and we had to choose because there was a conductive education class and we chose not to. The skills rather than the motor functions is really . . . is a goal for us. For instance she would not have been eligible for
the computer right now if she was in conductive ed. It wouldn’t have happened. So that was a goal for us. (interview, June 17)

Regarding the gains Sarah has made in the school and Maria’s classroom, her mother comments:

Well, the biggest is, again, although she has the agitation, she can work through it now. She can calm down. She can communicate through it. She can now communicate better than she ever has. . . . She initiates getting your attention to ask a question. Whether she could initiate a conversation is iffy, but she can tell us more and that’s the bottom line. She can tell us more. She’s calmer. She’s more attentive. She can sit and watch kids do stuff without needing all that attention. She’s definitely better when I’m not around, with other people. Maturity is part of it and the confidence. . . . As far as the schooling and stuff, I think things have been going very well. . . . Basically she has potential to realize her potential and I think everything we’ve been wanting has been realized in Maria’s class. (interview, June 17).

I came away from my interview with Sarah’s parents feeling a deep respect and admiration for them. They, like all families, seem to be overwhelmed with daily living. But they have the added task of advocating for their daughter and pushing for others to see what they see in their child. I felt a lot of warmth for them and a deeper understanding of Sarah and their commitment and belief in her. I felt humble.

Maria acknowledged the growth Sarah has made. But she remains extremely frustrated by the still unanswered questions related to Sarah’s involuntary movements and the impact they continue to have on her learning. Maria shared that she definitely doubted Sarah’s capabilities, especially during the first year. Indeed, it has taken her considerable time to get to know Sarah. However, she expressed her deep convictions about Sarah’s capabilities and potential.

But for Sarah, I think you know communication-wise because of the thrashing and the fact that we’ve never been able to get to the bottom of finding something that will enable her to inhibit that, I feel pretty good about Sarah overall in terms of her academics because I know, I know for a fact that she knows the things she knows. [The psychologist] was able to assess her and come up with a report as well. . . . This is a child who could easily be underestimated. And the thing that hit home about that was the
second year Joan made a comment to me about how low functioning Sarah was and I said, ‘Oh. Interesting’ I said, ‘She’s not low functioning. She’s not low cognitively.’ But every time we’d go in there [in Joan’s class], especially the first year we used to go at the end of the day instead of the beginning, and Sarah was just off the wall the first year. But still, I mean I do recognize the communication . . . she’s hard to communicate with. But, she understands what she’s supposed to do and when she’s calm she knows what to do. And even today when she wasn’t [calm], she was able to give me the answer and participate. So, I guess it’s people getting to know her (interview, May 31).

On Sarah’s attending Maria’s classroom, her mother replied, “It’s such a safe place to be.” Sarah will attend a segregated school in the fall. Her mother commented, “We’re optimistic about it...It’s really the best place for Sarah...There aren’t a lot of options.” I asked Sarah’s parents if they had considered sending her to her community school. Her mother speaks,

I think for Sarah it would be a placement not an integrated setting. Because she would just be put somewhere and if she didn’t have the right one-on-one worker there’s no way she could function in that environment. She wouldn’t have the OT and speech and everything right there for her. We’re so used to that now, don’t think it would work for her. I think if she was already using the computer with vocal output and more effectively, if she had had the computer for the last six months, who knows what I would have thought, but she’s just learning to communicate and express herself. I want her to be in a place where they know how to encourage that. So I don’t see many options (interview, June 17)

She went on to say,

Nobody knows what they are capable of except the people who are working directly with them. And if they were in an environment with other kids and other teachers around, they would say, ‘Oh, that’s the [special] class where these kids are learning it this way, whereas these kids are learning it...”. But, they’re all learning the same thing and Sarah, won’t be in that environment until she’s in high school because she’s at a [congregated school]. You know, because she’s going to be at [the congregated school].

Donna: And that’s okay?

Sarah’s
Mother: It’s not okay, but I think it’s the way it has to be (interview, June 17).
Dana

Dana is the youngest student at six years of age. Her petite frame and features make her look even younger. She relates well to adults and is generally good-natured. Dana is a quadruplet. She lives at home with her parents and four sisters, one of whom is two years younger than Dana. Dana’s parents have the financial means to provide for her many needs. They employ a fulltime nanny to assist with all the girls at home. Dana’s bus ride to and from school each day is considerable, since her family live on an affluent acreage development that is quite distant from the metropolitan area of her school. In addition to cerebral palsy, Dana suffered encephalitis, which was brought on by chicken pox, at the age of five. She experienced severe seizures during that time and lost some of her oral and fine motor ability. Since suffering the encephalitis at five years, Dana has lost considerable skill and is now re-learning some of the skills she was once capable of. She continues to experience small seizures throughout the day. Dana also wears corrective lenses. Her parents, particularly her mother, have struggled considerably to cope with Dana’s disability and its consequent influence on their family life.

Like her classmates, Dana is learning to communicate using Picture Communication Symbols (PCS). She has a small communication book that holds vocabulary pertinent to her experiences at school and home. Two or three PCS can be presented to her at a time on a Velcro strip. While she often reaches for the symbols, she is not able to do so accurately. She is being supported to use her eyes to look at the symbol of her choice. Childcare demands at home make it a challenge to integrate her communication system into a hectic family life.

While Dana appears to enjoy computer activities, her ability to attend to the computer fluctuates. She can touch a switch using her right hand with some accuracy. The switch often distracts her, diverting her attention from the computer screen. Dana is able to use her hands to a very limited extent, and she learns best when she is able to do so. She likes to play with dolls and puzzles. She enjoys hearing stories while she looks at the pictures and text. Her attention for these activities is good and she becomes most animated and very vocal when
she is being read to. The team has questioned whether Dana’s pointing to symbols and touching a switch when they are presented is done intentionally to communicate or interact with the computer software.

I met with Dana’s mother at her country home one hot summer evening. I followed her into her spacious living room, while the nanny at the other end of the house was watching the girls. Dana’s sisters’ chatter and squeals of laughter entered our conversation often. Dana’s mother spoke very quietly, seemed to retract into the couch and was admittedly quite nervous during our talk. Moving the taperecorder out of her line of vision helped, but she needed considerable probing, particular in the beginning of the conversation. When asked about goals for Dana, she initially replied,

I don’t have really any goals. Trying to do what . . . the best for her. Like I don’t have specific goals, just what’s going to bring up the best in her. I have no idea what she’s capable of doing. (interview, June 8)

When I probed further, she opened up:

Well, I think physically, to develop physically would be good, simply because she would be able to do more and I think it would make for a better quality of life for her. But communication is also really important, because it’s gotta be frustrating for her if she’s trying to communicate and have, you know, I’ve gotta guess, you know if she’s unhappy, I’ve gotta guess why exactly. Why. Usually I can get it, but there could be so much more she’s understanding than I’m [not] aware of, you know (interview, June 8).

Dana’s mother shared her struggles in getting to know her daughter and when asked about the progress Dana has made, she thought for a long moment, then offered:

Well, I guess the little things. She anticipates her AFOs [Ankle Foot Orthosis]. Anticipating, understanding things better. Seems more a part of the family. A part of the group. The changes are definitely due to school (interview, June 8).

At the end of our chat, I paused on the step to tie my shoes. At this point, Dana’s mother seemed more relaxed and shared that it is very hard for her get to know her daughter. She doesn’t see the same responses that the school team sees.
She wondered if that was okay. I reassured her that children often respond differently at home and at school and encouraged her to keep interacting with Dana. As I left the house, I thought, 'My goodness, this young woman is clearly overwhelmed and struggling with trying to understand her own daughter. What must that be like? Dana’s mother needs a close friend, someone who will support her in a gentle way, over the long-term.

Maria has been concerned about Dana’s physical setbacks and is frustrated that she has been unable to fully and adequately meet her developmental needs, especially in the area of play in the classroom.

Nothing’s happening at all. I don’t feel the child is progressing. I don’t feel the family is progressing that much. I’ve always felt that if there had been a spot she would have been better placed in Joan’s [entry level] class. So now as we look at the breakdown for the classes next year. I think she would be better placed in a class where there’s less academic, more play, more physical. The thing I know about the way Dana learns, she needs all that manipulation. She’s at an early developmental level, so that things like passing out the flags [for singing O Canada] and learning one-to-one correspondence. She’s learned simple choicemaking, she’s learned to be a member of the class and volunteer, she’s got a good attention span. I don’t feel we’ve failed with her, I just feel that she’s better served in one of the other classes because the way those classes are structured will meet her needs more (interview, May 31).

I don’t have a good feeling about Dana in terms of the progress we haven’t made with the family. I don’t feel we’ve made progress with this family much (interview, May 31).

In the fall, Dana will attend another class in the same school that has the characteristics that Maria has recommended for her. I knew that Dana would attend the school for one more year. When I asked Dana’s mother about her intentions for Dana after that time, she said that Dana would go to a different school from her sisters.

Mark

Mark is also six years old. He is a child of slight build who is very serious, mature, and inquisitive. He presents as an alert, bright child. You can see it in his
eyes. He enjoys playing with toys, listening to stories and ‘reading’ the text, and
going in his walker. He loves to control battery-operated devices, such as toys
and a taperecorder. When enthused, Mark volunteers readily to take a turn or
offer an answer in class. Mark is an only child and lives at home with his mother
and his maternal grandparents. Mark experiences quick changes in his mood and
can be passive and appear sullen. Mark’s mother is a very young, single parent
who has found it challenging to come to terms with his disability and follow
through with his many needs.

Mark enjoys communicating with people with whom he is familiar and
comfortable. He has a comprehensive communication book that includes an
index. He is very competent and effective in using his communication book. He
takes pleasure in using his communication book to talk with people. He is an
assertive communicator and insists that others take the time to hear him out.
Mark has some ability to vocalize. He is able to say, “No” and “More, please”. He often vocalizes and/or mouths the words and sounds during reading and
music activities.

Mark also is learning to control the computer and interact with software
programs. Maria reports that the computer is not Mark’s favourite activity this
year. He requires motivating software to keep him interested in computer
activities.

Mark’s mother shared her thoughts with me one afternoon over coffee in
the centre’s cafeteria. Regarding the goals she has for her son, she immediately
commented that “communication with [his] book was the most important thing”
(interview, June 4). She then went on to say,

Sitting on own, or do other things on his own. Walking obviously is
the key I mean every mother in this situation probably wants their
kid walking. But I think . . . I can’t expect him to be any more
smarter than he is at the age that he is and I think, for what he has, I
think he’s pretty smart. I mean, I think, and a lot of other people
think so, too. Other than walking, sitting, physical, stuff. I think
that’s the stage that I’m at now just because he’s coming along so
nicely in communicating and everything else (interview, June 4).
When asked about Mark's progress in the school and Maria's classroom, she matter-of-factly commented:

He's really come along nicely since he's been in this program. I think they really try to get them to communicate and I think that's the main goal, obviously, of all the kids that are there. ... He didn't come in with a book and he's leaving with a book.

He didn't know how [to communicate] when he first went. I think that's the major thing. I mean without this book I don't know what would happen. I don't know how he would communicate. He can say a couple of words, but that's about it. He's just grown over the years. He's matured ... Little changes, gradual changes (interview, June 4).

As we walked back to Maria's classroom, I thought, "This woman is so young and she's had to grow up in such a hurry. Indeed, she's still growing up." While she spoke confidently about her son's abilities, it seemed to be confidence devoid of full knowledge of his ongoing and growing needs and her own ability and skill in meeting them.

Maria is pleased that Mark has become an assertive communicator as he will be a strong advocate for himself. She is concerned about his emotional stability and the nature of support he receives at home. While reviewing his latest report card, she reflected on the progress he has made.

And then what things did I highlight in his report card? Well I did want to point out this business of his moods because I didn't want to be too negative about it so I just said his moods vary and occasionally he's out of sorts and appears tired and passive. People notice that. They notice that he's flat some days, you know. So I thought it was important. But he is sociable and enjoys interacting with a variety of partners. He interacts during structured sessions. He understands class sessions. He becomes upset if he must join the group rather than pursue his own interests I think that's important to point out. It's important to explain and negotiate with him to avoid tantrums and I've also told his mother that. I've known since the first day he came in here. If you explain things and negotiate you'll usually get your message across to Mark. He volunteers. He's quick to give an answer. He's aware of the environment. He's made great gains in using his book [communication] effectively. He willingly gives information. He's able to tell us what he did at home and it's reliable. He loves books,
stories, and answers all these questions. He can count up to 31 by rote if we use a numberline. He identifies the numerals. He’s learning concepts and likes playing card games. He’s been doing that at home. He can select pictures to create a pattern of various basic shapes. And then I also mentioned that he likes to do role playing using a VOCA and he does his art and he likes to participate in music and he likes to read the picture/symbol text. That’s one thing I’ve noticed about him when we do all those songs, he’s really looking. . . . So for Mark, I feel a good sense of satisfaction (interview, May 31).

I can tell Mark’s made a lot of gains this year because he can be so effective with such a wide range of people. He gets his messages across to a wide range of people (interview, April 26).

Mark will attend a segregated school in the fall. When I asked his mother about an integrated placement for him, she shared a comment made by her sister who is a teacher, “My sister said, ‘Don’t bother. Don’t go there.’ I’ve come this far and I don’t want to set him back (interview, June 4).

Patty

Patty is a shy six year old who approaches new people and activities with initial hesitation. However, like most of her classmates, she is very motivated to communicate and participate in all familiar classroom activities. She is very attentive in class and enjoys listening to stories and music and playing with toys that she is able to manipulate easily. Patty is the most physically able of her class peers. She is able to manipulate objects to some degree, vocalize some distinct words, and drink and feed herself once she is set up with appropriate utensils, such as an adapted cup, spoon and dish.

Patty lives at home with her parents and a younger brother. English is a second language for Patty. Tagalog, her native language, is spoken at home. The second language aspect at home has been a challenge for Maria and Patty’s parents in terms of supporting her communication and following through on the demands of homework. Despite the second language challenge, Patty’s parents are supportive and endeavour to implement recommendations. Maria has enlisted the help of one of the school matrons who acts as a translator for Maria,
making telephone calls about important issues and weekly tape recordings of instructions for completing Patty's homework.

Patty enjoys communicating with people. She has a comprehensive communication book that also has an index. She is competent in using her index to direct people in her book. A hand splint on her right hand allows her to accurately point with her index finger to one large symbol or a group of smaller symbols in her communication book.

Patty enjoys using the computer. She accesses the computer by using a headswitch. She understands the process of scanning and is able to interact with a variety of software programs.

Unfortunately, I was not able to meet with Patty's parents. Maria had advised me that this might happen, due largely to the second language barrier. While several attempts were made to convey the intent and activities of the study, including having one of the matrons who speaks their language speak to them about the study, they declined being interviewed.

Maria has been concerned that Patty continues to develop her communication skills and that she be in a language-rich learning environment. She is recommending that Patty attend the reverse integration classroom in the school next year, but worries that she will fall behind in communication and learning. Maria reflected on her past year with Patty,

Patty... I feel terrific about her! I think she's ready to roll and she's only just turned six. And she'll probably have skills that'll be superior to some of the kids that [her new teacher] is gonna get next year in his class because when I told him all the things she could do he said, 'Oh, wow! Maybe she should go to the [more advanced program]'. And I said, 'No. I feel for content and for socialization that this is the best place.' (interview, May 31).

In the foregoing descriptions of each of Maria's students my intent was to convey their unique characteristics and complexity not only in terms of their capabilities and limitations, but also in terms of their life outside of school. This life outside of school is important for Maria. Indeed, she made a statement that stands out for me.
I don't have just have a student in my classroom, I have a family (interview, March 15).

Ayers (1993) states, "We cannot really be child-centred if we are not also family-centred" (p. 41). Knowing and involving each student's family are critically important in Maria's practice. Very often the parents come into the school program with their child's physical needs in mind. Maria explained,

That's the reason for the existence here is the fact that the therapy can be integrated. What I do can be done out in a community school or at [the other congregated school] or wherever else. I can do that somewhere else. I don't have to do that here, the educational aspect. The reason that we have it here is because the therapy services are available (interview, March 31).

The school coordinator who has taught in the school for 13 years also commented,

I find generally when kids are really young the parents are really focused on the physical and they really want their kid to walk and that seems to be a really strong desire in a lot of parents and that's their focus. And you still get kids coming in here after going to nursery school, and the integrated nursery schools and that, whose parent goal is still primarily a physical one. In fact, we have one little guy going into Joan's class who I would look at and say, 'His primary need is communication.' But his Mom looks at him and says and I know she's thinking it's physical. She's really concerned about the physical aspect and that's really important that's why everybody likes the [school] because there are therapists here.

But I think at a certain point, you see a shift, you do see. It's part of coming to terms with the disability ... I think at certain points parents sort of realize. It's like letting go of little bits of dreams at a time. Like they come to realize, 'Okay my child's not going to walk. This is not a reasonable expectation.' So then they say, 'Okay, if they can communicate then I'll be happy.' And then and I have a little guy coming into Joan's class and his mother says, 'Now you know, I know he's not going to walk. I just want him to be able to communicate.' So now she's at that point....

Certainly I get parents ... who, they're concerned about all the child. I mean they want them to communicate, yes. But they want them to physically, you know, to be able to use their arms and their legs and I sorta see Maria and Joan as kind of helping them through that, not to say that you have to let go of that and not focus on that
anymore. But sorta see how powerful the tool of communication can be and how, you know, how that makes them more independent. And I know in terms of involving the parents I know that they really want the parents to be involved and they even insist, I mean they’re pretty persuasive! Maria’s pretty persuasive. I mean she has her ideas and I mean based on good solid experience on what. I mean she’s so dedicated I mean she has her ideas of what is going to work for certain kids and she insists on parents becoming involved and that it’s necessary for them to become involved and she has a way of getting them involved. I’m not sure how she does it but … guilt or what she does … She’s very strong, she’s convincing and she’s very dedicated. I mean if your teacher is putting this much effort into your kid, you must think as a parent, ‘Well I better try and come on board, too.” (interview, School Coordinator, June 28)

For the parents of Ricky, Sarah, and Bethany, their comments reflect an understanding and acceptance of their child’s most critical needs. Each of these parents has become a strong, articulate advocate. Each has come to realize how critical communication also is for their child. Each has come to understand what independence means from the perspective of communication. While still hanging onto hopes of their son someday using a walker, Ricky’s family now have a different, a broader understanding of what it means for Ricky to be independent. Sarah’s parents chose an educational program that focuses on developing communication rather than physical skills. Bethany’s mother’s comments reflect a focus on Bethany’s communication and cognitive development. While acknowledging the significance of being able to communicate, Mark’s mother’s mood and comments indicate that she is beginning to let go of the dream of him walking. Dana’s mother is moving in that direction, as well. They need more assistance along the way. As Maria states, “If parents come and their primary, their goal is the therapy aspect, we try and also get them to see that communication and education are really important as well. That all of these things are important” (interview, March 31).

I will now describe Maria’s classroom program, which also reflects the multiplicity of goals for her students.
Maria’s Classroom Program

Theories of curriculum and of teaching and learning cannot alone, tell us what and how to teach, because questions of what and how to teach arise in concrete situations loaded with concrete particulars of time, place, person, and circumstance (Schwab, 1971, p. 494).

Curriculum

Maria described her curricular program as being ‘fluid’ and dependent on the nature of each student (interview, March 31). Maria, in collaboration with her teacher colleagues, has developed much of the curriculum, the activities, and the materials over the years. She and Joan, the entry-level communications classroom teacher, have worked particularly closely in defining the curriculum for their students. Maria explains,

Over time . . . we’ve tried to come up, to develop a program. The other teachers looked at things like the Brigance and some of the other curriculum, but we knew that a lot of that stuff . . . for one thing we can’t cover it all. We don’t have time. So Joan and I sat down and we looked at the range of communication kids and tried to figure out, well, what were the things that we could focus on and cover? So, personally, I feel that we should spend our time mostly on communication, math, and literacy activities in here and then, if we can fit some other activities in those contexts. then we can kind of do that....

So in terms of teaching time, I sat down. I went over and talked to [another teacher in the school], I compiled a lot of materials together and I looked at, ‘What do I think I could reasonably get done between now and the end of the year, if we look at this maybe once a week?’.

I do it as the year progresses, but it’s kind of cumulative too because . . . This is kind of looking at it newly again this year. With the units that Joan and I do together, we’ll sit down and we’ll do brainstorming and then from the brainstorming we’ll come up with this kind of thing. . . . What are the objectives and what are the activities? . . . I would do it as the year progresses because I find that more meaningful in terms of the particular class I have and how much ground I can cover (interview, April 26).

If you had a child who was deaf/blind, you’re adding in goals at the one end of the spectrum and with a child that’s gifted, you’re
adding in goals at the other end, but it was gradually kinda developing into a kind of curriculum ... over time. Because when I came here, I said 'What's the curriculum?' There wasn't one! I spent time with [the previous teacher]. I knew the kind of things she was doing, but I didn't have the stuff to go on that [other teachers had] (interview, April 19).

Maria's development of curriculum reveals a great deal about the nature of her knowledge. I will come back to this in Chapter 5 when I provide an in-depth analysis of her knowledge.

**Student Goals**

The multiple needs of each student are reflected in the multiple goals that Maria and her team have developed for them. The students have physical and occupational therapy goals such as feeding, mobility, accessing the computer, and developing fine and gross motor skills. Some of Maria's general goals for all of her students include: orienting to the classroom, school, and building, identifying one's cubbyhole, understanding school routines and activities; and assisting with activities of daily living such as eating, drinking, and dressing.

Maria's main goal for her students is to develop their communication skills. Indeed, this is the mandate of the communications classroom. In consultation with the other professionals on her team, it is Maria's main role to determine a means of communication for each of her students. For Maria, this means not only aiming to develop an appropriate communication book to house the picture symbols that represent what the student needs and wants to say, but also providing them with opportunities to communicate effectively with a number of people. She explained this during our interviews,

M: And you want, you want the children to have exposure and opportunities to interact with as many people as possible, not just the teacher. I think that's really important.

D: Why is that?

M: Well, obviously, they're going to go out of here and I won't be around. You know. They need to be proficient communicators and they need to not just want to stick with one or two people.
They need to be willing to socialize and get to know more than just one person or two people. (interview, March 31).

M: We used to do circle every morning. Same thing, I'd hold up the cards. We'd sing the song. Kids would look. And that's effective, too. And I knew that particularly at the beginning of the year, before people know one another, I think. But now I have a sense of satisfaction in that the kids are getting opportunities to interact on a one-to-one a lot. People are working with them, the dressing and undressing. (interview, April 26).

M: I like doing things with the whole group of kids. But I also think they need time to communicate.

D: Because their communication is individual. It has to be.

M: Yeah, So that's why I set the jobs up so that we've got enough helpers, they go off ... like you can do it every morning. You can do the calendar and the weather ... and the whole group and it can take the whole morning. But I prefer to have them choose it. Like we don't do that all the time. I really like doing the calendar because I think that's important. I think having the daily schedule and the dates, that's more important than dressing the weather bear every day. But when we've got enough helpers then I really like ... that's another opportunity for communication one-on-one or ... and another opportunity to communicate to someone different and to direct what's going on and then to come back and share (interview, April 26).

A careful scan of Maria's classroom allowed me to "see" Maria's classroom program. The activities and lessons that her students were working on were apparent in the symbols that were displayed on the classroom walls and that identified the rows of binders of symbols that lined the bookshelves. Large, plastic bins stacked along a back wall held the props of her teaching: the symbols and concrete objects for the myriad themes, lessons, and activities. All were readily available and provided the students with the means with which they were able to actively participate in the classroom lessons and activities. They were a testament not only to the length of time Maria has taught students who use AAC, but to her optimism in their potential and her commitment in supporting the realization of their potential.
In addition to focusing on assessing and developing each student’s communication abilities, Maria’s classroom program has an academic focus: number concepts, colours, shapes, etc. The students are introduced to literacy and numeracy concepts. Literacy goals include demonstrating interest in books, knowing parts of books, orienting to books, print concepts, recognizing and spelling their name, letter/sound correspondences, and vocabulary and language development. Besides incorporating the literacy goals into as many activities as possible, Maria had a formal reading instruction time. She grouped the students according to their level of understanding, skill, and need. Though they have different goals, Dana and Ricky were typically grouped for reading instruction. Maria’s educational assistant, Sandra, often instructed them. Bethany, Mark, Sarah, and Patty formed the second group and were instructed by Maria. They were working on a formal reading series. The text of the readers had been adapted with symbols.

The students had individual education plans (IEP) which outlined their educational goals, program and progress. The IEP provided details of each student’s instructional goals and objectives, observable behaviours, teaching and assessment strategies, and evaluation methods and student achievements. Each team member (i.e., physiotherapist, occupational therapist, speech-language pathologist, and others as required) assumed responsibility for providing information related their particular goals and progress for each of the students. Maria was responsible for compiling the information on the IEP document. For each student, extensive instructional objectives were listed on their IEP for the areas of language, which included expressive communication and literacy skills; mathematics; personal and social development; the arts; occupational, physio, and speech-language therapy; and technology. My analysis of each IEP revealed detailed, observable behaviours related to each goal along with specific teaching and assessment strategies and materials. Comments related to each student’s progress towards achieving his or her goals were provided in the evaluation section of the IEP. In June, a provincially mandated Kindergarten-level progress report was also completed for each student. The IEP, which provided critical
details of the student's program and achievement, was attached to the student's progress report. The following is an example from Ricky's June IEP.

Instructional Goals/Objectives:

Communication-Social Interaction
Goal: To improve visual attention
Objective: Ricky will visually attend to objects and pictures presented to him and correctly identify them 4/5 times.

Observable Behaviours
Ricky is showing some visual accuracy when presented with familiar objects and pictures. The objects or pictures need to be in clear contrast to the background.

Teaching Strategies
1. Individual session with teacher and therapist 2 times per week outside classroom in quiet environment.
2. Ensure all class activities allow for maximum ability to see the objects or pictures presented.

Assessment Strategies
1. Document progress at each session.
2. Liaison with teacher and [Itinerant Vision Specialist] as to consistency in progress and re-evaluate materials and methods of presentation.
3. Record results of weekly sessions in anecdotal form.
4. Assess optimum size of picture.

Evaluation
1. Ricky has shown with his new glasses, he can identify 5/5 familiar, clearly outlined picture ranging in size from 2.5 - 6 inches.
2. He has difficulty with pictures of any size if there are subtle features e.g. mouths on the emotion symbols.
3. He is currently being assessed for a picture communication book to be used to support auditory scanning.
4. Intense training will be given to determine whether he can learn to focus on more subtle features.
I have described Maria's classroom program relative to the overall curriculum, the student goals, and the documentation used for planning and reporting student program and achievement. The curriculum and student goals are taught through activities which Maria and her classroom team have determined. I describe these program activities in the next section.

**Program Activities**

The activities in which the student goals were reinforced were typical of those found in many primary level classrooms. The day began with the undressing routine, which I re-counted at the beginning of this thesis.

Maria further rationalized this routine,

M: If children get their coats off right away and hang them up, they want more play time. That's what we were trying to teach Mark. If he would .... get [his] coat off you can play with toys or you can read your stories. But it's kind of revealing to see the directions they take with something like that which is why it was so reinforcing to have that woman give the lecture at Closing the Gap and to come back and try it. Joan and I kind of talked it over and she said, 'You know, I think that little Bethany is gonna really like this.' And so when I came back ... it's sometimes hard to implement new ideas if you don't get on it right away. You lose them. So I did. I sat down and I got the symbols ready and we tried it. And I remember [the occupational therapist] being kind of surprised and she said, 'Oh we've got something new here.' Because we all kind of ...

D: That was the dressing/undressing routine that you did?

M: Yeah. Like we always used to ask them, 'Right arm or left arm?' And they would look. And "May I help you off with your coat?" And they'd give yes or no. I mean we had the beginnings of it.

D: But here they were directing it.

M: Yeah. They were more in charge of it. And we always had them find their cubbies and that sort of thing. But this way then they're more in charge. And her [the woman presenting] message was, 'They are going to have to learn to direct people all their lives. It's time to start right now, getting them used to that, because that's gonna be so important when they're adults. They're gonna have to
handle aids.' And I thought, 'You are right!' I read Bill Creech’s book and all the problems he had. Is it Bill Creech? No Bill Rush. All the problems he had with all the caregivers and I just know that’s true. So I think it’s worth taking the time, plus it’s communication, it’s fundamental communication (interview, June 14)

After the undressing routine, the children were taken to the washroom, then returned to the classroom to have a bit of free playtime, before the singing of the National anthem and listening to the school’s morning announcements. The students had opportunities to choose and be responsible for a variety of jobs in the classroom: appropriately dressing the “weather bear”, watering the classroom plants, choosing the music, preparing the daily calendar, taking attendance, and choosing a book to be read to the class. I wondered about Maria’s choice of jobs,

D: What is the purpose of jobs or helpers in the class? Like someone might say, ‘Well Ricky won’t be able to water the plants’. Why do you do that with him?’

M: We don’t do it all that often....I do it more when I get a new class to develop a sense of the fact that we are a class and that different people take responsibilities and we work ... and it also makes a kind of a nice circle time...Because the kids aren’t wearing coats now, we have a little bit more time... I’ve set the jobs up so that they appeal to children with different abilities, so everybody can do something and feel some success and also work one-on-one for a few minutes with someone else: to go out, check out the weather, do the calendar. It’s nice sometimes to just do it with one or two children and then come back and share a lot of information and it can be really fun and motivating for the beginning kids....As the children mature then I see less and less of a reason to have to do [jobs]. I’ve picked out maybe the jobs I think are the most important. But I think it’s to give them a chance to go off and do something.

I also use it in an assessment way....For instance, I’ll be looking at children and how they’re progressing through those jobs. Are they able to work their way up to having success with the calendar? Usually with 4 year olds it’s kind of lost on them. But are they starting to develop a sense of how to do it? If they’re a beginner, are they motivated by making those choices over there for the weather bear? Is that meaningful? Is someone able to come and know who’s
absent from the class? I'm constantly assessing what's going on in terms of those jobs when we do them. When I don't know the kids well it provides me with an opportunity for assessment and it really does....

Sometimes I've had kids and we do circle every morning.... A couple of times I had classes where the children were at an earlier stage, maybe a lower cognitive level, and we really do the routine every morning and I'd sing this song, 'Where is so-and-so?' And we'd look and we'd wave and we'd have them make eye contact and I'd do some activities going around the circle and they choose go fast or slow or backward or forward or whatever. That was very teacher-directed, it is very teacher-directed.

If we've got enough helpers, it's less teacher-directed. They have control, they get to make a decision about which of those jobs they want....I don't know if you noticed, but Bethany just ... she had to have that [choosing music tape]. So that tells me about her personality... that she's gonna persist (interview, June 14).

There was also circle time where the students updated the daily calendar, weather, and classroom and school daily activities. Efforts were made to do this everyday, as Maria explained,

For the calendar, it's important to do it every day because if you're gonna keep track of events or provide a structure for the children... We don't get to it every day, I know. But if you want to give them some sort of sense of their world, you start with their everyday activities and this world they walk into every day. I try and teach them the days of the week and looking at the date on the calendar. It helps. It really helps. And we're also obsessed with it too. People are obsessed by weather and dates and activities, in general. So it's a skill that, you know, it's important to them. I remember a [previous student's] mother saying when he went she took him over to [his new school], how delighted he was when he went in the class and they were doing the calendar because he had had that experience. And that was very reinforcing for me as a teacher that he had this experience and now he could relate to something in his new environment and understand what was going on (interview, June 14).

Show and Tell was a key component of Maria's program, an extended length of time for the students to talk one-on-one with someone; to convey their thoughts and news from home; to use their communication tools: the books and
symbols, and to then share their news with their peers. It was also a time for Maria to determine how each child was progressing in their communication abilities. In a later chapter, I share a Show and Tell interaction between Maria and Bethany to illustrate the interaction among Maria's knowledge and beliefs.

Maria referred to the routines in the class: undressing, circle time, show and tell, and jobs as 'anchors' for her students and for her team who are interacting with the students. She explained.

You know you asked why we do those [dressing/undressing, snack time] all the time because they take up a lot of time. But even those activities where they're repetitive: so people can get a certain comfort level and they circulate among all the kids so that they learn for each child that they need to be using a little bit different method .... and that takes a while to develop. So, it's kind of nice to have these anchors, these anchor activities that people can come in and sort of slot into and learn. It sort of serves the same purpose for the kids as well. They have a few activities where it should be pretty straightforward and it should be repetitive so that they can practice with different helpers and try out their system .... I remember specifically teaching [a volunteer] how to do that dressing and undressing and she learned it really well because she had this whole routine. She pulls this thing out and she puts the symbols in the right order and she talked. Now we've changed on her and she's been away a little bit, so we have to bring her up to scratch with the new communication book. But the routine is comfortable to her .... so now it's just using a new book within that routine. She understands the end goal, so it will be a little less frustrating ..... So those little routines can serve us well and also give the children the chance to practice with many people (interview, April 26)

Maria's program had an academic focus. While there was little free playtime in the program, the students had access to a wide variety of age-appropriate toys with which they were able to interact. Maria had developed theme displays for many of the toys and activities. Many of the toys were battery-operated and could be activated with a switch, providing the students with opportunities to initiate control. Swimming, gym, play group, library, art, music, sensory, formal reading, mathematics, computer, and the ABC Puppet
show were scheduled on a weekly basis. Snack and washroom breaks were scheduled twice each day.

Maria summarized the main aspects of her program, I've always felt, and I've said for years and years, with this group of children, some things have to get the major focus and other things need to be sort of even left out because I think you run the risk of watering down everything so much that they don't come away with fundamental skills that they're going to build upon in the future. So, I think literacy, besides the communication which is, of course, the reason they're in this class, I think communication and literacy are the most important and then after that I work on numeracy .... I think we do do the calendar every day and the numbers. I think it's a great opportunity to bring numeracy in and to develop this understanding of a schedule. I think we do that one every day because it's important. I think the literacy activities, some form of literacy, I like to try and do at least one thing every day, something. I wish that we could do more. ...Communication, show and tell, I get very ornery if we aren't able to do some communication with those books and the literacy things is just critical, you know, learning their ABCs if they're able to do that, developing a beginning awareness of letter sounds, I think that's really important. Well I think it's all important but if you have to pare it down from the academic point of view I'd say the numeracy around practical numeracy, the literacy, giving them a chance with their books for communication - those three things are fundamentally the most important to me. I think getting a start on technology is very important in whatever form. So that's very fundamental to this class even if it's hitting their VOCA or turning on the tape recorder or if it's as high level as Patty is right now. So those things are important. And then other things, I mean the therapist would certainly have their ... but from an educational point of view I'd say those are the guts of the program (interview, June 14).

The activities in Maria's classroom were often theme-related and followed the inherent rhythm of the year and seasons.

I mean Halloween, . . . that can take a whole month. September you're talking about coming back to school. We do a lot of kind of fun things in September because we're just starting out and I need some activities that I know the kids will really like that will enable me to get to know them. Like this year we made ice cream in the first couple of weeks of school. It fit seasonally because it was still hot. We got the play group going right away because we had them selling ice cream to each other and eating ice cream. It was the most
popular theme we've ever had. But they're kind of tried and true activities that I've had in the past that I know will get them interested in school, that'll get them interested in going and gets us kind of off to a start, gets us off rolling. I've done the All About Me in the fall time, too, particularly if I don't know the kids. Like next year I'll have an all new class. I'll probably go back to All About Me because it helps me familiarize myself with the new children (interview, May 3).

During my stay in Maria's classroom, I experienced two themes: the school-wide Australia unit, which occurred in the weeks before the March Spring break and a Nutrition unit during Education Week in May. Again, Maria extended both of these units to the end of the school year. Further, Maria had multiple and varying goals within each activity which were dictated by the various needs of the students and the time frame for the activities:

The goal is for every kid, you know, no matter what they're communicating with, 'Are they communicating with more than one partner effectively so that the message is getting through?' And then in a way to extend it is to bring the literacy in and the interaction. You know when we're doing things we're doing more than one thing at a time. There's more than one goal very often at play there and I think that's the art of it is when you can see a way to weave in more than one goal into this sort of thing. So when four of them show up at the door and you've got one helper, okay, so then you think, 'Alright, well how am I gonna speed this up?' So this is the kind of problem-solving I have to do all the time. So I thought, 'Okay, well when there were two let's get them in to interact and help each other. When there are four, well then let's have them all participate and take a turn. But we need the speed so let's do it for all of them. And then let's have them all swap coats so they're reading a different name every morning. And it does take a long time, but it's important.' (interview, April 26).

This knowing their left and right to begin with, like we do that under dressing and undressing and then it moves out into space and then, you know learning to find their way around the building. I think it is really important; developing an awareness of that and learning to direct people. It's again learning to direct people. It's like what we did today, the art project, learning to direct people. Look how much satisfaction Bethany took from that activity because she was in charge, she got to say what the picture was like, she got say what the colours would be. She was in charge. I was doing what she wanted (interview, May 31).
Indeed, Maria squeezes as much as she can out of each activity. She explained,

I think when I first came I found these theme things, you know, if you only spent a week, it was just a lot of work and I wasn’t sure the kids were getting the payoff which is why I spent more time on the Australia [theme] because I felt, ‘Well let’s get some mileage out of this. Let’s use the songs longer’ (interview, May 3)

We go slowly with our themes. If I went faster .... if we went through this theme [food groups] in a week or two I just don’t think they would have the opportunity to grasp it. We wouldn’t have the opportunity to develop it (interview, May 3).

The nature of each activity also depends upon the amount of time available and the goal(s) Maria has in mind:

I might do things a little bit different way one time as opposed to another because of the time frame. So, like the Australia book, because I didn’t want them making that book that much further, I wanted them to start reading about that experience, as close to the experience as possible, I did the stuff for the book and essentially made that book for them. So my goal that time was to have them read those books (interview, May 3)

Maria also plans classroom activities on the basis of the number of people available to assist the students.

I’ve got sort of a framework of the kinds of things I want to do, but then sometimes the activities are dependent upon the number and I might hold off doing something if I don’t have enough people. Like I’ve found sometimes I would want to do those little books, the book we did on Australia. I’ve done that differently in the past when I’ve had more time where if we have a lot of helpers I take those sentence scripts and they have to fit the sentence structure to an appropriate picture. So we might hold up two pictures and just say, ‘Read this sentence and which one does it go with?’ So, if I have the manpower .... But I’ve had times when I’ve scheduled an activity like on a Wednesday afternoon and I get everything out and I think, ‘Oh. There’s a big problem here. We don’t have enough people to make this feasible.’ So, then, I mean with experience I’ve learned, ‘Okay, well that’s not gonna . . . I can’t do that at that time. I don’t have the coverage. So I might do the activity in a different way just because that kind of activity .. I don’t like to see if the kids are doing ... are meant to do that kind of thing, I don’t like to see them having to sit and wait a lot. And if it’s Sandra and myself and
an experienced volunteer, we might be able to do two-on-two, but if we have a volunteer who is not experienced, that's another part of the equation. If we have someone who is not as skilled then it's not gonna happen very well for certain children because the volunteer isn't skilled enough to maybe do it in the way that we would do it. So you kind of have to weigh it up. You take all these factors into consideration when I plan (interview, April 26).

Maria reflected on the program she provides for her students,

I really believe in this program and there's a lot of variety. I get frustrated because I think that there's not as much programming as I'd like to see sometimes but I feel it's a well-rounded program and these children are kindergarten age. . . . I mean I know about myself that I'm very sort of serious minded and I have a great commitment to seeing these kids make academic progress but I also, on the other side of the coin, sometimes feel guilty - do they get enough play time? It is kindergarten . . . . And so, even though some of them are six years old, given that they've had limited experience it's still meant to be a kindergarten program. So, even though I'd like to have the balanced literacy diet all day in some ways. In some ways, I really wouldn't. I think they'd fatigue. (interview, May 3).

Team Approach

The multiple needs of the students necessitate working with a number of professionals. Maria and her educational assistant, Sandra, have worked together for six years. They appeared to act as one. While they often met after school to plan lessons and events, they knew what to do on a daily basis and moved in and out of each other's roles seamlessly as described in this three-way conversation,

M: I know when I'm absent that it's Sandra who takes over because if you're just bringing in someone from the outside they're just not gonna know what to do.

D: Sure.

M: And Sandra's totally capable of doing that. But it's funny that you say that because I haven't noticed that. Like I feel very in communication with Sandra you know. Even though if you've noticed that we don't talk that much to each other.
S: Well we do. I mean we talk sometimes after school.
D: Yeah. Maybe after school
M: But that’s an interesting observation.
D: Not throughout the day you don’t.
M: Not throughout the day. No. We don’t have to.
S: No. There’s a rhythm.
M: It just flows. We don’t have to. I think that’s why. Because we don’t have to.
S: Yeah. Well, there’s just this understanding.
D: Yeah. And it’s not that it’s necessarily a routine. I mean there’s a routine element to it. Like you know what the schedule is.
M: We just know to fill in for each other.
D: Yeah. That’s the way it is. You just pick up . . .
M: I think the roles . . . I think on the team the roles overlap so much that team members will fill in for one another without even hardly thinking about it. It’s again, not this is Sandra who’s the EA, so she has to do the dishes attitude.
D: Right. It’s whoever . . .
M: It’s whoever . . .
D: in the position to be able to do the dishes.
M: Whoever is available to get them done.

Because of the multiple and complex needs of her students, Maria’s classroom team also includes an occupational therapist, a physiotherapist, a speech language pathologist, and a therapy assistant. The therapists are shared amongst the other classrooms in the school and scheduled accordingly. Maria typically has one therapist in her room at any given time. An occupational therapist, a speech language pathologist and a technologist from the rehabilitation centre’s augmentative communication service provide consultation to the team. The school psychologist joins the team as required and typically assesses each child before they leave the program.
As I have already discussed, Maria actively encourages the students' parents to be involved in supporting their children's goals at home and also by volunteering in the classroom.

I think it's very important for the parents to be involved in their program, their child's program (interview, June 7).

There's an open door policy here so we say that at the open house. 'We love to see you.' 'We love to have you come and spend time.'

In general, we have to beg them to come (interview, May 3).

The school psychologist reflected on parent involvement,

Because Maria does so much to involve parents, if parents are prepared to be involved certainly there appears from my perspective, consultation with them. Certainly there is in terms of the progress review process. I always feel that as the team [member] representing the goals that parents are encouraged to have input or to add to or to change them. I feel that it is welcomed and encouraged. I guess I know less well in terms of the actual sitting down and setting at the beginning and I guess my best impression would be that Maria and her immediate team set some initial goals that are then shared with the family, further discussed, refined as a team and then finally put into the IEP (interview, School Psychologist, June 24).

My interviews with the parents and each team member confirmed the welcoming stance and open communication in Maria's classroom. Each parent was able to describe the various goals for their child and felt that they were involved in the process of establishing the goals for their child. The parents of the students usually attend the twice-a-year progress review meetings. They each indicated that open communication exists between home and school and that they feel welcome at any time in the classroom. Over the years, though, Maria has experienced a trend in parents being unavailable for volunteering in the classroom. She suspects that this is due to the increased busy-ness of their lives. Still, she would like to see them more actively involved and wonders how this might be achieved.
Thus, a collaborative team approach to meeting each student's physical, sensory, educational, and social-emotional needs is followed in Maria's classroom. The school psychologist explained,

That's a class that seems to function under some fairly ideal circumstances. The goals in that class seem to be truly set as a team and that seems to be a team where members work well together and meet regularly and work on individual children's learning goals as opposed to more general or globalized goals covering all of the children (interview, June 24).

Maria's classroom team met once each week during the lunch period to discuss the students and their goals, program, and progress. Maria regards the team meeting as a time to share their experiences with the students and plan their program, and for ongoing professional development for herself and the classroom team. As she explains,

Maria: I always enjoy the team meetings actually.
D: The Thursday team meetings?
M: They're pretty serious you know. There are a lot of serious topics to always tackle but I always enjoy them.
D: Because?
M: Well, because I feel that the families and the kids are complex. The needs are complex, but we share the responsibility and I think that we see progress because we can share it. I think if it were just Sandra and I with none of the rest of the team I think we'd feel pretty burdened pretty quickly (interview, May 3).

All of the classroom team members expressed satisfaction in working in a team approach and in particular they enjoyed the professional learning and growth that a team approach affords. While a team approach prevails, a number of team members perceived Maria to be the 'leader' of the team as the following comments attest:

I think Maria's class is different from the other classrooms. I think that Maria takes a very firm sort of leadership role in deciding what the priorities might be. She will request specific input around a specific aspect of a student and from that then goals are established.
and a form of action is formulated. It is collaborative, but she probably takes more initiative than perhaps other classes in the [school]... Definitely the teacher takes the coordinating role, the quarterback role of the team. (interview, Speech Language Pathologist, consulting AAC service, September 1).

When I think of Maria, I sort of think of the focus of that team (interview, consulting Psychologist, June 24).

I think we got a really strong leader in Maria... Her goals are so clear and so specific and I think she sets a really high standard and she continues to develop it so I think it sets the tone, the framework of that class (interview, Physiotherapist, May 28).

D: Is there a leader of the team?

OT: The teacher. (interview, Occupational Therapist, consulting AAC service, June 15)

D: Would you say that there's a leader of the team within the communications class?

S: Well, probably, Maria would facilitate. She would bring up things that needed to be discussed. I think overall she seems to run the meetings and stuff, but it's funny. A leader. It's a funny word because I think everybody has their expertise and everybody has their input ... so I guess Maria is the coordinator (interview, Sandra, Educational Assistant, May 26)

Maria is a ring mistress. She's definitely in charge of how every flow and how everything goes. But it's not done heavy handed or with any sense of disrespect. (interview, volunteer, June 7).

Maria, too, alludes to her leadership or coordinating role within the classroom team:

I kind of have to engineer things... I'm kind of the engineer in here. I've got to make sure things are going (interview, May 3).

As has become obvious, the needs and capabilities of Maria's students are such that they require individualized assistance for most activities. Maria recognizes the dependence of her students and actively seeks and relies on volunteer support in her classroom. She explained,
M: Pretty much we go through the volunteer office. And in the Fall, I fill out, based on the schedule that I set based on how many therapists I have and when the special classes are, I look at that and I say, “Well, we could use a couple of people here and I don’t need anybody here.” And I give the list to the volunteer office and we try and you know, then fill the slots as we see the need. And volunteers are really important to me and always have been because I know I need them to carry out my job and that the kids need . . . can benefit so tremendously from them.

D: In what ways?

M: Oh, from the personal interaction. Just from coming in contact with other people from the community, other ways of doing things. Um, people to read them stories. They learn to request things of these people. It’s great practice because generally the volunteers come in and they’re maybe at certain times the least initiated and if I see a child able to sort of find their way and get what they want through a volunteer, I’ll think, “Hmmm, things are happening around the communication.” They become effective in another area with someone that’s maybe less familiar with them. (interview, May 3).

Maria was successful in enlisting volunteers from the community who provided support in myriad direct and indirect ways: developing computer setups for the students; repairing toys and equipment; fabricating tools, such as individual bookstands; and assisting students in classroom and field trip activities. A number of volunteers have been so for many years. There was considerable collaboration with Joan, the teacher responsible for the younger, entry-level students who use AAC. Maria and Joan often combined their planning and activities to teach both classes as a team. Maria has been a mentor to Joan in terms of teaching students who use AAC.

I’ve worked very hard with Joan over the years. Some day, if we think we’d like to share a job, that would be great and that’s important and we’ve worked hard together (interview, June 7).
If I attack something new and also with the units that Joan and I do together, we'll sit down and we'll do brainstorming and then from the brainstorming we'll come up with this kind of thing (interview, April 26).

This group [of students], they're terrific. But see part of the reason is Joan prepares them. They start early on....They're used to working in groups. They're used to listening, they're used to choicemaking. By the time they get in here, I don't ... that stuff is established. That's the beauty of working with someone, having shared the program, understanding the goals, so we're working towards common goals. It really makes a lot of sense, I think because the kids are ready for this when they come (interview, April 19).

Finally, collaboration amongst the staff of the school as a whole is integral part of meeting the needs of the children. Holidays and special events are celebrated together, as a whole school community. As Maria explained,

I think I find that that's what's special about this school in general is that all these special things we do. People get together and they work together. They work really hard and they have fun at the same time and it's kind of a contagion. . . . The school collaborates (interview, May 3, p. 2).

As I reveal in Chapter 7, collaboration amongst Maria, her classroom team members, Joan and other teacher colleagues plays a role in developing Maria's knowledge and beliefs and defining her teaching practices.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I have described the context of this study: Maria, her school, her students, and her classroom program. I chose to study a teacher who has significant knowledge and skill in teaching students with multiple disabilities and who use AAC. Further, her teaching takes place within a specialized environment that yields many advantages including the convergence of services and expertise.

Spending time with Maria observing her practice and discussing it with her offered me an opportunity to immerse myself in the practice of her teaching. It provided me with an opportunity to understand the connections among her
knowledge, beliefs, way of being and practice. It also provided me with an opportunity to explore how knowledge and beliefs, and her caring developed: the processes that support the development of effective teaching practices.

In the next chapter, I return to the research paradigm to describe the particular moves I made as a researcher. I outline the specific methodology I used in answering my research questions about Maria’s teaching practice.
Chapter 4: Method

Understanding a phenomenon as complex as teaching requires an approach that will capture its multi-dimensional complexities. I chose to gain an understanding of this complexity by observing and participating with a teacher who teaches students who use AAC, that is, through an in-depth study of a case. As I discussed in chapter 2, this study resides within a qualitative research paradigm. Accordingly, I followed accepted qualitative research practices (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Sandelowski, 1993). In this chapter, I describe these practices, the particular methods I followed, my moves or how I proceeded in this research study.

Selection of the Case

Of the numerous teachers with whom I have worked in my consulting role, I chose to study the practices of a teacher who is considered to have extensive knowledge of AAC and experience in teaching students who use AAC. While I have not had an opportunity to work with Maria directly in my consulting, I have interacted with her professionally on a number of occasions. Further, as mentioned earlier in this thesis, Maria is a teacher to whom I have often referred other teachers to observe her practices. I knew enough about Maria that I anticipated she would be open to being involved in this research.

Comments and appraisals from the parents of the students in her class and her colleagues confirmed my decision to study Maria’s practices:

She’s a saint. I mean, she’s marvellous. She’s knowledgeable. She’s motivated. She pushes where other people probably wouldn’t (interview, Sarah’s mother, June 17).

In response to a query regarding their expectations of Maria, Sarah’s mother quipped,

To teach her whatever it is she can learn, whatever way she has to do it and she’s met all those expectations and then some (interview, June 17).

Ricky’s mother reflected,
For Ricky, Maria is probably the best thing that could ever happen to him. And you know if she believes in something she'll really push for it, like with his glasses. We did take him to another doctor first, because it was closer. You know, going to Kitchener to see another doctor is pretty far and you know we already have to go to The Hospital and do this and that. But you know she really believed that this would be the best thing for him and she was right. Like she was right and she will, she will push. If she feels that this is the best thing for Ricky, she'll push for it, which is great in a teacher, like, it's really good (interview, June 7).

And in Mark’s mother’s words,

She’s great. A great person. Very nice and she’s done wonders for him. She really has (interview, June 4).

Dana’s mother’s regard for Maria is revealed in her response when asked about her expectations of Maria and the classroom team. After a long pause, she answered:

Well, I don’t know. I guess, what anybody would expect from a teacher that she’s there and cares, which I know she does (interview, June 8).

Bethany’s mother responded,

Maria’s more, I don’t know, sensitive. She’ll call me at home and say, ‘Well, [you] need this. It’s better for Bethany.’ Or, you know, ‘I’m concerned about her health. I think she needs more calories. Why don’t you think about sending some more puddings.’ You know? She’s concerned. She notices things and ... she’s really concerned about Bethany, some people don’t even notice. So she comments.... From my point of view, she’s amazing, amazing, sensitive.

I think Maria pushed a little bit. She’s helping to push her [Bethany] and to get there because she didn’t give up. She said, ‘Well, I know it’s hard for Bethany, but if we ... we continue trying and we get there’ [interview, June 16].

Maria’s colleagues, including administration, voluntarily shared their appraisals of her:

Just an excellent, excellent, excellent teacher. Dedicated. I’ve never met a woman, a teacher’s who’s so dedicated to that group of children. She just works beyond the call of duty, if there is such a
thing (interview, Administrative Consultant/Previous Principal, July 13).

Maria is so experienced (Interview, Occupational Therapist, June 15).

She has a vast background of experience with the communications children (interview, Principal, August 5).

I sorta see Maria is the expert in communication. I mean she’s just a good teacher, but she’s also an expert in communication and ... she’s a role model for me (interview, Teacher Colleague, June 28).

She wants to do the best she can for those kids and she wants to help them as much as she can. That’s what I’ve gotten from her. She may not say that directly, but that’s what I’ve gotten from her and she’s very good at what she does (interview, Therapy Assistant, May 28).

She’s very extremely, extremely dedicated to her students and feels you know very strongly about ... issues and has taken quite a leadership role in trying to make sure that what we have in the school serves the needs of our children in the best way (interview, Joan, Entry-Level Communications Classroom Teacher, June 2).

She’s just so, she’s so efficient. She’s such a good person. ... She’s so caring (interview, Sandra, Educational Assistant, May 26).

From the beginning, Maria regarded her involvement in this research as an opportunity to pause in her teaching and to reflect on her practices and learn from that process of reflection. This was revealed to me during an early interview, as she described what she gains from the experience of presenting at conferences.

You’re also sharing your expertise. The expertise that you’ve developed over time and it consolidates. It makes you really sit down. It’s the same reason I agreed to do it when you asked me to do the literacy thing or when ODPHD (Ontario Division for Physical and Health Disabilities, The Council for Exceptional Children) asked. Every so often I think it’s necessary to sit down and take stock and maybe organize what you are doing. I mean why would I agree to do something like this. It’s for the same reason. What are your motivations and what are your beliefs and why are you doing it (interview, April 19).
Maria also viewed her participation in this research pragmatically: an opportunity to have another pair of hands assisting the students in the classroom. She asked if I would help out on occasion. Initially, this request worried me. I was concerned that as a researcher that my becoming involved would influence Maria's practice -- taint my findings, so to speak. I was interested in how Maria defined her practice and I didn't want to influence that finding. In Maria's classroom, I mostly watched, trying to absorb all that was taking place. I furiously wrote. I laughed and commented. Gradually, though, I was drawn into the action. Indeed, at times I found myself forgetting that I was the researcher. My full inclusion in Maria's classroom was a gradual one but it had nothing to do with any perceived hesitancy on Maria's part. I return to this point later.

The Evidence

My analysis of Maria's teaching practices were drawn from several sources of information. They included:

i) my close observations and reflections recorded as field notes;
ii) video recordings of classroom activities;
iii) audio recordings of classroom team and planning meetings; and interviews with Maria and each classroom team member, including the parents of the students; and
iv) reviews of documentation such as, the student IEPs, communication reports, skill development progress charts, and weekly and daily activity plans.

I describe each of these types of data collection.

Close Observation, Field Notes, and Video Recordings

Close observation involves an attitude of assuming a relation that is as close as possible while retaining a hermeneutic alertness to situations that allows us to constantly step back and reflect on the meaning of those situations (Van Manen, 1997, p. 69).
I observed and participated in Maria's classroom for a total of 55 days over five months. As I entered the classroom early each morning, Maria's even earlier arrival was evidenced in her preparations for the daily activities. As she went about her preparations for the day, and I set up my videocamera and notebook, we would briefly discuss the day's activities. Soon, I settled into a rhythm of the day which typically followed each day's classroom schedule. As the children arrived, I focussed my lens on Maria, capturing her interactions and discussions with each child and her colleagues. At times I felt compelled to assist in the classroom and indeed, as I have already stated, I was gradually drawn into many of the activities. At other times, I observed and recorded from the periphery of the classroom. Lunch hours were spent either talking with Maria, filling-in the missing bits from the morning events in my field notes, or observing the once a week lunch time classroom team meetings. After the children had gone home for the day, Maria busied herself with preparations for upcoming lessons or met with colleagues to plan classroom or school activities. Occasionally, I was invited to join these planning sessions. More often than not, I sat at the large table in the classroom, completing my field notes and reviewing the student documentation.

I captured my daily observations and reflections in the form of field notes. Because of the nature of the students' communication and interaction, from the beginning I recognized a need to video record the classroom interactions. The students use visual means of communication and I felt that it was important to capture the interaction through visual means. Video recordings would also aid in the analysis and subsequent re-telling of the events, the moments. However, Maria alerted me to the issue of one student in particular, Sarah, who would likely be very distracted, not only by my presence, but by the videocamera. Maria suggested I not videotape the activities to begin with, providing the students with time to become accustomed to my presence. Consequently, for the first three weeks, I observed and wrote detailed field notes. This proved to be quite challenging. Capturing the interactive nature of the activity in the classroom and the verbal and visual dialogue simultaneously proved to be
difficult. I also wanted to capture my own thoughts and questions as they arose during my observations and develop questions, which I would later, ask of Maria. I was trying to maintain "hermeneutic alertness", the balance that Van Manen speaks of: assuming a close relation with the events while, at the same time, reflecting on my observations and experiences. This was an intense time, one of vigorous attention.

Once Sarah and the other students and staff were accustomed to having me in the classroom, I began videotaping the classroom activities. Thankfully, the transition to videotaping was a smooth one. The students demonstrated some curiosity in the beginning, but their acceptance was remarkably immediate and for the most part, they ignored the camera. In fact, I became the class cameraman, filming field trips and school events. In the classroom, I very often held the camera, or propped it on one of the bookstands to free my hands to continue making notes or to assist Maria as necessary. I video-recorded over 100 hours of classroom events.

To manage the field notes, I divided each page in half vertically by drawing a line down the page at about two thirds of the way across each page. On the left side, I wrote notes on my observations of the classroom activities and dialogue. On the right side of the page, I wrote notes to myself. These notes comprised my questions, reflections on my observations. It was challenging to take complete notes. There was much to attend to. The following is a sample from a field note:

Thurs. Mar. 25

**Observations**

9:00 Maria taking books & things out of student’s bags; reading them, etc. Kathy with Patty, Sandra with Mark, Jane with Bethany, Sue with Ricky, Sarah at washroom. Maria putting rings in Dana’s communication book and writes a note to her parents. “These were in Dana’s coat pocket. I thought I’d give them to you.”

**Questions/Reflections**

There’s lots of time this a.m. for students to choose & engage in activity. Maria worried about her putting them in her mouth-care/advocacy?
For the first few weeks, my notes were very extensive reflecting my attempts to write down everything I witnessed along with my questions. Indeed, in the end, I questioned everything I saw. The following provide an example of the types of questions I wrote in my field notes:

- You use picture communication symbols with all of the students. Why?
- How do you maintain a schedule in your classroom?
- The students have a lot of ‘stuff’. How do you manage it all?
- Tell me about the role of administration in influencing what you do as a teacher?
- When you were singing the Valentine song, you were showing the symbol for “who”. Why were you doing this?
- On what basis do you decide to work with a given student each day?
- How do you decide who is going to do what activities and tasks in your classroom?
- What are your academic goals for the students?
- A lot of time is spent each morning on having the students direct their undressing. Why do you do this?
- How do you decide who you are going to work with?
- Why did you give Mark a drink when it was time to go to Library?

In preparation for the first interview with Maria, I organized my list of questions. I analyzed each question and categorized it according to a theme or category. The questions were categorized under the following themes: collaboration, assessment, literacy, communication, classroom routine, student needs, parent-teacher relationship, classroom programming, goals, and beliefs. These themes captured all of the questions and formed the basis of the semi-structured interviews, which I conducted with Maria.

**Interviews**

The interview (1) may be used as a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon, and (2) the interview may be used as a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with a partner about the meaning of an experience (Van Manen, 1997, p. 66).

My interviews served both of these purposes: gathering more data to be used as a source for developing meaning from Maria’s teaching and including Maria in the development of that meaning. I conducted 9, semi-structured
interviews with Maria. Since Maria teaches within a collaborative teaching and therapy environment, I felt it was important to hear the thoughts and perceptions of people who work closely with her. I conducted one interview with each classroom team member, three teacher colleagues and two administrators within the school, and the parents of five of the students in Maria’s classroom. I will describe the interviews with Maria; her classroom team; the teaching colleagues and administrators; and the parents of her students.

**The Teacher**

I intended to meet with Maria at the beginning of each day or lesson to preview her plans for the day. In hindsight, this was somewhat unrealistic. The realities of teaching soon became apparent. Maria’s priority was her teaching and the beginning of each day, which often started at school at 8:00 and even 7:30, was absorbed with preparations which were necessary before the children arrived: gathering materials, organizing picture symbols, phone calls to parents and professionals, planning meetings, et cetera. We soon settled into a mutually comfortable routine for getting together to discuss the questions. We decided to meet once each week after school, at the round table that provided a focal point in Maria’s classroom, to discuss any questions and issues that arose during the previous week. This arrangement proved to be most beneficial to both of us. I had time to organize my questions and thoughts into the themes that were emerging, and thereby capitalize on our time, and Maria had an interruption-free length of time to consider and reflect on her teaching. We met over tea and cookies at the round table nine times throughout the study. Our conversations typically lasted for two hours, well exceeding what I had initially anticipated. I audio-taped approximately 18 hours of conversation with Maria and we continued some of our conversation through e-mail and face-to-face conversations long after I left the classroom.

In addition to topics which I already had in mind, (i.e., background information on each student, background information on Maria, collaborative process, etc.), the questions I had recorded during my first three weeks of
observation in the classroom provided much of the initial content of the beginning interviews. Thus, each interview had an overall topic or theme with related questions. The questions served as a guideline: a starting point for our conversation and markers or checkpoints along the way. As I have alluded to, the interviews typically took the form of a conversation, with other topics and issues being woven in as they arose naturally in the conversation. Maria and I were very comfortable with each other.

**The Classroom Team, School Colleagues and Administrators, and Parents**

While the focus of this research is on Maria's beliefs, knowledge, and practices, she works in an environment which follows a collaborative team approach. Additional information related to her beliefs, knowledge, and teaching practices was sought by interviewing members of her classroom team, school colleagues and administrators, and the parents of her students.

Each classroom team member was interviewed once. The following team members were included: educational assistant, occupational therapist, physiotherapist, therapy assistant, speech language pathologist, psychologist and the AAC service speech language pathologist and occupational therapist. The input of three teachers who had experience in collaborating with Maria was also sought. I chose these teachers on the basis of my knowledge of some of their collaborative work. The school's current and previous principal were interviewed. In these interviews, I asked the team members to share their experiences with Maria. All of the interviews took place at the school during the lunch hour or after school. Each interview lasted approximately one and a half hours and was audio recorded. I audio-taped approximately 15 hours of interview conversation.

Many of the interview questions were derived from my observations and questions, which, in turn provided a structure for the interviews. But, like Maria's interviews, a natural conversation was allowed to occur.
Teacher Efficacy Measure

It has been shown that teaching behaviours are influenced by the internal skills and the abilities a teacher feels he or she possesses (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; DeForest & Hughes, 1992; Jordan, Kircaali-Iftar & Diamond, 1993; Stanovich, 1994). Maria also completed The Teacher Efficacy Questionnaire (Gibson & Dembo, 1984). This questionnaire provided information concerning Maria’s belief about her ability to effect learning in her students. The purpose of having Maria complete the questionnaire was to ground her profile within the larger context of teacher efficacy. The construct of teacher efficacy has a longstanding history of predicting teacher effectiveness (Tschanen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998).

Documents

Maria and the students’ parents granted me access to each student’s Individual Education Plan (IEP), report card, and communication reports. My review of these documents clarified the students’ communication, therapy, and academic learning goals and achievement. Maria also shared her weekly lesson plans. At the beginning of each week, I reviewed and made a copy of these plans. Documents pertaining to the students’ progress and achievement in literacy and computer access were also shared.

Interpreting the Evidence

When we analyze a phenomenon, we are trying to determine what the themes are, the experiential structures that make up that experience (Van Manen, 1997, p. 79).

I began this study with the literature on teacher knowledge and beliefs in mind. However, allowing themes to emerge from my observations and experiences allowed me to be open to other possibilities for meaning. As Van Manen (1997) explains, “We try to unearth something ‘telling’, something ‘meaningful’, something ‘thematic’ in various experiential accounts – we work at mining meaning from them” (p. 86). Thus, in addition to the research literature, I
used themes as a means of making sense of Maria's practice. Themes were another tool for gaining meaning from the experience of Maria's teaching.

With each day in Maria's classroom, I mined meaning from my experiences, from my observations, from my daily notes, and from my discussions with Maria. And at the end of my time in Maria's classroom, I mined meaning. I reviewed my field notes. I did this several times. The first time, I just read the notes, remembering and reflecting on my experiences. During the second reading, I paid attention to any themes that seemed to be emerging and documented the themes in pencil in the margins of each page. During a third reading, I added themes, then compiled them. I prepared a chart recording the date, classroom event, and theme. Finally, I reviewed all of the themes, collapsing them into a smaller number of categories and recorded the number of times the theme occurred.

The audio recordings of each teacher interview were transcribed yielding a total of 353 single-spaced pages of text rich in meaning. Then, an analysis similar to that done with the field notes was followed. I reviewed the transcriptions at least three times. During the first review, I read the interview text while listening to the audio recording. This was to note any errors and to insert emphasis in Maria's speech, as appropriate. During a second reading, particular themes were noted and documented on the transcript. The third review took place while I was writing and still interpreting the data.

Maria also reviewed each interview transcript. She wrote comments which reflected clarification and further information. We then met to discuss her review and the emerging meanings.

I repeatedly reviewed the audio recordings of the interviews with Maria's colleagues and the parents of her students, listening for insights and information that would support my accounts and interpretations of Maria's practice.

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) emphasize the importance of validating research information and researcher interpretations in case study research. The accounts and interpretations of Maria's knowledge, beliefs, and practices were developed in consideration of the extant research literature and the particular
themes that emerged from my data. I must add that this did not occur at once or in a lock step fashion. Indeed, I learned that time is essential to developing understanding and meaning of this nature. Thus, I developed my understanding of Maria's teaching practice over time and with repeated visits with my data, the research literature, and my own thoughts and perspectives. This is the nature of qualitative research. The development of meaning is an evolutionary process. Repeated and ongoing discussions with Maria provided her with opportunities to review and provide written validation of the accounts and my interpretations. Further, we met in person and through e-mail to discuss the data, as required. Maria also reviewed each draft of my thesis and this final account.

**Reflections on the Moves I Made**

In the concluding section of this chapter, I will reflect on the journey I took as a researcher; my moves, why I made them, and the impact they had on this text.

When I began this study, I knew that Maria would want me to assist with the students in her classroom when necessary. Indeed she intimated this when I requested her involvement in this research. Initially, I was quite reticent to participate in the classroom for fear of influencing Maria's practice or the students' behaviour. I had a clear understanding of my research role. I was to observe, record, discuss, interpret, write, and do all of this as objectively as possible. Indeed, initially, I experienced what Heshusius (1994) described: "anxiety about how to be as objective as possible . . . [and] anxiety about how to manage subjectivity as rigorously as possible" (p. 15). But my subjectivity arose and took me by surprise quite early on in my observations.

For the first three weeks in Maria's classroom, I experienced an uneasy conflict between my personal ethic and my steadfast intent to be objective in my researcher role. My transition from objectivity to subjectivity was initiated by my inability to watch certain activities in the classroom without feeling considerable discomfort and even guilt for not offering assistance. Each morning the matrons wheeled the students into the classroom, lining them up, very often two,
sometimes three at a time. Then, the students typically watched and waited while Maria and her teacher aide greeted each of them and began the slow process of having each student direct them by looking at symbols, to remove their coats, hats, and mittens. Neither was I able to remain distant from a student who watched silently, intently and, once again, waited with what seemed to be an enormous amount of patience for a child, as the other students were assisted, individually, with their snacks and drinks.

I turned again to the qualitative research literature for guidance. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) reminded me, “The decision maker in most studies is the researcher, who is never an objective participant, no matter what he or she claims” (p. 121). Guba and Lincoln (1998) concurred:

The notion that findings are created through the interaction of inquirer and phenomenon . . . is often a more plausible description of the inquiry process than is the notion that findings are discovered through objective observation ‘as they really are, and as they really work’. (p. 200).

Very soon into my classroom observations, I realized that if I was to truly and deeply understand Maria’s teaching, I would need to become more involved in the classroom. Thus, subsequently, I became involved with Maria and her students, to a greater degree than I had intended at the outset. I turned toward what Heshusius (1994) refers to as a “participatory mode of consciousness”. I realized early on that an important part of discovering and developing meaning in teaching comes from interacting and building a relationship with the researched. Ironically, Maria engages in these same processes in her teaching.

After three weeks of observing, I gave in to my personal ethic. My offers of assistance were readily greeted with smiles and sighs of relief by all. I decided to put the video camera aside, still recording, though, and offer help whenever I perceived it to be necessary and whenever I was asked. It was at that point that my role changed from being an observer, to being an observer and participant in Maria’s classroom. That ethical decision ultimately allowed me to experience what Heshusius (1994) calls “a deeper kinship between the knower and the known” (p. 16). She states, “in borrowing methodology from the natural sciences,
we borrowed the idea of distance, the idea that the knower is separate from the known” (p. 16). However, interpretive work is characterized by intersubjectivity between researcher and researched and mutual creation of data. Rather than ignoring my subjectivity, I listened to it. I used it as a guide in making decisions in Maria’s classroom and in interpreting the data once I had left. As my relationship with Maria, her team, and the children deepened, my data became richer and more meaningful.

My focus of attention shifted. In the beginning I was concerned with capturing the materials, and organization, and approaches Maria used and her thinking and beliefs that lead her to her practices. However, what became increasingly significant for me was the way she taught, the not-so-obvious manner in which she carried out her practice. I began to explore how this manner, this way of being in the classroom, in her profession, influences and defines her teaching practice.

Summary

In this chapter I detailed the methods I used in gathering, interpreting, and conveying the evidence of my understanding of Maria’s teaching. In the chapters nested between here and my Synthesis in Chapter 9, I build my argument, my case for the interactive and interdependent nature among Maria’s knowledge, beliefs and teaching practices. I also reveal the role of the affective dimension of teaching in defining each of these components and shaping Maria’s teaching practices. I begin in Chapter 5 by conveying my understanding of the knowledge that Maria brings to her teaching. In Chapter 6, I reveal her multifaceted beliefs and their influence on her teaching practices. Three principles of practice emerged from what I witnessed in Maria’s classroom. These principles are described in Chapter 7. In Chapter 8, I reveal the affective dimension of Maria’s teaching and its role in developing her knowledge, beliefs, and ultimately defining her teaching practices. In each chapter, I share detailed teaching interactions between Maria and her students. I use these vignettes in a cumulative way throughout this thesis, as the basis for my analysis of Maria’s
teaching practices. Some of the vignettes are quite lengthy and I interject comments in order to draw your attention to elements which are particularly critical to the analysis. Finally, in Chapter 9, I synthesize my understandings of Maria’s teaching practice; offer implications for understanding exemplary teaching practices and considerations for practice; and raise questions for future research.
Chapter 5: Maria’s Knowledge

In this chapter I provide an in-depth analysis of the knowledge which underlies Maria teaching practices. I begin by recounting one of the formal reading lessons which took place in Maria’s classroom. This lesson will provide the foundation for much of my analysis of Maria’s knowledge. The actual lesson took 48 minutes. The resulting transcript occurs over the next 24 pages. I share the detailed transcript of the reading lesson in its entirety in an attempt to have you, the reader, “experience” the lesson and Maria’s interaction with her students as much as is possible from reading a text. Remember Shulman’s (1986, 1987) categories of knowledge that teachers hold: (a) content or subject matter knowledge, (b) general pedagogical knowledge, (c) curriculum knowledge, (d) pedagogical-content knowledge, (e) knowledge of learners characteristics and needs, (f) knowledge of educational contexts, and (g) knowledge of educational ends, purposes and values. I remind you of these knowledges because, as you are reading, I want you to think about the kinds of knowledge Maria uses, as well as the kinds of knowledge she gains during the lesson. As in the undressing routine that prefaced thesis, I interject comments in italics in order to alert you to various incidents which I believe to be particularly relevant to understanding Maria’s knowledge. These interjections will provide useful reference points in my subsequent analysis.

A Reading Lesson

April 16, 10:45 a.m.

The students have just finished their snacks and drinks and one-by-one have returned from their washroom break. It’s time for the reading lesson. They have been reading the book, ‘Fred’s Mess’, which is part of a reading series called, ‘Fred the Pig’. Maria discovered this now discontinued reading series a few years ago and has used it quite successfully with her students. Maria finds that the students are motivated by the animal characters and their comical, everyday antics. The reading books are colourful with simple, but descriptive dialogue. Maria has embellished each reader with 3/4” picture communication
symbols (PCS) and words that appear above the text in the book. She has also modified the student questions, and worksheets that accompany the teacher’s manual to suit the reading skill level of her students. From among the accompanying student questions, she has chosen those which represent a range of thinking (i.e., factual to inference). She has developed evaluation documentation for recording each student’s response and tracking their understanding and achievement.

During the three-times-a-week reading instruction, Maria divides her students into two reading groups. Dana and Ricky form one group and work with Sandra, the Educational Assistant. They, too, are reading ‘Fred’s Mess’, but with different accommodations, such as reading at a slower pace and using a variety concrete materials to represent the characters and actions. Mark, Patty, Bethany, and Sarah form Maria’s reading group. While Sandra takes Dana and Ricky to one end of the classroom, Maria and I wheel the remaining students into a semi-circle at the opposite end of the classroom in front of the large whiteboard. This morning, Maria has one volunteer in the classroom. The volunteer sits beside Mark at one end of the semi-circle and will assist him throughout the lesson. Maria hands the volunteer a folder, and asks her to record the student’s answers. Maria prepares for the lesson by folding and placing small, hinged bookstands on each student’s laptray. The individual bookstands were made by another classroom volunteer. They serve to hold the books in an upright position, with the pages open for the students.

Maria: Fred’s Mess! We’ve read it a few times, so I don’t think we’ll read it again, today. I think we’ll go through it, page by page, but I’ll give you a few minutes to look through the book, just to remember what the story is about. [Maria turns to Mark. As she places the brightly illustrated reading book, ‘Fred’s Mess’ underneath the clear plastic lexan on Mark’s bookstand she explains.] So, for Mark, we’ll keep the book underneath the plastic like that and then we’ll turn the pages when he needs them, just so he doesn’t catch the pages and tear them.
[Then Maria places ‘Fred’s Mess’ on each student’s bookstand.]

[This next instructional sequence focuses on the title of the book. Pay attention to the kinds of questions Maria asks, what she doesn’t say, and the prompts and cues she provides to her students.]

Maria: [Standing in front of the students, smiling and looking eagerly at each student.] Okay! Take a look at the cover of the book. The front cover. Can everyone find the title? The title.

[Maria automatically looks at and moves to each student ensuring they are pointing correctly to the title of the book with their hand or eyes. She uses her hands to cue or assist when necessary.]

Maria: Good. Good. And how do we know which word to read first? How do we know? Do we read the top word [She points to the top word on one of the books] or the bottom word [She points to bottom word on same book.] The top word or the bottom word?

[Maria moves along the line of students in front of her, looking at each one, connecting with her eyes, pointing out words, adjusting their books. Then she picks up Sarah’s book, holds it facing Sarah.]

Maria: What do you think, Sarah? [She points to each word consecutively a couple of times.] What do you think? Do we read this one or this one?

Sarah: [Sarah is not having a good day. Her involuntary movements, what Maria and her team refer to as ‘thrashing’, is considerable.]

Maria: Recognizes that Sarah is going to have difficulty responding and her responses will be difficult to interpret. Still holding the book, she pulls the yes/no strip out from under Sarah’s laptray with her free hand and places it behind Sarah’s bookstand. She crouches down in order to meet Sarah at her eye level.
Maria: O.k. Just look at the words first. Then, she points to the first word, "Do we read this word first? Then she presents Sarah with the yes/no strip. Looking intently at her response.

Sarah: Continues to 'thrash' unable to look at the book. Maria puts Sarah's book back on the bookstand and moves to Bethany. She points to the words on Bethany's book.

Maria: Do we read this word first [pointing to Fred's] or this word [pointing to Mess?]

Bethany: Vocalizes affirmative.

Maria: Retrieves Bethany's yes/no strip from the bag on the back of her wheelchair and then points to the second word (mess) and says, "or this word first. Which one? She holds up the yes/no strip in front of Bethany. This one?

Bethany: Looks at 'yes'.

Maria. O.k. [She moves next to Patty.] What do you think, Patty? I want to hear what everyone thinks about which word we read first. There are two words there. [She points to each.] One two. Which one do we read first. What do you think, Patty? This one or this one.

Patty: Points to top word.

Maria: Okay. [She then moves to Mark.] What do you think Mark? [She points to each word in turn]. Do we read this one first? Or this one?

Mark: [Mark becomes animated. With arms fully extended, he points to the book with both and his head flops forward, but his eyes remain on the book title. The volunteer moves Mark's head to upright position. With arms stable in extended position, he slowly rakes his fingers across the title of the book.

Maria: [Pointing to the first word.] This one?
Mark: [Still raking at the title.]

Maria: [Pointing to the second word.] This one?

Mark: [Shakes his head slightly. Still raking at the title.]

Maria: This one? [Pointing to the first word.]

Mark: Nods his head toward the 'yes' symbol on his laptray.

Maria: [Moves back to Sarah who is now looking and Maria points to the first word in the title of her book.] Alright!. We read the one that begins with... what sound? She places her hands apart in front of her and moves them together slightly as a prompt.

Bethany: Vocalizes and smiles.

Maria: Everyone, take a look at that letter. [She points to the first letter in the first word on both Patty's and Bethany's books.] Remember? We'll do our Jolly Phonics sounds. [She moves to Patty.] The first one begins with sound of 'f' [she places her hands in the air and moves them together, imitating the sound the students have learned in the Jolly Phonics program.] We have two words there. The first one starts with the sound of 'f', [moves hands together.] She's looking at each student in turn. When we squeeze the air out of the fish, right? [Maria continues to move along the line of students in front of her, making eye contact and demonstrating the sound to each one.]

Bethany: Vocalizes.

Maria: [Standing in front of Bethany, she points to the first letter of the first word in the title of Bethany's book.] Does anybody know this word? Does anybody know this word? [Maria stands back and looks at all the students. Then she looks at Patty, who is looking puzzled as she gazes back at Maria.]
Maria: Don’t know this word, Patty? Can anyone read this word? [Maria points at the word in Bethany’s book.] Can anyone read this word? Bethany, do you think you know?

Bethany: Smiles and vocalizes affirmative.

Maria: Yes? Alright. I’ll give you a chance to answer. [She picks up a Velcro strip from the small table that holds materials at the side of the reading group. Individual pictures of four characters from the reader are displayed about two inches apart on the Velcro strip. The names of the characters are printed above each picture. Maria is standing in front of Bethany.]

Maria: What does it say?

Patty: Offers ‘Mom’.

Maria: [Reaches over to Patty’s book and points to the first word in the title.] You think it says ‘Mom’? This one?

Patty: Shakes her head, ‘No.’

Maria: No. [She then presents Bethany with the Velcro strip.] What do you think it says, Bethany?

Bethany: Looking at the last picture on the Velcro strip: Fred.

Maria: [Looks at Bethany’s eyes and taps the last picture on the strip.] Look. Look. Look. Bethany thinks it says . . . . [ Maria doesn’t say, Fred. Rather, she shows the strip to Mark, then Patty and taps the last picture. ] Do you agree Mark? Are they the same, these two words?

Mark: Banging the top word on the book in front of him.

Maria: Take a look. Maria points to the word on Mark’s book and the word on the Velcro strip.] Do you think that Bethany is correct Mark? Do you think she’s correct?
Mark: Looks intently at the word above the fourth picture symbol on the Velcro strip then vocalizes affirmative.

Maria: [Moves towards Patty.] Do you think she's correct? She thinks it says, this [Maria points to the word on the strip.] Do you think she's correct Patty?

Patty: Nods her head 'Yes.'

Maria: [Moves to Sarah.] Sarah, do you think she's correct? [Maria looks for Sarah's yes/no strip that had fallen on the floor. She picks it up and is then interrupted by the physiotherapist who wants to take Mark to do some therapy. Maria is reluctant to let him go at this time, so they quickly negotiate another time to take him. They settle on 1:00.] Well, ...except that we promised him that we were going to have a little bit of a playtime with the battery toys.

[Upon hearing this, the students get excited. Maria and the physiotherapist decide that Mark can walk to lunch.]

You can walk to lunch?

Mark: Nods his head.

[In the next instructional sequence, pay attention to the nature of Maria’s explanations of the vocabulary which the students encounter in the story.]

Maria: Alright. Well, we have to get our story done! If we don't finish we'll be working at 1:00! Okay. Alright, Sarah, do you agree with Bethany? Is this the same word. [pointing to the fourth symbol on the strip.]

Sarah: Smiles.

Maria: Alright!. There's just one little difference. [Maria moves to Bethany.]

Bethany, that's very good reading. F-r-e-d is the same as it says here, F-r-e-d. [She points to each letter on the symbol strip and the book title showing the students. Then she points to the word 'Fred' and each letter displayed
on chart paper on the whiteboard in front of the students.] F-r-e-d. So that’s good thinking, Bethany.

Bethany: Her head has fallen to the side.

Maria: I’ll move this chart so you can see it. [Maria adjusts the chart, by centering it on the whiteboard so it is in Bethany’s line of vision.] F-r-e-d. Okay. There’s just one little difference, [She points to the word in the title of the book] This is called ‘apostrophe s’. [She points to the picture symbol on the Velcro strip.] This word, is Fred [She points to the word on the chart paper.] This word is Fred. [She then points to the word in the title of the book.] And this word is Fred’s. It’s something that belongs to Fred. [Maria touches her hand to her chest]. It belongs to Fred. And what belongs to Fred? Let’s look at the next word. [She points to the word ‘mess’ on the title of the book]. What’s the letter sound? Can anyone tell me the letter sound for that word? [She puts Bethany’s book back on her bookstand.] The beginning sound.

Patty: ‘mmmm’

Maria: [Looking at Patty.] Good! Fred’s mess! [Maria moves to Bethany’s book..] Fred’s mmm [Looking at each student, she rubs her stomach with her hand.] Fred’s mess. [She points to each word on the book cover as she says the title,] Fred’s mess. Who remembers about Fred’s mess?

Patty: Me.

10:55 a.m.

The reading lesson continues with Maria analyzing the picture on the front cover. This serves to remind the students of the setting for the story. Opening each student’s book to the first page, Maria then directs her students to read the story to themselves:

Maria: Read the title to yourself. Read the sentences. [She pauses as each student ‘reads’ the title of their book.] When you’re ready, you can let me know
and I’ll turn the page. [She looks at each student, taking her cues from their signals:

The students: [Examining the pages of the books.] I’m still reading. [Looking at Maria or attempting to turn the page.] Turn the page, please.

Maria turns the page of each student’s book. She holds the books down on the bookstands for the students, re-adjusting them, as required.

Just look at the pictures. Read the sentences. Remember what the story was about? I just want you to remember. It’s been a little while since we read it together.

[Maria looks at Bethany.] Good looking, Bethany. You’re looking at both pages. You’re really thinking about it. Okay.

Maria: Are you ready, Patty? Take a look. What happens?

Patty: Ooh.

Maria: Right! You’re remembering the word. Right, Patty. What did Kitty say when she fell? It’s up here. The word you’re saying is right there. [Maria points to the word on Patty’s book.] ‘Oops’ Is that what you’re saying?

Patty: Nods.

Maria: Oops. It’s right there. Oops. Ready, Bethany to turn the page? Good looking, Bethany!

10:58 a.m.

[Bethany is momentarily taken out of the reading group to receive her daily medication. Maria and the volunteer turn the pages of the books when each student indicates by looking at them.]

Patty: Barney!

Patty: Oh Oh.

Maria: Does he say, ‘Oh. Oh.’? Read what he says.

The lesson is interrupted by an announcement over the school’s P.A. system in regards to indoor recess. Maria freezes and looks up, her hands spread over two of the student’s books as she listens to the announcement. The students listen, as well until it is over.

Maria reminds them, “Okay. Remember if you’re reading the sentences, which page do you read first? [She points to each page on each student’s book.] Page 9 or page 8, [She points to the page numbers at the bottom of Patty’s book.] Which number comes first, Patty, the one on the left or the right?

Patty: [Points to the page number on the right.]

Maria: The one on the left. Always, the one on the left first. [She taps the left page of Patty’s open book.]

[The lesson continues with Maria turning the pages, re-positioning the books, holding them, responding to the student’s responses: their words, their laughs, their expressions.]

Maria: You really like this story! ....You, too!

[Maria prompts her students to keep the goal in mind.]

Maria: Remember, what is the story about?

[Mark bangs his tray as the book is placed under the lexan. Maria notices a little blood on Mark’s hand. She quickly removes the lexan cover from the bookstand and instructs the volunteer to hold the book for Mark. She wipes Mark’s hand with a paper towel. Mark appears unfazed by the]
incident while Maria talks about putting clear tape on the edges of the lexan so that it isn’t so sharp.]

11:00 a.m.

[Fifteen minutes into the lesson, each student remains very attentive to the activity, to reading the story.]

[Bethany returns to the group. Maria re-positions her book and turns the page for her.]

Bethany: Looking at the book, she laughs.

Maria: Are you remembering the story? It’s funny!

Patty: Oh. Oh.

Bethany: Laughs.

Maria: Bethany, you really like this story!

Patty: Yah!

Maria: You too, Patty?

11:02 a.m.

[Pay attention to Maria’s next strategy.]

[When they have finished reading the story to themselves, Maria closes everyone’s book and places each upside down and backwards on their bookstand. She instructs the students that they will start at the beginning.]

Maria: Now I would like to go back to the beginning of the book. The beginning. We want to start at the beginning. The beginning of the story.

Mark: Vigorously shakes his head, squirms, bangs his tray. Something falls off his chair, making a pinging sound as it hits the floor.

Maria: Mark, you’re a real wiggle worm, today!
Mark: Laughs.

Patty: Looking a little puzzled, she looks at the book displayed in front of her and then at her classmates.

Bethany: Vocalizes, smiles and looks at Maria.

Sarah: Smiles broadly, and looks at Maria.

Maria: Is this the beginning? Mark says, ‘No’. ‘No’. Where do we find the beginning. Where do I go? Can somebody tell us where the beginning is? [Maria holds up the open books with the front and back cover facing the students.] Will this get us to the beginning? [Maria folds back the back cover.] Will this get us to the beginning? Okay. We want to start at the beginning. [Maria ensures that each child has had a chance to respond. Then she re-positions their books.]

[Maria prompts the students that this is the inside cover.] The inside cover has the title again. [Then she asks someone to read the title.] Who will read?

Bethany: Vocalizes.

[Note: Maria regularly inserts green and red dots into texts which serve to cue the students to where to begin and end reading, respectively.]

Maria: Bethany. Okay. We don’t have any red dots and green dots. I forgot to put them in. I forgot. Can we do it without them today? Who can tell me where we start even though there’s no green dot? Where do we start? Where do we start? We’re going to read the picture sentence.

Sarah: Points up to the top of her book.

[Read Maria’s directions to Bethany very carefully.]

Maria: Good, Sarah! Sarah’s pointing way up to the top. And there are no red dots or green dots to help you today! Do we start there? We start with the word... Fred. And Bethany’s reading today. Okay, so Bethany you need to
sit up nice and tall [Maria positions Bethany’s head upright in the middle of her headrest.] Okay, Bethany, you say the word and I’ll say it. You read the word and I’ll say it. You think it. You think it even if you can’t say it with your voice. I want you to think it in your head. Okay? Because that’s the same as reading. You’re reading even if you’re just thinking of the word. Okay? Even if you can’t say it out loud, if you’re thinking what it is, you’re reading!

Bethany: [Looks at the first word ‘Fred’s’ in the book title in front of her:] Fred’s.

Maria: Okay. ‘Fred’s’. She says, ‘Fred’s’. Okay, Bethany can you say the next word?

Bethany: [Looks to Sarah who is sitting on her right and then back at Maria.]

Maria: Bethany, I’m waiting for you.

Bethany: Returns her gaze intently to the next word in the title.

Maria: ‘Fred’s’ ‘Mess’. This is a bit of a hard symbol to figure out. We had to make it up because there’s no symbol for, ‘mess’. [Maria goes on to explain the symbol representing ‘messy room’ to her students. She turns the page of each of their books and asks them which page to read first. She directs their attention to the numbers on the pages and explains that sometimes there’s a number and sometimes not. She tells them that the books are a little confusing and that there should be a number on the bottom of the page, but there was no room for the number because of the picture on the page. She waits until each student has found a number on the page then reinforces each student for finding the numbers on the pages.]

Maria: Good. Which page do we read first, left or right? Or do we only read the numbered pages? Which page? [Maria gives each student a chance to respond]. You’re all correct! Even though there’s not a number, we read the page on the left first, always, always, always!
Maria: So, Patty, you’re reading. [Maria points sequentially to the symbols in Patty’s book and waits for Patty to vocalize each. She provides verbal prompts, then has Patty ‘say it’.

Maria: Fred said, ‘Good morning’. Do you remember that from when we had our play? Fred came out and said, “Good morning.” “Good Morning.” And what does Kitty say? Sarah, What does Kitty say? You look and I will read. [She crouches down in front of Sarah.]

Sarah: Tries to touch the book.

Maria: Okay. Don’t worry about touching it. Just use your eyes, okay? [Maria holds the book up in front of Sarah and prompts her to look with her eyes.]

Sarah: Begins to thrash and is not able to look. She reaches for the bookstand in front of her.

Maria: Don’t worry about it. [Maria points to each word in the symbol sentence.] “What a mess, said Kitty.”

[Takes the bookstand off of Sarah’s tray and continues to hold the book in front of her at eye level.]

Sarah: Looks at the symbols on the page.

Maria: [Repeats the sentence having Sarah look at the symbols.] “What ... a... mess! ... said Kitty!

Maria: Good! That was good looking, Sarah!

[The lesson is interrupted when Maria notices that the volunteer is wiping blood from Mark’s finger. Maria takes a box of Band-Aids from the cupboard and proceeds to cover Mark’s finger with one.] The fellow was supposed to smooth the edges of that when he made it. I’m sorry Mark! What a mess!
[Pay close attention to the kinds of questions Maria asks, as well as her explanations.]

[The lesson continues with Maria asking the student’s pre-planned questions about the story. The volunteer records their responses in a book, which Maria has set up for such purpose.]

Maria: Okay. I would like everyone to look at Fred’s face.

[Maria asks the students how the character, Fred, feels. They need to infer this from the look on his face. Maria shows them three symbols attached to the Velcro strip and demonstrates each: mad, happy, worried, frustrated. She provides an example and models each, asking, “Have you ever felt that way?” She then explains how each of them feels if they’re frustrated:]

11:10 a.m

[Mark is taken out of the group for physiotherapy: walking to lunch.]

Maria: Sometimes, I think Patty feels frustrated if people don’t do things in a hurry for you right? [Maria makes a face, clenches her fists, and vocalizes: RRRRRR.] Okay.

Sometimes, I think Sarah feels frustrated if she can’t stop moving and she wants to give an answer and she can’t. And she knows the answer. She has it in her head and she knows it and she wants to tell me, but she can’t stop moving to tell me with her eyes. [Maria makes a face, clenches her fists, and vocalizes: RRRRRR.] I think it makes her feel frustrated.

Sometimes, I think Bethany feels frustrated if she wants something and she doesn’t get what she wants or she can’t tell someone what she wants. [Maria makes a face, clenches her fists, and vocalizes: RRRRRR.] I think Bethany feels frustrated then.

Sometimes, I feel frustrated when I work at the computer and it doesn’t work. That makes me feel frustrated. [Maria makes a face, clenches her fists, and vocalizes: RRRRRR.] If the computer gives me trouble, I feel frustrated.
Each student intently watches Maria, seemingly greatly interested in her explanations of what the term, ‘frustrated’ means to each one.

Alright! So, does Kitty feel frustrated? [Maria pauses.] What would you think Kitty feels? How does Kitty feel?

[Maria points to each picture symbol on the Velcro strip she has presented to the students and acts each emotion out.]

Maria: You know what mad means. Does she feel happy? [Maria smiles.] Or does she worry? [Maria holds an open hand to her cheek and has a worried look on her face.]


[Maria gives the students the four choices.]

Bethany: [Looks at each symbol with Maria asking her to confirm her answer. She fixes her eyes on the ‘worried’ symbol.]

Maria: Bethany thinks she feels worried. Sarah, what do you think? You can use your eyes.

Sarah: [Looks immediately at the frustrated symbol.]

Maria: Frustrated. Sarah thinks Kitty’s frustrated. Patty, what do you think. I’m curious. How do you think Kitty feels?

Patty: [Points to the frustrated symbol with her finger.]

Maria: Frustrated. Alright! Bethany, I’m going to act something out. If I were Kitty and I were worried about Fred’s mess, I would say it this way.

[Maria makes a worried face and holds her open hand to her cheek.] ‘What a mess. What a mess.’ If I were worried, that’s how I would say it. If I were frustrated or mad, They’re very close. The meaning of frustrated
and mad are very close. I think if you’re frustrated you’re mad, but you’re maybe even more mad. I don’t know. It’s hard to think. Frustrated is if things don’t go your way. That’s frustrated. Mad. You can get mad about a lot of things. I think if I were Kitty, I’d be mad or frustrated: ‘What a mess!’

[Maria quickly directs the volunteer to record each student’s answer in the recording binder.]

Maria: Okay. Why is Kitty mad or frustrated? Why? You know when Patty always says, ‘Why?’ ‘Why?’ When she asks that, she wants to know the reason for something.

Maria: Why? What action made Kitty mad? I can give you some choices. [Maria chooses four picture symbols from the table, attaches them to the Velcro strip and presents them to the students.] Alright. Here are some choices. [Maria points to each symbol.]

Is Kitty mad because of being wet?

Is Kitty mad because of the mess?

Is Kitty mad because of soap?

Is Kitty mad because of being cold?

What is making Kitty mad? [She turns to Patty.] Okay, Patty, I want you to answer quietly because I’m going to ask everyone the same question.

Patty: [points to mess symbol.]

Maria: [Turns to the volunteer and looks at the recording sheet.] m-e-s-s. [The volunteer cannot find the question on the page. Neither can Maria and she quickly realizes that she has asked the wrong question.] Oh! I got ahead of myself. Do teachers make mistakes? They sure do!
Maria: Turn to page 4. [Maria turns each child’s book to page 4.] What happens on page 4? ‘Oops!’ Remember, ‘Oops’ and what happens to Kitty? What does she say? Patty, will you read? What’s that word when you point to yourself? [Maria points her finger at her own chest.]

Patty: I

Maria: [Maria points to each symbol in the sentences in Patty’s book. Once Patty has looked, Maria says the words] ‘I’m... tired... of... Fred’s... mess,... said... Kitty... I’m... tired... of... Fred’s... mess!’ Alright. And look at Kitty’s face. Okay. Why is Kitty mad? Why is she mad? [Maria reaches for the Velcro strip with new symbols.] What action did Kitty do that made her mad? [Maria points to each symbol on the strip.]

dancing
falling
sitting
watching

[The volunteer says, ‘watching’.]

Maria: [Surprised, she grins and looks over at the volunteer.] Don’t say it. I’m trying to ...

[The volunteer apologizes.]

Maria: [Still smiling] Alright. You didn’t hear the answer did you, Bethany? What action made Kitty mad or frustrated: dancing, falling, sitting, watching? What’s your answer?

Bethany: [looks at dancing symbol.]

Maria: Because she’s dancing?

Patty: No!
Maria: Patty, give Bethany a chance to think of it herself. She needs to think of it by herself. Dancing? Why is she mad?

Bethany: Looks away from Maria and the book.

Maria: I can tell you’re thrilled, Bethany! Let’s ask Sarah. [Maria turns to Sarah. and crouches at her eye level, showing her the choices on the Velcro strip.]
What action made her mad?

Sarah: [Looks at the ‘watching’ symbol.]

Maria: Okay, Sarah got it. [Maria glances at the clock.]

Maria: We’ll stop at lunch.

Patty: Why?

Maria: You answer your own question. Why do we stop at lunch? [Maria takes patty’s communication book from the back of her wheelchair and flips to her index page.] Where do we go in your book to answer that question?

Patty: [Looks at the action word block.]

Maria: How about the action words? [She flips the pages to find the action words page.] What action do we do at lunch? [Pauses.]

Patty: [to the play symbol.]

Maria: We play at lunch?

Patty: laughs.

Maria: You’re thinking after lunch? After lunch, we will play. What do we do at lunch? [She traces a circle with her finger around all of the action words.] Of all of these actions, what do we do at lunch?

Patty: Points to the ‘eat’ symbol.

Maria: Eat! Let’s go eat!
An Analysis of What Maria Knows

The key to distinguishing the knowledge base of teaching lies in the intersection of content and pedagogy, in the capacity of a teacher to transform the content knowledge he or she possesses into forms that are pedagogically powerful and yet adaptive to the variations in ability and background presented by the students (Shulman, 1987, p. 15).

Maria covered considerable pedagogical territory in this 45 minute reading lesson with her students. The lesson reveals the variety of knowledge which she brings to bear in her teaching. Maria has considerable knowledge of language, literacy, and AAC concepts and their development. Her knowledge of emerging literacy skills tells her that print awareness, alphabetic understanding, phonological awareness, decoding, and encoding, and comprehension skills such as understanding vocabulary and conventions of written text are important skills for her beginning readers.

In this lesson, Maria reinforced concepts about books and print: titles, page numbers, and reading from left-to-right and top to bottom in a book and on a page. She supported her student’s understanding and recollection of the content, the characters and events in the story. She reinforced their knowledge of letter-sound correspondences. She explained the vocabulary they encountered in the reading: ‘mess’, ‘Fred’s’, ‘frustrated’, and ‘worried’. These were some of the curriculum and content-related concepts or knowledge that Maria had in mind when she planned the lesson and as she taught it.

Maria’s knowledge of general pedagogical principles supported her student’s learning and the smooth and efficient operation of this lesson. The lesson demonstrated many of the effective classroom and instructional management techniques arising from the process-product literature (Englert, Tarrant & Mariage, 1992). She was well prepared and organized for this lesson. She gathered and arranged the reading and communication materials ahead of time and they were readily accessible to her. Transitioning into the lesson, she
quickly arranged her students in a semi-circle in a quiet area of the room, with their backs to Sandra’s group and the classroom door. There were minimal distractions there. Her students were able to see each other. Moreover, Maria was able to see and physically support more than one student at a time: re-adjusting their bookstands, books, and communication materials; touching a student’s hand; a look and a smile; gently placing a student’s head back into an upright position against their headrest. She was also able to see her educational assistant, Sandra, working with Dana and Ricky. Indeed, she glanced over at them on a few occasions during the lesson. Maria also had procedures in place for recording her student’s responses to her questions and for supporting students like Mark, who required one-to-one assistance.

“Educational equity is more likely if the forms of representation are diverse rather than restricted” (Eisner, 1998, p. 179). Maria knows this. She provided verbal and visual cues for the students: pointing to the letters and symbols on the pages, touching her chest to convey ‘belonging’; pointing to herself for ‘I’. She integrated their learning by cueing them with the visual and auditory learning aids of the Jolly Phonics program for the sounds of the letters ‘f’ and ‘m’. She didn’t merely tell her students what the story was about. Rather, she supported their remembering of the story by analyzing the illustration on the front cover of the book, thereby actively modelling an important reading comprehension strategy. She directed her students to remember the events in the story: “Just look at the pictures. Read the sentences.” She pointed out features of the book: page numbers and particular words such as ‘Oops’. She assessed her students’ understanding of book concepts by placing their books upside down and backwards on their stands and telling them that she wanted to start at the beginning.

This reading lesson also revealed a great deal about what Shulman (1986b) refers to as pedagogical content knowledge: “the particular form of content knowledge that embodies the aspects of content most germane to its teachability....in a word, the ways of representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others” (p. 9). Pedagogical content knowledge
"represents the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organized, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction (Shulman, 1987, p. 8). As Eisner (1998) states,

It is through pedagogy that content is fine-tuned to suit the particular needs and backgrounds of individual students and specific communities. It is through pedagogy that aims are rendered meaningful and that the curriculum becomes more than merely the good intentions of curriculum developers and educational policymakers (p. 26)

More than merely knowing about language and literacy concepts and their development, Maria has knowledge of how to support their development in her particular students.

The prominence of knowledge of her students' characteristics and needs and how it interacts with her other knowledge to inform and define Maria's teaching practice is striking. This is Maria's pedagogical-content knowledge: "the ways of representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others" (Shulman, 1986b, p. 9). During the reading lesson, Maria used her knowledge of each student to define her expectations and goals for each and adapt her teaching practices. Moreover, Maria demonstrated pedagogical-content knowledge in both her planning and on-line delivery of instruction during the reading lesson.

Perhaps the clearest evidence of Maria's pedagogical-content knowledge was in the accommodations she employed in order to support her students' learning. Her knowledge of students, of pedagogy, and of subject matter or content was evident in the materials and the actions of teaching. These included the brightly illustrated, symbol-embellished readers that Maria had chosen because they convey everyday experiences, use simple language, and have endearing characters that her students easily relate to; the Velcro strips and picture communication symbols representing the vocabulary Maria expects the students to use and learn; the individual yes/no strips; the bookstands that provided each student with a book to read; the lexan covered bookstand for
Mark, and the large chart of story characters which was displayed on the classroom wall. Accommodations were also revealed in Maria’s actions: the number and kinds of questions that she asked, the time that she gave her students to respond, and her multi-sensory explanations, cues, and prompts. Maria knew that without these accommodations and instructional strategies, her students would be mere passive observers during the lesson. Moreover, Maria would not know if they were learning at all.

Maria knew how and when to implement these accommodations. She attended to her students. She knew the meaning beneath their facial expressions, their eye movements, their gestures, and their vocalizations. Maria responded to her students’ looks, their expressions, and their vocal commenting:

Patty: Barney

Maria: Barney, right? And what does Barney say?

Then she looks at Patty, who is looking puzzled and gazing back at Maria.

Maria: Don’t know this word, Patty?

Bethany: Looking at the book, she laughs.

Maria: Are you remembering the story? It’s funny

Bethany: Laughs

Maria: Bethany, you really like this story!

Maria: Is this the beginning? Mark says, ‘No’.

Attending to her students is integral to Maria’s teaching. She is responsive to her student’s communications. She gains knowledge of her students which informs her teaching. Albeit, Maria had goals in mind for the lesson, but she allowed her students’ responses to influence her teaching moves: explaining the vocabulary, ‘mess’, ‘frustrated’, ‘mad’, and ‘worried’; reinforcing beginning to read from the left; taking the time at the end of the lesson to have Patty respond to her own question by using her communication book. Maria modelled learning
strategies and self-talk. She related the word 'frustrated' to Patty's impatience, Sarah's involuntary movements, and Bethany's communication. And teachers get frustrated, too. Maria modelled the meaning of the vocabulary: Computer technology frustrates Maria. To support Bethany's understanding of the vocabulary, Maria returned to her, demonstrating the difference between worried and frustrated and the similarities between 'frustrated' and 'mad'. Indeed, Maria acknowledged that frustrated and mad are very similar in meaning. She accepted that 'mad' might also be an appropriate answer conveying the understanding that there is often more than one correct answer.

Alright! Bethany, I'm going to act something out. If I were Kitty and I were worried about Fred's mess, I would say it this way. [Maria makes a worried face and holds her open hand to her cheek.] 'What a mess. What a mess.' If I were worried, that's how I would say it. If I were frustrated or mad, they're very close. The meaning of frustrated and mad are very close. I think if you're frustrated you're mad, but you're maybe even more mad. I don't know. It's hard to think. Frustrated is if things don't go your way. That's frustrated. Mad. You can get mad about a lot of things. I think if I were Kitty, I'd be mad or frustrated: 'What a mess!'

Another time, Maria recognized that Bethany's hesitation in reading the word, 'Mess' stems from her lack of familiarity with the new picture symbol. She explained the new symbol to all of her students. When Sarah was unable to answer, Maria did not give up. Rather, she simplified the task for her. Sarah indicated her answer through looking at either the yes or the no symbols on either end of her yes/no Velcro strip. Maria later returned to Sarah to inform her of the correct answer. Maria recognized the difficulty Sarah was having in responding due to her involuntary movements. Another time, she crouched to Sarah's eye level and directed her to use her eyes to look at the words. Maria watched Sarah's eye movements to ensure she was looking. Patty was able to vocalize. Maria waited for her to say the first sound of the words she was reading, with Maria repeating it and providing the full word: 'Patty, what's that word when you point to yourself?' Maria's attention to her students is critical to
Maria knows her students. More will be said about Maria’s knowledge of her students in the chapters that follow.

The complex interaction among Maria’s knowledge is further illustrated as she explained the general goal for the formal reading instruction:

For the reading group the important thing is I want to check their comprehension and I want to get going so I don’t want to work on accessing. So it depends on the context. So with reading group I would provide them with the vocabulary. Another thing is too, those questions are planned ahead of time and a lot of them may not have their vocabulary in their [communication] book. So I have to make sure that if I’ve come up with questions, do we have the vocabulary available? If I’ve gone to all that trouble and it’s on strips then I would use those strips because I’m also wanting to cover ground. If we’re up at the calendar or particularly around things like show and tell, then I would be trying to get them into their books.....It’s always a real balancing act. There’s a lot going on in your head. (interview, June 21)

Maria’s students are working on multiple goals: physical goals, communication goals, academic goals, functional goals, etc. Maria distinguishes among her students’ various goals and knows when it is appropriate to work on each. Her students are not yet sufficiently proficient in using their communication books. Maria knew that if they used their communication books to answer questions, they would struggle and the focus of their attention would be one of physically accessing the symbols in their books. It would take up time. Thus, during the reading lesson, Maria’s goal for her students was focused on a reading goal, not a physical goal such as being able to use their communication books (i.e., accessing). She provided the appropriate vocabulary on a Velcro strip. Simplifying how the students would respond to the questions allowed Maria to focus on the goal of the reading lesson. It allowed her to ‘cover ground’. Further, the factual and inferential-type questions that were included attest to the kinds of student understanding Maria is seeking.

Much of Maria’s knowledge appears to be strategic. She draws on her considerable knowledge and skills in teaching students who use AAC to make decisions about her current teaching. In other words, the case knowledge Maria
has gained from both her current and previous students is used to plan, organize and execute her teaching practice.

Further, Maria transforms the propositional forms of knowledge that are inherent in texts and conference or workshop presentations into strategic knowledge. She considers the information in light of her knowledge about her students and their attendant cognitive and personal characteristics, and the classroom and school context. She endeavours to render ideas and recommendations meaningful and useful to her current students and teaching practice. Very often she does this through reflection and collaboration with her colleagues. More will be said about her collaboration and reflection in Chapter 7.

Maria has knowledge of the state of literacy skill among individuals who use AAC in general. She knows that students who use AAC tend to have limited access and opportunities to engage with print materials and that their involvement tends to be passive rather than active (Koppenhaver & Yoder, 1992a, 1992b, 1993). Maria includes literacy activities in her classroom program. She stated,

I could spend my whole time on communication and we used to. When I first worked at [previous school] it was the communication class and that's what we worked on. And from the field we get, you know, from the field of AAC, 'Why weren't these people ever working on literacy? ..... In the early days when you were just trying to get the communication going and it was a whole new thing, no one was thinking about literacy. They were thinking about communication because this was the first time. Now, as far as literacy ... there were no materials to use either. So, I mean it wasn't that I wasn't working on some literacy things, but I certainly, since I've been here, there's been a serious effort to get materials adapted, to even have the materials (interview, April 26).

The literacy thing.....that's the one area everyone will tell you that I try to protect. It's the one area....I think I'm pretty flexible with the others, but I'm not with that because I'll always remember.... Remember when [professor in field of augmentative and alternative communication] came and she did her survey and she reported and she said, 'Well, guys, look! All these teachers do is play read-along tapes and look how little time they spend on literacy!' And you're sitting there, just dying! (interview, June 14).
Maria reflected on how the educational context has changed her teaching practices:

I think I’ve become more structured and more demanding as I’ve been here in this school. The expectations have been higher. The field has had higher expectations. AAC has had higher expectations because … we’ve learned more of what an AAC user needs. Things we neglected in the past. So, I’ve felt way more of a mandate to pursue literacy because that has been what’s happening in the field (interview, April 19).

‘If we don’t do literacy, it gets lost!’ (field notes, May 19).

As we were wrapping up one of our interview sessions, Maria showed me a game she had developed for her students to support their literacy skills. It was a board game designed to reinforce reading words that follow the –an phonogram (i.e., can, man, fan, etc). By hitting a switch, the students activate a spinner, which stops on a word. Then they read the word and indicate what it is by identifying the picture of it. To take a turn, a large die is strategically placed on the student’s lap tray. The student hits the die after which they move their token along the board. While Maria had used the board game format with her students, she had yet to try this particular game with them. In anticipation of introducing it to them, she reflected on her students' skills and her teaching practices:

M: “You can’t always tell if they’re getting it.” The goal is to get them to listen, but also the initial consonant. Great review of the Jolly Phonics! My feeling is that Bethany is getting this and Patty is getting this. They’re the one’s that are established. I’m feeling Mark is wavering. I don’t feel he gets it.

D: But we’ll get some information.

M: Right. Right. We will. Patty, I’m sure is getting it. Although the other day she didn’t do as well as I thought she would. Now, they’ve been taking it home for homework. I give them one spelling thing in their homework and they took their name home to do for two weeks in a row. But the weeks before, for a couple of weeks before they did this word family.
And, it's really teaching me. I'm learning. Like, I'm learning that [AAC and literacy expert] is absolutely right. They are coping with this. They are! I am amazed at the name thing. The parents are all saying they're able to do their name.

D: Yeah? To spell it?

M: So, ... she’s right, I mean she’s right. It’s just ... The challenge now, I think. This is adding a new piece of the puzzle for me and I'm learning how to incorporate it. It’s like the Fred the Pig stuff, when I first started using it, I found it very difficult to use. I found it really difficult. Now it’s just kinda second nature to do all this stuff. But, so now I’m ready to introduce another piece of the puzzle. Always, the literacy lessons have been the most exhausting to me to teach. The days when I’ve had reading group, have always been the most exhausting because it’s a new area. I don’t have it in my head like, established like some of the other things. Now, I don’t find it exhausting no., But when I first, the first few years, oh. It was. ‘Okay. Now we’ll do... ’ Familiarize myself with the story and translating the questions. Now, I’ve got a lot of that support material established, so that aspect of it and plus it’s tried and true. I can see a kid like Bethany. They all, I’ve seen with the different classes how motivated they are by those stories. And one thing that I’ve changed is that ... I always thought I didn’t want them to read the story ahead because they’d get bored. Like you’re coming from a different world! Where the other kids know they read it, then they read it and then put out a sign? Whereas, now I’m finding that the more they read it, the better. Let’s read it all together first, so that you are so familiar with that story that by the time you actually look at those picture symbols you’re already predicting! I don’t know why I wasn’t thinking that way because it fits in with the same, it fits in with the exact normal. But I wasn’t thinking that way. I was trying to lead them through the story to structure them more. Now I want them to, you know, to play with it a bit. I used to do the VOCAs [voice output communication aids] at the end. Now, I do it at the beginning. So it kinda changed. Yah.
And the questions, it depends on your classes obviously. But, this year I've had they've been the best ever at answering questions and being attentive ... This group, they're terrific. But see part of the reason is Joan prepares them. They start early on they're doing these Patti King DeBaun [books]. They're used to working in groups. They're used to listening. They're used to choicemaking. By the time they get in here, that's all established! That's the beauty of working with someone, having shared the program, understanding the goals, so we're working towards common goals. It really makes a lot of sense, I think. Because the kids are ready for this when they come. And I think she's [Joan] sometimes surprised at the goals that I'll have. You know some of the goals that I'll share with her, I don't think she would have thought of demanding these things of the kids. And she's even trying now to start asking questions of the kids about stories. And she's saying 'But they don't have any idea how to answer these things.' But when they come in here, like they're doing it. You know, you keep demanding. You keep providing the opportunities and gradually they'll get there. They will. I know they can do it. And I'm finding this is what I'm learning with the spelling. They're getting it and I learned with the ABC's I had some kids that took to it right away and the parents were working with them and Jason. He was starting to do simple spelling by the time he left my class at the end of the first year. This kid! He learned those letters so fast with his mother. All I had to do was... There was none of this Jolly Phonics business [at the time]. All I had to do was sit down and draw pictures on a paper. So he was at the high end, but it's a real learning experience, teaching. It's more of a learning experience than a teaching experience (interview, April 19).

This lovely reflection richly illustrates how Maria's knowledge changes from year to year based on her experiences with her students. By engaging with her students, Maria learns from them. Her student's responses and their achievements influence her expectations for them. Her expectations define the nature of her teaching practice. The vignette demonstrates the wisdom of
practice that Shulman speaks of: learning from year-to-year, building, constructing knowledge and re-applying knowledge and learning from that: pedagogical content knowledge in action. Finally, Maria’s reflections on her collaboration with Joan highlight the critical role of collaboration in building teacher knowledge, but also in providing continuity of educational programming for her students. It also illustrates how Maria uses her case knowledge of her students and their characteristics and needs to turn information or knowledge that is propositional in nature into strategic knowledge. Maria thinks critically about the information presented at a workshop in light of her particular students to determine the relevance to her student’s needs and how her students can benefit.

The dynamic and interactive nature among Maria’s categories and forms of knowledge and her wisdom of practice are also inherent in her explanations of the process in which she engages when deciding what to teach her students:

In terms of the aspects of the curriculum that I cover, I do what I think I can reasonably do. And I sat down this year with the new Kindergarten curriculum and I took a look at the goals. Not all of them can really be done in this context. There are too many. So I picked out the things that I thought were most relevant and most important in the Kindergarten curriculum....I think that the needs of these children are so specific that we’ve had to focus on certain ...Well, just identify certain areas that I consider to be important: communication, using technology, learning to use and get control over technology, literacy, and number concepts. Those are some big areas that I would prefer to focus on and then other things. Then you look at the particular child and if they have some social/emotional needs or problems, then you focus on that (interview, April 26).

I look at a lot of curriculum materials and I take my kids into account and think what is it that they could actually understand in this whole big massive ....I mean it’s fine to give someone a Kindergarten curriculum guide and say, ‘These are the things that you will teach.’ But then you have to look at it and say, ‘Well, we have to adapt here and we have to narrow down here and we have to pick out what’s the most important.... And there’s no one who tells you to do that.... you feel as a professional those are the judgement calls that you make (interview, April 26).
"Curricula cannot be represented as a body of pre-existing knowledge, except in the most general sense. Teachers transform even that general body of knowledge for their own use" (Hillocks, 1999, p. 118). Maria draws on her professional judgement, her wisdom of practice to decide what to teach her students. She considers the propositional knowledge inherent in the formal curriculum in light of her more case-based knowledge of her students characteristics and needs and the learning context (Shulman, 1986b). Thus, Maria both uses and develops strategic knowledge in her teaching practice.

**Summary**

This reading lesson revealed a great deal about the knowledge Maria brings to bear in her teaching. Her classroom and lesson organization and well-established routines allowed her to maximize the time for teaching-learning interactions in the classroom. She has well-established routines and works adeptly and smoothly at moving the students from one activity to the other.

Maria’s teaching during this reading lesson attests to the interaction chiefly among her knowledge of each of her students’ characteristics and needs, knowledge of pedagogy, and knowledge of content. The complex interaction among these particular knowledges defines what Shulman (1986a; 1986b) refers to as pedagogical-content knowledge. Maria’s pedagogical-content knowledge is revealed in the many instructional accommodations she makes for her students. Her pedagogical-content knowledge is revealed in the materials and strategies that she employs while teaching her students. Maria’s knowledge base of teaching does indeed lie at the intersection of content and pedagogy. She is able to transform her content knowledge of language and literacy in a pedagogically powerful way that so that each of her students is able to participate and learn. Shulman’s categories of teacher knowledge provide a useful structure or framework for understanding the various knowledge that Maria brings to bear in her teaching practice. But, they don’t tell the whole story. They do not entirely account for what I witnessed in her classroom. Indeed, there is much more to Maria’s teaching than is explained by her knowledges.
 Teachers develop or adapt curricular structures on the basis of their own views of the students whom they teach and their ideas about the nature of learning (Hillocks, 1999, p. 94).

Maria states, 'For the reading group the important thing is I want to check their comprehension' (interview, June 21). In addition to revealing Maria’s knowledge of content and her students, this statement hints at her beliefs about that content, in this case, reading, and her beliefs about her students.

What teachers believe students are able to do has a clear impact, not only on the goals and purposes they adopt, but also on the microcurricula, the minute-to-minute and day-to-day activities they develop for their students (Hillocks, 1999, p. 120).

Indeed, Pajares (1992) contends that there appears to be “a strong relationship between teachers’ educational beliefs and their planning, instructional decisions, and classroom practices” (p. 326). In the next chapter I will explore Maria’s beliefs and the nature of their influence on developing her knowledge and defining her teaching practices.
Chapter 6: Maria’s Beliefs

The understandings, assumptions, theories, and beliefs that teachers use to make meaning for themselves in the classrooms in which they work influence the instructional decisions and actions they make in the classroom (Copeland, Birmingham, DeMeulle, D’Emidio-Caston, & Natal, 1994, p. 167).

Included in Shulman’s (1986a, 1986b) categories of knowledge essential for teaching is knowledge of educational ends, purposes and values. I have come to understand this category of knowledge as having more to do with Maria’s educational beliefs, particularly her beliefs about her students, her role as their teacher, and her beliefs about the nature of teaching and learning. Maria’s educational beliefs play a pivotal role in shaping her teaching practices. Moreover, Maria’s educational beliefs play a role in the very acquisition and nature of her knowledge.

In this chapter, I explore the beliefs which underlie Maria’s teaching practices. As in the previous chapter, I begin with a story Maria told me about one of her former students. I have chosen this story because I believe it poignantly illustrates Maria’s beliefs about her students, her role, and teaching and learning processes. In my analysis of Maria’s beliefs which follows the story, I refer not only to this story, but also to the formal reading lesson that prefaced Chapter 5, the undressing routine which prefaced this thesis and to other events which I witnessed in Maria’s classroom.

Jason’s Story

His mother used the book. I know she did use the [communication] book, but somehow we did not get the message across to her about the importance of having that book with him at all times because....

He went over to [a congregated school] and his mother was very comfortable with our team. She really loved it here and she loved the team. And one time she came back and she visited and you could tell she was just so glad to see everybody.

He went to [a congregated school] and then he wasn’t at [the other school] very long before she moved back to Newfoundland. She was a good advocate for her son and she applied for a Sunshine
Foundation grant. And while he was in this class it was when the Blue Jays [baseball team] were really doing well with the World Series and everything and they won the World Series. And Jason took a real interest in baseball. We used to do things. We used to sing the Blue Jays song. One of the class jobs was to look at the score of the game because I had [another student] that year ... I had all boys.

So they would do the score and they would mark the score with a stamper and we had a whole bulletin board devoted to the Blue Jays and we used to put the score out every day and that was part of someone's class job. And Jason, because we were doing all these kinds of exciting things and he was with us for 2 years and both those years ... Yeah, I guess both those years, the Blue Jays were really good. He developed this incredible love of baseball and then she brought him back to Ontario.

She got a Sunshine Foundation grant to meet Joe Carter. So she phoned me ... I didn't know any of this. She phoned me and she said, 'Maria. Oh, I'm so glad I reached you. I'm here in town with Jason and we're gonna meet Joe Carter and can you come down? We're down at the Holiday Inn and they're putting us up.' So, I went with [my husband] and it was a Sunday afternoon or something and we went there.

He didn't have his book! So I said, 'Where's his book?'

'Oh we didn't bring it.' And I was just devastated! I didn't know what to say. So, anyway I didn't say much to her about it. All I could do was talk to him. And [my husband] said afterwards, 'Well, how's he gonna communicate with Joe Carter?' And he said, 'I'm not sure I knew how he was communicating because he was just using yes and no and I was asking him a lot of yes and no questions and everything.' And he was quite a proficient communicator. He loved his book and he was able to look ... like you knew the group he was looking at. You knew what that kid wanted.

So I tell that story to the parents and they all say they remember it. Because I said, 'I failed with that mother!' I failed because I failed to get across the point that when you go out of the house he needs to have that book. I said, 'Imagine yourself in the position of going to meet your baseball idol and having no way to communicate! Can you imagine how devastating that is?' That person's gonna come out on the field and he's gonna pat you on the head and he's gonna say, 'Hi, nice to meet you.' He's not gonna have a clue what to do!' I
said, ‘I failed.’ I blamed myself. I failed with that mother. I failed to get this message across.

So now I thought, ‘Well, whenever anything goes wrong I like to try and build on the experience. And from that experience, I will try and share that with other parents because it’s a very memorable story. You’re not gonna forget that story.’

And someone said to me this year, ‘Oh, we went out.... But we had the book. I always think of Joe Carter!’

And in a way, it’s really kind of necessary to instill a bit of consciousness, maybe even a little guilt because it’s just so easy to do everything for the kids all the time! (interview, May 3).

Maria told this story with a passion and depth of conviction that indeed rendered it memorable. The story reveals the strength and multi-faceted nature of her educational beliefs and how they inform her teaching practices. Maria holds beliefs about her students in terms of their capabilities, needs, and potential. She also holds beliefs about her role and responsibility as their teacher and her ability to make a difference in their lives. Further, the story illustrates Maria’s beliefs about teaching and learning. Maria learns from the experience with Jason. She also recognizes that the story of the experience provides a meaningful context for supporting parents’ understanding of the fundamental nature of communication. Maria uses the experience to advocate on behalf of her students. What follows is an analysis of each of these facets of Maria’s beliefs.

**Beliefs About Her Students**

Your stance is the attitude you take that communicates who you think your students are and how much you believe they can produce (Fried, 1995, p. 154).

It worries me because I think, I really do believe these children have the potential to become literate... I know that the kids have the potential. It’s just ...Will it happen for them?...Will it happen for them even down the road? Will all those demands ... We’re pretty sensitive in this environment to the fact that there are all the demands and we do try and balance. I really think we do. ... It’s such an important thing, but I don’t know that the rest of the world sees it that way.... So that’s why I think I’m so driven to kind of
give them as much foundation as I can because if I can say things in reports to other teachers then, you know, If I can say, 'The kids know their sounds.' Then they see, 'Oh, they’ve been working on that.'... You just hope that if the child can show some potential in this setting and I can say it ... then it [the report] will show that potential (interview, June 14).

Maria’s stance towards her students is clearly one of optimism and possibility. Recognizing the fundamental human nature of communication, she believes that each of her students can learn to communicate effectively.

Bethany is so aware that she may be having these thoughts and when we’re lucky they coincide with the vocabulary available to her. The hardest part for these kids is that their vocabularies are so inadequate to capture the thoughts that are going through their heads ... Sometimes you can grab a stamp [a picture communication symbol] but you know that also requires that you go get the book, you search, you rip it out and then the moment is gone! You’ve interrupted the communication opportunity. They’re at such a disadvantage these kids. They’re at such a huge disadvantage! (interview, June 7).

Moreover, Maria believes that each of her students has the potential to become literate. And ultimately, she believes that each of her students has the potential to realize his or her independence through becoming competent in communication and literacy.

Maria’s hopefulness is reflected in the high expectations she has for each of her students.

Look at the child. Don’t underestimate the child’s cognitive abilities. Start with the child. Don’t be afraid. So often people are just afraid of these children and it causes a lot of anxiety. Don’t underestimate them. Don’t have lower expectations because they use AAC (interview, June 14).

But, her hopefulness “rests not in idealized images, but on a detailed and concrete perception of children’s lives” (Elbaz, 1992, p. 426). Maria looks beneath the surface of her student’s disabilities — beneath the accompanying hardware. She looks beyond all of this and sees human feeling and ability.
Imagine yourself in the position of going to meet your baseball idol and having no way to communicate! Can you imagine how devastating that is?

Maria’s students are children first. By looking deep within her students, Maria is able to truly know her students and believe in their potential.

I am motivated to work with AAC users because they deserve a chance to develop their minds and to express their intelligence just as other children do (e-mail, June 27).

Her detailed and concrete knowledge of her students not only underlies but also sustains her hope for them, her optimism, her belief in their potential. Her beliefs influence the nature of her educational program and activities she organizes for her students which, in turn, contributes to the very nature of her knowledge.

Maria’s optimistic stance toward her students plays out each day in her classroom. Her beliefs form the foundation for the goals she establishes for her students: competence in communicating, reading and writing, and becoming independent. Her beliefs also determine the instructional program she develops for each student and her moment-to-moment interactions with them.

In the reading lesson, which prefaced Chapter 5, Maria expected her students to read the story on their own while she played a supporting role and engaged them in the process of doing just that:

Read the title to yourself. Read the sentences. [She pauses while each student ‘reads’ the title of their book.] When you’re ready, you can let me know and I’ll turn the page.

And Bethany’s reading today. Okay, so Bethany, you need to sit up nice and tall [Maria positions Bethany’s head upright in the middle of her headrest.] Okay, Bethany, you say the word and I’ll say it. You read the word and I’ll say it. You think it. You think it even if you can’t say it with your voice. I want you to think it in your head. Okay? Because that’s the same as reading. You’re reading even if you’re just thinking of the word. Okay? Even if you can’t say it out loud, if you’re thinking what it is, you’re reading!

Maria allowed Bethany to direct the reading, waiting for her to look at the words before Maria repeats them aloud. Thus, Bethany was in charge. Bethany experienced independence in reading the story. And together, Maria and
Bethany modelled the reading process for all of the students. For Maria, her students can read. For Maria’s students, they are reading.

Maria’s expectations and beliefs are reflected in the words she chose to say to her students.

Maria asked, ‘What do you think?’
She remarked, ‘You’re reading’.
‘Bethany, that’s very good reading’;
‘That’s good thinking’;
‘Good looking.... You’re looking at both pages. You’re really thinking about it.’;
‘Right! You’re remembering the word.’;

Maria used the word ‘thinking’ with her students repeatedly. I noticed this very early on in my observations of her in the classroom and explored her reasons for saying it. She explained:

D: When you’re interacting with the students you very often say, ‘Good thinking.’ Why do you say that?

M: Oh just to give them ... to encourage them, to give them a reinforcement, to let them know. I mean it’s like sort of a validation that I want to know what you’re thinking and that’s interesting and to encourage them to continue to think and to express themselves and to give them some feedback about what they’ve said about their contribution. (interview, June 7).

At first glance it might appear insignificant, but Maria’s choice of words make a difference in her class. Her words reflect her regard for her students. The words she chooses confirm her students. They acknowledge her students’ intelligence and validate their engagement, their role in learning. The words attest to Maria’s beliefs in their potential. Despite their disabilities, Maria regards her students as human beings full of potential and possibility. Maria’s students are intelligent and capable. Maria provides opportunities for her students to express their intelligence.
Beliefs About Her Role

A teacher who anticipates creativity and hidden talents in her students will greet a class quite differently from one who looks for deficits and defects (Fried, 1995, p. 154).

Maria not only believes in her students' potential, she assumes responsibility for their realizing their potential. Maria holds 'interventionist' as opposed to 'pathognomonic' beliefs about her role (Jordan, Lindsay, & Stanovich, 1997). Rather than believing that her student's difficulties in learning reside solely with them (pathognomonic), Maria believes that she and the learning environment she creates for her students are responsible for their learning (interventionist) (Jordan, et al, 1997). Rather than deferring to 'specialists' to support her students, Maria assumes responsibility and strives to organize her instruction in ways that support her students' growth toward the achievement of their potential. She engages her students in meaningful dialogue, reading and writing experiences because she believes that her students can learn these things and it is up to her to ensure that they have opportunities to learn these things. Maria greets her class with optimism and hope and assumes responsibility for their achievement.

The internal skills and abilities a teacher feels she possesses influence teaching behaviours (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Jordan, et al, 1997). While Maria strives tirelessly to meet the needs of each of her students, she is well aware of her own strengths and limitations. She explained,

The children are very complex. I can't possibly have all the knowledge that I would need to have. I come at it from my own narrow perspective. On the team, everybody comes at it from their own narrow perspective. But by sharing, we learn from each other. We share the responsibilities. We sometimes share the pain. In situations where maybe we don't feel we're being effective we share so that you don't feel as one person, 'Aahh! I've got the weight of the world!' And we share the joy of it.... Also we support each other. I really believe we support each other as a team and I think that's important (interview, June 21).
If she feels she does not have the knowledge or skill to meet her students’ needs, she seeks other resources. This, too, is part of her responsibility. She often refers to this as a work up:

I guess I think of a “work up” when we have to find outside resource people to assess the child.... With a previous student... we determined with the help of [school for the blind] staff that he was deaf-blind and thereby entitled to funding for an intervenor. We got him to [specialist doctor for the blind] who provided specific information about optic nerve damage and what he felt he was actually seeing. He made practical suggestions on how to program for him. I was then able to pass this information on to others. I guess if I have students who pose challenges I have not encountered before and I have to find outside resources to help me figure out how to program for them, and I can pass this information on to the next teacher that qualifies as a “work up” (email, Maria, Jan. 27).

And she’ll do everything that it takes to make sure those kids learn. Don’t get in her way. She’s very clear on why she’s there and what’s she’s doing. And she’ll pull in as many people in as many ways or whatever she has to do to meet those goals (interview, volunteer, June 7).

Thus, Maria assumes direct responsibility for her student’s learning. Her responsibility includes seeking resources and supports if she feels she does not have the capabilities or full knowledge of their needs.

**Parents as Partners**

Instituting open and genuine dialogue implies a weakening of professional structures and an attempt to establish teachers and parents as cooperative educators (Noddings, 1984, p. 186)

“I don’t just have a student in my classroom, I have a family” (interview, March 15, 2000). While Maria assumes responsibility for her students’ learning, she believes that their growth requires their parents’ involvement. Maria’s teaching practices attest to this belief. She actively engages the students’ parents in their learning. She is committed to knowing her students. She believes that understanding her students’ home experiences contributes to her understanding
of them. Moreover, she extends her teaching responsibility beyond her students to include their parents.

I said, 'I failed. I blamed myself. I failed with that mother. I failed to get this message across.'

Maria teaches her students. Maria teaches their parents. She is committed to having the parents of her students understand the importance of communication and draws the parents into her teaching.

Aside from the requirement to meet with the team during the twice a year progress reviews, Maria is in daily contact with the parents of the children in her classroom through the home-school communication book and weekly homework assignments.

I as an individual teacher can have an influence right now. That's why I send the homework home (interview, June 7).

This statement is powerful. It attests to Maria's beliefs about her role and sense of self-efficacy. It also reveals her beliefs about the role of parents in her teaching. The weekly homework assignments extend her students' learning, draw the parents into the learning process, and in turn, Maria gains more knowledge of her students. Each week she carefully plans, gathers the materials, and fills each student's large fabric homework bag. She explained,

I give more and more homework because I see more and more potential sometimes ... so I keep adding things that I think the parents could do. When I first started, the first year, I would send a little bit of homework. But maybe I'd just send some ABC books and counting books and ask the parents to kind of go over those and I'd swap the books. Like. I'd have a big basket of books and I'd swap them every week and I might ... I didn't send that much. I sent things for the ABCs....I had them make the ABC book and cut out the pictures [from magazines] and we'd go over them in class. But, ... I wasn't in an established routine so I'd sometimes forget to go over them in a group. But, nonetheless, I think it taught me ... I was effective. Two of my students went from knowing nothing to knowing them all by the end of the year! So I learned something there.

So, then the next year I thought, 'Well let's make this a little more formal.' So I got more information and started to ... what I did the
second year, I think, was everybody got the same homework. So, it wasn’t taking up a lot of my time. But there was maybe a little more prepping. Then I’d start looking at their IEPs and think, ‘Well this would be a good opportunity to individualize a little bit.’ So I started to branch out ... So I sometimes do that. Like a lot of times they’ll all be reviewing their letters, if that’s a goal for them. But sometimes I’ll try and I’ve got a lot of books that I’ve made up, workbooks and things.... I have card games. So if that’s a goal for that child I might start throwing that in for that child, maybe not for another. So as time has gone on, I’ve tried to individualize more and more. Someone like Dana has a tutor and [the occupational therapist] gave me, wrote out all her goals for Dana and because Dana is at such an early stage of development I try and put some of [the occupational therapist’s] goals in because in fact that is how that child learns which is maybe in some ways more important at this stage that she do some of those kinds of things. So I always have blocks or playdoh or something that’s gonna be developing motor skills. And [the occupational therapist] actually wrote the goals out so when she got her tutor, like I sent [the tutor] a list of [the occupational therapist’s] goals so she knew.

So over time, I’ve gotten ... it’s gotten to be quite a lot and I’m thinking, maybe I should just make it a little easier on myself. But when I actually start getting going with individual students then I think, ‘Well, this will be a good thing.’. And some of those things you just don’t have time in the class to get to. ...I started to see some pay off with some families with homework. And I started to see that it was a way to communicate once or twice, once a week, or once every two weeks about a specific child with a parent in pretty, quite in-depth. Because if I were making out a lesson for their individual child then the parent was giving me feedback on how things went. I was learning even more (interview, June 14).

That Maria assigns homework is not surprising given her optimistic beliefs about her students. She recognizes potential in her students. She sees possibilities. She also acknowledges the time constraints at school and is aware of each student’s goals. She knows that her students need more time to learn. She views homework as an extension of their academic program, an opportunity for more individualized instruction and for continuity in their program. Further, homework is another means of gaining additional insight into each of her student’s skills and needs,
So on Wednesday nights I come up with these ideas. Now for some kids they'll be the same. This group of four, a lot of times their activities are similar. But, then her [Bethany's] mother will tell me this and when I sent the puppets home ... like when the kids are just learning their ABCs, I send puppets home and her mother told me that she just loves them. I was getting this. So then I started to see, 'Oh she's motivated.' And I realized that I would never know this without this feedback from her mother. So, it's another way ... It's so hard to do formal assessments with these kids. I don't have the time. I don't have the necessary materials. So it's a lot of this kind of assessment where you try things out and then you're observing these children or you're getting feedback (interview, June 14).

The achievements of Maria's students reinforce her beliefs in their potential, contribute to her knowledge and further shape her teaching practices:

I think it taught me. I was effective....I was learning even more.’ ‘I started to see some pay off with some families with homework and I started to see that it was a way to communicate once or twice, once a week or once every two weeks about a specific child with a parent ... quite in-depth (interview, May 3).

I'd rather have demanding parents than passive parents or non-participant parents. It's a two way street you know. If I have a family where they're really, really concerned about their child and they're willing to do what they can to help their child it feeds me. It feeds me because I think, 'Well here's a family who's really gonna put in the energy.' And I really try and ... And it doesn't have to be overt either. Like Patty's mom where English is difficult. She told me on the field trip, 'I do the homework with her all the time.' And she told me how important it was. So I know now that when I do that [homework] bag, Patty's mother does it without fail and it's in here on Monday morning. So if I have to ... I go to Patty's bag first... If I had to miss out anybody, Patty gets her homework (interview, May 3).

It's one of the ways that we knew that she [Sarah] was really coming along because her Mom bought her a calendar for her birthday ... on her birthday the first year that she was in our class. So, for her fifth birthday and I thought, 'Good luck. that's quite high level.' But [Sarah's Mom] has you know, always taught me! She persists and Sarah is really, you know, by doing it at home where the parents see things as priorities that the children work on them at home, they start getting them (interview, June 14).
One particular occasion, illustrates the success and rewards and reciprocal nature of the collaborative relationship between Maria and Bethany's mother. Following a number of unsuccessful interventions, Maria called Bethany's mother to discuss the child's frequent incidents of crying at school. Bethany's mother said that Bethany had been doing the same thing each night when she arrived at home. One of her previous consultants from the AAC service recommended that she develop a visual schedule for Bethany so that she would understand the regular routine and any changes that might occur. The schedule was represented by individual picture symbols which were posted on the refrigerator. When Bethany arrived home from school, she and her Mom would review the visual schedule. Bethany's Mother recounted,

First you get out of your chair, watch TV, have a drink, then eat. It was good for me and her. We agree? Yes. No more problems (interview, Bethany's Mother, June 16).

The schedule was a visual reminder to Bethany and also served as a starting point for re-negotiating the order of activities. Maria developed a similar system for Bethany at school. And it worked. Bethany's crying episodes dissipated.

Maria learned from Bethany's mother. She learned about Bethany and her home experiences. She learns a great deal from working with each student's parents. She learns what will and will not work. Working with Bethany's mother became another avenue for understanding Bethany.

Sometimes we ask, you know, 'How's it going with the book at home?' And you might get, 'Well it's busy.' Like Bethany's mom will say, 'Now you realize, I do the homework and I do some of these things on the weekends because by the time I get home from Wheeltrans it's sometimes 7 or 8 o'clock at night.' And I said, 'I appreciate that 100% any work there or assistance that you give Bethany on the weekends to follow through' (interview, April 26).

From working with Ricky's parents, Maria learned,

It's far more important for that child to be included in the family baseball game and hockey game and to be out in the community and be seen as so-and-so's brother and go out on the ice and have his picture taken with the team ... that's far important than sitting
and having him look at the ABCs. I mean if there has to be a value judgement I've made that decision because I think that that child needs to be a loved member and a fully participating member of the family. And Ricky is such a challenge to program for that I have to say that I'm not even sure that he should be spending his time doing some of those activities (interview, April 26).

Maria's belief in working closely with her student's parents, increases her knowledge and understanding of her students. This evolving knowledge and understanding influences her teaching practices. She learns when to push and when to back off. She learns who requires support and who doesn't.

So maybe some families will, when you interview them, say I push too hard. I don't know what they'll say. I mean I think I have high expectations and I try ... like I've seen ... I've seen such progress in some kids if I've got cooperation from the family. But I can't say that in my history here at [the school] that I get cooperation from every single family. It's always going to vary (interview, April 26).

Backing off of her expectations and demands of the parents does not come easily to Maria.

When you say how much can I push, I guess it depends on my relationship with the family and how much give and take there is in that relationship, how much honesty there is in that relationship (interview, April 26).

Having the close relationship with the parents is critical to Maria's ability to understand the family situation and how her teaching practices influence the dynamics.

The collaborative relationship supports the parent's evolving understanding of their child's characteristics, needs, and potential.

I think for someone like Bethany's Mom, she started to see what Bethany was capable of and they start to realize that their child has academic potential and they're always happy by that. They're always encouraged (interview, June 14).

By being involved in their child's learning, parents are able to participate in the development of the shared understandings of which Eisner (1983) speaks.
Beliefs About Learning

Beliefs are instrumental in defining tasks and selecting the cognitive tools with which to interpret, plan, and make decisions regarding such tasks; hence they play a critical role in defining behaviour and organizing knowledge and information” (Pajares, 1992, p. 325).

Maria’s instructional practices reveal her beliefs about knowledge and how it is acquired, her beliefs about learning. As Marshall (1992) states,

Beliefs and assumptions about the nature of classroom learning have important consequences for opportunities that are provided for learning, for what is learned, for the kind of knowledge that individuals will be able to deal with, for how knowledge is used, and for how students view themselves (p. 5).

Maria’s students “actively construct [their knowledge] in meaningful, multiply connected, contextually relevant networks that allow for deeper and interrelated understandings” (Marshall, 1992, p. 2). At the same time, though, Maria’s classroom program reflects activities in which she directly teaches communication, numeracy, and literacy concepts and skills. First, I will illustrate Maria’s direct instruction beliefs, then features of her constructivist beliefs about learning. Finally, I will share a vignette which further illustrates the complementary nature of these two stances in Maria’s instruction.

Direct Instruction

Maria believes that if her students are to become proficient communicators, readers and writers, then language, communication, and literacy concepts and skills need to be taught directly. And Maria teaches these skills directly to her students. Her direct instruction in communication during the undressing routine attests to this belief. The fact that she teaches formal weekly reading lessons also attests to this belief. Letter knowledge and phonemic awareness were taught directly through the Jolly Phonics program and the weekly alphabet puppet shows. These skills along with decoding and word recognition and spelling and writing were taught directly and reinforced in the reading lessons, show and tell activities, language experience activities, board
games, and indeed, in the undressing routine as she prompted her students to find each other’s cubbyholes. Thus, Maria provides systematic, explicit instruction in communication, language, literacy concepts and skills on a daily basis. She taught the skills in separate lessons and within the context of other activities in the classroom. Maria does not leave it up to her students to learn from these activities. She incorporated direct skill instruction into these authentic activities. During these authentic activities she reinforced concepts and skills which she had specifically taught in other lessons.

**Constructivist Beliefs**

Maria knows, “It’s just so easy to do everything for the kids all the time!” (interview, May 3). But her students are not passive observers or listeners in the classroom. During the typically lengthy reading lessons, each student remained remarkably attentive and engaged. For Maria, the students must be attentive and actively engaged in activities if they are to learn. Indeed, Maria believes that as much as possible, her students must be actively involved in *constructing* their knowledge and understanding and acquiring skill by actively participating in activities. During the undressing routine, Maria supported her students’ active engagement in the process of removing their outdoor wear. Maria believes that her students will learn by being actively engaged, actively participating through communication. She organizes her teaching in ways that engage her students in their own learning. As Hillocks (1999) states,

Because optimistic teachers assume... that students will learn under appropriate circumstances, and because they understand that students must be engaged in the construction of their own knowledge, they set about developing activities that will allow students to do just that. Because their activities allow students to respond frequently in class to a variety of factors, they are also privy to what students are doing in response to the activity and what they seem to be thinking. Given this openness, such teachers are able to evaluate progress, consider possible revision in the activity or the store of ideas available, and take action to facilitate change in their students even while they work (p. 132)
Maria believes that the development of language, communication, and literacy are intricately connected and interdependent.

You know as well as I do that they’re [literacy and communication] so interconnected..... It’s very difficult to make those kinds of divisions because if someone becomes literate then their communication will change for the better (interview, June 21).

Indeed, it was difficult to distinguish between communication and literacy in Maria’s classroom. She infused language, communication and literacy experiences seamlessly into her instructional program. Moreover, Maria believes that her students will learn about language, and learn to communicate and learn to read and write by being engaged in authentic, purposive activities and experiences, many of which arise naturally in the course of the day and school year.

Maria’s students prepared birthday and thank you cards. They created books based on their school and community experiences. They prepared a special pudding for a classroom visitor by reading from a symbol-embellished recipe. They read the words of songs during music lessons and school assemblies. They used their communication books to tell their news from home while someone listened and printed it for them. These activities provided authentic experiences in which her students learned concepts and skills related to communicating, reading, and writing.

Dialogue figured prominently in Maria’s classroom, no mean feat in a classroom of non-speaking students. Maria asked questions, expected her students to respond, and was patient in waiting for their response. Further, the kinds of questions Maria asked reflect her belief that her students are thinking and that what they are thinking is important, that they might have something novel to say. Maria wants to know what they are thinking. It is critical to her teaching. Indeed, it defines her next move. The questions she asked require more than a simple yes or no response. She supported her students in being able to answer by anticipating what they might say and providing appropriate pictures and words from which they could choose. Moreover, Maria acknowledged that
She may not have correctly anticipated what they had to say. She gave her students a chance to let her know this by offering the symbol: ‘something else’. Maria adjusted both her questions and the presentation of the items according to each student’s capabilities and responses.

In the reading lesson, Maria asked her students, “What do you think she feels? I’m curious. Look at her face. She said, ‘What a mess!’ Why? Is Kitty mad or frustrated? ‘Why?’ Susie’s always asking, ‘Why’? What is the reason?” Maria’s students were not told how Kitty feels. Rather, they were given opportunities to think about it, to construct their knowledge and understanding. Maria asked her students what they think. She mined her student’s understanding and provided them with an opportunity to articulate what they think.

At the same time, Maria was wholly attentive to her students: re-adjusting their books, directly pointing, drawing their attention to what they were reading, reminding them of the goal: ‘Remember, what is the story about?’ She acknowledged her students and provided encouragement and feedback that was specific and directed at each one:

Mark says, ‘No’;

Good, Sarah! Sarah’s pointing way up to the top. Good! That was good looking, Sarah!

Maria was engaged with her students. She listened to what her students said. She observed and acknowledged their communications: Patty’s words: “Oops”, “Barney” and the other students’ laughs, smiles, and gestures. These communications did not go unnoticed. They were acknowledged. The meaning and intent behind them was recognized. Maria developed what her students said. She used their thinking, their actions as a crucial part of the knowledge-building process during the lesson.

In turn, Maria gained insight into her students’ thinking processes and understanding, thus expanding her own knowledge.

So now this year he’s [Mark] really sort of spreading out and showing people how his thinking is working which is so revealing. When they get to this stage, it’s so interesting [Interview, Maria, May 31].
By involving the students in dialogue, Maria is privy to their thinking and is able to evaluate their developing understanding and skill. "As teachers expand their knowledge of how children actively and often collaboratively construct their own knowledge, they modify their teaching practices" (Marshall, 1992, p. 13). Maria’s students’ responses, which reflect their thinking processes and understanding, present a platform for Maria to teach (Hillocks, 1999). As Englert and Mariage (1996) assert, "Teachers cannot effectively instruct without knowledge of students’ mental states; and knowing students’ mental states can only come from the process of instructing" (p. 160). Maria spoke of ‘pushing the envelope a little further’ on the basis of her students’ responses:

As I’m seeing that the children are getting the letter sounds, I’m thinking, ‘Okay. I’m not gonna write this down in their IEP right now, but I will report on it when I write a report. I will report that we are beginning to do the kinds of activities we’re doing. I guess I’m following their lead when it comes to that because I feel, well they’re showing me that they know their letter sounds, so it’s time for some of them to move on. So, I’m kind of pushing the envelope there. I think when you set those goals, they’re targets but you never know.... You may not reach the target or you may exceed the target.... I want to push them in that way now. I want to push them further in terms of what they can attain within the course of the year (interview, April 26).

This is terrific! Because this is what I intend by doing all the things, the ‘Fred the Pig’. Now we’re moving into another stage where that child, Mark, is taking great pleasure, taking meaning from print, reading a book about what we do at school, being really motivated and we’re getting all that beginning literacy stuff. So as far as the literacy area, I guess every year I try and tackle something new (interview, April 26).

Maria’s beliefs about learning and her attention, enthusiasm, encouragement, and support ensure that her students will continue to contribute to the knowledge-building process. At the same time, she learns from her students and her growing knowledge influences her teaching practices. She adjusts her instruction based on the moment-to-moment needs of her students. Maria’s students’ responses both inform and modulate her teaching. Maria’s knowledge grows along with her students’ knowledge.
Kinds of Knowledge Conveyed

If we view the classroom as a place of learning and see knowledge as existing in the actions of the participants, the declarative knowledge emanating from one individual in the form of lecture or performance can only be activated for the others if they somehow work to transform it (Hillocks, 1999, p. 27).

The kinds of knowledge Maria conveys to her students also provide hints to her beliefs. During the reading lesson, Maria conveyed two kinds of knowledge to her students. She anticipated what may be unfamiliar to her students and provided explanations to support their understanding. Thus, she conveyed declarative knowledge or knowledge of 'what' (Ryle, 1984). In the reading lesson, she explains an apostrophe to her students:

There's just one little difference, [She points to the word in the title of the book] This is called 'apostrophe s'. [She points to the picture symbol on the Velcro strip.] This word, is Fred [She points to the word on the chart paper.] This word is Fred. [She then points to the word in the title of the book.] And this word is Fred's. It's something that belongs to Fred. [Maria touches her hand to her chest]. It belongs to Fred.

She explained unfamiliar words and concepts. But, Maria's explanations were not undertaken with the assumption that her students were listening and by implication would understand. Maria helped her student's understand by rendering her explanations meaningful to them. She incorporated visuals and gestures to convey the meaning of the little black mark that sits above the line between two letters, the apostrophe. She also brought her explanations to life through her examples and her animated manner. Maria spoke of the new vocabulary in terms that were relevant to the terminology and organization of her students' communication books: 'feelings' and 'action' words. The question, 'why' was related to what all the students have experienced in the classroom: Patty's frequent asking, "Why?". Maria integrated prior learning into the lesson: She related the term, 'frustrated', to particular incidents which she perceived each of her students had experienced. She spontaneously related Mark's
experience in cutting his finger to the reading activity: “What a mess!” She said, “Take a look at that letter. Remember? We’ll do our Jolly Phonics sounds.”

Maria conveyed another kind of knowledge to her students. Optimistic teachers engage their students more in procedural modes of knowledge (Hillocks, 1999). Maria engages her students in the acts of communicating and reading and in doing so, teaches important procedural knowledge: how to communicate, how to read (Ryle, 1984). Further, her prompts, her explanations and questions, guide her students through the act of reading. As Meichenbaum and Biemiller (1998) explain, “The ways in which teachers calibrate task difficulty, titrate assistance, and relinquish task control as students become more competent at a given skill have been referred to as scaffolding” (p. 87). In the reading lesson, Maria provided scaffolds for her students’ learning. She provided minute-by-minute cues and prompts to their independent reading and understanding of the questions she asked and the vocabulary she emphasized.

And look at Kitty’s face. Okay. Why is Kitty mad?

Analyzing the pictures to aid in remembering what the story is about:

Just look at the pictures. Read the sentences. Remember what it’s about.

Reading the words by determining the initial consonant sounds:

Let’s look at the next word. [She points to the word ‘mess’ on the title of the book]. What’s the letter sound? Can anyone tell me the letter sound for that word?

Guiding the students through reading the story themselves:

Remember if you’re reading the sentences, which page do you read first?

Where do we find the beginning. Where do I go? Can somebody tell us where the beginning is?

Okay, Bethany, you say the word and I’ll say it. You read the word and I’ll say it. You think it. You think it even if you can’t say it with your voice. I want you to think it in your head. Okay? Because that’s the same as reading. You’re reading even if you’re just thinking of the word.
[Maria points to each symbol in the sentences in Patty’s book. Once Patty has looked, Maria say’s the words] I’m ... tired ... of ... Fred’s... mess,... said... Kitty... I’m ...tired ...of... Fred’s... mess!

Maria did not leave it up to her students to make the transformation from declarative (knowing what) to procedural (knowing how) knowledge. Maria’s students were not passive participants in the reading lesson. They were actively engaged. Maria’s students learn how to read by reading. They learn how to communicate by communicating. In Maria’s classroom, the students engage considerably in learning procedural knowledge. They are actively engaged in communicating, in reading, in spelling, in directing others, in learning both what and how kinds of knowledge.

Many activities in Maria’s classroom attest to her beliefs about learning. At the end of each school day, Maria’s students had an opportunity to reflect on their day at school in order to share their school news with their parents. Maria has developed a standard reporting sheet with words and symbols for this purpose. The students chose the words and symbols that represent how they felt that day at school (i.e., happy, sick, sleeping, sad, mad, and afraid) and the activities in which they were involved (i.e., circle, weather, show and tell, computer, reading, etc.). Thus, the students were able to communicate and read their news to their parents.

Maria and Joan regularly combined their classes for theme-related activities. In addition to the unit on nutrition, I witnessed an Australia unit. The combined classes sang Australian songs, scrambled emu eggs, read books about Australia, and were treated to the playing of a didgeridoo. All of the materials, the songs, the recipes, and the books were embellished with the picture symbols and words that the students used in their communication. This was true for all of the materials that were used in school-wide events such as assemblies and field trip days.

Maria’s teaching is not confined to her classroom, or school for that matter. She extends her teaching beyond the classroom and school to the community. She brings the community into her classroom and takes her classroom into the community. As she remarked to me, ‘I love having community people involved.’ (field note, May 27).
Community people not only meet with her students, but they are directly involved in working with the students. Maria ensures that community people understand her student’s characteristics and needs. For the nutrition unit during Education Week, her students spent a day at one of the city’s large downtown supermarkets. Maria arranged for her students to begin their excursions with a guided tour of the supermarket. Prior to the visit, Maria contacted the store manager to explain the nature of her students and her goals for their visit. During the tour, the store’s manager talked about the various food groups, asked the students questions, and provided an opportunity for them to taste different food items from each food group.

Later that day, the students went to the city market, where they were engaged in similar activities. Maria followed up the visit to the supermarket by engaging the students in writing a thank you card to the manager. On another afternoon, they walked to the local grocery store. During all of these activities, Maria’s students were engaged in activities of reading words and symbols, learning about and identifying food items by their food group, and purchasing an adult’s weekly groceries. They were learning about foods and the importance of nutrition, they were learning to communicate. They were learning to read, all within authentic, meaningful activities with Maria gauging their learning and providing cues, prompts, and scaffolds as required.

In Maria’s class, each community trip ended in an activity in which the students developed a class set of books that captured their experiences. The books contained photographs of the events and the students contributed sentences that told the story of the experience. The books form the basis for not only extending the experience, but myriad opportunities for skill instruction: matching words to symbols, putting words in correct order in sentences, putting sentences in correct order, and, of course, reading and re-reading as Maria said many times, ‘to anyone who will listen’ and re-living the experience all over again. The students in Maria’s class graduate with a gift that will last a lifetime: a yearbook replete with photographs and words and sentences highlighting their experiences in her classroom.
Merging Beliefs About Learning

Maria's beliefs about learning merge within her teaching practice. I will illustrate this merging of Maria's beliefs about learning by sharing a teaching-learning interaction I witnessed between Maria and Bethany. This particular vignette elucidates the complementary nature of the roles of Maria's beliefs about learning and how they define her teaching practices. Further, it richly illustrates the significance of the interaction among her various knowledges and multi-faceted beliefs and their role in defining her instructional interactions with her students, thereby synthesizing my analysis of Maria's instructional practices to this point in the thesis.

During Maria's three-times-a-week show and tell activity the student's share their news by using their communication systems. Maria viewed this as a critical time for the students to communicate with someone who may or may not be familiar with their particular way of communicating. Students who have well-developed communication books and skills, such as Mark, Bethany, and Patty are able to direct the activity or tell their news using their books. Sarah, Dana, and Ricky typically require more direction, prompts, and support. Whoever is assisting the news provides prompts in the form of asking questions such as who, what, where, when, and why and also writes the news on chart paper or in the student’s individual journal. Show and tell culminates in the students gathering in a circle to share their respective news which their communication partners read from the journals or the chart paper. The entire, 36-minute, show and tell interaction is re-counted in the next 19 pages of dialogue and description. As with the other vignettes, I interject comments to alert you to significant aspects of the interaction.

Show and Tell

April 26, 10:36 a.m.

The students are individually working with someone to prepare their show and tell. Maria works with Bethany in the back corner of the room. Maria is standing in front of Bethany, who has her back to the class and is
looking up at Maria. A chart stand holding a blank piece of chart paper is to Maria's right. Maria picks up Bethany's communication book, flips to the index pages and holds it up in front of Bethany.

[Pay attention to the nature of Maria's questions.]

Maria: Alright. Bethany, where should we go in your book? [She looks to Bethany.] Do you want to tell me something that's in your book.

Bethany: Looks to the green 'yes' symbol that is displayed on the right side of her communication book.

Maria: Okay. In this group [Maria points to the top left group in the book.]

[Maria runs her finger along the top row of symbols in the group.] Do you want to tell me in the top row?

Bethany: Looks to red 'no' symbol.

Maria: [Maria runs her finger along the bottom row of symbols in the group.] Do you want to tell me in the bottom row? [Maria points to the 'no' and 'yes' symbols in the book.] No or yes? [Maria points to each group of symbols on the index page.] Action words. Descriptions. Descriptions are good and bad and hot and cold. Prepositions like I and we, and you.

Bethany: Smiles and looks at Maria.

Maria: Okay. [Maria flips to the prepositions page and shows it to Bethany.]

What are you going to tell me?

Bethany: Looks at the symbols on the page in front of her.

Maria: [Pauses.] Did you find it? Is it in this group? [Points to the group of symbols that she sees Bethany looking at.]

Bethany: Smiles and vocalizes.

Maria: Yeah? [Points to the top row of symbols in the group.] Top row?
Bethany: Smiles and vocalizes.

Maria: [Points to each symbol in the top row.] Girl...a woman.... She.

Bethany: Smiles and vocalizes.

[Pay attention to the numerous explanations Maria provides to Bethany.]

Maria: She. Who is 'she'? [Turns to the chart and begins to draw the symbol of a

girl.] Who is 'she'? When we use the word ‘she’ we have a picture of girl.

[Maria finishes drawing the picture, then turns back to Bethany with a

puzzled look on her face.] When you say ‘she’, I need to know who you’re
talking about. So maybe, should we go to the people page? And you can
tell me. [Maria flips to ‘people’ page in the book.] Who is she? I know it’s a
girl or a lady. But who is she? Is she one of the people on this page?

[Circles the people symbols with her hand.] No or yes?

Bethany: Looks at Maria, smiles, and vocalizes.

Maria: Yes. Can you tell me who it is?

Bethany: Looks at the top left-hand group of symbols on the page.

Maria: This group? ? [Points to the top left hand group of symbols.]

Bethany: Smiles.

Maria: Yes. In the top row? [Points to the top row of symbols in the group.]

Bethany: Smiles

Maria: Yes. The only woman in this group is Jane. Is that who you’re talking

about?

Bethany: Looking at the symbols.

Maria: Top row. Jane. Is that who you mean?

Bethany: Looks at the ‘no’ symbol on the page.
Maria: [Points to the ‘no’ symbol.] No. [Points to the bottom row of symbols.] Is it in the bottom row?

Bethany: Smiles and vocalizes.

Maria: It’s in the bottom row. [Points to the bottom row.] You see this is the top row. [Hides the bottom row with the palm of hand and highlights the top row with the free hand.] This is the top row. [Hides the top row with the palm of her hand and highlights the bottom row of symbols with her free hand.] And this is the bottom row. Let’s see, there’s Mary.

Bethany: Smiles and vocalizes, looking at Maria.

Maria: Mary? Okay [Looks at Bethany and turns to the chart. Mary. Alright! [Draws a symbol of a girl’s head and prints the word ‘Mary’ above it.]

Bethany: Watches intently.

[Here is another example of the kinds of questions Maria asks.]

Maria: [Points to the word, Mary while turning back to Bethany.] Mary. Alright. What did Mary do? [Turns to the ‘core’ page of Bethany’s communication book.] Is there something that we can do on the core page that you can tell me.

Bethany: Vocalizing

Maria: Yes? Or No? [Points to each symbol in turn.]

Bethany: Looks at the ‘yes’ symbol.

Maria: [Points to the ‘yes’ symbol.] Yes. [Opens the book so that both of the core pages are displayed in front of Bethany.] [Taps the top page with her free hand.] Is it on this page? Page one of the core pages?

Bethany: Vocalizes and smiles.

Maria: Alright. You look with your eyes and tell me where to go. [ Watches Bethany.]
Bethany: Looks at the bottom right hand group of symbols on the page.

10:40 a.m.

The conversation is interrupted briefly by Ricky's helper who is looking for his show and tell.

Maria: [Turns back to Bethany.] Alright! It's in this group. [Points to the bottom right hand group of symbols.] Is it in the top row.

Bethany: Smiles.

Maria: Yes. [Then points to each symbol in the top row.] Go somewhere.... Buy something.

Bethany: Smiles and vocalizes.

Maria: Alright. [Turns toward the chart and points to symbol of Mary.] Mary... buy [Draws the symbol for buy on the chart.]

Bethany: Watches.

[Maria's comments to Bethany are instructive.]

Maria: Alright. [Points to each symbol on the chart. ] Jane ... Buy. [Turns back to Bethany and holds up the book.] What did you say you wanted Jane to buy? [Waits and watches Bethany.] Oh. You have some little clips in your hair. They're nice. [Touches the clips that are holding Bethany's hair in place.] Wow! Those are nice. Those would be a good thing to show for show and tell. Did you see them? Did Mom show them to you? [Takes one out of Bethany's hair and shows it to her.] Dragonflies. They're beautiful. Would you like to show them? [Looks at Bethany.]

Bethany: Looks towards the 'no' symbol on her tray.

Maria: No. [Puts the clip back in Bethany's hair.] They're kind of like the ones Dana and Sarah wear. Alright. What do you want Jane to buy? Is it on the core pages? [Points to each page in turn.]
Bethany: Looks to 'yes' symbol.

Maria: Okay. So where do I go on the core pages.

Bethany: Looks to the bottom right hand group on second page.

Maria: This group? [Points to the bottom right hand group on second page.]

Bethany: Smiles.

Maria: Yes. Top row? [Points to top row of symbols.]

Bethany: No response.

Maria: Bottom row? [Points to bottom row of symbols.]

Bethany: Smiles.

Maria: Alright. [Points to the first symbol in the group.] Videotape.

Bethany: Smiles and vocalizes.

[Pay attention to the following interactions.]

Maria: Videotape. [Turns toward the chart and begins to draw a videotape and writes the word above it.] Buy videotape. [Points to each word/symbol.]

Jane buys [writes an 's' in the word 'buy'] videotape. [Turns back to Bethany.] Should we finish the sentence... for somebody? Who was this videotape for? For ....

Bethany: Looks at top left group of symbols on core page one.

Maria: This group. [Circles her finger around the top left group of symbols.]

Bethany: Smiles.

Maria: Yes. Top row?

Bethany: Smiles.

Maria: [Points to each symbol in top row.] Bethany?
Bethany: Smiles and vocalizes.

Maria: Bethany? Alright, let’s go to your pronouns. [Flips to the pronouns page in the communication book and holds it in front of Bethany.] If you’re talking about Bethany, what would you say for … [Points to herself, then Bethany.] And you’re talking about yourself. [Points to and circles the top left corner of symbols on the pronouns page.] This group. Would it be in the top row? Or The bottom row? [Points to each row in turn.] [Waits to see Bethany’s response.

Bethany: Smiles.

Maria: [Still pointing to bottom row.] for him [Pauses.] for me. [Pauses.]

Bethany: Smiles.

Maria: For me. [Turns to chart and pointing the words and symbols.] Jane buys a videotape [Writes the word ‘for’ and the word ‘me’. Then draws the symbol representing ‘me’ under the word.] For me. [Points to the symbols and words in the sentences.] Jane buys a videotape for me. [Turns back to Bethany.] Okay. Do you want to say about? About what? Because she could buy a videotape about … About what? [Flips to the index page.] Okay. Where would I go in your book?

Bethany: Looks at bottom right corner group of symbols.

Maria: [Points to the symbols.] This group?

Bethany: Smiles.

Maria: In the top row? [Points to the top row of symbols.]

Bethany: Smiles.

Maria: [Points to the top row of symbols.] At home? Things at home?

Bethany: Looks at ‘no’ symbol on the page.
Maria: No. [Points to the next symbol.] Clothing? Transportation?

Bethany: Looks puzzled.

Maria: Is it in this top row? At home? Your at home page?

Bethany: Looks at no symbol on page.

Maria: Your clothing?

Bethany: Looks at no symbol on page.

Maria: Transportation?

Bethany: Looks hopeful at Maria.

Maria: You transportation page. [She begins to flip to the page.]

Bethany: Starts to frown and initiate a fuss.

Maria: [Immediately stops flipping to the page and holds her hand palm open in front of Bethany.] Just say no. Say no. I got it wrong. [Holds the page in front of her.] The bottom row?

Bethany: Smiles.

Maria: The bottom row. [Points to the bottom row of symbols and then each symbol.] Animals.... Toys....

Bethany: No response.

Maria: [Points to the last symbol in the row.] TV.

Bethany: Smiles and looks at Maria.

Maria: Your TV page. Good Bethany. You’re doing a good job of communicating. [Rubs Bethany’s hand then flips to the TV page.] You’re telling me ‘no when I get it wrong and you’re doing a good job of communicating. Good! Really good! [Finds the page.] Okay. So you’re saying, ‘Jane bought a videotape for me about ...’.
Bethany: Looks at the groups of symbols on the page.

Maria: Is it this group? [Circles the bottom left corner group of symbols.] No or yes?

Bethany: Looks at the ‘no’ symbol.

Maria: Did you find the group you want? You got one now. Look at me when you’re ready. [Points her finger at her eyes.]

Bethany: Looks at Maria, then at the top right hand group of symbols.

Maria: [Circles that group of symbols.] This group? Is that the group you want?

Bethany: Smiles.

Maria: [Points to the group of symbols.] So that looks like about the Big Comfy couch?

Bethany: Smiles.

Maria: Molly. Loonette. [Points to each symbol.] Is that what you want it to be about? [Points to the symbols below the group.] Or down here?

Bethany: No response.

Maria: Top row? Big Comfy Couch. Molly. Loonette. Is that the sort of videotape that you want Jane to buy you?

Bethany: Smiles. Looks at ‘yes’ symbol.

Maria: Yes. [Turns to the chart and crouches to add to the symbol sentence.] So I’ll put them all together. I’ll write the Big Comfy Couch (Proceeds to draw a symbol of a couch.)

Bethany: Watches intently.

[Pay attention to Maria’s explanation to Bethany.]

Maria: [Stands up when she’s finished. Points to the chart sentence and Looks at Bethany.] Alright! So we have a big sentence here. [Points to the word,
'she' at the top of the page. First of all I'm going to talk to the kids about 'she' and how you said, 'she'. And I didn't know who she was? [Shrugs her shoulders. Points to the symbols in the sentence.] Jane buy a videotape for me about the Big Comfy Couch. Then you told me that she was Jane. [Points to the words and symbols.] That was really good. Alright. So here is your sentence. Jane buy a videotape for me about the Big Comfy Couch. And you had first said, 'she' and I didn't know who you were talking about, so you had to tell me Jane. If you were talking about Jane. .. If you said Jane first and then used she, then I know. But if you use 'she' first, she could be Sandra, she could be Sarah, she could be any girl, so I had to know who you were talking about.

10:50 a.m.

Okay. Bethany is there anything else you would like me to write down like what you did on the weekend? Or what you want to say to the kids. What else would you like me to write down. You could tell the kids what you did on the weekend? I think your Mom sent a paper. [Goes to the back of Bethany's wheelchair to retrieve the show and tell news from Bethany's backpack.] Yeah. She did. [Maria shows the paper to Bethany.]

Bethany: No response.

Maria: Would you like to read it with me? Just to remind you of what you did on the weekend?

Bethany: Smiles.

Maria: [Shows her the page of news and points to each symbol.] She says, I ate ice cream cake. Chocolate ice cream cake. I played party games. ? Did you have a party? And you listened to Brazilian music? Did you have a party? [Pulls the yes/no' strip off of her laptray and presents it to Bethany.

Bethany: Looks at the 'yes' symbol.

[This next sequence of interaction is important.]
Maria: Can I ask you a question?

Bethany: Smiles.

Maria: Okay, here's my question? You have all these things on your news sheet about a party? [Flips the chart paper to a new page.] So my question is. Draws a 'who' symbol and 'party' symbol. Who had a party. Who had a party. [Shows Bethany the index page of her communication book.] Where would we go in your book so you can answer my question?

Bethany: Looks at top left corner of book.

Maria [Points to top left corner of book.] This group?

Bethany: Smiles.

Maria: Top row [Points to top row.]

Bethany: Smiles.

Maria: On your pages one and two?

Bethany: Looks at yes symbol.

Maria: [Flips to the next page.] So, on these pages?

Bethany: Looks at top left corner of symbols.

Maria: Looks like you're looking at these.

Bethany: Smiles.

Maria: Yes. Is it in the top row? No or yes.

Bethany: Looks at yes symbol.

Maria: Mom did. John did.

Bethany: Smiles.

Maria: John did? No or yes.
Bethany: Looks at yes symbol.

Maria: Okay. So your brother had a party. John had a party. [Turns to the chart.] Was it John’s birthday party? [Holds up the yes/no strip from her laptray.]

Bethany: Looks at yes.

Maria: Yes. Okay, so John had a birthday party. [Draws symbol of boy and writes John above it.] John had a party. Alright. I have another question for you. [Draws ‘who ‘symbol on chart.] Who went to the party? Who went to the party? Who went to John’s party? [Holds the communication book open in front of Bethany.]

Bethany: Looking at the page. Her head falls to the side.

Maria: I’m asking who. About people, so where do I go in your book? Who was at the party?

Bethany: Looks at bottom right corner of page.

Maria: [Points to group of symbols]. Your ABC’s?

Bethany: Smiles.

Maria: Turn Okay. [Flips to the ABC page] Your ABC’s. You’re going to try and give me the letter of someone who was to the party, the letter name. Is this a person you’re gonna try and tell me. Okay. What’s the letter name.

Bethany: Looks to a group on the right side of the page.

Maria: It looks like you’re looking at this group. Okay. When I say a letter you watch or look at me or make a noise or look at yes. I …].

Bethany: Smiles.

Maria: Someone who’s name begins with ‘J’, is that right?

Bethany: Smiles.
Maria: Is it someone whose picture is not in your book? Is it someone who’s not in your book? [Presents Bethany with yes/no strip from laptray.]

Bethany: Looks at yes symbol.

Maria: Okay. So it’s someone whose name begins with ‘j’. Okay. I have a question. I’m going to go to your pronoun page. [Flips to the page.] Is it a boy [Points to the first symbol in group of symbols on left of page.] or a girl [Points to first symbol in group of symbols of right of page.] or a man [Points to second symbol in group of symbols on left of page.] or a woman [Points to second symbol in group of symbols on right of page.] whose name begins with ‘j’? Whose name begins with ‘j’. A man or a boy? A boy j or a man j? or a girl j or a lady j?

Bethany: Looks at group of symbols on right.

Maria: You’re looking at this group. A girl name j? A girl name j?

Bethany: Smiles

Maria: It’s not Joy is it? Joy? Do we have the picture in your book now? [Looks at the small photographs of the people on her people page and finds the photograph of Joy. Shows it to Bethany.] Joy. [Flips back to the pronouns page.] Is it a girl or a lady?

Bethany: Smiles when Maria says girl.

Maria: A girl J. And is it right that you don’t have the picture in you book. Is that right? [Holds up the laptray yes/no symbol strip.]

Bethany: Looks at yes symbol.

Maria: Yes. Okay. So someone it’s a girl whose name begins with j. [Draws a girl symbol on the chart with J above it.] Turns to Bethany.] It could be Jill. It could be any name that starts with j, right? So you know what I’ll do. We’ll send this home and we’ll ask Mom to give us a little more information.
Bethany: Smiles.

Maria: Turns to the others who are working with the children. So how are we doing? Do we have enough information to come together now and share.

[Turns to Bethany.] You did very well with your book! Can I give you a hug?

Bethany: Smiles.

Maria: [While hugging Bethany.] You did very well this morning. You really worked hard. [Stands back, looking directly at Bethany.] You know what I really liked the most was when I didn't get the picture right, you just said, 'No.' and I kept trying. I really liked that. [Bends down and comes closer to Bethany's face, touches her hand, then steps back.] You didn't get mad at me. You just said, 'No.' and I kept trying until I got the picture I want, that you want. I was happy. I was really happy!

11:00 a.m.

**Synthesis of Maria's Knowledge and Beliefs**

Participants must take part in a culture in which the language is used, and they must be motivated to acquire facility in the language....readers and writers must come to understand how to use the cognitive processes to become producers and users of knowledge rather than mere consumers of knowledge (Engiert & Mariage, 1996, p. 157).

Maria's interaction with Bethany during this show and tell activity reveals how her instruction represents her beliefs about learning and how these beliefs add to her knowledge and define and inform her teaching practices. Maria teaches her students about language, how to communicate and literacy concepts and skills directly through authentic, purposive activities. Sharing news about home experiences provided a meaningful and motivating context for Bethany's learning.

Maria relinquished control of the interaction by providing Bethany an opportunity to direct the conversation, thereby supporting the development of Bethany's independence:
Alright. Bethany, where should we go in your book? Do you want to tell me something that’s in your book.

Bethany, is there anything else you would like me to write down? Like, what you did on the weekend?

By allowing Bethany to direct the conversation, Maria gained knowledge of Bethany’s ability to use her communication book. She also gained knowledge of Bethany’s experiences and interests.

Maria used this knowledge as a starting point to teach Bethany during the interaction. For example, when Bethany began the conversation with “she”, Maria explained that she does not know who “she” is and prompted Bethany to be more explicit:

She. Who is she? ....When you say ‘she’, I need to know who you’re talking about. So maybe, should we go to the people page?

Also, when a communication breakdown occurred when Bethany is communicating who “she” refers to, Maria perceived that the confusion may be resulting from the words she used with Bethany. Maria subsequently clarified the difference between the “bottom” and “top” rows of symbols in Bethany’s communication book and began to read the names of the people within those rows.

Maria modeled the connection between communication, that is spoken and written language, the picture symbols, and traditional orthography or text by printing what Bethany said on the chart and talking about the words:

When we use the word ‘she’ we have a picture of girl.

If you’re talking about Bethany, what would you say for .... [Points to herself, then Bethany.] And you’re talking about yourself.

These actions illustrate Maria’s knowledge of communication, language, AAC, and literacy. It also illustrates her knowledge of pedagogy and her beliefs about the nature of learning. Maria modelled language and communication for Bethany and provided scaffolds for her developing knowledge of language structure:
What did Mary do? [Turns to the 'core' page of Bethany's communication book.] Is there something that we can do on the core page that you can tell me?

Should we finish the sentence,... for somebody? Who was this videotape for? For ....

Do you want to say about? About what?

The show and tell interaction illustrates that, in addition to cognitive goals, Maria has affective goals for Bethany. Bethany tends to 'fly off the handle very quickly' when people do not understand her. Maria knew this and encouraged Bethany to communicate in a more appropriate manner. This also demonstrates Maria's understanding of general pedagogical principles.

Just say no. Say no. I got it wrong.

You're doing a good job of communicating. [Rubs Bethany's hand then flips to the TV page.] You're telling me 'no' when I get it wrong and you're doing a good job of communicating.

Thus, Maria provided a meaningful context for Bethany's developing knowledge of language, communication, and literacy. Further, she gave control of the activity to Bethany since it was Bethany's news that was being shared. She knew that Bethany always talks about videotapes and subtly encouraged her to share the new barrettes that she was wearing. While she respected Bethany's wishes to pursue her sharing of the videotape, Maria encouraged her to extend her thinking and understanding by telling more about the experience, developing a more detailed sentence. Finally, she summarized the interaction by modelling the experience for Bethany. She will share the news with the others in the class during sharing time, thereby rendering the thought processes apparent for all.

So we have a big sentence here. [Points to the word, 'she' at the top of the page.] First of all I'm going to talk to the kids about 'she' and how you said, 'she'. And I didn't know who she was? [Shrugs her shoulders.] [Points to the symbols in the sentence.] Jane buy a videotape for me about the Big Comfy Couch. Then you told me that she was Jane. [Points to the words and symbols.] That was really good. Alright. So here is your sentence. Jane buy a videotape
for me about the Big Comfy Couch. And you had first said, ‘she’ and I didn’t know who you were talking about, so you had to tell me Jane. If you were talking about Jane. .. If you said Jane first and then used she, then I know. But if you use ‘she’ first, she could be Sandra, she could be Sarah, she could be any girl, so I had to know who you were talking about.

Maria engaged Bethany in procedural kinds of knowledge infusing declarative knowledge into the activity as well. The dialogue informed Maria’s teaching. She was able to gauge Bethany’s competence in using her communication book to express her thoughts, her understanding of language concepts, and her growing ability to assert herself through her communication.

**Summary**

The more one reads studies of teacher belief, the more strongly one suspects that this piebald form of personal knowledge lies at the very heart of teaching (Kagan, 1992, p. 85).

In this chapter I have highlighted Maria’s beliefs and the pivotal role they play in defining her instructional practices and shaping her knowledge. I have come to understand that Maria’s beliefs about her students, her role as their teacher, and about the nature of knowledge and learning have a powerful influence on her knowledge and instructional practices. Maria’s beliefs and knowledge interact to inform her teaching practices. Her teaching practices, in turn, influence the development of her knowledge and beliefs.

Maria is optimistic about her students’ potential. She has high expectations for them. Her central goal for her students is independence. She believes that the key to their becoming independent is through learning to communicate and to read and write. As their teacher, Maria assumes responsibility for ensuring that her students move towards fulfilling those goals. Thus, she organizes her teaching in ways that support her student’s growth toward realizing their potential.

Hillocks (1999) contends that a teacher’s epistemological stance “appears to be a powerful influence on the construction of teacher knowledge” (p. 124). Certainly, Maria’s beliefs about learning influence the manner in which she organizes her
teaching practice. Maria believes that knowledge is constructed. She provides authentic, meaningful activities which actively engage her students in constructing their knowledge through dialogue. Maria also believes that her students require direct instruction. Maria provides direct skill instruction through specific lessons and within the context of other learning activities.

Maria's students responses and communications inform her teaching. Maria's teaching experiences further shape her knowledge. She learns from her students. As she explains,

The more experience that you get, it's scaffolding for you, as well. The more that you have something to relate [to], the more it relates to what you actually do, the more meaningful and the more of a payoff you get. It's just typical of learning (interview, March 31).

Maria's insight reflects her beliefs about learning, her epistemological stance: knowledge is constructed through authentic experiences. This belief applies not only to Maria's students, but also to their parents and Maria's own learning. The instructional decisions she makes are determined on the basis of her interconnected and multi-faceted beliefs and knowledge. The resulting experiences further shape her beliefs and knowledge: knowledge of pedagogy, knowledge of content or subject matter, and knowledge of her students.

Like most other areas of teacher knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge appears not to be some body of pre-existing knowledge that teachers dip into, but knowledge constructed by the teacher in light of the teacher's epistemological stance and conceptions of knowledge to be taught ...learning theory, and students (Hillocks, 1999, p. 122).

Maria and I share the same beliefs. But my beliefs are somehow more abstract – devoid of a real context, real students that I know intensively. They're more belief 'statements'. Maria's beliefs are more than statements. They are enacted and shaped each day in her interactions with her students. They are based on her personal, practical interactions with her students each day in her classroom and cumulatively each year.

Thus far, in this thesis I have illustrated the multi-faceted, interconnected and interdependent nature of Maria's knowledge and beliefs and how they
explain much of what I witnessed in her classroom. The beliefs that Maria holds about her students, herself, and the nature of learning lead her to teach in ways that support her students’ active involvement in learning knowledge about and gaining skill in communicating and literacy and becoming independent. Maria’s vision of her students and their future, guides her teaching practice. She sees her students achieving independence and being able to advocate for themselves.

I guess I feel like I’m always monitoring myself. How much am I controlling and how much are the kids using those books and effecting what’s going on in the class? You know, are things changing because they want it to change? It’s a lot harder to do that with this group. It’s a lot easier for the teacher to be in control all the time and to set it up. I mean, the kids aren’t going to argue with you. But I feel as they get more and more proficient with their communication, I should be letting go, letting them start to influence what’s happening. I feel very comfortable with that. I think it’s important. This morning I was very comfortable with the fact that we were able to move in a new direction and they were all watching. I mean I was looking and I was gauging by them. It grew out of working one-to-one with a child (interview, March 31, p. 23).

In turn, Maria gains valuable insight into her students and her teaching. This knowledge informs her teaching practices. Her students’ responses, the nature of their achievements validate Maria’s beliefs and confirm her commitment to her goals, her vision of their developing independence. Maria organizes her teaching in ways that support her student’s achievement of this goal. I witnessed it in the undressing routine where she teaches the students to direct others, and thereby learning to advocate for their own care and support. She affixes the symbol, “I need my communication book” to each student’s laptray and teaches them how to use it, and in so doing directly supporting their ability to advocate for their own communication. The students take turns being the ‘leader’, navigating the centre hallways to the library and using their left and right symbols to direct whoever is pushing their wheelchairs. Thus Maria advocates for her student’s being independent in their communication and caregiving.

To help another person grow is at least to help him to care for something or someone apart from himself, and it involves
encouraging and assisting him to find and create areas of his own in which he is able to care. Also, it is to help that other person to come to care for himself, and by becoming responsive to his own needs to care to become responsible for his own life (Mayeroff, 1971, p. 7).

Maria is deeply committed to her beliefs. They have a significant impact on her teaching practices. Her beliefs together with her various knowledges lead her to follow a number of principles in her teaching practice.

Thus far, my descriptions and analyses of Maria’s knowledge and beliefs have hinted at key principles which she follows in her teaching practice. These principles and their role in developing Maria’s knowledge and beliefs and in defining her teaching practice will be described in greater detail in the next chapter.
Chapter 7: Principles of Practice: Reflection, Collaboration, Advocacy

Knowing of any sort is relational, animated by desire to come into deeper community with what we know... Knowing is a human way to seek relationship and, in the process, to have encounters and exchanges that will inevitably alter us. At its deepest reaches, knowing is always communal (Palmer, 1998, p. 54).

Maria’s knowledge and beliefs lead her to follow certain principles in her teaching practice. These principles are connected with the way Maria conducts her teaching. The key principles of Maria’s teaching practice are reflection, collaboration, and advocacy. These principles are also key to understanding her knowledge, beliefs, and teaching practices. They appear to arise from her knowledge and beliefs, but at the same time are instrumental in shaping her knowledge and beliefs. They are instrumental in contributing to both the categories and kinds of knowledge that she acquires. Indeed, it appears to be through reflecting, collaborating, and advocating that Maria gains knowledge that is strategic in nature (Shulman, 1986b). Further, these key principles of practice contribute to confirming her educational beliefs. In this chapter, I describe reflection, collaboration, and advocacy as key principles of Maria’s teaching practice.

Reflection

Every piece of teaching is a piece of research... Teaching, like any art, is an endless cycle of trial and error. If you imagine you will one day have the whole game sewn up, think again and keep thinking. And keep reading and discussing, and changing and experimenting. The best ‘teacher’ you will ever have is careful reflection on your own experience as a teacher... in your own classroom (Fox, 1993, p. 165).

Maria is a reflective teacher. She reflects on and in her teaching practice. Schon (1987) refers to this process of thinking about one’s practice as ‘reflection-in-action.’ Maria thinks deeply and critically about her teaching both after and in the moment of teaching. Indeed, Maria seems to be naturally reflective. Maria’s reflective nature is critical to her evolving knowledge, beliefs, and teaching practices (Schon, 1987).
My accounts of Maria’s teaching practice attest to her reflection. The following example illustrates one of the many ‘conversations’ Maria engages in between herself and the teaching situation, a conversation which Schon (1987) indicates is made possible by “back-talk” from the situation.

I think that you really are learning from the kids and I’m learning right now, this spelling stuff. I’m thinking today, ‘I’m underestimating them! I’m not trying this soon enough!’ You know! It’s really gonna effect me in the future. Now, this is this particular bunch of kids too. But, I’m thinking, ‘Hmmm.’ You know, my first couple of years we weren’t emphasizing. Like, I read the Adam’s book and I thought, ‘We’ve gotta really get these ABC’s down pat and these sounds and all that. Now I’m thinking, I’m listening to [AAC literacy expert], ‘Gotta get his spelling and writing integrated everyday. I’ve got to find ways to do this!’ ... It was really exciting last night [during a brainstorming session that followed a conference on literacy and AAC] because some of those ideas we came up with, I can be doing that no matter what the level of child. I could start that labelling activity. I can start that! I can start that if they don’t know their ABC’s! ... I can start that. Because that’s giving them, that’s teaching them something that they don’t even need to know many letters in order to achieve. Putting them in their locker and having them go through something to label. They don’t have to have a background in that. So, I think learning to integrate things, you know. That’s, I think, the most successful lessons are when you can integrate all these various things... I don’t know if I’ve given you a philosophy, I think that .... always learning, learning from the kids, learning from other professionals (interview, March 31).

The term reflection implies thinking about events or issues after they have occurred. While Maria certainly does this, she also thinks critically about her practice while she is teaching. “I’m thinking, ‘Hmmm.’” In Maria’s classroom, one source of the “back-talk” comes in the form of student responses. The achievements of her students lead her to think critically about her expectations for them: ‘I’m underestimating them! I’m not trying this soon enough!’ Thus, she modulates her teaching on the basis of her student’s responses. Maria’s reflection influences her teaching practices: ‘It’s really gonna effect me in the future.’ Her reflection supports the ongoing development of her knowledge and beliefs.
Actually, *thoughtful* might be a more apt descriptor for Maria: 'full of thought; meditative; thinking; heedful, careful, attentive; esp., considerate of others (Webster's New World Dictionary of American English, *3rd College Edition*). Maria *is* thoughtful in her teaching practice. While she is teaching, she is attentive to many things and adjusts her actions accordingly. The instructional incidents which I have shared in this thesis attest to Maria’s thoughtful practice.

Maria demonstrated thoughtfulness in the undressing routine. She commented on Sarah’s unfastened snaps, explaining that Sarah’s Mom was “probably in a hurry in the morning” just like “we’re always in a hurry at night”; She asked Sarah if her jacket was new. She greeted the students as they entered the class. She explained the purpose of shoulder straps. She decided to pair the students for finishing the undressing routine in order to involve all of the students who are now waiting and to also speed up the activity. She commented on Patty’s completed homework, then remembered that yesterday Sarah indicated that she didn’t like homework. She also adjusted the cues she provided to each student as they proceeded to find each other’s cubbyholes. All of these actions demonstrate Maria’s thoughtfulness *in the moment* of her teaching.

The reading lesson also demonstrates Maria’s thoughtful teaching practices. While she taught this lesson, she attended to the goals of the lesson and the strategies she was using. Indeed, she attended to the multiple goals of each of her students. She attended to her students’ physical positioning, their understanding, and their ability to respond. She attended to the efforts of the volunteer and periodically looked over to see what Sandra was doing with Ricky and Dana and how they were coming along. She glanced at the clock to gauge the amount of time that was remaining. She provided cues and prompts and modelling on the basis of her student’s responses and communications. Maria is thoughtful in the moment of teaching. The feedback she receives from all she attends to influences her teaching. Collaboration is another key principle of Maria’s teaching.
Collaboration

Passionate teaching can only take place in a certain setting... passionate teachers create the environments that make passionate teaching pay off... They are able to develop a culture that forges relationships of integrity and respect, in which people—adults and kids—know they are engaged in important work together (Fried, 1995, p. 31).

Maria’s teaching does not take place in isolation. Rather, the multiple and complex needs of her students and the context in which she teaches require her to work closely with many other people. Maria explains,

If I don’t know, trying to find somebody who can help me because the easiest... I mean it just doesn’t make sense to try and get things out of the books. You’ve got to go to the people who have the experience who can tell you things. Otherwise, you do a lot of guessing....I mean that’s why I wanted [AAC literacy expert] to give that course. So people could hear it. If you’re just reading books, it’s all theoretical. It’s talking to people who’ve had prior experience through teaching. And they can tell you, ‘Well, you should see this happening,’.... ‘This needs to be in place.’ You know. You need guidance from people like that and then you’ve got something to hang onto (interview, May 31).

I feel the families and the kids are complex. The needs are complex. But we [the team] share the responsibility and I think that we see progress because we can share it (interview, May 3).

Maria’s knowing is communal. It arises from her interaction, her dialogue with her students and ‘back talk’ from her experiences. It also arises from collaborating, from reflecting with other people, from, in Maria’s words, ‘share[d]... responsibility. You’ve got to go to the people who have the experience who can tell you things... learning from the kids, learning from other professionals’ (interview, March 31). I witnessed Maria going to many people to discuss her students and her teaching: people within her classroom team; colleagues within her school; professionals within consulting services in the rehabilitation centre and in the community. Collaborating with others is not only a necessary process for Maria, given the nature of the students she works with, but also a preferred process for gaining, for constructing her knowledge. In
Maria’s classroom, the integrated education therapy philosophy of supporting the students implies that the classroom team work closely together on a daily basis to meet the complex needs of the students. This philosophy of service leads to close collaborative relationships and overlapping roles and responsibilities. Moreover, collaboration leads to increased, broader and shared knowledge and beliefs. I will describe the nature of collaboration further in the context of Maria’s classroom team and her teacher colleagues within the school.

Classroom Team

Jackson, et al (1993) speak of the ‘substructural forces’ of the curriculum, the ‘enabling conditions’, the

...elaborate amalgam of shared understandings, beliefs, assumptions, and presuppositions, all of which enable the participants in a teaching situation to interact amicably with each other and work together, thus freeing them to concentrate on the task at hand (p. 16).

Collaborating is an ‘enabling condition’ in Maria’s classroom. The people on the team approach their role from their particular discipline or perspective. However, the team’s ability to work in concert in integrating and implementing each student’s communication, therapy, and education goals exhibits a cohesiveness that I believe stems from the shared understandings, beliefs, assumptions, and presuppositions of which Jackson, et al (1993) speak.

The players on Maria’s team understand and accept two things: (1) the kids come first and (2) communication is the priority goal.

The kids come first I hope....the kids and their family. I really do feel that kind of commitment from the team members in this class... you know I never feel that someone's letting down the side.... People follow up with the families because they know how important it is. So I think people really do try and carry their weight. I remember when I worked at [previous centre school], we’d have these ... there was no such thing as a team or anything like this. It was just the teachers. There were therapists in the Centre but we didn’t ... they didn’t participate as team members. And around the augmentative communication, we tried to get people who were interested in it to come to an after school meeting. So people would come to those meetings. We called them the Bliss
meetings. People would come to them. And we’d meet about once a month but people then would go away and we’d come back to the next meeting and people hadn’t taken responsibility for what they sort of said they would do and there was no way to kind of hold them accountable so it was kind of frustrating....But here it’s just expected. You’ve got to ... your responsibility to carry your weight on the team (interview, Maria, May 3).

I feel they [the team] have to be willing to see that as a priority, to see AAC as a priority (interview, Maria, May 3).

These shared beliefs and understandings are also inherent in the comments of members of Maria’s team.

In Maria’s room, I think some of the focus is so central to the communication that I think probably the team is a lot stronger in ways... than in other rooms where the professionals sort of work more on their own.... You know, that you are focussing on the needs of the child. That comes together particularly well (interview, Physiotherapist, May 28).

I think that when you work as an effective team you are much more likely to accomplish goals because there’s that concerted action towards something, especially in something like communication. I mean I can’t isolate it toward a particular class during the day, it’s just an integral part of the way everything proceeds (interview, Occupational Therapist, Consulting AAC Service, June 15).

“Everything is done differently, but, there, I find things are very I think they’re more cohesive. We seem to go together more all the team members in Maria’s class seem to go together more. Work together a bit stronger, and not so independently. I see a little more independence in the other classes it might be just because of the needs of the children in Maria’s class (interview, Therapy Assistant, May 28).

There’s not a lot of ego. And there’s not conflict. There’s no competition. It’s nobody’s role is more important or any part of the child is more important. The child is seen as a whole (interview, volunteer, June 7).

I think, too, that something that’s there that you don’t always get .... is a genuine respect for the individual student, that they’re kids first, the patience and waiting for them to communicate, the belief that they have something to say and the real commitment to finding the way to have them say it as opposed to moving more
quickly through the day and not stopping to wait .... which doesn't necessarily imply a lack of respect for the children, but the respect comes through so much more when you take that time and wait. So there's a real, I think, a real genuine respect that the kid's first, the disability second, I think that underlies a lot of work (interview, School Psychologist, June 24).

Noddings (1984) states, "The purpose of dialogue is to come into contact with ideas and to understand, to meet the other and to care" (p. 186). What is striking in each of these comments and in the collaborative interactions I observed in Maria's classroom is the give and take among the team members; their willingness to listen, to be open to ideas, and to learn from each other. The team members' comments reflect a shared belief that the students are the focus and that communication and independence are central goals.

Collaboration is a vehicle for developing knowledge in Maria's classroom. Maria and her classroom team members share information and opinions on a regular and ongoing basis. They reflect aloud and are open to having people respond to their reflections. From such collaboration comes new knowledge and understandings.

Well I think it's very important that if something's bothering you that you communicate it to the team member instead of harbouring resentment. That's the kind of philosophy that whenever I can, I do. That you've got to have these open lines of communication if you're gonna have a successful collaboration (interview, Maria, May 3).

She has great expertise and she shares it once again and she's always seeking more and she communicates. She doesn't just gather a body of knowledge and keep it to herself and say, 'Oh I'm the expert. You come to me... But it's very much of this sharing and knowing that the more she takes in and the more she gives out the more she'll get back and the more she'll give to the kids. And I don't even know if she knows that, but that's how she works (interview, volunteer, June 7).

A lot of it is informal. They'll catch each other in the hallway, or something happens over snack. Somebody notices something, somebody starts talking and that's part of why they're so effective is that they're so open. It's not a closed system (interview, volunteer, June 7).
I witnessed a great deal of collaborative sharing of information 'on the fly' as Maria, Sandra and the various therapists and volunteers went about their day with the students. Information was also shared more formally at weekly team meetings over the lunch hour. An agenda was posted on the cupboard above the sink in the classroom and team members added items as required. The team typically focused on one student each week, with flexibility for emergency items. Maria chaired these meetings. The meetings provided a focused time for the team to reflect, to share information and concerns, and to discuss myriad issues related to the students, their needs and progress. Some of the discussion topics included student assessments; follow-up from progress reviews; review of goals; sharing experiences with working with the students in the classroom and during home visits; the classroom program in terms of strategies and materials; policies influencing the students and the program; equipment orders; and issues related to nutrition, seating, communication, computer, mobility, and sensory.

Thus, working closely on a regular and ongoing basis increases each team member's knowledge. Maria's comments illustrate the role of collaboration in building her own knowledge,

We're involved in it all the time.... I take the walkers down when I go for recess duty because I know that the goal for that therapist is to get that kid in the walker. I'm in there [the gym] at that time. I can see that the child ...I like to see things happen for the kids in my classroom and I've also seen over time that if you put a child in a walker for an hour a day they learn to control that walker. Sometimes they really gain skill. So it's been through working with them. And then also the give and take in programming. So that during the gym period, they have mobility. That's when the kids in my class... that's when their mobility session is. They can't be like [another teacher's class] and parade around the school and around the playground. So, they try and work their goals in... you try to help each other....And by the same token, if therapists are meant to try and integrate their therapy into the education it's supposed to work the other way too, you know, that we try and provide opportunities for them to realize their goals. So when we set up our schedule we try, you know, that's why they do take a whole session for gross motor or therapy swim. We have to give over time and help because they need the one-on-one during that as much as I need it (interview, May 3).
The close collaborative relationships in Maria's classroom support the team members' knowledge and understanding of the multiple and interrelated needs of the students and ways of meeting the needs. Each student requires one-to-one assistance for most activities. Thus, most team members have an opportunity to work directly with each student and thereby gain knowledge about the student's particular characteristics and needs as well as skill in supporting that student. Thus, by working closely together Maria and her team understand the students from a more holistic perspective.

You all have our own goals but they do all need to sort of overlap and come together, ... there is room for negotiation ... but I think it, it's a sort of a very tight knit class. It's only got the six kids and a lot of focus on the kids a lot of time is spent on feeding and toileting, you know everybody has to just cooperate. You do a lot of activity that really isn't part of your profession. I'd say in that way it really differs ...and you know a lot of, I find um that my time is spent differently. It isn't spent on sort of the physiotherapy aspects as much (interview, Physiotherapist, May 28).

There's a lot of give and take...There isn't obviously any sort of territorialism that you might get in perhaps other teams (interview, Maria, May 3).

I don't think the academic goals are more important than my, than my goals, but I certainly see that my goals are important and without them a lot of the academic can't take place. So I think it's trying to find that balance where everybody's goals are met so that the kid can get the whole picture because that's what they're here for education and therapy (interview, Occupational Therapist, May 31).

I mean positioning is the number one ... one of the prerequisites for reliable communication (interview, Maria, June 14).

I know they're getting, gonna be effective communicators and that's the most important thing down the road for these kids. And they're gonna have computer skills. But as an OT doing day-to-day things, there's a lot that doesn't get done (interview, Occupational Therapist, May 31).
This close working relationship and comprehensive understanding of the students leads to the overlapping of roles and responsibilities that I witnessed in Maria's classroom.

With this particular team especially it's a really strong team and we work well together. ...So, even though we have roles... I feel that our roles overlap. And in a way I think that that is good and I think that there's comfort in the overlap. I think that is what is special about this particular team. There have been times in the past where I've had therapists who are pretty rigid about This is my role. Don't change what I say or they're more protective of their turf. But ...I think we're all working together and I don't get that feeling.
Sometimes I think, 'Oh maybe I shouldn't say anything. I'm not the therapist.' But in fact I don't really feel that ... I think people should feel free to make a comment or to question because I don't really ... I don't think I'm an expert on everything to do with teaching. I think a lot of other people ... like when [the educational assistant] came in this morning and she said, 'Well let's do this.' And I just think, 'Oh! This is so good.' Because you sit and you try and think of your ideas all on your own and sometimes it's just those little triggers and I think, 'Oh, that sounds like a good idea.' (interview, May 3).

The rules of the classroom just follow on and everybody seems to just, uh to follow through with it. And then if there's, you know, if something happens and, uh Maria gets called out, then the classroom just goes on. People go and do the calendar or do whatever it is they're doing at the time. Things just keep on moving (interview, Sandra, Educational Assistant, May 26).

You know, say if the therapists said, ...'Could you take somebody's splints off?', they would expect you to do it. ...I think people have quite high expectations of each other. They expect them to do the very best they can which I think they do and they expect them to carry it through and at least to be prepared and ready. And also you know be flexible so that if something happens and that's not going to work then expect them to do something else... And if one person was busy then the other person would try and do whatever it was that needed to be done. So you know things like washing up. whoever's not busy will do it. It doesn't matter. Who's not busy will just do it (interview, Sandra, Educational Assistant, May 26).

But I think in general we do fill in for one another. So if I see a lot of people already feeding the kids and things and I don't think I'm needed I'll start reading the books or writing in the books. There's
always something to do. So I'll sort of take a quick [look]... and I think we're all that way. Like the other day we didn't need [the educational assistant] so she said, 'Okay, I have something I could work on.' I said, 'Fine.' (interview, Maria, May 3).

The integrated nature of therapy and education and the central goal of developing communication in Maria's classroom lead to a change in professional roles and responsibilities in the working relationships. Therapy, communication, and educational goals are provided during any particular activity. The students work on mobility and directing others through their communication while on the way to the library. They're out of their wheelchairs and onto the mats for direct therapy during music time. They can be positioned in their standers during formal reading time. Likewise, communication and literacy skills are integrated into more therapy-oriented activities such as swimming (e.g., choosing songs represented by symbols) and gym and a sensory class (e.g., choosing activities and items represented by symbols).

The result of shared beliefs, goals and responsibilities is increased knowledge, which translates into holistic, integrated learning for both the students and the team members. Maria and her team share their thoughts on the team process:

I've learned even more from working here with the therapists because they're very good at sharing information and we hear a lot (interview, Maria, April 26).

This is why I like working here. Because everyone pulls together (field note, Maria, March 11).

I think that each profession brings expertise with it and you can learn from that person ... I think just because you are integrating everything into the more functional . . . environment and I think it's a real plus that everybody learns from everybody else (interview, physiotherapist, May 28).

She [Maria] wants to do the best she can for those kids and she wants to help them as much as she can. That's what I've gotten from her. She may not say that directly, but that's what I've gotten from her and she's very good at what she does (interview, Therapy Assistant, May 28).
I think it’s a wonderful class to work in. I do. I just learn so much all the time and there’s such a lot going on. I mean there’s always such a lot to learn, you can always be learning something... So in that way you can always be pushing yourself for you’re never just at a standstill. ... There’s always something new. There’s always something to learn and that’s what’s so,... I guess it’s challenging in it’s way, but it’s never ever boring (interview, Sandra, Educational Assistant, May 26).

I think also in learning from each other. I think oftentimes when you can brainstorm together, you accomplish something that you wouldn’t do if you were just talking to yourself. I think also it increases your sensitivity and your awareness because you get other perspectives and you have a much more holistic view of things, of the students, and of the families, a more rounded aspect of what’s happening, what their issues are, what’s happening to the children (interview, Occupational therapist, Consulting AAC Service, June 15).

I think you learn a lot too. It’s a stimulating environment ... because perhaps you’re more actively challenged in having to look at things from a whole variety of perspectives ... I’ve learned a lot by being on teams ... You get to learn a lot when you can see something from someone else’s perspective and when you need to explain what you’re doing and why you’re actually doing it (interview, Occupational therapist, Consulting AAC Service, June 15).

I mean this is our laboratory for sure. And I think... as I go down the road and I learn new things ... I think I’ve said it before. When I stop feeling motivated to learn new things then that’s the time I should leave. That’s the time. And I mean I’m always doing this self-check on that, you know, and when time ... I’m feeling now it’s the end of the year and I’m really glad that I don’t have to keep coming up with all these ideas. I need a rest.... You know. But perhaps you reach a stage in your career where you feel the same way you do at the end of the summer and you just think, I can’t think of any new ideas any more. And I maybe don’t like it as much anymore ..... But when that time comes I hope I’ll listen to myself. I mean I hope that I would be in a position to be able to back off if that’s how I do feel. .... Or maybe go into some new direction where it taps my skills...but you know I really do enjoy it. I must say I do enjoy all of the vastness of this job
where you're having to be creative and you’re collaborating with colleagues and coming up with new things. So, I still enjoy it (interview, June 14).

**Teacher Colleagues in the School**

Maria extends her collaboration beyond her classroom to include other teachers within the school.

Maria has certainly bent over backwards to assist teachers both internally and externally ... she’s worked as a resource (interview, Previous Principal, July 13).

I find that that’s what’s special about this school in general is that all these special things we do, people get together and they work together. They work really hard and they have fun at the same time and it’s kind of a contagion ... the school collaborates ... and it’s really reinforcing. When you have a good day, like we had that Australia day, it’s just really reinforcing that you want to put in all that time and energy because people appreciate it, the kids appreciate it (interview, May 3).

Maria and Joan, the entry-level communications classroom teacher, work very closely together. They regularly combine their classes to teach lessons, facilitate play, and share field trips and follow-up activities. Maria explains the roots of this collaborative relationship,

When Joan came on board, we started to collaborate. I kind of felt that I needed to collaborate with a teacher because she had the kids who were coming to my class. And then if she knew what my goals were here and she could start preparing the children, that would leave me free ... If they came in with some of these skills already, that would leave me free to push the envelope a little further. And that’s precisely what has happened. We met together. We went over our program. We worked on that report [report card] together, even in the summer we did it. We worked to set up ... we had all of our goals to the IEP, we had them coded so it was in a word processor, we could go in and go zip, zip, zip for this particular child. Like they were all ... we didn’t have to type it over and over. We had it all done. ... There’s been a satisfaction in working with her a lot and then actually at one point [a speech language pathologist from the consulting AAC service] said, ‘Oh you gotta go in and see what Joan’s doing around music with her kids.’ So I went in and I observed and I thought, ‘This is great.’ So at the end of the year or at the beginning of the next year I said, ‘How about if we join together and we do some of these activities together?’ Because I
thought the music was great. She had more, you know, more interest and more skills in this area than I did. So I said, 'Let's make it like a combined music/story.' So over time we've developed this rhythm of working together that I think is going very well. We're getting a lot of satisfaction (interview, April 26).

Maria's comments reflect her belief in the importance of providing a seamless education system for her students. By working with Joan, she is able to gain a better understanding of the students she will be teaching and, at the same time, begin to influence their current experience and build on those experiences when they are her students.

Joan comments on her collaboration with Maria and the influence it has had on her teaching practice.

For me it's been terrific because it's been a really good learning experience for me, you know to be able to observe some of the different things that I ... can learn....I've come a long way from where I started. I've learned a lot about how to structure a communication class, how to present the kinds of activities, and how to make them more meaningful for the children.... I think my whole style has probably changed dramatically actually in the seven years I've been here (interview, Joan, Entry-Level Communications Classroom teacher, June 2).

Maria's collaboration leads to a broader sharing of knowledge and expertise and beliefs amongst teachers within the school. One longstanding teacher colleague described this collaboration:

We plan together. ...We had students that have come together. This whole idea of having kids who speak and kids who don't speak come together. Even in my first three years here, Maria and I would be planning language lessons and seeking out all of these different programs that would be appropriate for kids to use for reading. 'Oh, how about his one?' And we'd sit there on Wednesdays from 3:30 to 5:30 to quarter to six planning out single lessons, double lessons for three or four or five students of ours collectively, to do together. So our association goes way back and ...It's the same thing. 'I've got this idea! If these kids were taken aside to work. How would you like to have some of your kids ...? What would you think?' 'Yeah, I think it would be good.' So, then we'd get together and work on a project together. I think we've worked on, I've lost count of all of the projects that Maria and I have worked together on. But it's really nice, you know. It's always spread
throughout the school after that point. Maria and I started this and it spread. I mean, she started the puppets. I never would have thought of the puppet idea. And then the puppets came in and then a class joined us and we started to get sort of an idea of how to make things more formalized and make it more important and memorized. And then that grew a little bit and then it grew even more. We added more teachers and then this year, we've gotten to the point of saying, 'Okay we need a script to follow because it will be better remembered. It will be better laid out. And now we've been writing scripts. And the thing is, this thing has changed into this colossal, colossal program (interview, teacher colleague, June 17).

If you can collaborate, you're going to have a stronger program (interview, Maria, March 31).

As a follow up to the AAC and literacy conference. Maria initiated a school-wide project for the purposes of learning about particular software programs that would facilitate making adapted books. Maria explains her rationale,

Because nobody has any time! It's the same. I was thinking about it as I was driving to work. Do I feel like sitting here after school and pulling out the software that we did in the middle of February and trying to sort through it? Do I even feel like doing it in the summer time when I'm all on my own and I pull it out and I think, 'Oh. Now what did we talk about?' I think you need the cross-fertilization that you get if we set up a lab and we just review it. You know that can take a half an hour. And then we all sit there and work together and we share. I find that to be personally very satisfying. And everybody's in it together and you generate the enthusiasm. I know it will work. I know if [the Director of the Consulting AAC Service] will go for this idea that it'll work. I know that that software will then be used. There are a lot of good reasons to pursue this. We need to make sure all our machines have the software and that they'll run it. And then we need to have everybody dip their feet in, more than dip their feet in. Do a project as if it's for a course. Do a project. Share it. You know. What better way to motivate people (interview, April 19).

One of Maria's teacher colleagues responds to her initiatives,

Maria is a real dynamo and a moving force in our school who has the best interests in mind whenever she does stuff. Even though sometimes you know, you think, it's like you don't want to do it
because it means change and it means a lot of work. But you’re quite pleased and proud and happy that this has happened and that it’s going. (interview, Teacher Colleague, June 17).

Maria’s collaboration with her classroom team and parents and colleagues beyond her classroom increases her knowledge of her students characteristics and needs and how to meet those needs. Collaboration also influences her beliefs about her students’ potential, how her students are best supported and her role in and ability to meet their needs. In turn, Maria’s knowledge and beliefs influence her teaching practices.

Eisner (1983) states, “Classrooms and students are particular in character. Theory is general. What the teacher must be able to do is see the connection — if there is one — between the principle and the case” (p. 9). Maria bridges the gap between theory and practice through the principles of collaboration and reflection. Through collaboration and reflection she develops strategic forms of knowledge which are applied to her teaching practice.

Maria was instrumental in organizing a joint school and AAC consulting service conference on the topic of AAC and literacy. The conference was very successful and well attended by teaching personnel and therapists from the school, the rehabilitation centre and the community. Immediately following the conference, Maria organized an after-school-hours, informal brainstorming session in her classroom. The purpose was to generate ideas on how the theory and concepts and strategies, which were presented at the conference, could be implemented with the students who use AAC in Maria’s and the other classrooms in the school. She invited people from within the school and in the consulting AAC service to attend.

I invited the [student teachers] to our brainstorming because ... they told me that they really got a lot out of the conference that we had ... so I thought that maybe they’d have something to add. I think maybe they were learning. They were using it as a learning experience more than contributing and in fact, a student said to me, ‘You know I’d like to come in and observe in your class now. I’ve become really interested.’
But, she said, and this is exactly what she said to me, she said to me: ‘One thing that I think is really great is how different staff members showed up to share ideas.’. She said, ‘You always hear, ‘The teachers do their own thing and they find it difficult to share.’ And ...I said, ‘I think you’ll find that that’s a general feeling in this school. I think it’s what makes this school special is that the teachers do have a comfort level and that there’s a lot of collaboration.... I think to really be good, it’s good to collaborate.’ One person sitting at their computer at the end of a long day is not going to come up with the number of ideas that flew around the room last night in one half hour and ... actually [one of the school Occupational Therapists] said to me after that was over, ‘That was really special! You know? I think I felt just like it was a real learning experience for all of us.’. And I just ... I love that. I love that. I love. I think professional development and continued learning is really important to me. If I feel that I no longer have anything new to learn, I think it’s time for me to go.... ‘Cause I know that there’s a lot I don’t know and I guess in terms of my philosophy of the way I handle this class I think maybe by the second year I thought, ‘You know, this class is sort of like a laboratory. It’s my laboratory. I’m learning from these kids all the time’. So I guess teachers should be learning from the kids as much as kids should be learning from the teachers. Cause you gotta be you gotta be getting vibrations form them.... You’ve gotta be learning from them and you’ve gotta be able to see what’s effective and what’s not (interview, March 31).

Staying open to mystery, to the recognition that there is always more to know and more to be is to allow students their full humanity, and to stay alive as a teacher (Ayers, 1993, p. 49).

Maria’s comments reflect her deep beliefs about learning and the important role collaboration and reflection play in learning. I witnessed many examples of Maria collaborating and reflecting with others in order to make the connection between theory and practice, between the general and the particular. Reflection and collaboration are wholly connected to Maria’s educational beliefs. Learning is constructed through interaction, collaboration with others and through deliberate, thoughtful reflection. Indeed, it is difficult and somewhat arbitrary to describe the principles of collaboration and reflection separately. For, like knowledge and beliefs, they are so intricately interconnected and related to Maria’s teaching practice. Reflection is inherent in collaborating. Working closely with a range of people leads to careful thinking, constructing and reconstructing
about one's knowledge, understandings, and beliefs. Much of Maria's reflection and collaboration have a great deal to do with another principle of her teaching practice: advocacy.

**Advocacy**

Hope as an expression of a present alive with possibilities, rallies energies and activates our powers (Mayeroff, 1971, p. 19).

Maria's beliefs are perhaps most profoundly illustrated in her tireless advocating on behalf of her students. One teacher colleague explained,

This woman is like a dynamo, a catalyst, whatever you want to call it; an engine for progress in our school. Because she's trying to do so much for her kids that it translates into good things for other people's classes if you follow along and get into the same program as her. You know. She's a great force among our teachers because she seeks to do the most for her students and it translates into people doing things for their classes as well when you get in with her on a project (interview, Teacher Colleague, June 17).

Maria's advocacy arises from her knowledge and her deep beliefs about her students, their needs, and her perceived role in meeting their needs. Her advocating occurs on many levels: classroom, home, school, and community and all are efforts to further the cause of her students.

'I can't understand why this child went without glasses for seven years!' Maria was instrumental in having Ricky's eyesight assessed at a prominent vision clinic considerably distant from the school. Maria accompanied the family to the assessment (Field note, Feb. 22).

Upon arriving at the school each morning, Maria's students are first wheeled to the classroom. Once their undressing routine is over, Maria and her staff assume responsibility for taking them to the washroom. 'I don't want them to sit in the hall for twenty minutes waiting.' (Field note, March 1).

Maria enlisted the support of a school matron who speaks Tagalog to translate Patty's homework for her parents, so they are able to do Patty's homework with her.

Maria protects academic time in her classroom. 'If we don't do literacy, it gets lost.' (Field note, May 19).
Writing notes to or telephoning parents to remind them of proper positioning of their child in the wheelchair, or ordering eyeglasses, or putting the tipper bars down on the child’s wheelchair.

Meeting with Bethany’s new daycare workers to discuss how she communicates (Field note, March 29).

Maria expresses concern that the matrons in the school change every two months which is not good from the students’ perspective who need continuity (Field note, May 3).

Maria’s advocacy finds a vehicle for expression in her collaboration with others. She and Joan advocate on behalf of their students in the school. They are involved in planning, organizing and carrying out many school-wide events, such as those which occur during Education Week and in the week leading up to the yearly school spring break. They do this in part because in the past they have seen that the needs of their students have not always been considered and thus, their students have not had the opportunity to fully participate in the school activities. By being involved, Maria and Joan are able to ensure that the unique characteristics and needs of their students are taken into consideration in the school-wide events. The school psychologist explains,

I think they have a role in representing children who are non-speaking and just showing by how they work and how they interact and how they program how children can fit in, in more ways and in different ways. So I think it’s more by example and model than by formal title. How they take their group of children to a group activity in the gym, how they include and have them participate and others who are there, can only learn (interview, School Psychologist, June 24).

I witnessed numerous public acts of advocacy during the time I was with Maria: re-positioning the television monitor to ensure her students are able to see it; re-positioning the student’s wheelchairs during puppet shows and demonstrations so that they, too are able to see the show; wheeling her students to the front of the room during school assemblies and presentations; asking to have furniture moved so that her students are better able to see; speaking to presenters about what questions might be asked of the students, to ensure that
they, too, will be prepared with communication materials, ensuring that her students have theme displays with vocabulary that allow them to participate in singing, and asking and answering questions; providing her students with time to move in close to items that are being displayed; and jumping into the conversation to explain concepts when she perceives her students need clarification.

By collaborating with other teachers in the school around these events and ensuring her students are included, Maria advocates for her students. She teaches her colleagues by example. She increases her colleague’s awareness and knowledge of the unique characteristics and needs of students who use AAC and the kinds of supports they need in order to fully participate in events. Joan explains,

Inasmuch as there are communications students in the school, then they are the ones, particularly the communication class teachers, who advocate most for those students and make sure that activities in the school are appropriate for the students. ... We are the ones who sort of watch out and make sure our kids are included in everything and that the activities are most appropriate for them. ... We’re very much advocates for them, for our students. ... That’s why Maria and I are often involved in education week, because we wanted to set up themes and activities that were meaningful to our students because when we worked on it we found that sometimes activities were planned which really were hard for our students to get involved in. So, by doing that we can kind of make sure that things are happening (interview, Joan, Entry-level communications classroom teacher, June 2).

Other team members speak of a distinct advocacy role played by Maria:

Maria was constantly questioning, sort of beating the bush. "Why is this child [Sarah] doing the kinds of things she’s doing? We need to get some clarification. Is it physically-related?" I think it’s just because she won’t take no for an answer. She just keeps beating the bush! She wants to find out.... That whole assessment process for those difficult children, she just wants to make the best use of time. Whereas some other classes might of just said, ‘Well, we haven’t come to an answer. It doesn’t seem to be this. It doesn’t seem to be that.’ You know, probably a little bit more laid back. So for some students I’d say yes, they’ve made more communicative mileage [in her class]. (interview, SLP, September 1).
Her [Maria's] priority is the kids and she's going to do whatever it takes for these kids to learn. And that's terrific because that's the framework upon which the classroom works so it just becomes supporting that framework (interview, volunteer, June 7).

Maria's a very strong advocate for her kids. Very strong in her programming (interview, Physiotherapist, May 28).

She is very extremely, extremely dedicated to her students and feels, you know, very strongly about ... recording [individual education plans] issues and has taken quite a leadership role in trying to make sure that what we have in the school serves the needs of our children in the best way (interview, Joan, Entry-level communications classroom, June 2).

She does things like in terms of transitions for home she tries to organize and arrange for tutors for certain kids or at least try and get the wheels in motion for that, so she teaches beyond her classroom (interview, SLP, consulting AAC service, Sept. 1).

In Chapter 6, I described Maria's beliefs about the role of parents in supporting their child's learning. Maria's beliefs lead to close collaboration with the parents of her students. But more than that, her collaboration with the parents serves as another avenue for advocating for her students.

There's no formal agenda for making parents advocates except when it comes to the communication. I'd say then it's formal. I mean, the reason that we have the kinds of goals that we do where the kids are taught to look for their books and taught to ask for their books is: if the kids can do that, then they are their own advocates and they start making the parents aware. And then, if the parents reach an awareness, then they might still ... they might ... and if this book is successfully used then they might see, 'Oh oh.' I better not take off without the communication book.' And I always tell the story to the parents ... I always tell the story of Jason (interview, May 3).

Maria tells the parents the story of Jason in hopes that they will understand what communication means for their child: independence. Maria assigns homework to provide her students with more opportunities to learn and in turn, she learns more about her students by collaborating with their parents.
But what is particularly striking is the other reason why Maria assigns homework.

I still feel really frustrated by the situation out there for AAC users in terms of what happens with their curriculum and how at the mercy they are. It really bothers me. I mean, I figure that I can only ... I mean I, as an individual teacher, can have an influence right now. That's why I send the homework home. I try and show the parents that the kids have academic potential and that this is important. And I try and have them be more and more of an advocate for their child, so that when they get out there, if they see things not happening that they would be asking questions, you know. ‘How come my child was able to do this at this point in time?’ I don't think a lot of them do have the confidence for that....I think it's very important for the parents to be involved in their program, their child's program. But when they leave and the teacher doesn't send it home I often wonder how many of them ... don't they question that? Don't they request it? Don't they want it? [A parent of a previous student], she was on that teacher all the time, ‘I want homework!’ When you get a good advocate parent, they want it. If it was just something they had to fit in their weekend and they did it to placate me then some of them are just relieved that they don't have to worry about it anymore. But the intention is, in part, not only to consolidate those basic skills, and I feel they need it, at least on the weekend, it's also to get the parent involved in the child's program and get them to see what their kid is capable of and to make them an advocate so that they say, ‘How come? ... ‘How come?’ (interview, June 7).

"Hope’s reference to the future in caring enlarges the significance of the present" (Mayeroff, 1971, p. 19). "I try and show the parents that the kids have academic potential and that this is important and I try and have them be more and more of an advocate for their child." Maria assigns homework as a means of advocating for her students. She extends her teaching beyond her students to their parents, beyond their classroom to their homes. She believes in the potential of each of her students and she supports their parents in also believing in their child’s potential so that they will carry on advocating for their child’s learning needs. Maria extends her teaching beyond the present to fulfill the hope she has in her students’ future.
To be concerned, after all, is to be conscious of a web of possibilities, to experience passion is to be invested in what might or might not be (Greene, 1986, p. 74).

Maria's advocacy for her students, her concern for their continued development over the long term, extends well beyond the walls of her classroom, and beyond her time with them. It is reflected in the relationships she establishes with their parents and those she strives to develop in the community. While she understands the broader educational context for students who use AAC, she is concerned with knowing more about the local educational context that her students enter once they have left her program.

Ever since I've been here, where I see the gap is that we cannot follow our students to give that extra help. We're certainly available by phone and everything if the teachers call. We write reports. I sometimes go and meet with teachers just maybe once or twice. I've gone over to [a congregated school for children with disabilities, where many of Maria's students graduate to]...I've gone in June and I've, I haven't gone so much in September, but I've definitely talked to people in June. But people have called me from [the congregated school] for information in the fall and I think that those links, since a lot of our students go to [the congregated school], those links could be strengthened. And I wished that we had a way so that I could visit each one of my students wherever they go and be available to answer questions with the new teacher (interview, March 31).

The ability to reach beyond, to envisage a wider span of understanding and a better order of things enables persons to perceive the deficiencies in what exists, to become capable of indignation or even outrage. Outrage is something other than a recognition of kitsch. In outrage...there may be efforts to reach out with others to do something, to repair. To feel that way is to recognize the importance of reflection as a mode of release (Greene, 1986, p. 79).

Maria's reflection, her collaborative initiatives and advocacy seem to arise from her own quest to know, to learn, to 'envisage a wider span of understanding'.

If I feel that I no longer have anything new to learn, I think it's time for me to go... 'Cause I know that there's a lot I don't know (interview, March 31).
A strong feeling or emotion characterizes Maria’s quest for understanding and knowledge for herself and others. “Feelings are the source of one’s energy, they supply the horsepower” (Peck, 1978, p. 156). This horsepower is witnessed in Maria’s passion. Maria’s feelings, her passion emanate from her beliefs and supply the horsepower in her practice.

**Passion**

To be a passionate teacher is to be someone in love with a field of knowledge, deeply stirred by issues and ideas that challenge our world, drawn to the dilemmas and potentials of the young people who come into class each day – or captivated by all of these (Fried, 1995, p. 1).

Maria teaches with deep passion. She is truly captivated and stirred by all Fried refers to: the dilemmas and potentials of her students, the field of AAC, and teaching. As one team member reflected,

She has that kind of um, torch, if you want to think of it. That Olympic torch kind of feeling about the field [AAC] (interview, SLP, consulting AAC service, Sept. 1).

Indeed, in Maria’s classroom, I felt “a throbbing heart-beat of passion connecting the class to itself and the teacher to the class” (Fox, 1995, p. 13). This is the way Maria approaches the mission of teaching, with “a feeling of great depth” (Peck, 1978, p. 156). Her passion drives her teaching. The teaching events in her classroom stem from a passion that breathes life into learning. Maria’s passion is borne out each day in her teaching: It is how she conducts her work.

Your stance as a teacher or parent combines the beliefs about children that you consciously try to adhere to and the qualities of feeling that you communicate through words, gestures and actions (Fried, 1995, p. 168).

The teaching interactions, in Maria’s classroom are of the fireworks variety: “a series of bangs and other loud noises and excited applause at each flash and whiz (Fox, 1995, p. 10). Maria’s animation, her tone of voice, her facial expressions, the way she moves about her work, the way she meets and interacts with the students, the way she collaborates and pursues issues of importance
exude passion: passion for the students and their learning and passion for teaching. Noddings and Shore (1984) call the emotions that bring about insightful, passionate teaching, ‘caritas’:

Caritas, which is related to the words charity, caring, and cherish, is a Latin word meaning regard, affection, esteem, and love, and also has the connotation of preciousness (p. 222).

Indeed, Maria’s passion demonstrates her love of her students and love of teaching. "If I truly love another, I will obviously order my behavior in such a way as to contribute the utmost on his or her spiritual growth" (Peck, 1978, p. 155). Maria’s passion facilitates her advocacy and teaching. Her passion is a key element in making things happen. A classroom volunteers remarks,

She’s passionate which is key. Yeah, that’s something I didn’t say about Maria, is the passion. Her passion’s wonderful and it’s communicated daily. It’s communicated to the kids and it’s communicated to the Centre and that really makes a difference. She’s not someone who just comes and you know doesn’t care, just punches in and out. Everybody hopes for their dream job and everybody hopes that they find what they do best and Maria’s found it and she does it and everybody in this Centre benefits from that (interview, volunteer, June 7).

Her enthusiasm really carries people along. She’s very passionate with all her students and really sees advocacy for the students as being very, very really critical. I think probably that aspect of things, that she’ll get involved in things probably more than in some of the other classrooms because of her passionate devotion to the students (interview, Occupational therapist, Consulting AAC Service, June 15).

The school psychologist provide insight into the critical need for someone to advocate for students who use AAC,

I see them [the students] being different, too, in terms of how staff have to represent them and advocate for them. I see these children at this age, most of them being, because of the difficulties with communication, being less able to advocate and sell themselves too whether it’s the community, whether it’s somebody visiting the centre, whether it’s just somebody else here at the centre. I mean, they can’t walk in and say something cute and establish that kind of rapport. So, I think a lot of children need more assistance with that advocacy and being represented until they develop that ability
themselves. And even children who are as incredibly competent as [the bright student who uses AAC], somebody meeting her for the first time, you don't, sadly, you don't automatically assume that she's as competent as say [another student in the girl's class] in that classroom. And there needs to be people representing her in that respect and creating the situations through which their competence will show. It's sadly not automatically assumed that children are able and competent (interview, School Psychologist, June 24).

As I have described throughout this thesis, the competence of Maria’s students, their potential is revealed through Maria’s teaching.

**Summary**

Thus far in this thesis I have described the nature of Maria’s knowledge and beliefs. I have made a case for the interactive and interdependent nature of Maria’s knowledge, beliefs, and teaching practices. In this chapter, I highlighted three principles which Maria follows in her teaching practice: reflection, collaboration, and advocacy. These principles both arise from and are instrumental in shaping Maria’s knowledge and beliefs. Moreover, Maria teaches with great passion.

With all that I have described what more could there be underlying Maria’s teaching practice? Yet, there is more.

I began to perceive another dimension to Maria’s teaching. A dimension that is not discovered or learned from reading texts or attending conference presentations, nor from simply speaking with other teachers or consultants. I discovered an affective dimension of Maria’s teaching. Maria’s teaching practice powerfully revealed to me the "personhood from which good teaching comes" (Palmer, 1998).

I have been building my case, my analysis of Maria’s teaching practice towards describing what I believe is the *essence* of her practice, the driving force, the engine that propels her to be the teacher that she is. This essence is inherent in her comments,

I do worry about them when they make the transition. Like, I’d like to be there to be able to answer questions for the teachers and also if you set up a personal relationship with someone…. like say three
of them [students] are going over to the [congregated school for students with disabilities], if I get to know those teachers then I think if they know me as a person and I know them they'll feel more comfortable calling me and asking me things....I'd like to see more communication between us....I really would (interview, May 3).

Palmer (1998) argues,

Teachers who take a stand, who advocate remember the passions that led them to become academics, and they do not want to lose the primal energy of their vocation. They affirm their deep caring for the lives of students, and they do not want to disconnect from the young. They understand the identity and integrity that they have invested in teaching, and they want to reinvest, even if it pays no institutional interest or dividends. These teachers have decided that teaching is a front-of-the bus thing for them, even though their institutions want it moved to the back. . . . They act in ways that honor their own commitment to the importance of teaching (p. 170).

Maria’s expressed concern illustrates her strong advocacy for her students. But it also points to a particular and essential thread which ties her knowledge, her beliefs, and her teaching principles of reflection, collaboration, and advocacy into the fabric of her teaching. Maria has a way of ‘doing’, a way of ‘being’ with her students that defines her practice in a very significant way. Fried (1995) calls it ‘a stance’.

It starts in a physical way. There is a posture, a way we hold our bodies, that can communicate to students a sense of acceptance, respect, and expectation: how we greet them when they arrive. . . ; where we stand or sit when we talk to them; how we move about the room. And, of course, there is the emotional or intellectual sense of the word ‘stance’: the way we prepare ourselves for what students will be bringing with them into the classroom, and what we want them to leave with. Who are these kids? How great is their potential? What are the talents they’ve got that nobody has yet discovered? What’s holding some of them back from using their minds creatively in school? How can we help them get their act together academically? How important is this work we’re doing, anyhow? What do we expect them to achieve? (p. 139).
Passionate teaching, like all teaching is necessarily a social process, not just an individual performance. It is grounded in the relationship between teacher and student (Fried, 1995, p. 30).

This thread, this essence is what I call caring. In the next chapter I hope to do justice to Maria's caring by describing it so that you, the reader, will also come to understand and appreciate its role in Maria's teaching.
Chapter 8: Maria’s Caring

[Classroom events] inherent passions and the love that flows through them freshen up an often dry and meaningless education system, enabling it to become more affectively oriented and therefore also ultimately more effective, by capturing hearts so minds will follow; they make a school year like fireworks, not mud; they ignite an intensity of interest, a reality of purpose, an excited engagement and meaningful language development... They create a sense of community, like that of a family, with all its attendant realities of language use. They make teaching come alive and breathe passion on the windows of learning (Fox, 1995, p. 14).

In this chapter, I bring my examination of Maria’s teaching practice full circle. I highlight qualities of her being that are threaded through her teaching practice. Having consulted the research literature, I have settled on referring to these qualities, these critical threads as caring. And, like her knowledge, beliefs and principles of practice, Maria’s caring is multi-dimensional. Moreover, her caring is intricately intertwined with her knowledge, beliefs and principles of practice. I begin my analysis of Maria’s caring by recounting one particularly meaningful interaction which took place between Maria, Mark, and Bethany. I will draw on this example and many others to illustrate the qualities and significance of Maria’s caring to her teaching practices.

Mark Wants Pudding

The students are gathered around the classroom’s large round table. It’s time for the afternoon snack. The food and drink items are taken out of the bags from the backs of the students’ wheelchairs. Mark’s Mom has provided him with a veritable cornucopia of snacks from which to choose. Mark’s arms extend and stiffen in front of him on his laptry. Pouting and with brow furled, he lowers and continues to shake his head, ‘No’, eyes fixed on each item that Maria takes from his bag and places on the table in front of him.

Maria: I’m sorry, it’s not a restaurant, Mark. You have a few things that Mom sent. (She points to and names each.) You have yogurt, Nutrigrain, Teddy Grahams, cereal, cookies.
Mark: Continues to shake his head as Maria says each. Then he looks over at Bethany’s pudding.

Maria: Pudding? Well, that causes a problem . . . But, it’s a good opportunity for you to ask.

Maria: Takes Mark’s communication book from the back of his chair and presents it to him on his laptray.

Maria: What would you say to Bethany?

With a look of hopefulness, Mark scans the index on the front cover of his book, fixing his eyes on the ‘Questions’ symbol.

Maria: Questions page.

Maria: Flips the pages of the communication book, presenting Mark with the page of questions.

Mark: Looks at the yellow group

Maria: Yellow.

Mark: Looks at the number 3, then the word ‘please’ on the page of his communication book

Maria: Number 3. Please. That’s right! That’s the asking word.

Maria approaches Bethany explaining to her that Mark has a question. She wheels Bethany towards Mark.

Maria: For snack I would like . . .

Mark: Looks in his communication book and indicates ‘pudding’. Then looks intently and expectantly at Bethany.

Maria: Pudding.

Bethany: Looks at Maria, then vocalizes: Yes. She looks at Mark.
Maria: [Looking at Mark.] She says ‘yes’. What do you say?

Mark: Looks puzzled. Then looks at ‘please’

Maria: Please is when you ask. [pause] It’s ‘Thank you’. Now you say it.

Mark: Finds and fixes his gaze on the ‘Thank you’ symbol in his communication book.

Maria: [Looking at Bethany.] Thank you, Bethany.

Bethany and Mark: Look at each other, smiling.

Maria: Turns to Mark.

Maria: I’ll ask Mom to send pudding.

Mark: Looks at Maria and vocalizes, yes (February 25, Afternoon Snack).

An Analysis of Maria’s Care

Children — and adults, too — grow through association with people who model caring through dialogue on matters of central human concern, through practice in caring for each other, and through confirmation — through hearing clearly that a beloved and trusted other sees a more lovely self than the one exhibited in small daily acts (Noddings, 1987, p. 7).

What I have recounted can be described as a “tiny vignette of pedagogical give and take lodged within the larger framework of the day’s lesson” (Jackson, et al, 1993, p. 199). In some classrooms, Mark’s protest might be overlooked, even ignored. At best, he might be quickly pacified in the more pressing interests of time and routine. After all, the unanticipated protest could be seen as a major glitch in an already tight classroom schedule. In fact, as I observed this interaction, I found myself looking at the clock. How long will this unexpected delay take? What will Maria do? Who will win here?

I count myself among those ‘outsiders’ observing from the periphery of a classroom, who on more than one occasion have regarded the snack routine as an inconvenient departure from the curriculum and “real” learning. In Maria’s
classroom, the twice-daily snack routine absorbs precious resources: time and people. Maria’s students need one-to-one assistance and the task of feeding them can be slow, often taking 30 minutes. It could be easy to ignore Mark’s protest.

But, Maria doesn’t see it that way. It’s not that she isn’t aware of the time it will take, on the contrary. She explains, “It’s always a real balancing act. There’s a lot going on in your head” (interview, June 21). “I’m always asking: ‘Is there something I can squeeze out of this activity?’” (interview, March 15). Thus, Maria is aware of the time element. But, her decision to act is driven firstly by the needs and goals of her students.

In Maria’s classroom, Mark’s protest was acknowledged, indeed, it was embraced. As she remarked to me so many times, ‘He’s asserting himself!’ Where others might see problems or barriers, Maria sees opportunities for growth, for learning, for independence and for relating. Relationships are the bonfire beneath the fireworks in Maria’s classroom. Maria cares!

It sounds trite to say that Maria ‘cares’. Of course, she cares! She’s a teacher. But, Maria’s care emerges as something quite special. It emerges as a kind of caring that, not unlike, her knowledge and beliefs, is multi-faceted, qualitatively rich and as I will reveal, pivotal to her teaching practices. Maria’s caring “is a way of being in a relation, not a set of specific behaviours” (Noddings, 1992, p. 17). Indeed, Maria’s manner of caring, as manifested in her practice, is not carried out in a mechanical fashion. The undressing routine that I described at the beginning of this thesis is not just a time to carry out a task or specific goals: to get the student’s coats off; to teach them symbols or a way of communicating; or of reinforcing their literacy skills. It is a time to relate to each student, to build a relationship with each student, a relationship that both defines and influences Maria’s teaching practice. As Mayeroff (1971) describes, caring, is

...helping another grow and actualize himself ... a process, a way of relating to someone that involves development, in the same way that friendship can only emerge in time through mutual trust and a deepening and qualitative transformation of the relationship (p. 1).
Maria's way of being, her caring and relating and its importance to her practice gradually became apparent to me. This recognition occurred by observing closely her interactions with her students: her way of talking to them, the words she used, the explanations she provided, the spontaneity of her talk, her questions, her prompts, and her responses relative to her students' responses. And then there were the many wordless things she said to her students. There was a manner of being that was inherent in Maria's tone of voice, her animation; her smiles; her quick glances and prolonged gazes, her eye contact with her students, and her waiting, the time she took to give them an opportunity to talk. This manner of being was also witnessed in her physical contact with her students; her touches, her nudges, her way of repositioning them in their chairs, her way of knowing what they needed and of supporting them; the softness in her eyes. But that softness is not the kind of softness of feeling sorrow for the child. Rather, it was the kind of softness that reveals deep understanding, which is an important distinction. There is a difference.

Maria's caring has to do with her fundamental beliefs about teaching and her students. Her caring is connected to how she organizes her teaching to fulfill those beliefs. Ultimately, the qualities or dimensions of caring serve to broaden Maria's knowledge and beliefs which, in turn, influence her teaching practices. I turn to the literature to further define what I mean by caring.

Caring is Relating

Caring is a relationship that contains another, the cared-for (Noddings, 1987, p. 58).

Teachers' concern for children is grounded in relationship, in the connectedness of teachers and learners (Elbaz, 1992, p. 421).

Caring, as helping another grow and actualize himself, is a process, a way of relating to someone that involves development, in the same way that friendship can only emerge in time through mutual trust and a deepening and qualitative transformation of the relationship (Mayeroff, 1971, p. 1).

Cathecting [care] ... the process by which an object becomes important to us. Once cathected, the object . . is invested with our
energy as if it were a part of ourselves, and this relationship between us and the invested object is called a cathexis (Peck, 1978, p. 117).

Educating is an act of caregiving, regardless of the age of the students (Goldstein, 1997, p. 3).

Caring is relating and all human encounters are regarded as potential caring occasions (Noddings, 1987).

Each of these authors regards care and relating synonymously. As Noddings (1992) reiterates, "Caring is a way of being in a relation, not a set of specific behaviours." (p. 17). I have come to understand this synonymous nature of care and relating by witnessing it in Maria's teaching. In Maria's teaching, care and relating are one and the same. Thus, in the analysis and descriptions which follow, I use the terms interchangeably.

**Dimensions of Caring**

In a classroom dedicated to caring, students are encouraged to support each other; opportunities for peer interaction are provided, and the quality of that interaction is as important (to both teacher and students) as the academic outcomes . . . . The object is to develop a caring community through modelling, dialogue, and practice (Noddings, 1987, p. 7).

And so, during snack time in Maria's classroom, the students are not mechanically fed and given drinks according to some arbitrary schedule. The activities of eating and drinking become opportunities to care, not in a custodial sense, but to relate, to connect. And in that connection there is an opportunity to teach and to learn - to care. Maria recognizes and seizes an opportunity that arises naturally in the course of the day to teach her students about communication, about interaction, about relating, about caring. In the pudding scene, Maria attends to Mark's physical well being, his hunger and thirst, and she attends to his protest, recognizing and caring that he be heard. She cares that Mark has a voice and that his voice is heard.

For Maria, caring is relating: "any pairing or connection of individuals characterized by some affective awareness in each. It is an encounter or series of
encounters in which the involved parties feel something toward each other (Noddings, 1987, p. 6). In this routine activity, Maria establishes a relation, a caring moment with Mark. What’s more, she facilitates a caring moment, a moment to relate between Mark and his classmate, Bethany, a very rare occasion for students who use AAC. A closer look at this moment with Mark and Bethany and other incidences reveal the multi-dimensional attributes of Maria’s caring.

In the snack routine, Maria seizes the opportunity for Mark to talk to a classmate, to allow the classmate to be the caregiver. It is also a natural opportunity for Mark to use his communication book in a meaningful way – another one of those small moments of learning (Meier, 1986). These actions attest to Maria’s beliefs in her students. Maria allows Mark to voice his wants; to say he doesn’t want any of the snacks that his mother sent with him to school, but would rather have one of his classmate’s puddings. In a classroom of children who speak with their voices, such interaction goes unnoticed. Yet, in Maria’s classroom, the communications are recognized and celebrated. Maria provides the opportunity for the interaction, the relation, the caring. She allows the two students to interact, face-to-face, while she merely facilitates by moving them closer, handling Mark’s communication book, and speaking and pausing at appropriate times. It certainly would be easier and considerably quicker for Maria to ask questions requiring a simple yes or no response from the students. Indeed, the scene would play out quite differently if she had said to Mark, “Oh, I see you’re looking at Bethany’s pudding. You want pudding. Let’s ask her: Bethany, can Mark have one of your puddings?” But Maria doesn’t do this. She’s not motivated by time, by the schedule, by getting through the snack time. Rather, because of her care, her beliefs, her knowledge she recognizes and takes an opportunity to teach her students. She relinquishes her control of the situation to her students. She prompts them verbally by asking open-ended questions that get at their thinking (i.e., “What would you say to Bethany?”). She pauses and waits for each student to respond. Her next move depends on their response. She models and scaffolds the communication (i.e., “For snack I would like . . .”) and in doing so, teaches her students about language and communication. She points
to each symbol in Mark’s communication book and merely repeats what the students have indicated. What follows is an illustration of the multi-dimensional nature of Maria’s caring.

Attention and Will

When I care I really hear, see, or feel what the other tries to convey. The engrossment or attention may last only a few moments and it may or may not be repeated in future encounters, but it is full and essential in any caring encounter (Noddings, 1992, p. 16).

Maria attends to Mark. She is present with him. Noddings (1992) would say Maria is ‘engrossed’ in Mark. She attends to Mark’s protest. She looks at him, into his eyes. Mark returns the attention. They connect. Maria listens to his communication. She attends to his protest. Maria cares. She relates. A caring encounter is born: “a moment of receptivity – one in which the full humanity of both parties is recognized – and it is followed by a return to the human other in all his or her fullness” (Noddings, 1992, p. 24).

“To attend is to spend time with, and the quality of the attention is proportional to the intensity of concentration during that time” (Peck, 1978, p. 130). Caring “involves the whole of whatever is at each of the two poles of the encounter. It is not just a part which is involved.” (Noddings, 1984, p. 74). Maria’s caring is characterized by wholeness. She is wholly attentive and involved in her interaction with Mark and then in supporting the encounter between Mark and Bethany. “The I responds to his or her Thou with emotions as well as with intellect – with body, mind and soul.” (Geering, 1983, p. 20). She is wholly patient with them. She chooses to attend to and listen to Mark with her whole self: her intellect, her heart, and her soul or in Palmer’s (1998) terms ‘her undivided self – an integral state of being’ (p. 15).

Noddings (1984) speaks of full attention in caring, in relating. She writes,

...what I must do is to be totally and nonselectively present to the student—to each student – as he addresses me. The time interval may be brief but the encounter is total(p. 180).
In the previous chapter, I described Maria’s ability to reflect both after and during teaching. I used the term thoughtful to describe her thinking while she is teaching. This thoughtfulness is closely related to Maria’s caring. While she is teaching, she thinks carefully about many things, as she remarked, ‘There’s a lot going on in your head’ (interview, June 21). Further, Maria has thoughtful encounters with her students. She chooses to connect, to relate with her students. This connection with a student, in the moment of teaching is care, is being thoughtful.

Peck would say that Maria’s listening to Mark, her attending to him is a labour of love. “Listening well is an exercise of attention and by necessity hard work” (Peck, 1978, p. 121). Maria endeavours to understand Mark’s communication. Truly listening to and understanding Mark is work for Maria. It requires effort. She must weigh each vocalization, each look, each expression, each gesture, in an attempt to understand and meet his needs. Understanding Mark requires concentration and effort. Maria chooses to have Mark connect with Bethany by using his communication book to ask her for a pudding. The process takes time. It is a labour of love.

Maria might have ignored Mark’s protest. Rather, she chooses to attend to him. Peck (1978) argues that “true listening, total concentration on the other, is always a manifestation of love” (127). Maria chooses to notice and attend to Mark’s protest.

Genuine love is volitional rather than emotional. The person who truly loves does so because of a decision to love. This person has made a commitment to be loving whether or not the loving feeling is present (p. 119).

As Peck (1978) says, “Attention is an act of will” (120). Maria chooses to connect with Mark. She chooses to ‘be loving’, in Peck’s terms. She chooses to care, to relate, whether or not she feels the emotion of love. For,

Love is not a feeling…. The feeling of love is the emotion that accompanies the experience of cathecting. …. The principal form that the work of love takes is attention. When we love another we give him or her our attention; we attend that that’s person’s growth. … When we attend to someone we are caring for that
person. The act of attending requires that we make the effort to set aside our existing preoccupations . . . and actively shift our consciousness. Attention is an act of will (Peck, 1978, p. 120).

Maria’s attention to Mark, her relating with Mark is an act of volition, of will, that Peck calls bracketing.

An essential part of true listening is the discipline of bracketing, the temporary giving up or setting aside of one’s own prejudices, frames of reference and desires so as to experience as far as possible the speaker’s world from the inside, stepping inside his or her shoes (p. 127).

Noddings (1984) calls it ‘motivational displacement: “I receive what the other conveys, and I want to respond in a way that furthers the other’s purpose or project” (p. 16).

Maria chooses to temporarily disregard the routine of snack time and view the situation from Mark’s point of view. Her ‘motive energy’ flows toward Mark and his wants (Noddings, 1984). In this encounter, Maria chooses to shift her attention to Mark. She desires to know what he wants. She is “seized by the needs of another” (Noddings, 1992, p. 16).

When I care, when I receive the other . . . there is more than feeling; there is also motivational shift. My motive energy flows toward the other and perhaps, although not necessarily, toward his ends. I do not relinquish myself; I cannot excuse myself for what I do. But I allow my motive energy to be shared; I put it at the service of the other (Noddings, 1984, p. 33).

Further, Maria’ motive energy flows to Mark and Bethany. She chooses to have Mark connect or relate with Bethany. She doesn’t have to, but in her caring, she recognizes the value in doing so.

The attention and will characteristic of Maria’s care provides for what Buber (as cited in Geering, 1983) calls, ”an encounter, the one with the other and the other with the one, a genuine meeting “ (p. 16). Maria creates an ‘I-Thou’ moment that Buber speaks of, a moment to relate, to connect, a moment to care.

The moral importance of this sense of ‘attentiveness’ lies in the recognition of immeasurable value in the everyday details of children’s lives (Elbaz, 1992, p. 426).
She also describes attentiveness in caring:

...the ability to notice details, to watch for small signs of growth, to remember important bits of information at the right moment . . . to understand and appreciate the complexity of these children (p. 426).

Caring and attentiveness are critical to developing holistic knowledge about these students, knowledge of their characteristics and needs. I refer not just to knowledge of their abilities and disabilities, but knowledge of who they are as individuals. Maria’s attentiveness allows her to know her students. Attentiveness is also witnessed in Maria’s collaborative relationships with the parents of her students and with her colleagues. And as with her relationships with her students, Maria learns.

**Patience**

Patience is not waiting passively for something to happen, but is a kind of participation with the other in which we give full of ourselves (Mayeroff, 1971, p. 12).

Maria’s caring, her relating is characterized by patience. She is patient in her interactions with her students. She truly participates fully with her students, listening to them, observing, providing necessary cues and prompts. Her patience with Mark manifests itself in her attending to him, and providing him with an opportunity to say what is on his mind. She remains focussed on Mark. She doesn’t rush him. She is patient with him. She provides cues and prompts when necessary. Her patience can also be regarded as a measure of her belief in social justice: everyone will have an opportunity to speak and be listened to. By being attentive and patient, Maria fully and meaningfully participates in the relationship. Further, she provides Mark with space to participate. In Mayeroff’s words, Maria gives Mark “room to live” (p. 12). She provides him with a chance to have a say, to relate, to care.

In her quest to learn more about her students and how to teach them, she is patient with the parents of her students, her classroom team members, and
colleagues. She participates with them in dialogue, in constructing her knowledge.

*Respect*

In caring as helping the other grow, I experience what I care for . . . as an extension of myself and at the same time as something separate from me that I respect in its own right (Mayeroff, 1971, p. 3).

Maria’s care or relating is characterized by respect for the one cared for. She “starts from a position of respect or regard for the projects of the other.” (Noddings, 1984, p. 176). Maria demonstrates respect for Mark by attending fully to his communication, by her patience with his protest. Maria’s moves are guided by Mark’s real and present needs rather than the artificial needs inherent in the curriculum.

“Genuine love recognizes and respects the unique individuality and separate identity of the other person” (Peck, 1978, p. 151). One of the most poignant experiences of Maria’s respect for a child’s and their dignity occurred when early in one week, Mark was diagnosed with a recurrence of what was suspected to be ringworm. A few small, scaly patches were apparent on his face and arms. As school policy dictated, Band-Aids were quickly administered to the affected areas. The Band-Aids were to remain until the ringworm had disappeared. A note outlining this directive went home with Mark that evening. Mark did not show up for class for the rest of the week. This did not come as a surprise to the classroom team. It greatly bothered Maria. She surmised that Mark’s Mom had kept him home because of the Band-Aids. Maria didn’t blame Mark’s Mom. She also would not send a child to school with Band-Aids on his face! However, Maria was clearly upset because he had missed the activity of making bread that was part of a nutrition unit. She commented that if it were up to her, she’d “rip the Band-Aids off of Mark!” (Field note, May 28).

This experience, along with many others highlights Maria’s concern for the dignity of her students, dignity and respect for the individual over following the rules of the system.
Trust

Caring, as helping another grow and actualize himself, is a process, a way of relating to someone that involves development, in the same way that friendship can only emerge in time through mutual trust and a deepening and qualitative transformation of the relationship (Mayeroff, 1971, p. 1).

Maria understands this. She recounts her first meeting with Mark, the roots of building a trusting teacher-student relationship:

When he first came in the classroom and I remember things too because when he first came in the classroom his grandmother brought him and it was an open house. And I remember the activity we were doing.

We were playing store like we are now actually. And I was reading the story about going shopping, the Little Critter story. And so people came in and they were all sort of standing around watching and most of them were adults. I don’t think there were that many students who came with their parents to the open house, but Mark was with his grandmother and she did a really great thing. I wish that we had had a chance to interact more with his grandma because I think she knows a lot.

She brought him in and the children were all in a circle. So she was standing in the back and he was in a little stroller and she pushed him up to join the circle and she stepped back and he tolerated that beautifully. He was so interested in this story. He didn’t mind that Grandma ... you know how some kids would be.

But he was right in there. So I knew, “Here’s a child who likes stories.”

The first day he came in the class ... I took him over to the bookshelf because I remembered that.

So I guess you’re looking for ways to set up a relationship where the trust can be built quickly because you’re making quite a few demands on the kids. You’re asking a lot of them when they first come in. You’re asking them to change the way they’ve communicated before and some kids take to that very easily and others don’t (interview, June 7).
If another person is to grow through my caring, he must trust me, for only then will he open himself to me and let me reach him (Mayeroff, 1971, p. 33).

"My role is of their teacher" (interview, June 14). For Maria, establishing a relationship with each of her students is requisite to her teaching. Further, for Maria teaching is a moral activity. She acknowledges and takes her role very seriously. She is responsible for her student's developing communication and learning abilities. She re-counts an interaction that occurred on the playground one day during lunch duty. Maria will be teaching Lana next year.

She's quite an emotional little girl, so it's gonna be an emotional adjustment. And I said something to her today, I said, 'Oh, you know, you might be in my class!' And she really looked alarmed because I know that she's had [Joan] for two years and she needs to be very secure in the environment she's in. So it's gonna be quite an adjustment. But, I kind of just wanted to see how she would react to that news.

So then I tried to play with her quite a bit to develop a relationship. So I think that's ... and we talked about that with Mark. Establish the trust, establishing some sort of relationship so that when you start imposing these changes and they're sometimes pretty major for a child that the child will go along with you (interview, June 14).

During another conversation she explains further,

Well I always hope that I'm an advocate for AAC users....and I think that they need that kind of advocacy. So, I try to listen to them and to be sensitive to the fact, especially when they come in and they're younger and they don't have a mode of communication, an effective mode of communication. It's really important to almost ... to convey to them in some way that I'm gonna listen to them or I'm gonna try and take the time to sort the messages out until we have an easier way to do it. It's important to establish that confidence and that bond (interview, June 7).

To communicate they have to feel they're in control, they have to feel that they can make decisions, that their decisions are valid, that people will listen to them. Otherwise, they'll just be passive. Why should they bother to go to all this trouble if no one listens to them? ....And that's one of the reasons I'd like to try and have them making decisions because they are in control and I'm trying to give them control of the communication so that they're getting
confidence and they're practicing using that book. Sometimes if I'm in a hurry I'm tempted to just turn to the page and just give them the ... but then I think I'm doing them a bit of a disservice because this is always rehearsing for when they're going out somewhere and people aren't as familiar with their book so they have to be familiar (interview, June 14).

The bond or relationship, the trust that Maria establishes with each student, grows from being consistent with them. As Peck (1978) contends, "Anyone who is truly concerned for the spiritual growth of another knows, consciously or instinctively, that he or she can significantly foster that growth only through a relationship of constancy" (p. 141). Maria's consistency provides the basis for Mark's trust that his teacher will listen to him. In the pudding incident, he calms down and looks towards Bethany and then back at Maria: "I'd like one of Bethany's puddings." Mark's trust that Maria will listen, has developed from the consistency of Maria's relating, her caring. Maria demonstrates respect for Mark by acknowledging his protest and responding positively.

Without a trusting and respectful relationship among students and teachers, everyone's ability to work collaboratively and to take the kind of risks that learning requires is minimized (Fried, 1995, p. 47).

Indeed, Maria responds positively to her students' behaviours and communications. She seeks the meaning and the intent underneath her student's actions and response. Even when their behaviours are inappropriate and somewhat distracting, Maria conveys an optimism and positive attitude, teaching her students how to communicate their thoughts in a more appropriate manner, usually through their communication books. Maria's consistency in her approach arises from her beliefs about her students and the nature of learning. Through consistency, Maria supports trust in her students.

When Sarah and Ricky disagree over choosing a shared activity and, as a result, they run out of time to do either activity, Maria promises to find time later in the day for the activities and she does.
Maria’s understanding of the importance of trust in a relationship was conveyed to me during one of our discussions. She recounted an experience with Mark which had occurred at the end of one Friday at the end of a particularly busy week.

M: I felt so guilty. Mark was very passive all day and then we had no time at the end and that’s when he really wanted to use his book. But it was a Friday afternoon. We had no help. We were getting the bags on the backs of the chairs, doing the papers. But I did feel really guilty.....So here he was. The one time in the day when he was, [Maria imitates Mark banging on his tray at the ‘I need my communication book’ symbol]: ‘Get that book out.’ But, it’s one of the few times I’ve done that to him.

D: So what did you say to him?

M: Well, I said, ‘You know Mark, we don’t have a lot of time.’ I didn’t actually make a big deal of it because I didn’t want him to have a tantrum, but I felt very guilty.

Maria’s guilt arose from not being able to take the time to talk with Mark on that particular occasion. She felt she had betrayed a well-established trust in her relationship with Mark: I will take the time to listen to you. Subsequent to this experience, Maria makes an effort to reserve a little time at the end of the day for her and Mark to engage in a conversation.

I mean I think [Mark’s Mother] is a good example of a parent who now really understands the importance of his use of the communication book. I mean he won’t let her. I don’t think he’ll let her. I mean I think she really would have terrible behaviour problems with him. I think she knows as well as we know. It’ll be interesting to see what she says in her note tomorrow if anything because I think that she knows that if we just say, Sorry Mark, goodbye. The bus driver wouldn’t thank us for that because she’d have this screaming kid on her bus.

He would be just furious. And you know in that situation I feel it would be a betrayal of trust because the very thing that I said to you that I want to establish that trust that we will take the time to sort it out. If I sent him out of here when he really, you know, when he’s in this mood when he’s got something he really wants to say that’s a betrayal of trust. How could I do that? (interview, June 7).
"Consistent and steadfast caring ... can arise only from a capacity for commitment" (Peck, 1978, p. 118). Maria is well aware of the importance of trust and is committed to acting in ways that promote the trust between her and her students.

I think it's just important to establish some sort of way that they'll know that whenever possible we'll take the time and communicate. And I did go today with Bethany after she went into the lunchroom and I said, 'Now what was it you wanted to tell me?' And she went off talking about TV. And I said, 'Well now listen, you know, I asked you a question. You were to choose who goes next. It wasn't time to talk about TV. So I've come later to talk about TV.' But, that I think ... it's important to try and let them know that I will ... and that all of us in this environment will try to listen to them (interview, June 7).

There have been times with him when he [Mark] does definitely have something in mind and you can tell he's frustrated and we've gotten it. And that's what I mean when I say about establishing the trust because when you get it, it's like, 'Hallelujah! These people understand what I'm trying to say!' And you have a few of those kind of watershed experiences like that and the child does have confidence that you'll keep trying (interview, June 7).

Maria develops trust in her students. A relationship of trust grounds confirmation, another key quality of Maria's caring (Noddings, 1992).

The quality of trust is also inherent in the collaborative relationships Maria develops with the student's parents and her team members.

**Confirmation**

[Confirmation is] an obligation to help children attain a higher, better image of their moral selves, and an educator does this in part by attributing the best possible motives to their acts. I confirm children when I consistently, patiently, lovingly hold out to them a vision of their better selves. This vision must be realistic in the sense that it must be really possible. It must be something that I honestly believe is lovely, and it must be something that I have reason to believe the child also desires and can attain. To act in this way I must have a well-established relation with the child, and this suggests that far more time than is now available should be given to teacher-student conversation (Noddings, 1987, p. 7).
Confirmation is grounded in Maria’s beliefs about her students and their potential. As described in Chapter 6 on beliefs, there are many acts of confirmation in Maria’s classroom. Her care, her relating with her students is connected to her hope and optimism for them.

**Honesty**

Even when the facts are unpleasant, I respect them, for it is only by taking them seriously that I can be in touch with the other and care for it (Mayeroff, 1971, p. 13).

Maria is honest in her caring. Similar to confirmation, her honesty has a great deal to do with her beliefs about her students and her role in teaching them. She recognizes and experiences considerable concern for the impact of Sarah’s involuntary movements and for Dana’s physical setbacks. While she recognizes that the difficulties experienced by the two girls are not within her or their control, she does not dismiss their participation in the classroom based on the barriers. Rather, she modifies and adapts her teaching practices to accommodate and include each student. Her close relationship with Ricky’s parents supports her understanding of what they are able to manage. She acknowledges and respects their family situation and adjusts her expectations accordingly. Mayeroff (1971) calls this honesty in caring. Palmer (1998) refers to it as integrity. Maria acts honestly with regard to her students by striving to understand them, accepting them wholly, and acting accordingly.

Maria is also honest with herself in terms of understanding her capabilities and limitations in providing for her student’s needs. As Mayeroff states, “I must also see myself as I am. I must see what I am doing and whether what I am doing helps or hinders the growth of the other” (p. 14). This honesty is linked to Maria’s self-efficacy. Maria seeks support from others when knows she does not have the knowledge or skill to support her students.

Love of students, subject, and teaching/learning does invoke belief, but it is belief in one’s own ability to find solutions to new problems, belief that one will encounter students whose lives will be touched and whose lives will affect ours. ....Pedagogical Eros,
[contains] this kind of inner reserve of hope that makes satisfying teaching possible (Noddings & Shore, 1984, p. 171).

**Reciprocity**

The I-thou relation is reciprocal. It is not a force or movement which works only in one direction. There is a two-way attraction. There is a mutual response. There is an encounter, the one with the other and the other with the one, a genuine meeting (Geering, 1983, p. 16).

Maria understands the reciprocal nature of caring, of relating. She provides for a genuine meeting by giving Mark an opportunity to speak, to have a voice, to say what is on his mind. Thus, Mark is involved in the relating, the caring, in connecting, and a relationship develops – a mutual response.

I was delighted when that child [Mark] came in today and he had already told [a matron] to put his arms under his tray. He's looking out for himself.

When you asked how come I spend so much time on dressing and undressing that's why because it's learning to direct people, learning to think about what do I need and how am I gonna get it. We all do that. We're always doing it. What do I need and how am I gonna get it? He's thinking of that.

But I was delighted that he was able to, however he did it, convey that information to [the matron]. It couldn't be easy. She must have put his tray down and he must have banged and she was sensitive. Like we've given her no particular training, but she understands how he communicates (interview, June 21).

Mark demonstrates his progress in communicating and in becoming independent by communicating a message to someone who is unfamiliar with the way in which he communicates. Besides procedural knowledge, knowing *how*, Mark has developed *strategic* knowledge. Like Maria’s strategic knowledge, Mark has learned *when, where* and *why* to do something. After using the washroom, he asks the matron to put his arms under his tray in anticipation and preparation for the upcoming snack. Maria gauges or evaluates her teaching according to Mark’s actions. He enters her class with his arms already under his
tray. She is delighted with his learning. It reinforces her teaching practices, her beliefs.

Teaching is highly personal—an intensely intimate encounter. The rhythm of teaching involves a complex journey, a journey of discovery and surprise, disappointment and fulfillment. A first step is becoming the student to your students; uncovering the fellow creatures who must be partners to the enterprise. Another is creating an environment for learning, a nurturing and challenging space in which to travel. And finally, the teacher must begin work on the intricate, many-tiered bridges that will fill up the space, connecting all the dreams, hopes, skills, experiences, and knowledge students bring to class with deeper and wider ways of knowing. Teaching requires a vast range of knowledge, ability, skill, judgment, and understanding—and it requires a thoughtful, caring person at its center (Ayers, 1993, p. 127).

The essence of Maria’s care, her relating, her teaching is poignantly conveyed in a conversation that took place towards the end of the school year.

One time you asked me....What is it? Oh, what was it you said? Something about....Was it why would you . . . . what do you think makes a good teacher for children like this or whatever? And I was saying, you have to establish the trust and the bond and have the respect for the individual as a human being and I think that is very fundamental.

And I think I really do care about these kids....They’re just wonderful human beings.

I learned early on I think when I went to [the previous school] how lucky I was to work with these kids.

I think that’s a little bit of a difference. Certain teachers would think they weren’t lucky to work with this population. I’ve always felt really lucky to work with these kids because you’re sort of unlocking the secret in a way, this personality, this person is able to develop and bloom and come out and if I can have a small role in that well I just feel very privileged.

So I really do care... and as I said before too, I think a lot of the [consultants from the consulting AAC service] are the same. It’s a bond that we share. We really do value people using AAC as human beings and we want to see them lead the best lives they can. And it’s ... well you never question. Like my husband will say he waits for the bus and sometimes wonders what he’s doing with his
life but he says he's sure that I don't and it's true. When you work in the front line with the children and their family it is a caring thing, it's a very fulfilling thing and you do care about them as human beings (interview, June 14, p. 20).

Noddings (1992) writes, "Even when the second party in a relation cannot assume the status of carer, there is a genuine form of reciprocity that is essential to the relation" (p. 17). Mark's actions, his gestures, his looks, and what he communicates with his communication book influence Maria's actions. "I'm doing a lot of assessment that is not apparent" (interview, June 7).

What the cared-for gives to the relation either in direct response to the one-caring or in personal delight or in happy growth before her eyes is genuine reciprocity. It contributes to the maintenance of the relation and serves to prevent the caring from turning back on the one-caring in the form of anguish and concern for self (Noddings, 1984, p. 74).

Indeed, these are the rewards of teaching - student responses, growth. 'He's asserting himself!'

Geering (1983) writes,

Buber saw an intrinsic connection between 'word' and 'relation'. He saw them, first, as the verbal expression of a relation, which already existed prior to the human creation of words, and secondly, as instruments by which relations, particularly personal relations, are nurtured (p. 13).

Dialogue figures prominently in Maria's caring. Maria's students contribute to the relating by their responses, their communications, their gestures, their looks, their learning. As Noddings (1984) states, "The purpose of dialogue is to come into contact with ideas and to understand, to meet the other and to care" (p. 186). "Dialogue is a common search for understanding, empathy, or appreciation" (Noddings, 1992, p. 23). Maria needs to engage her students in dialogue in order to know and understand them. In turn, this knowledge and understanding guides her teaching practice. Noddings believes dialogue "also provides us with the knowledge of each other that forms a foundation for response in caring (p. 23).
"Caring requires knowledge and skill as well as characteristic attitudes" (p. 23). Dialogue, which is implied in engrossment, is the process through which this knowledge and skill is gained. But, it’s an open-ended, reciprocal dialogue. Maria’s dialogue is open-ended. Neither she nor her students know what the outcome will be. This kind of dialogue informs each other’s actions. It connects each party to each other and helps to maintain caring relations (Noddings, 1992). As Maria states, “I think it’s just important to establish some sort of way that they’ll know that whenever possible we’ll take the time and communicate” (interview, June 7).

[Bethany’s] been a teacher too. I thought we were going to have a big tantrum on our hands this morning and uh she accepted you this, this morning... She had one last week and it was over some stupid, oh it was just because of the spoon. She gets fixed. Like Maria uses a silver spoon. Sandra uses a silver spoon. [The occupational therapist] uses a plastic spoon. So she sees me using a silver spoon and it was her way to tell me. She didn’t have it in her book to prepare her, so then I’m guessing and then I say, I explain to her that I took the new plastic spoon with the dark rings away because you could hurt your teeth on that. So now we’re going to try this spoon and she accepted that. ... I always told Mark’s mother, ‘Explain what you are doing and he’ll accept it... Provide an explanation and he will cooperate. He just wants to understand. And Bethany is very similar although sometimes she does not give you a chance to explain. She just flies off the deep end before you ever get a chance to say anything (interview, April 19).

This reciprocity has much to do with Maria’s beliefs about the nature teaching and learning. ‘It is not a force or movement that works only in one direction.’ Teaching is not transmissive. Teaching involves a mutual response, a genuine meeting. Teaching is about genuine meetings. Dialogue also figures prominently in Maria’s interactions with her colleagues, which again is characterized by reciprocity.

I have described the qualities or dimensions which are inherent in Maria’s caring. In the next section of this chapter, I illustrate these qualities of caring further.
These few small moments of learning are sprinkled throughout my education. For both teacher and student, they are incidents and situations that cannot be predicted or planned. They will pop up as a surprise, as a treat, when one least expects it. And often, when these moments arise, they come quietly and subtly. They are not accompanied or preceded by proclamations or warnings, or followed by a double asterisk or an exclamation point . . . They are odd and quirky moments that spin off from a teacher's love of the moment and willingness to improvise, to go on a hunch, to take a risk, to deviate a little, to go with one's teaching intuition . . . . They can be hidden in the cracks and crevices of one's education and brought out for reference as one needs them (Meier, 1986, p. 21).

While not immediately discernable, there were many small moments of learning, of caring in Maria's classroom. Attention, will, patience, honesty, respect, reciprocity, and trust, and confirmation are witnessed most in the small moments of Maria's teaching: the undressing routine that prefaced this thesis, the formal reading lesson that I recounted in Chapter 5, the pudding vignette that begins this chapter and the numerous incidences in between. I have chosen these particular incidences to represent the many small moments of caring that I witnessed in Maria's classroom. They represent moments in which she relates to her students and in doing so, gain knowledge about them. They represent moments to follow and confirm one's educational beliefs.

Maria capitalizes on situations that arise naturally throughout the course of the school day to teach her students about communication, about interaction, about relating to others. By doing so, she allows each student to experience the power of communication: independence. She teaches her students about relating by modelling caring and giving them experiences in caring. Her students are given a chance to relate to those around them, to their peers, to those who are feeding them and to others who might enter the room. These qualities of care, learning in small moments were witnessed repeatedly in Maria's classroom.

"We do not tell our students to care; we show them how to care by creating caring relations with them" (Noddings, 1992, p. 22). Through caring for her students, Maria serves as a 'model of caring'. Further, she involves her
students in occasions of caring for others. Maria’s care is extended to the many volunteers who work alongside her in the classroom. Gratitude for the efforts of the volunteer who fixes the battery-operated toys is demonstrated in a celebration one afternoon filled with playing with the toys, providing the volunteer with an opportunity to get to know each child, in order that “he can see the fruits of his labour” (field note, April 15). On other caring occasions, the students made thank you cards for the mother of the music teacher who came to the class to make bread, and for another teacher’s grandmother who came in to make pasta. By involving the students in these acts of gratitude and care, Maria teaches her students the importance of caring for others. Moreover, care is seen as a reciprocal phenomenon rather than charity.

On another occasion, Maria’s observes Bethany’s increasingly emphatic protest because a new volunteer misunderstood what she wanted for snack. Maria steps in:

Bethany, [the volunteer] is new. Not everybody knows. Not everybody is the same in knowing how to use your book. You need to be patient. She almost got it, Bethany! You have to give her a pat on the back! She was close (observation, Feb. 26).

Maria explains the situation to Bethany. She supports Bethany’s understanding of how to care, how to relate with another: She conveys that in relating as in caring, you have a responsibility to be patient and understand the other’s point of view.

Mark arrives to class early one morning. Smiling and looking a him, Maria approaches him.

Maria: How are you doing, Mark? Can you tell me how you feel?

Mark: Drops and shakes his head from side to side.

Maria: No? Okay. I’ll do my work. [She proceeds to go back to the pile of binders on the class table.]

Mark: Bangs his extended arms on his laptray.
Maria: Turns around: Oh. You want to talk to me. She presents the index page of his communication book to him. “dressing and undressing?”

Mark: Shakes his head.

Maria: That’s not dressing and undressing. Did you change your mind?

Mark: Vocalizes.

Maria: Okay

Mark: Looks at groups of symbols on index page.

Maria: Pink group, one, one, one. Drink. You want a drink.

Mark: Looks up at Maria, smiling (Observation, March 1).

‘Can you tell me how you feel?’ Maria expects Mark to answer the question. When he clearly doesn’t want to, she acknowledges and respects his response, and continues with her work. Maria quickly attends to Mark’s protest. In the interests of time, she could have guessed at what he wanted. But, she doesn’t. She recognizes his role in the conversation, the reciprocal nature of relating, of caring. Indeed he initiated this interaction. She provides him with an opportunity to direct the communication, to communicate in a more meaningful manner by using his book. She also acknowledges that he changed his mind and this is okay. Again, Maria confirms Mark through her actions: I know you can ask me by using your communication book and I will have a better understanding of what you say.

Maria understands the reciprocal nature of caring, of relating. It is reflected in her comments to her students: “Sometimes I forget, so you need to remind me” (Observation, Feb. 22).

Maria is standing in front of Bethany, holding Bethany’s communication book upright and open in front of her. Bethany looks from one symbol to another. They are engaged in conversation.

Maria: Bethany, you’re the boss! Tell me what you’d like to do. You have something in your mind you’d like to do.
Afterwards, Maria comments to me:

I’m going to miss Bethany. She always wants to talk and it’s great (field note, March 1).

More easily recognized, traditionally understood acts of care are inherent in Maria’s physical care for her students. There is the on-going re-adjusting and cleaning of eye glasses, brushing hair off of the face and into ponytails, cleaning saliva and food bits from laptray surfaces, changing shirts soaked with saliva, adding and removing clothing as the student’s comfort warrants. These are automatic, everyday acts of caring in Maria’s classroom and yet, they are not done in a mechanistic, custodial manner. None of Maria’s caregiving is done to a student. They are undertaken with great respect for another human being. They are moments to connect with each student. Maria converses with each student as she goes about delivering her physical care. She tells them what she is doing and why. Many times she asks for their permission. She engages them in conversation, opportunities to relate. In doing so, she demonstrate a deep regard, a respect and care for each student. The manner in which these automatic, acts of caregiving occur within the normal routine of the day, arise from Maria’s beliefs about her students, her respect and regard for her students.

Maria takes the time to listen and follow through when a student requests a drink after a lengthy bus ride to school and when another student is adamant in his request for a drink just when all of the students are lined up at the classroom door, prepared for the five minute walk and elevator ride upstairs to the school library. She notices and offers ointment when a student’s lips appear chapped and offers to wash a student’s face, all the while acknowledging that Mom and Dad were likely too busy to do it this morning.

When one of the therapists who is responsible for feeding a student at lunch didn’t show up, Maria comments, “I should go feed one of the kids. One of the feeders didn’t show up today” (observation, Feb. 26). And she does. Maria forgoes her own lunch to feed her students; to fulfill their needs, not because she is looking for recognition at having done so, but because she is genuinely concerned that her student’s needs be met. Maria cares.
One early morning interaction, again with Mark, further attests to Maria’s regard for her student’s physical well-being and at the same time a respect for what they have to say. Standing beside Mark at the classroom sink, facecloth in hand, Maria grins and comments, “Looks like Mom didn’t wash your face this morning. I’ll take the sleep out of your eyes. There, now you’re all fresh! Your lips are chapped, Mark. Want some Vaseline on your lips? Mark drops his head and shakes it from side to side. “If I do, will you? We’ll do it together!” Mark’s frown and obvious denial of the ointment is respected. Maria puts the lid on the Vaseline and wheels him to join the other students (observation, March 1).

When a recurrence of head lice is suspected and confirmed in Patty’s hair, empathy and concern for the child’s feelings is expressed. She smiles at the worried child, explaining, “Mom will wash your hair really well tonight” (field note, March 25). The child is not quarantined from the others and snack time continues as usual. These everyday incidences of caring might be easily missed in a hectic schoolday, but they very much underline the care in Maria’s teaching.

These same qualities of care are fundamental to Maria’s collaboration with the people who comprise her team. I argue that this collaboration is also caring. Further, collaboration, relating with others is fundamental to Maria’s knowledge and beliefs, indeed, and everyone’s knowledge and influences their practices.

I think one of the nice things is that we have the team and different members of the team bring different skills to the team and that’s apparent....I think we feel comfortable asking each other for advice. I think in the team setting we say, ‘What do you think we should do?’ And people put forward their ideas. And it’s definitely true ... I think that’s why we’re so fortunate to have this team. I think teachers out there, isolated, who ... when I taught at [previous school] I tried to set up teams because you’re just one mind, you’re one brain. And I find Joan and I will just get together for a few minutes and we want to focus on something and we’re popping off with all kinds of ideas. You feed off of each other. When you’re sitting by yourself at the end of a long day, you’re not really able to ... that’s not the same process. And yet it’s so satisfying collaborating with people. I think that’s one of the reasons it’s satisfying because they trigger a thought or they make you think about something or they teach you something new that you can
learn, that you can store away and try and share. I love that (Interview, Maria, June 14).

**Summary**

“Relation precedes any engagement with subject matter” (Noddings, 1992, p. 36). For Maria, relating with her students is requisite to her teaching. Through relating, through caring, she develops a deeper understanding of her students’ capabilities and needs. She brings this understanding to bear in her teaching practices. In other words, Maria’s caring is wholly connected to her pedagogy in the classroom; knowing what and how to teach each student. Caring also has a great deal to do with Maria’s educational beliefs. Through Maria’s work, her care and connecting with her students, she builds a relationship with each of them and through that relationship she affirms their humanness, their worthiness, their capability, and their potential.

Eisner (1998) speaks of the ‘signature’ that teachers give their work. When one finds in schools a climate that makes it possible to take pride in one’s craft, when one has the permission to pursue what one’s educational imagination adumbrates, when one receives from students the kind of glow that says you have touched my life, satisfactions flow that exceed whatever it is that sabbaticals and vacations can provide. The aesthetic in teaching is the experience secured from being able to put your own signature on your own work - to look at it and say it was good (Eisner, 1983, p. 12).

Maria’s signature in her teaching is one of committed caring, of believing strongly in her students, who they are and who they might become. There is a volunteer who has worked with Maria for the past three years. She remarked,

It’s all part of Maria’s philosophy and all part of how Maria views education and because that’s so important to her, she transfers that energy and she’s a constant catalyst in terms of bringing about new ideas and bringing about new programs and just trying new things. And she’s always out there communicating with the other teachers, she’s always out there checking to see what’s working and what’s not. She’s also very aware that she’s one of the older teachers so she also sees herself in a mentor role and in terms of that she also knows that she picks up really great stuff from the younger teachers...
It’s how she operates. It’s how she flows. It’s how she gives and takes and focuses on the kids. She wants to know who’s doing what, you know. She loves the fact that puppet shows are going on. She always supports new initiatives. She doesn’t have to hang onto it. She’s happy to see it’s working and then give it away. She doesn’t have that need to control and have that power base. You know how some people get and that’s not doing anybody any favours, so she’s constantly. She’s very receptive to change and to initiating change, and to organize it. She’s a fighter. Which is terrific. The kids benefit once again, you know. We need more Maria’s out there. Particularly people who are articulate because she’s very good about understanding the issues and putting them forth (interview, volunteer, June 7).

A catalyst, a force, a dynamo, an engine of progress in our school, pushing, passionate devotion, Olympic torch kind of feeling, strong, convincing, lives her work, great advocate, caring. These are the words that people use to describe Maria and her teaching. These words are the signature Maria puts on her work. Those words reflect Maria’s caring, her relating, her beliefs and her knowledge.

Your reason and your passion

are the rudder and the sails of your seafaring soul.

(Gibran, 1923)

Maria teaches with reason and passion. They are part of who she is. They are tied to her identity and integrity (Palmer, 1998). She teaches from her identity and integrity. Reason and passion are both integral to the effectiveness of Maria’s teaching. Together, the cognitive and the affective dimensions of Maria’s teaching move Maria, her students, the classroom team and the school forward.
Chapter 9: Synthesis of Maria’s Teaching

Outstanding teachers engage their students, interact with them, draw energy and direction from them, and find ways to give them a reason to follow along. This is the difficult and serious work of teaching (Ayers, 1993, p. 129).

In this study I explored the organic character of one teacher’s practice. My study was motivated by my experiences as a consultant providing support to teachers who are responsible for teaching students who have multiple disabilities and use AAC. I was interested in gaining a deeper understanding of the nature of teacher knowledge and beliefs and their role in informing teaching practices. For the subject of my study, I chose a particular teacher who teaches particular students in a particular classroom and school. I chose, Maria, a teacher who is considered by her colleagues and the parents of her students to be exemplary in teaching students who use AAC. I wondered: What does Maria know and believe that leads her to teach her students as she does? What is it that makes her an effective teacher with these students and how might this knowledge be useful to other teachers and consultants?

I spent 55 days over a period of 5 months with Maria and her students, observing and discussing her teaching practices, exploring her reasons for her practices, participating in the classroom routines and events; and speaking with her colleagues and the parents of her students. In essence, I was determining the essential features which underlie her teaching practices. I consulted the research literature to guide my analysis and to support my interpretations of Maria’s teaching practices.

Thus far in this thesis, I have presented my analysis and interpretations of the essential features underlying Maria’s teaching practice. I have used teaching episodes, classroom observations, Maria’s explanations, and testimonials from her colleagues and the parents of her students to convey the nature and roles of Maria’s knowledge, beliefs, and teaching practices. I have framed my analysis and interpretations in consideration of the research literature. Moreover, I have elucidated the nature and role of a dimension which I hadn’t anticipated at the
outset of this study, the affective dimension, what I call caring as witnessed in Maria’s teaching practice. I have argued that Maria’s caring is central to the development of her knowledge, beliefs, and teaching practices.

In this final chapter of my thesis, I synthesize Maria’s teaching and make the case for its exemplary nature. I draw on the literature on exemplary and effective teaching and the development of expertise to further substantiate my claim (Berliner, 1994; Englert, Tarrant & Mariage, 1992; Meichenbaum & Biemiller, 1998; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993; Shulman, 1986a, 1986b, 1987; Sternberg & Horvath, 1995). I affirm the dynamic character of teacher knowledge, beliefs and practices and focus on the role of knowledge of student characteristics and needs in developing pedagogical content knowledge: the wisdom of practice. I highlight the central role of caring in developing the cognitive dimension of teaching and argue that the qualities which comprise caring are fundamental to developing and shaping knowledge, beliefs, and teaching practices. Caring as relating drives teachers to develop wisdom of practice. I propose several implications which arise from this study and contribute to our understanding of teaching along with considerations for students, teaching, and consulting practices. Finally, I raise questions and issues which I believe are worth further study. I begin with my synthesis of Maria’s teaching practices.

Dynamic Nature of Teacher Knowledge, Beliefs and Practices

Teacher knowledge and beliefs are often regarded as discrete entities in the study of teaching practices. But, I witnessed Maria defining and making sense of her teaching, and determining what counts as being important for her students on the basis of both her knowledge and educational beliefs. Indeed it was challenging to recognize, examine, interpret and convey my understanding of her knowledge, beliefs and teaching practices as distinct entities separate from each other. Moreover, her teaching practices inform and determine the very nature of her knowledge and beliefs. Over the next several pages I synthesize the nature of Maria’s knowledge, beliefs, and teaching practices. In my synthesis I
make the case for the exemplary nature of Maria’s teaching. I make reference to teaching examples which I have provided elsewhere in this thesis, highlighting those which are particularly illustrative of my points. I begin by returning to my broader thesis question: What does Maria know and believe that leads her to teach her students as she does?

Knowledge

Maria has both a diverse range and extensive breadth of knowledge. The teaching practices which I have detailed in the preceding chapters reflect each of the categories of knowledge for effective teaching proposed by Shulman (1987). Maria has knowledge of the general curriculum and subjects. She has knowledge of language, communication, literacy, and numeracy concepts and their development. She has knowledge of the educational context in terms of the classroom, home, school, and broader community in which her teaching and her students’ learning take place. Further, Maria’s categories of knowledge are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they interact and inform each other through her teaching practices. They are interdependent in defining her knowledge and teaching practice. In turn, her teaching experiences shape her knowledge. Thus, Maria’s knowledge influences, and is shaped by, her teaching experiences.

Much of the literature on developing expertise focusses on the cognitive processes of teachers in developing automaticity in their practice; that is, routines and procedures which allow them to attend to the broader goals of the curriculum and lessons. This is true for Maria, as well. Maria has knowledge of general pedagogical principles including classroom and time management and lesson presentation (Englert, Tarrant, & Mariage, 1992). I witnessed numerous procedures, many of which were written, which Maria had developed and which lead to the smooth operation of her classroom program. These included procedures for documenting individual student progress in areas such as reading, eating and drinking, and accessing the computer and a switch; posting the team meeting agendas; noting vocabulary which the students needed in their communication books on post it notes on the cupboard; and wall charts for each
student describing and demonstrating through photographs critical information
such as proper seating, methods of feeding, and the student's way of
communicating. Moreover, the very organization of Maria's classroom
supported the smooth operation of her program. The materials were predictably
and readily accessible. Maria had established a routine in her classroom program
which was well-understood and predictable for her classroom team and the
students. The repetitive routine operations inherent in running a classroom have
become automatic for Maria. The well-established routines supported her focus
on the broader goals of the curriculum and lessons (Englert, et al, 1992). But more
than that, I would argue that they also allowed her to focus on gaining
knowledge from her instructional interactions with her students.

The one category of knowledge that is particularly prominent in and
critical to the effectiveness of Maria's teaching: knowledge of her students'
characteristics and needs. As Berliner (1994) argues, "Experts know the cognitive
abilities of the students they teach regularly, giving them insight for determining
the level at which to teach.... They know their regular students personally" (p.
168). Further, "Expert teachers seem to be unusually sensitive to the affective
concerns of the students they teach and to individual differences among their
students" (p. 180).

Maria knows her students. She knows her students on at least two levels.
She knows them as members of a particular population of learners who have
particular characteristics and needs. Her experiences in the field of AAC lead her
to have in-depth knowledge of AAC and the attendant needs of students who
use AAC. She understands the myriad issues facing individuals who have
physical disabilities and use AAC, issues concerning learning to communicate,
learning to become literate, and learning to achieve independence. However,
more than this general knowledge related to her students, Maria knows her
students as children, as unique individuals with talents, idiosyncrasies,
preferences, personalities, and personal histories.

Look at the child. Don't underestimate the child's cognitive
abilities. Start with the child (interview, June 14).
Maria involves herself at the level of the child and his or her family in order to get to know them and to fulfill her goals for her students: "I don't just have a student in my classroom, I have a family" (interview, March 15, 2000). This is the third occurrence of this statement in this thesis. I repeat it here because in addition to revealing Maria's beliefs, it reveals her understanding of what it means to know a student. Maria's knowledge of her students as individuals informs her teaching practices in very significant ways.

I guess I'm following their lead when it comes to that because I feel, well they're showing me that they know their letter sounds, so it's time for some of them to move on. So, I'm kind of pushing the envelope there (interview, April 26).

The hardest part for these kids is that their vocabularies are so inadequate to capture the thoughts that are going through their heads (interview, June 7).

Imagine yourself in the position of going to meet your baseball idol and having no way to communicate! Can you imagine how devastating that is? (interview, May 3).

Barth (2001) reminds us that "learning from experience is not inevitable. It must be intentional" (p. 65). Maria learns from her teaching experiences. Reflection plays a significant role in supporting the development of her knowledge (Schon, 1986, 1987; Copeland, ). So, too does collaboration. Close and regular collaboration with her classroom team and school colleagues provide opportunities for Maria to reflect on her teaching practices relative to her students and support the development of her knowledge. Maria thinks deeply and critically about her students, their learning, and her teaching. Moreover, she thinks critically after and while she is teaching. In fact, in Chapter 7, I used the word thoughtful to describe Maria's teaching practice. Her thoughtful practice is reflected in the number and variety of pedagogical decisions she makes while she is teaching and the manner in which she interacts with her students. The show and tell activity I recounted in Chapter 6 attests to her knowledge of her students informing her teaching and the thoughtful nature of her teaching practice. Because Maria knew that Bethany tends to talk about the same topic
(i.e., buying videos), Maria encouraged Bethany to talk about something else:
"Oh. You have some little clips in your hair. They’re nice. Wow! Those are nice. Those would be a good thing for show and tell” (April 26).

Indeed, I assert Maria needs to know her students. She told me that her curriculum is fluid and dependent upon the needs of her students (interview, March 31). Her curriculum and the activities in which she engages her students support her students’ multiple needs, including their affective needs. As the following comments illustrate, Maria organizes her teaching to learn more about her students:

We do a lot of kind of fun things in September because we’re just starting out and I need some activities that I know the kids will really like that will enable me to get to know them (interview, May 3).

I’ll probably go back to “All About Me” because it helps me familiarize myself with the new children (interview, May 3).

I started to see some pay off with some families with homework. And I started to see that it was a way to communicate once or twice, once a week, or once every two weeks about a specific child with a parent ... quite in-depth. Because if I were making out a lesson for their individual child then the parent was giving me feedback on how things went. I was learning even more (interview, June 14).

I’ll be looking at children and how they’re progressing through those jobs. Are they able to work their way up to having success with the calendar? Usually with 4 year olds it’s kind of lost on them. But are they starting to develop a sense of how to do it? If they’re a beginner, are they motivated by making those choices over there for the weather bear? Is that meaningful? Is someone able to come and know who’s absent from the class? I’m constantly assessing what’s going on in terms of those jobs when we do them. When I don’t know the kids well it provides me with an opportunity for assessment and it really does (interview, June 14).

If we’ve got enough helpers, it’s less teacher-directed. They have control, they get to make a decision about which of those jobs they want....I don’t know if you noticed, but Bethany just...she had to have that [choosing music tape]. So that tells me about her personality... that she’s gonna persist (interview, June 14).
It's like what we did today, the art project, learning to direct people. Look how much satisfaction Bethany took from that activity because she was in charge, she got to say what the picture was like, she got to say what the colours would be. She was in charge. I was doing what she wanted (interview, May 31).

I give more and more homework because I see more and more potential sometimes (interview, June 14).

In-depth knowledge of her students is requisite to the development of Maria's pedagogical content knowledge, her "ways of representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others" (Shulman, 1986, p. 9). Maria has knowledge of language, communication, literacy, and numeracy concepts and skills, and of how they relate to her particular students. She uses her in-depth knowledge of each of her student's characteristics and needs in concert with her content, curriculum, and general teaching knowledge to guide her teaching practices. She draws on all of this knowledge in modifying her curriculum, teaching strategies and materials, and indeed, the minute to minute teaching interactions with her students.

Much of Maria's knowledge appears to be strategic in nature. Her accumulated teaching experiences afford her the ability to consider propositional forms of knowledge (i.e., information presented in texts, conferences, etc.) in light of her rich case-based knowledge of her current and previous students and teaching situations to develop strategic knowledge, which she brings to bear in her teaching practice. Maria has developed what Shulman (1987) refers to as the "wisdom of practice", the complex combination of knowledges of content, pedagogy, and students which allow her to teach as she does.

While Maria has developed automaticity in her classroom routines, she is flexible and opportunistic in her teaching interactions (Berliner, 1994; Meichenbaum & Biemiller, 1998)). She uses her various knowledges to adapt her instruction at a broad level in terms of determining the curriculum, goals, strategies and materials for instructing her students. Moreover, she adapts her instruction at the level of teacher-student interaction. In the reading lesson, in particular, she adjusted her prompts, explanations, and questions in order to
determine and extend each student’s thinking. Maria is an opportunistic teacher (Meichenbaum & Biemiller, 1998).

The expert teachers’ behaviours may look routine and scripted, as they model thinking, engage students in goal setting and deliberate practice, calibrate task difficulty, teach strategies directly, fade supports, and employ peer assistance. However, this appearance belies a mindfully vigilant educator in action (p. 262).

Maria is a mindfully vigilant educator. She is wholly attentive, sensitive and responsive to her students. She has a qualitatively rich understanding of her students, of pedagogy, and the curriculum. She understands the multidimensional features of each and how they interact to inform her teaching and define her students’ learning experiences. She is aware of and considers the circumstances of the task, the environment, and her students’ physical, affective, and cognitive needs and adjusts her instruction accordingly. Research indicates that experts draw on their considerable knowledge in solving problems (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1993; Berliner, 1994; Sternberg and Horvath, 1995). Maria is deliberate and analytic in solving problems. She reflects in her teaching. She brings rich case and episodic knowledge to bear in her teaching. Berliner (1994) states,

...the information that experts extract from the phenomenon with which they are confronted stems, in part, from the concepts and principles that they use to impose meaning on phenomena in their domain of expertise...Among the salient and useful pedagogical concepts with which teachers make meaning from phenomena that they encounter in their work are ‘attention’, ‘work’, ‘responsibility’, ‘affect’, and ‘individual differences’ (p. 180).

I observed these pedagogical concepts in Maria’s teaching practices and have shared them throughout this thesis. I have illustrated Maria’s deliberate attention to her students, motivated by the instructional significance of her students’ characteristics and needs. She is cognizant of her students’ cognitive, physical, sensory, and affective characteristics and needs. She acknowledges and accepts individual differences among her students and responds in pedagogically appropriate ways. Her teaching practices demonstrate her responsibility for each
student's affective well-being and achievements. Maria regards her students as active participants in the learning enterprise. They, too, are responsible for their own learning. Maria organizes her teaching to support her students' active involvement in learning.

Pogrow (1998) defines an exemplary program as "one that can increase learning to a surprising extent with a great deal of consistency" (p. 22). He goes on to explain what he means by surprising: "exceed some typical standard.... preferably by a substantial amount" (p. 22). While Pogrow's definition of exemplary refers to programs, and not specifically to teaching behaviours, I believe his definition is useful in understanding the exemplary nature of Maria's teaching.

Considering the significant inherent barriers which are presented to their learning, Maria has increased her students' learning to a surprising extent. She has created a powerful learning environment for her students in which she consistently endeavours to teach her students to realize their potential. It's a daily effort for Maria. She consistently challenges her students to do their utmost best towards achieving their potential. And her students have achieved. They have made remarkable gains in communicating, learning literacy and numeracy skills, and becoming independent. In Chapter 3, I described the students' achievements which were reflected in the comments of their parents and Maria. I repeat some of those comments here to remind you, the reader, of the achievements of Maria's students which further substantiate my interpretations of her pedagogical content-knowledge knowledge and the exemplary nature of her teaching:

He's independent. . . . He won't just sit there....He wants to choose what we're having for dinner and he likes to help [with] cooking.... He wants to make decisions now which before he wouldn't want to do it.

The benefits have been that for everybody, especially for everyone else, they can now communicate with him, and they know what his likes and dislikes are (interview, Ricky's mother, June 7).
Bethany [is] learning a lot and she’s growing … We can see [her progress] right away because if I ask her something and she answered something and we have that dialogue then I know we’re doing the right thing … Before I was the only one who could communicate with her. Now anyone can communicate with her.

So it’s things that I never imagined she could get at that point. She’s growing more. Even more responsible for things around her. She wants to know (interview, Bethany’s mother, June 16).

I feel a sense of satisfaction with Bethany. She’s made significant gains in two years. She’s made gains in communicating, in her emotional, in the way she handles herself emotionally and academically. I think she’s made great progress. … She’s ready to go out. (interview, Maria, May 31).

She can tell us more and that’s the bottom line. She can tell us more. She’s calmer. She’s more attentive… She has potential to realize her potential (interview, Sarah’s mother, June 17).

I feel pretty good about Sarah overall in terms of her academics because I know, I know for a fact that she knows the things she knows… She’s hard to communicate with. But, she understands what she’s supposed to do and when she’s calm she knows what to do (interview, Maria, May 31).

Well, I guess the little things….Anticipating, understanding things better. Seems more a part of the family….The changes are definitely due to school (interview, Dana’s mother, June 8).

She’s learned simple choice-making, she’s learned to be a member of the class and volunteer, she’s got a good attention span (interview, Maria, May 31).

He didn’t come in with a book and he’s leaving with a book....

Without this book I don’t know what would happen. I don’t know how he would communicate (interview, Mark’s mother, June 4).

I can tell Mark’s made a lot of gains this year because he can be so effective with such a wide range of people. He gets his messages across to a wide range of people (interview, Maria, April 26).

I feel terrific about [Patty]… She’ll probably have skills that’ll be superior to some of the kids that [her new teacher] is gonna get next year in his class (interview, Maria, May 31).
Maria’s students have learned. Moreover, they have learned skills upon which their continued achievements hinge. Many of Maria’s goals for her students have been realized.

Maria’s beliefs about her students, her role, and teaching and learning and contribute to her knowledge and developing wisdom of practice. She engages her students. She interacts with her students. She finds ‘ways to give them a reason to follow along’. In turn, her students’ learning informs and motivates her teaching.

**Beliefs**

Maria’s beliefs about her students, her role as their teacher, and the nature of knowledge underlie the instruction and learning that take place in her classroom. Moreover, Maria’s beliefs play a crucial role in shaping the nature of her knowledge and developing her wisdom of practice. Maria’s stance towards her students is one of optimism which is evidenced in her expectations and the goals she establishes for her students. She has multiple goals for her students. She believes in her students’ potential to ultimately achieve independence. Further, she regards competence in communication and literacy as keys to their developing independence. The activities I have shared in this thesis attest to Maria’s beliefs about her students. Her beliefs about her students arise in part from her knowledge of AAC relative to their communication, literacy, and independence.

Maria’s beliefs about learning also influence her teaching practices and the nature of her knowledge. She believes that her students will learn and ultimately achieve independence by actively engaging with learning materials and activities in the construction of their knowledge. Maria maximizes instruction time for her students. She provides direct instruction through meaningful activities. Further, she delivers instruction based on her students’ individual learning needs. Maria wholly engages her students in activities and interactions. As the teaching interactions I have shared throughout this thesis illustrate, dialogue is prominent in Maria’s classroom. Maria’s students are involved in learning procedural forms
of knowledge: learning to communicate by communicating; learning to read and write by reading and writing, learning to become independent by engaging in activities which promote independence. Maria believes her students will learn to communicate and to read and write by engaging in authentic communication interactions and learning activities.

In turn, Maria’s beliefs about learning influence the nature of her knowledge. She uses her students’ responses, their communications to gain knowledge of their understanding and skill. She uses this knowledge to calibrate her instruction. Thus, this knowledge informs Maria’s teaching. She provides her students with scaffolds to support their developing understanding and skill: prompts, cues, explanations and questions. Her students’ responses, their achievements or lack thereof, confirm or disconfirm Maria’s multi-faceted beliefs. The following reflection on her literacy instruction illustrates how her beliefs change based on her teaching practices:

And one thing that I’ve changed is that ... I always thought I didn’t want them to read the story ahead because they’d get bored. Like you’re coming from a different world! Where the other kids know they read it, then they read it and then put out a sign? Whereas, now I’m finding that the more they read it, the better. Let’s read it all together first, so that you are so familiar with that story that by the time you actually look at those picture symbols you’re already predicting! I don’t know why I wasn’t thinking that way because it fits in with the same, it fits in with the exact normal. But I wasn’t thinking that way. I was trying to lead them through the story to structure them more. Now I want them to, you know, to play with it a bit. I used to do the VOCAs at the end. Now, I do it at the beginning. So it kinda changed (interview, April 19).

Maria gains considerable insight into each of her student’s characteristics and needs on the basis of her interactions with them. In other words, her students’ communications, behaviours and responses shape her knowledge and beliefs which serve to inform her teaching practices. Maria adapts her teaching on the basis of her growing knowledge of her students.

Maria’s beliefs about her role as a teacher influence her teaching practices. Maria assumes responsibility for her students’ achievements. Moreover, she
regards her students’ learning as a measure of her teaching. As previously quoted, Maria explains,

I've always felt really lucky to work with these kids because you're sort of unlocking the secret in a way. This personality, this person is able to develop and bloom and come out and if I can have a small role in that, well I just feel very privileged (interview, June 14).

Maria holds interventionist beliefs about her students which are reflected in her teaching practices (Jordan, Lindsay & Stanovich, 1997). She is committed to ‘unlocking the secret’, committed to ensuring her students move towards realizing their goals. Her accumulated year’s of experience teaching students who use AAC provide her with knowledge and skills and a strong sense of self-efficacy in meeting her students’ needs, either directly, or by seeking and advocating for supports and resources which will move her students towards the fulfillment of their goals.

The construct of teacher efficacy has a longstanding history of predicting teacher effectiveness (Gibson & Dembo, 1984, Tschannen-Moran, et al, 1998). Gibson & Dembo define personal efficacy as “the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcomes” (p. 570). In order to ground Maria’s profile within the larger context of teacher efficacy, she completed The Teacher Efficacy Questionnaire (Gibson & Dembo, 1984). This questionnaire provided information concerning her belief about her ability to effect learning in her students. Higher scores on this instrument indicate higher perceived self efficacy. This measure has been used in large scale studies examining teacher characteristics which lead to successful inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classrooms (Jordan, Kircaali-Iftar, & Diamond, 1993; Stanovich, 1994; Stanovich & Jordan, 1998).

Given my observations of Maria’s teaching and my discussions with her of her practice, I expected Maria to score at the high end of the scale on this measure. To my surprise, however, she didn’t. This was an interesting result which raises an important question. Could it be that Maria is constantly questioning her efficacy with her students as a result of the high standards she
holds for herself and her teaching? Perhaps the Teacher Efficacy Questionnaire does not capture this level of efficacy? Indeed, I experienced Maria questioning the effectiveness of her teaching numerous times:

I know about myself that I’m very sort of serious minded and I have a great commitment to seeing these kids make academic progress but I also, on the other side of the coin, sometimes feel guilty – do they get enough play time? It is kindergarten . . . . And so, even though some of them are six years old, given that they’ve had limited experience it’s still meant to be a kindergarten program. So, even though I’d like to have the balanced literacy diet all day in some ways. In some ways, I really wouldn’t. I think they’d fatigue (interview, May 3).

The high standards and responsibility which Maria sets for her teaching are also reflected in several of her comments related to some of her students who have not achieved as much as she had hoped:

Three years is not enough time with someone as complex as Ricky. We’re just beginning to figure him out (interview, May 31).

I don’t have a good feeling about Dana in terms of the progress we haven’t made with the family. I don’t feel we’ve made progress with this family much ....I don’t feel the child is progressing. I don’t feel the family is progressing that much (interview, May 31).

With regard to Sarah’s physical thrashing, Maria commented,

We’ve never been able to get to the bottom of finding something that will enable her to inhibit that (interview, May 31).

Maria challenges herself in meeting her students needs. For a student as challenging as Sarah, Maria has endeavoured to understand her, to see the potential that Sarah’s parents see in their child and eventually come to believe in Sarah’s capabilities as they do.

Maria spoke of ‘pushing the envelope’ with her students. However, her reflective comments on her teaching reveal to me that she pushes the envelope with her own teaching, as well.

I still feel really frustrated by the situation out there for AAC users in terms of what happens with their curriculum and how at the mercy they are. It really bothers me. I figure that I can only ... I
mean I, as an individual teacher, can have an influence right now (interview, June 7).

And I wished that we had a way so that I could visit each one of my students wherever they go and be available to answer questions with the new teacher (interview, March 31).

And the area I would want to liaise, if I have an opportunity to liaise, is to make sure that they are comfortable using her [Bethany’s] book; the same with Mark. Are they comfortable using their books? And I’d like to give them background on their emotional, the way they handle themselves emotionally. Make sure they understand about the strip [a visual reminder of the steps to follow when she becomes upset that is affixed to Bethany’s laptray] for Bethany. Make sure they understand about negotiating with Mark... because that’ll ease the way for the children (interview, May 31).

I know that the kids have the potential. It’s just ... Will it happen for them? ... Will it happen for them even down the road? Will all those demands ... It’s such an important thing, but I don’t know that the rest of the world sees it that way.... So that’s why I think I’m so driven to kind of give them as much foundation as I can (interview, June 14).

Moreover, I believe Maria’s advocating on behalf of her students attests to her self-efficacy and the high standard of responsibility she establishes for herself in her teaching. In Chapter 7, I described many of Maria’s acts of advocacy on behalf of her students. Maria’s colleagues recognized her strong advocacy and sense of responsibility as well,

It’s just because she won’t take no for an answer. She just keeps beating the bush! She wants to find out (interview, SLP, September 1).

...and she’s going to do whatever it takes for these kids to learn (interview, volunteer, June 7).

Indeed, Maria admitted,

If I feel that I no longer have anything new to learn, I think it’s time for me to go.... ‘Cause I know that there’s a lot I don’t know (interview, March 31).
This study also revealed a dimension of Maria's teaching practice which I had not expected. In the next section, I argue for the significant role played by caring in defining Maria's teaching practice.

Caring

What leads Maria to become "a mindfully vigilant educator" (Meichenbaum & Biemiller, 1998)? In Chapter 8, I described a dimension of Maria's teaching which I hadn't anticipated at the outset of this study. During my experiences in Maria's classroom, I discovered an affective dimension of her teaching. Saying that I discovered an affective dimension seems odd. Of course, there is an affective dimension to teaching. But because I didn't set out to study this dimension, it surprised me and what I discovered was the particular nature of this dimension and just how critical it is in defining Maria's teaching. There was a certain quality to Maria's teaching, a way of being which I believe defined and influenced her teaching practice in important ways.

I drew from the research literature to support me in defining and analyzing the significance of what I observed in Maria's teaching practices (Ayers, 1993; Elbaz, 1992; Fox, 1993, 1995; Fried, 1995; Geering, 1983; Goldstein, 1997, 1999; Jackson, 1993; Meier, 1986; Mayeroff, 1971; Noddings, 1984, 1986, 1987, 1992; Noddings & Shore, 1984, Peck, 1978). I called this affective dimension of Maria's teaching, caring. I have argued that caring and relating are synonymous, that is, caring is relating. Maria's caring is characterized by the qualities of attention and will, patience, reciprocity, trust, respect, confirmation, and honesty. Caring and its attendant qualities are inherent in Maria's teaching and are witnessed in the relationships she established with her students and with many others whom she considers to be partners in the teaching enterprise. Caring was inherent in the vignettes I have shared throughout this thesis: the undressing routine, the reading lesson, show and tell, and Mark wanting pudding. Furthermore, caring was inherent in the smaller teaching episodes, many of which were described in Chapter 8. They included Maria's acts of physical care: providing drinks to a thirsty child, offering ointment for chapped
lips, brushing hair away from eyes; washing faces and laptrays. Moreover, they included acts of attending to, of noticing details, of connecting during these moments of caring. In each of these caring incidents Maria willfully and actively attended. She connected. She related. And in so doing, she modeled caring for her students. But more than that, in caring, Maria gained insight into her students and her teaching practice.

I have come to understand that caring is the thread that ties Maria’s teaching together. Caring is the engine that drives her teaching. Regardless of what metaphor one chooses to use, caring is a mediating factor in Maria’s teaching. The qualities of relating, of caring influence and define Maria’s teaching. The affective dimension of Maria’s teaching interacts with the cognitive dimension to inform Maria’s teaching is very significant ways. Caring is wholly connected to Maria’s knowledge and beliefs. Caring is the foundation upon which Maria’s pedagogical content knowledge is developed. Caring supports, indeed drives the development of Maria’s wisdom of practice. Maria’s caring, her relating, provides her with the means to know her students and the means to be an effective teacher.

I argued in Chapter 5 and at the beginning of this synthesis, that knowing her students as unique individuals is critical to the effectiveness of Maria’s teaching. Caring and its attendant qualities are responsible for Maria’s knowing her students. Maria attends to her students. She establishes a connection, a relation with each student. She supports the student’s role in the interaction, the relation. One could say she sets up a framework of unwritten, unspoken “rules” which convey to her students: I will listen to you because I care about and respect you. What you say counts to me. Knowing you is important to my being able to teach you. Your communication is key to helping me teach you. These are the inherent understandings in Maria’s classroom. These understandings are key to her teaching. These underlying rules of caring and the consistency with which they are followed in Maria’s classroom establish trust and respect in relationships. Maria takes the time to attend to her students, to listen to what they have to say. Caring creates a learning environment in which the students
know consistently that they are important and valuable and that they, too, are responsible for their achievement, that they have a role in their learning. The reciprocity underlying Maria’s caring is key to her teaching. Her consistent attention and patience encourages and motivates her students to attend and communicate and learn. Her students’ responses confirm or disconfirm Maria’s beliefs.

I have argued that relating with her students is critical to Maria’s teaching practice. So, too is relating with her students’ family and her colleagues. Indeed, the same qualities of caring, of relating are characteristic of Maria’s caring in collaboration: attention, will, respect, trust, honesty. Collaborative relationships support Maria’s reflection. Collaborative relationships develop Maria’s holistic understanding of each of her student’s multi-dimensional characteristics and needs. By caring, relating with her classroom and school colleagues, Maria gains broad and deep knowledge and understanding of her students’ unique characteristics and needs and her teaching practices. She uses this knowledge to modulate her teaching practices and gain even more insight into her student’s characteristics and needs.

Noddings (1984) states,

The joy that accompanies fulfillment of our caring enhances our commitment to the ethical ideal that sustains us as one-caring (p. 6).

Maria is rewarded by her student’s achievements. And here is where we come full circle in understanding her teaching practice. By attending to her students, Maria develops an understanding of them and their needs. “He’s being assertive! He’s asserting himself!” Those words were repeated many times during my time with Maria. The words represent both Maria’s reward and motivation for relating, for caring. She, too, grows from knowing her students and using this knowledge to meet their needs. Her student’s growth confirms her beliefs:

I remember a [previous student’s] mother saying when he went, she took him over to [his new school], how delighted he was when he went in the class and they were doing the calendar because he had had that experience. And that was very
reinforcing for me as a teacher that he had this experience and now he could relate to something in his new environment and understand what was going on (interview, June 14).

I’m going to miss Bethany. She always wants to talk and it’s great (field note, March 1).

Mark is reinforcing. Mark represents the principles of communication that I have always held dear and he is just showing me that that’s right. You know. You start small. You start with meaningful vocabulary. You gradually build. You know. You build the power in and teach the child the power. You work to the best of your ability with the parents, and that’s been a real challenge and we’ve made it through the years, but now he’s taken over. She’s [Mark’s Mom] having to respond to his communication now. He forces it. If he thinks you’re not going to listen, he grabs you and he makes you. He tells you right in front of her (interview, April 19).

Maria and Mark both win. Maria’s care ‘builds the power in’: the knowledge and skill; the strategies and approaches; the opportunities she provides, all ‘build the power in’, the power of independence. Maria’s teaching practices and her educational beliefs are confirmed by Mark’s growth: ‘He represents the principles of communication that I have always held dear and he is just showing me that that’s right.’ Mark and Bethany, too, can now advocate for themselves through their communication. They have reached a level of competence in communicating, which allows them to be independent and advocate for themselves.

Meichenbaum and Biemiller (1998) assert,

Mastery can be fostered if the circumstances are right. .... Self-direction should be viewed not as an attribute of the child, but as a reflection of the ‘fit’ between the demands of the situation and the ability and interests of the student. Active self-directive learning and ‘expertise’ are not accessible only to a few high achievers or only to very competent children. Most students have the potential to become more expert (p. 58).

We have seen this in Maria’s teaching. Through her teaching, Maria creates the right circumstances in her classroom, circumstances which enable her students to become competent in learning language, communicating, becoming
literate, and ultimately self-directed and independent. Maria incorporates the affective, caring, to enhance the cognitive in her teaching (Fox, 1993).

I am not saying that Maria is exemplary in all aspects of her teaching practice. Indeed, she admits that she can’t have all the knowledge:

The children are very complex. I can’t possibly have all the knowledge that I would need to have. I come at it from my own narrow perspective. On the team, everybody comes at it from their own narrow perspective. But by sharing, we learn from each other. We share the responsibilities (interview, June 21).

What I am saying is that the affective dimension, the caring which is characteristic of her teaching, drives her to seek knowledge, to learn from her teaching, to develop pedagogical content knowledge, the wisdom of practice.

In summary, there appear to be two critical dimensions of teaching practice: cognitive and affective. These two dimensions are integrally interrelated in teaching. Moreover, the affective dimension as defined as caring, supports the development of the cognitive dimension. In the next section, I propose several considerations for practices, which arise from both the cognitive and affective dimensions of exemplary teaching.

**Implications**

Accounts bring us closer to the ‘lived reality’ of teachers’ work, making us aware of the great challenge in holding the ‘teaching act’ together. This account can, if we are willing to let this happen, help us to reorient our own perspective on teachers, their work, and its place in the curriculum process (Elbaz, 1983, p. 67).

What might we learn about a teacher who is regarded to be exemplary in teaching students who use AAC? How might this knowledge be useful to other teachers and consultants? My inquiry and the resulting account in this thesis have served to “reorient [my] perspective on teachers [and] their work” (p. 67). This inquiry has provided an explanation of critical factors in teaching, which we might otherwise miss. As I reflect on my experiences during this study, my experiences in Maria’s classroom, my analysis and interpretations of her teaching practice, and the case I make in this thesis, I have come to realize that while
Maria, her team, and her students are particular in nature, there is also a great deal that is not so particular. That is, I believe I have learned much that is universal to all teaching irrespective of the particular teachers, students, and teaching context. As Van Manen (1997) contends,

The paradoxical thing about anecdotal narrative is that it tells something particular while really addressing the general or the universal. And vice versa, at the hand of anecdote fundamental insights or truths are tested for their value in the contingent world of everyday experience (Van Manen, 1997, p. 120).

It is most interesting to note the while Maria's students have disabilities and associated needs in multiple areas: physical, health, sensory, cognitive, and emotional, her teaching reveals a great deal about these students, which is not particularly unique to them. Indeed, their disabilities do not overshadow the fact that they are children, first. Moreover, their disabilities do not preclude having high expectations for their achievement, providing an authentic and meaningful context for learning, teaching concepts and skills directly within meaningful context, engaging them in the very skills which are being taught: communication, reading, and writing and all-the-while providing opportunities to experience independence. For these students, we understand that competence in language and communication and literacy are significant links to their ultimate independence. Through Maria's teaching we gain an understanding of the inherent capabilities of her students. Maria's teaching reveals her students' competencies. This, too, is what is exemplary about Maria's teaching.

It is truly ironic that what is special and unique about Maria's teaching practice reveals what is not so special and unique about her students. Maria expects her students to achieve because she believes they can: "I know that the kids have the potential (interview, June 14). She believes that she is responsible for her students' learning: "My role is of their teacher" (interview, June 14). And what that means for Maria is that she must know her students. She comes to know her students by interacting with them, by communicating with them, by connecting with them. Maria organizes her teaching according to these key beliefs. They are the foundation upon which her practices rest. These beliefs are
revealed in the goals she establishes for her students and the activities, strategies, and tools she incorporates in her teaching to support her students' achievement.

While I have studied a particular teacher in a particular context with particular students, I believe that much of what I have learned about Maria's practice can be generalized to all teaching. I propose several considerations, which arise from this inquiry. These considerations are offered within two broad areas: (a) Implications for contributing to our knowledge of teaching and (b) Considerations for teaching and consulting practices.

**Implications for Contributing to our Knowledge of Teaching**

I believe this study contributes to what we know about the nature of teaching. My detailed analyses and interpretations of Maria's teaching practices further substantiate the research literature which is shedding light on the *dynamic* relationship among teacher knowledge, beliefs, and practices (Jordan, Lindsay & Stanovich, 1997; Jordan & Stanovich, 1996, 1998; Pajares, 1992; Stanovich, 1994; Stanovich & Jordan, 1998). Maria's teaching reveals that teacher knowledge and beliefs are *each* multi-dimensional and interactive. Further, teacher knowledge and beliefs are interdependent. They interact to shape and define each other. Moreover, teacher knowledge and beliefs interact to inform teaching practices. In turn, teaching practices influence teacher knowledge and beliefs.

This study also reveals the role of the affective dimension of teaching. I have defined this affective dimension as caring. Through my analysis and interpretations of Maria's teaching practices, I have argued that caring influences teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and teaching practices. Caring is relating. The qualities of attention, will, patience, respect, honesty, trust, confirmation, and reciprocity characterize caring. Caring and its attendant qualities support, indeed, drive the development of knowledge and beliefs to inform teaching practices. Caring as relating to students and colleagues is instrumental in increasing teachers' knowledge, in particular their knowledge of students' unique characteristics and needs which is requisite to effective teaching. Caring
is instrumental in supporting the development of the pedagogical content knowledge, the wisdom of practice.

**Considerations for Practice**

In an attempt to synthesize my research findings and develop new understandings, I have struggled considerably with how to organize this next section: Considerations for Practice. My struggle has reflected my thought processes along the lines of the specific to the general (i.e., students who use AAC to all students; teachers who teach in special education settings to those who teach in inclusive education settings). I have come to realize though, that the considerations I offer are more universal than particular to a student or teacher or educational setting. Therefore, I have settled upon organizing the considerations for practice according to: (a) Student Learning, (b) Teacher Instructional Practices, and (c) Consulting Practices. I begin with the students.

**Student Learning**

If all of my possessions were taken from me with one exception, I would choose the power of communication, for by it I would regain all the rest.

Daniel Webster

As a result of this study, I have come to understand that the most significant distinguishing characteristic of students who use AAC is their relative inability to manipulate language both spontaneously and independently. And language is critical to the development of communication, literacy, learning, and ultimately, independence. Specifically, language acts as:

- a problem-solving device, a tool for learning, and a solution generator;

- a means for accessing and activating stored information and for enhancing - conceptual understanding;

- a process that facilitates transfer;

- a way to seek and access assistance;
- a tool for sharing and consulting with others, as well as with oneself; and

- a means to becoming a member of a community of learners (Meichenbaum and Biemiller, 1998, p. 82).

My first consideration for practice is:

1. **Students need to manipulate language in the classroom.**

Through my examination of Maria’s teaching practices, I have learned that for students who use AAC, learning about language and learning to use language to communicate and become literate are keys to their independence. Does this make them unique from their peers? No. Indeed, these are goals we likely endeavour to meet with all students. But, manipulating language does not come readily nor easily to students who use AAC. *This is what is particularly unique to these students.* Unlike their speaking peers, students who use AAC are dependent on others to recognize the importance of language and support them in terms of providing authentic opportunities to manipulate language through communication interactions and active involvement in activities and learning. Maria knows this.

Therefore, if we have these goals for students who use AAC [and why wouldn’t we?], then they *need to* manipulate language in the classroom.

Language and communication and literacy are keys to their independence, to becoming *members* of a community of learners. As Meichenbaum and Biemiller state,

> If students are to become independent learners, they must be able to use the power of language and other forms of mental representation to guide construction, adaptation, and correction of task performance, and to benefit from the assistance of others (p. 81).

The vignettes and observations I have used throughout this thesis have illustrated that supporting students who use AAC in conversation is a time and resource consuming process. At the same time, though, it is critical to knowledge and skill acquisition: both the students’ and the teacher’s. Regardless of the educational setting and like their speaking peers, students who are learning to
use AAC tools and strategies need time and space to communicate in the classroom. They require communication partners who will provide them with this time and space, who will care, that is, actively attend to, respect, and foster their communications and learning. As Greene (1986) states,

It is difficult to imagine students discovering what they think and what they do not yet know if there is no space of conversation, no space of engagement in diversity. A sense of agency is required of the teacher if such things are to happen (p. 73).

Students need to manipulate language in the classroom. Maria understands this. She knows the power of communication. She sees its role in achieving independence. This consideration is relevant to all learners in the classroom, but is especially critical for those learners who do not have the means to manipulate language. Moreover, providing opportunities for students to manipulate language through communication provides teachers with a means to know their students, which leads to my second consideration for practice within the area of teaching practices.

Teaching Practices

2. Knowledge of student characteristics and needs is critical to providing effective instruction.

Meichenbaum and Biemiller (1998) contend,

Assuming that all children of a given age are – or should be – at the same level of skill and competence at the same time only exacerbates differences. We believe that each child should be treated ‘the same’, in the sense of having opportunities to learn new skills, strategies, and concepts that build on existing knowledge and skills, and of having opportunities to build expertise and self-direction on tasks at which they are competent and can exercise their expertise with others (p. 59).

Underlying this belief is knowledge of the individual student. I have argued for the prominent role played by knowledge of student characteristics and needs to the effectiveness of Maria’s teaching, to the development of her pedagogical content knowledge, her wisdom of practice, and ultimately to her students’ achievement. Knowing students is a pre-requisite for providing effective
instruction. It is pre-requisite for determining appropriate student learning goals. It is pre-requisite for determining instructional strategies and materials which will be effective in meeting their goals. Knowing students is critical to modifying the curriculum expectations and goals and providing accommodations (i.e., instructional strategies, materials, and supports) to meet student needs. Knowing students is a pre-requisite for constructing pedagogical-content knowledge, the wisdom and practice.

My third consideration for practice is closely related to the second:

3. Regular and ongoing opportunities to interact directly with students, collaborate with colleagues, and reflect on practices are necessary in order to develop teacher knowledge, in particular pedagogical content knowledge.

Berliner (1994) contends, “Experience alone will not make a teacher an expert” (p. 168). Expertise is developed through deliberate, motivated learning. As he states, “What appears to be so easy for the expert and seems so clumsy for the novice is the result of thousands of hours of reflective practice, experience from which learning derives” (Berliner, 1994, p. 171). Meichenbaum and Biemiller (1998) concur, “Like experts in other areas, expert teachers are reflective, strategic, innovative, and self-evaluative, especially when their teaching objectives are not met” (p. 263).

My analysis of Maria’s teaching practices demonstrates that knowledge of students is developed through caring; that is, through direct observation and interaction with each student on an ongoing and regular basis. As Noddings and Shore (1984) state,

The individual with whom we interact, whom we teach, or whom we care about, must be viewed and experienced directly, without the mediating and diluting influence of words or symbols that turn the Thou into an It (p. 165).

Maria’s knowledge of her students also develops through reflection and close, regular, and ongoing collaboration with classroom team members, including parents. Collaboration and reflection appear to be powerful processes for
constructing knowledge, shaping beliefs, and effecting teaching practices. As Hilllocks (1999) states,

At the heart of such transformations lies reflection of the highest order, reflection that involves knowledge of the students and what they can do, detailed knowledge of the learning task that is the goal, an openness to the myriad of possibilities that might make the desired learning possible, and an ability to imagine and evaluate what the consequences of any set of activities might be” (p. 123).

Maria’s teaching practices have developed over many hours of reflective, collaborative practice. Moreover, the teaching principles of reflection and collaboration ensure that her knowledge and beliefs continue to develop.

Regardless of the teaching environment, teachers who teach students who use AAC or who experience other learning difficulties, invariably do not teach in isolation. As in Maria’s case, a team consisting of professionals who have particular expertise, provide support to the classroom teacher and student.

My fourth implication for practice evolves from collaboration and reflection and relates to the role of consultants in providing support to students, parents, and teaching personnel.

Consulting Practices

4. Collaboration and reflection among all team members need to occur in the classroom alongside the teachers, the paraprofessionals and the students who are being supported.

Eisner (1998) states,

So much of what is suggested to teachers and school administrators is said independent of context and often by those ignorant of the practices they wish to improve. If qualitative inquiry in education is about anything, it is about trying to understand what teachers and children do in settings in which they work. To achieve this aim...it is necessary to ‘get in touch’ with schools and classrooms we care about, to see them, and to use what we see as sources for interpretation and appraisal (p. 11).

This study provides further evidence for the role of teacher knowledge and beliefs in informing teacher practices. Teacher beliefs have a significant influence on the nature of teaching and learning processes in the classroom for
the students and for the teacher. Researchers have concluded that changes in beliefs follow, rather than precede changes in behaviour (Pajares, 1992). Hillocks (1999) argues that teacher knowledge is constructed on the basis of their beliefs about students, epistemology, and what is to be learned. He found that teachers' nonoptimistic statements about their students seemed to be linked with high levels of declarative knowledge, high levels of frontal teaching and simplification of subject matter. He states,

We cannot conclude absolutely that attitudes toward students are the cause of simplifications of purpose and content. However, what teachers themselves say lends credence to that interpretation. It may be, of course, that some teachers began teaching in a simplified way, and when students did not respond with interest, assumed that students were slow and so justified the teachers' simplifications. Another possibility is that these two tendencies may be related to other variables that are somehow responsible for both. Whatever the case, it seems to me there is no doubt that teachers' beliefs about students strongly influence their decision about the purposes and content of instruction (Hillocks, 1999, p. 74)

Nespor (1987) asserts that changes in beliefs take place through "helping teachers and prospective teachers become reflexive and self conscious of their beliefs and ....presenting objective data on the adequacy or validity of these beliefs (p. 326).

If teacher knowledge is constructed on the basis of their experiences and in light of their beliefs as it appears to be, then it follows that team members should take an active role in supporting the construction of teacher knowledge. Indeed, Maria actively constructs her knowledge based upon her regular and ongoing collaborative and reflective experiences with her students, their parents, and her colleagues. It follows then, that the classroom is the essential context for effecting change. As Little (1985) states,

Among the potentially most useful yet most demanding interactions among teachers are those that focus on actual classroom performance. Such interactions enable teachers to learn from and with one another, and to reflect on crucial aspects of curriculum and instruction. However, they also place teachers' self-esteem and professional respect on the line, because they expose how teachers teach, how they think about teaching, and how they plan for teaching to the scrutiny of peers (p. 34).
The context in which Maria teaches supports collaboration, reflection and contributes to the exemplary nature of her teaching. She teaches in an environment in which there is a convergence of specialized, accessible services. Her classroom team work closely together in the classroom on a regular and ongoing basis to meet needs of students.

I witnessed Maria and her team working in a transdisciplinary nature. In my discussion of team collaboration in Chapter 7, I illustrated the nature of Maria’s collaboration with her team. I discussed the overlap in roles which I witnessed. The shared understandings and give and take and regular and ongoing working, reflecting and collaborating together in the classroom to support the students. Providing recommendations and collaborating with teachers has the potential to be reciprocally effective if it takes place within the classroom on a regular and ongoing basis.

Consultants have much to learn from teachers. Working with teachers directly in the classroom provides opportunities to move in close to teacher thinking and practice and to collaboratively build shared understandings, habits, and skills among all team members. Specifically, consultants can provide teachers with opportunities to care. They can work in ways which provide teachers with increased knowledge about students and their characteristics and needs. Consultants can demonstrate and model effective strategies and provide teachers with time and opportunities to develop relationships with students. This knowledge is best acquired through direct contact with the student. Having regular and ongoing opportunities to work directly with students who have special needs is requisite to developing relationships and in doing so, teachers develop knowledge of students’ characteristics and needs. Since teachers’ educational beliefs are influenced by their teaching experiences, the collaborative and successful implementation of recommendations may serve as a catalyst for constructing teacher knowledge and influencing teacher beliefs about the students they are teaching. At the same time, teachers’ sense of self-efficacy in being able to teach students who are experiencing learning difficulties is more likely to increase. However, Little’s (1985) caution nearly twenty years ago
remains eminently relevant today, "The challenge is to devote close, even fierce, attention to teaching while preserving the integrity of teachers" (Little, 1985, p. 34).

I have come to understand that consulting is more than telling or advising or recommending from across the table. The effectiveness of consulting depends on working with. It depends on collaborating with. It depends on reflecting with. Taking a collaborative, caring stance in supporting students who experience learning difficulties promotes the preservation of everyone's integrity.

Caregiving fits uneasily into bureaucracies. Bureaucratic institutions operate on the basis of a set of general rules, but the essence of caregiving is attentiveness to the individual (Hult, 1979, p. 12).

Hult's statement can be applied at the classroom, school and board levels. 'The essence of caregiving is attentiveness to the individual', whether it's the teacher-student relationship or the teacher-parent relationship or the consultant-teacher relationship. Caring and its attendant qualities of attention, patience, honesty, respect, and trust, are essential to effective collaboration and teaching.

Fundamental to each of the considerations for practice I have proposed is caring, relating with others. As Ayers (1993) reminds us,

Teaching is a human activity constrained and made possible by all the limits and potential that characterize any other human activity. Teaching depends on people—people who choose to teach and other people who become students, by choice or not. There are these two sides to teaching, and on each side there are human beings, whole people with their own unique thoughts, hopes, dreams, aspirations, needs, experiences, contexts, agendas, and priorities. Teaching is relational and interactive. It requires dialogue, give and take, back and forth. It is multi-directional. This explains in part why every teaching encounter is particular, each unique in its details (p. 16).

Just as teachers need to understand the particular in their students, consultants, need to understand the particular knowledge and beliefs of particular teachers. Understanding the particulars of each context is a critical first step in providing appropriate support and effecting change.
Future Research

My inquiry raises a number of questions, which warrant further investigation. These questions are broadly stated and could serve as programs of future study. They relate in general, to all students who have learning difficulties in the regular classroom.

The categories of knowledge proposed by Shulman, particularly knowledge of students and their characteristics and needs, are critical to the effectiveness of Maria’s teaching within an interactive, collaborative classroom environment. It is interesting to note that knowledge of student characteristics and how to adapt instruction to support individual learning is given only fleeting mention in Shulman’s (1987) Model of Pedagogical Reasoning and Action. In fact, the teacher knowledge literature appears to limit the types of teacher knowledge, downplaying or neglecting knowledge of student characteristics and its impact on making pedagogical adaptations to accommodate student learning. Indeed, Shulman states, “the activity of teaching is rarely engaged with a single student at a time. This is a process for which the special term ‘tutoring’ is needed” (p. 17).

However, research indicates that in heterogeneous classrooms exemplary teachers follow classroom and instructional management principles which allow them to maximize instruction time for students and allow them to adapt to the level and rate of individual student learning and spend more time with individual learners (Jordan, Lindsay, & Stanovich, 1997; Stanovich & Jordan, 1998; Jordan & Stanovich, 1996; 1998). Certainly, in Maria’s classroom, I witnessed knowledge of learners as being pivotal to her teaching practices. And yet this knowledge is hardly recognized by Shulman. I question the effectiveness of teaching students who use AAC without relating to them directly, without understanding, firsthand, their unique characteristics and needs and using this knowledge to plan, organize and teach. Indeed, I question the effectiveness of meeting the needs of any student who experiences learning difficulties without knowledge of their particular characteristics and needs. My first question for future research is related to examining the process of acquiring and implementing knowledge of student characteristics and needs in an inclusive, collaborative teaching environment.
1. How do teachers in inclusive classrooms acquire knowledge of their students' characteristics and needs? Further, how do they interpret this knowledge in light of their beliefs about their students? What classroom, school, or board level structures and processes support teachers' acquisition of this knowledge?

Much research has focussed on the individual teacher's effectiveness in teaching students with diverse needs. This perspective assumes that the teacher works in isolation. In reality, collaboration with parents and numerous professionals is a necessary component for meeting the needs of students who use AAC in classrooms and indeed most students who experience learning difficulties. In inclusive education, everyone is responsible and accountable for student achievement. My second question for future research is also situated within an inclusive, collaborative teaching environment.

2. What is the nature and effect of collaborative interactions on each team member's knowledge, beliefs and practices? How do they share their individual insights about a student? How do they, as a team, structure learning events that optimize student learning?

In this inquiry, I have illustrated how the affective dimension, defined as caring, interacts with characteristics of teaching which have been more extensively documented. Indeed, this affective dimension appears to be absent from current research discussions of expert or exemplary teaching. And yet it played a pivotal role in defining Maria's teaching. In Maria's teaching, I witnessed the affective dimension of her practice, the relational and interactive dimension of teaching. Moreover, I saw a critical link between the affective and the cognitive dimensions of teaching, a link that deserves further attention. The common denominator in Maria's collaboration with her team and colleagues and the interactions with her students is caring. Maria establishes a caring encounter with her students and her colleagues from which knowledge is constructed: Maria's students' knowledge, her colleague's knowledge, and her own. The affect in Maria's teaching arises from her beliefs and out of her caring to inform
her knowledge, further shape her beliefs, and effect her practice. Thus, the affective and cognitive dimensions of Maria's teaching are integrally intertwined.

The affective and cognitive dimensions of teaching have been researched as separate entities. Goldstein (1999) calls for beginning a "conversation about the role of caring interpersonal relationships in children's intellectual development" (p. 669). In examining the affective aspects of Vygotsky's conception of zone of proximal development, she argues that "the interpersonal character of the co-construction of knowledge closely resembles a caring encounter" (p. 648). She writes,

Although it may have been overlooked in many of the summaries and interpretations of his work, Vygotsky himself saw affect and intellect as interconnected and inseparable (p. 654).

Goldstein argues for a broader conception of the zone of proximal development, which includes both the interpsychological and the interrelational. There is an overarching, interpersonal character to the construction of knowledge in Maria's classroom. Her collaborative encounters with her team and colleagues and the relationships she develops with her students attests to this. As Goldstein argues, "the process of scaffolding positions collaborative relationship as a direct sources of cognitive growth" (p. 650). Maria's teaching practices have demonstrated the pivotal role of conversation and scaffolding in constructing student knowledge. This is a monumental challenge for students who are non-speaking. My third question for future research is intended to broaden and deepen our understanding of the role of caring in teaching and learning processes.

3. What is the role of caring as relating to in exemplary teaching? What is the nature of the role of caring, of relating on students' intellectual development? Can caring be operationalized and measured? In inclusive classrooms, who is doing the caring or relating? What are its nature and consequences? For example, what is the role of conversation in developing the knowledge and skills of students who use AAC? Relatedly, how does conversation support the teacher's understanding of the student and what are the consequences on their teaching practices?
Conclusion

If a person is thoughtful, caring, and committed, mistakes will be made, but they will not be disastrous; if a person lacks commitment, compassion, or thought, outstanding technique and style will never really compensate. Teaching is primarily a matter of love. The rest is, at best, ornamentation, nice to look at but not of the essence; at worst it is obfuscating—it pulls our attention in the wrong direction and turns us away from the heart of the matter (Ayers, 1993, p. 18).

I have learned a great deal about teaching from being in Maria’s classroom, most of which I have shared in this thesis. I began my inquiry with eager anticipation of what I might learn from my time in Maria’s classroom. Initially, I was interested in the ‘stuff’ of her teaching: the particular strategies and materials she uses with her students. But, I was also interested in her *reasons* for her practice: her knowledge and beliefs which underly her teaching practices. I learned that in addition to knowledge, teachers’ beliefs about their students, their role, and the nature of teaching and learning are instrumental in determining and defining their teaching practices.

I also learned something quite different, something I had not anticipated. I now know that the difference that is made in teaching students who use AAC does not reside in the computers, or the switches, or the adapted books, or the voice output systems, or the curriculum and the materials – the ‘stuff’ of teaching these students. The difference is made in the people in those environments *relating* to the students.

I always advocate for these kids because I think, again, it would be so easy to just say, ‘No. They don’t need it. They’re more severely disabled. They can’t benefit as much.’ But they need it in a different way. And, in fact, there are more demands! Maybe I wouldn’t feel that way if I were working in one of the other classrooms because [a school therapist] has often worked with primary readiness [students] and she’ll say, ‘You know, they have a lot of needs, too, the children in those classes.’ But, they can access information so much more easily. They can speak. They can reach out to people with their voices and grab attention and get information. It’s so much easier. And we’re just trying to give these kids some semblance of that opportunity (interview, Maria, June 14).
The most important resource in Maria's classroom is a teacher who ensures that each student has optimum opportunity to talk, to learn to communicate; a teacher who builds relationships, who gets to know her students; a teacher who determines each student's capabilities and needs and their possibilities. Teaching is a complex phenomenon involving connections and dependencies among knowledge, beliefs, and practices. The interrelationship and interdependence among Maria's knowing, believing, doing, and way of being defines her as a teacher. Maria recognizes the 'different way' in which her students need support. She regards her students' communication as being the key to their academic growth and their self-help and ultimately, their independence. Maria encourages and supports the students to be in charge of their own care. "Expert teachers are expert at having their students weave their own webs, as they instill students with the lifelong desire to learn" (Meichenbaum & Biemiller, 1998, p. 266). Maria teaches her students that through their communication, they can independently advocate for their own care.

At the heart of Maria's teaching and critical to the development of her knowledge and beliefs, is caring: developing a relationship with her students who use AAC. I argue that this essence, this caring is fundamental to teaching students who use AAC and indeed to all students.

Buber coined the word-pair, 'I-Thou' to represent the phenomenon of personal relation. Buber's 'I-Thou' word-pair succinctly represents the relating that is at the heart of the matter in Maria's teaching. This seemingly simple word-pair is imbued with meaning. As Geering (1983) writes,

Wherever the basic word I-Thou is being spoken, that is, wherever a person is in thought, word or deed, and in general attitude saying (symbolically) 'I-thou', there is being realized and established the world of relation. It is chiefly characterized by the qualities we associate with personhood, such as love, affection, caring, concern, loyalty (p. 21).

This human, 'personhood' quality of relating that Buber described speaks to the affective, the caring element that I observed in Maria's practice. There is
something very human in Maria’s teaching practice that is evidenced in her thinking, and intent, and words, and actions. For me, Buber’s ‘I-Thou’ highlights a fundamental dimension of Maria’s teaching practice: the relationships she builds with each of her students, their families, and the many others with whom she works.

We are now able to see the essential ingredient that makes [teaching] effective and successful. It is not ‘unconditional positive regard’, nor is it magical words, techniques or postures; it is human involvement and struggle. It is the willingness of the [teacher] to extend himself or herself for the purpose of nurturing the [student’s] growth — willingness to go out on a limb, to truly involve oneself at a level in the relationship. To actually struggle with the [student] and with oneself. In short, the essential ingredient of successful deep and meaningful [teaching] is love (Peck, 1978, p. 173)

While Peck speaks from the perspective of psychotherapy, parallels can be drawn in education. Indeed, my substitutions of ‘teaching’, ‘teacher’, and ‘student’ render his statement a suitable summary of the teaching that I have endeavoured to convey in this thesis. ‘Human involvement’, ‘extend ... for the purpose of nurturing ... growth’, ‘to go out on a limb’ ‘to truly involve oneself at a level in the relationship’ All of these words describe Maria’s teaching, her caring, her relating. For Maria, teaching is relating. It is caring. Caring as in relating shapes teacher knowledge and beliefs and consequent teaching practices in very fundamental ways.

Geering (1983) translates and interprets Martin Buber, the Jewish religious thinker and humanist, as follows,

The essence of what it means to be human is not to be found in the individual human being but in the personal relation which exists between two human beings (p. 15).

Buber’s statement succinctly speaks to the heart of the matter, of teaching; the heart which is relating and caring. I ended my stay in Maria’s classroom knowing this. It’s what I take from being in Maria’s classroom.
References


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