

NEW INTERPRETATIONS OF
GIFTEDNESS IN EARLY YEARS:
LOOKING THROUGH THE LENS OF
SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	ii
Acknowledgments: A letter to my thesis	viii
Dedication.....	xii
Abstract	xiii
List of Tables.....	xv
Prologue: A personal narrative of the journey.....	xvi
Chapter One: Introduction	1
1.1 Focus of this research	1
1.2 Background of the research – giftedness is a social construct related to intelligence	3
1.3 Rationale for the research.....	7
1.3.1 Education is a right, as well as a need	8
1.4 Educational policy frameworks for inclusive education in Aotearoa New Zealand	9
1.4.1 New Zealand gifted education documents: a legal challenge to the exclusion of giftedness in early childhood contexts	13
1.4.2 New Zealand early childhood curriculum and the New Zealand curriculum.....	14
1.4.3 The two evolving curriculum documents for early childhood education and school	16
1.5 Process of inquiry	21
1.6 Thesis structure.....	22
1.7 Conclusions.....	25
Chapter Two: Theoretical and conceptual frameworks	27
2.1 Introduction.....	27
2.2 Ontological position	27
2.3 What is social constructionism?.....	28

2.3.1	Social constructionism, facts and power	32
2.3.2	Implications for research using social constructionism	34
2.3.3	Investigations into the social constructions of giftedness ..	35
2.3.4	Intelligence as socially constructed	38
2.3.5	Learning is socially constructed.....	46
2.3.6	Meritocracy and the social constructions of giftedness	49
2.4	Conceptual frameworks.....	53
2.4.1	Alternative models of teaching-learning	54
2.4.2	Ethics of care	59
2.5	Research gaps	60
2.6	Research aims and questions.....	63
2.7	Conclusions.....	64
Chapter Three: Process of inquiry – Methodology and research		
	methods.....	67
3.1	Introduction.....	67
3.2	Methodology.....	68
3.2.1	Interpretive research.....	69
3.2.2	Researcher positioning.....	71
3.2.3	Data collection methods.....	73
3.2.4	Montage methods	74
3.2.5	Participant groups.....	75
3.2.6	Online open-ended questionnaire	78
3.2.7	Skype interviews	85
3.2.8	Facebook Group	89
3.3	Data analysis.....	92
3.3.1	Grounded theory and inductive approach for the data analysis.....	93

3.3.2	Ontological justification.....	98
3.3.3	Validity and reliability	98
3.4	Ethical considerations.....	100
3.4.1	Previous connections.....	104
3.5	Limitations of the research.....	105
3.6	Conclusions.....	107
Chapter Four: Social constructions of learning and learners		109
4.1	Introduction.....	109
4.2	Views of learning that ability can be measured for gifted children.....	111
4.2.1	Giftedness is a different fixed ability.....	115
4.2.2	Categorising abilities by achievement	119
4.2.3	Labelling the gifted through measuring their abilities	125
4.3	Effects of constructions of learning when ability can be measured for gifted children.....	128
4.3.1	Learners acquire new knowledge in predictable and manageable stages	133
4.3.2	Gifted children are misunderstood.....	136
4.4	Conclusions.....	142
Chapter Five: Social constructions of pedagogy		145
5.1	Introduction.....	145
5.2	Views of learning that learning equals being taught for gifted children.....	147
5.2.1	Role of the teacher.....	149
5.2.2	View of learners for gifted children.....	152
5.3	Responses to ability which is seen as fixed	168
5.3.1	First response - providing different resources for one child.....	169

5.3.2	Second response - giving extra work.....	170
5.4	Effects of different constructions of teaching and learning on gifted children	174
5.5	Summary.....	179
5.5.1	Conclusions	182
5.5.2	Next chapter.....	184
Chapter Six: Socially constructing teaching and learning as learning community.....		185
6.1	Introduction.....	185
6.2	Developing a learning community.....	187
6.2.1	Teachers are learners: professional openness and curiosity.....	189
6.2.2	Connective pedagogy	195
6.3	Ethics of care in supporting gifted children.....	199
6.3.1	Recognising and responding to gifted children.....	200
6.3.2	Relational pedagogies – caring relationships	206
6.4	Consequences of being supported by teachers	221
6.5	Conclusions.....	224
Chapter Seven: Discussion and Conclusions – Moments of hope.....		230
7.1	Introduction.....	230
7.1.1	About this chapter	232
7.2	The heart of this research – giftedness is socially constructed	233
7.3	Summary of the data collection process	237
7.3.1	Open-ended questionnaire	237
7.3.2	Interviews	238
7.3.3	The Facebook group.....	238
7.4	Summary of the three findings chapters	239

7.4.1	Summarising Chapter Four: social constructions of learning and learners	240
7.4.2	Summarising Chapter Five: social constructions of pedagogy	242
7.4.3	Summarising Chapter Six: constructing learning and teaching as pedagogies of relationships	245
7.5	Summary of the consequences of the different constructions of teaching and learning	246
7.5.1	Consequences of ability is constructed as a fixed ability that can be measured.....	247
7.5.2	Consequences of teachers are constructed as experts	248
7.5.3	Emotional effects.....	249
7.5.4	Consequences of having a caring relationship with children.....	250
7.6	Using the two conceptual frameworks to reconstruct teaching and learning that transforms learning possibilities for gifted children.....	251
7.6.1	Effective teaching pedagogy needs to include gifted children’s voices	253
7.6.2	Developing a sense of belonging in the learning community	255
7.6.3	Relationships – a clue to developing a sense of belonging.....	257
7.7	Key contributions	260
7.7.1	Gifted education in the Ministry of Education	262
7.7.2	Teaching practice	263
7.7.3	Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for gifted education	264
7.8	Recommendations for future research	264
7.9	Conclusions of this research.....	267
7.9.1	A crystallising moment – beliefs about giftedness evolved.....	270

References	273
List of Appendices	291
Appendix One: Ethics approval letter.....	292
Appendix Two: Email invitation for potential participants – Online open-ended questionnaire.....	293
Appendix Three: Information sheet and consent for potential participants – Online open-ended questionnaire	294
Appendix Four: Information sheet for potential participants – Skype interviews	295
Appendix Five: Consent form for potential participants – Skype interviews	297
Appendix Six: Information sheet for potential participants – Facebook.....	298
Appendix Seven: The “About” of the group on Facebook site	300
Appendix Eight: Online open-ended questionnaire questions.....	301
Appendix Nine: Skype interview questions.....	303
Appendix Ten: Facebook themes.....	305

Acknowledgments

A letter to my thesis

Dear Thesis,

You have been here since 2012; although I have only been a part-time student, I cannot remember life without you. We have a tumultuous relationship – I have not always appreciated your presence and have wanted to turn away from you more than once. But it has not all been challenge and chaos, and it is time to let you know just what I have gained since I met you.

I never expected to be where I am today, and it is because of you, Thesis. During the journey we have been walking together, I have come to realise that I can learn, which is different from what I had been told when I was little. It was through you that I have met two enlightening people: my supervisors, Professor Missy Morton and Dr Nicola Surtees. These two wonderful women believed in me, believed that a person who is labelled as dyslexic can complete a PhD – and so I believed myself to be capable of doing this study. They have not only supported me in completing the study, they have also cared for my social and emotional needs and for my family, as well as my career considerations. My perseverance has been strengthened by their endless encouragement. Missy and Nicola helped me to discover that learning by trial and error works best for me, and that standard books on academic study skills just do not apply.

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The journey would not have been so smooth without the continual support of my family, friends, colleagues and supervisors. But most importantly, it was God who made our relationship sustainable, Thesis. My PhD journey has been filled by the grace of God and His protection.

Finally, dear Thesis, I cannot do much about my learning differences but I am grateful that you have been part of my life. I have met so many wonderful people because of you. I feel that I belong, and I have found a passion for support and connection with others that I hope to continue.

Arohanui (Much love),

Mel

Dedication

For my two gorgeous children:

Belicia, who is labelled as a gifted child

Chavela, who is labelled as a twice-exceptional child



Each spiral of the koru symbolises the growth and strength I have gained during different stages of this blessed journey.

Photo credit: Mel Wong, Rotorua, New Zealand, 2013

Abstract

This research investigates the social construction of giftedness, social constructions of teaching and learning for gifted children, and the consequences of these constructions in the early years of education. Social constructionism (Burr, 2015) was used as a theoretical lens through which to shape this research. The research examines how participants interpreted teaching and learning that related to giftedness, and how their constructions influenced their attitudes; with some constructions inter-related but some competing with one another. The research data were collected through three phases using different qualitative methods. These methods included an open-ended questionnaire for early childhood practitioners in Aotearoa New Zealand, Skype interviews were conducted to collect data from initial teacher education (ITE) programme leaders and teacher educators in Aotearoa New Zealand. In the third phase, data were collected through a Facebook closed-group discussion. Some members live in Aotearoa New Zealand, but a significant number resided overseas in countries that include: the United States of America, Australia, Canada, Singapore and India. The data were analysed through an inductive approach. Two conceptual frameworks were used to construct the stories of the participants and these were developed after the data were analysed. The conceptual frameworks of this thesis included the three alternative models of teaching-learning of Smith & Barr (2008) and Noddings' (1984) concept of ethics of care.

This research developed three major findings about the participants' constructions of teaching and learning that impacted on gifted children. The first finding focused on how the participants constructed giftedness as a fixed ability – a result of their construction that giftedness is identified and determined by measurements. The second finding investigated how the participants constructed learning and teaching for gifted children that involved the role of teachers and the views of learners. The third finding discussed that many teachers were dedicated to developing a learning community and were committed to working with gifted children and their parents. The participants indicated that it is important for teachers to develop positive relationships with gifted children and their parents. This research does not seek a common or dominant definition of giftedness; instead, the research explores how the participants constructed teaching and learning and how their constructions influence their actions towards those who are gifted. This thesis argues that giftedness is not a thing that has always existed but, rather, it is a concept invented by people as a way to describe certain phenomena and make sense of certain experiences. This argument highlighted a significant message: that giftedness is socially constructed and each construction of giftedness can have consequences for gifted children and their families.

List of Tables

Table 1: Labelling the child through measuring their ability.....	118
Table 2: Common roles of the teacher, goals of teaching and views of learning	181
Table 3: Common views of learning/learners and teaching/teachers in a collaborative way	226

Prologue

A personal narrative of the journey

My professional and personal experiences have motivated me to conduct this research. I am labelled as a twice-exceptional learner, the mother of a child who is labelled as gifted and of a child who is labelled as twice-exceptional. These labels give me personal insights into the stories of the parents of gifted children and the children who struggle with being labelled by teachers. Furthermore, I have been a student teacher in an early childhood teacher education programme, an early childhood teacher and a teacher educator, so I can appreciate the perspectives of early childhood practitioners and teacher educators. The insights I bring from my personal and professional roles have assisted me in making a personal connection with this research.

My journey down the road of twice-exceptionality started in kindergarten. When I was three years old, my mother was told by my teacher that I was autistic. She had come to this conclusion simply because I liked to play on my own and did not talk much, but the label brought me to a place where teachers were seeing me as a difficult child. I did not perform well in either primary or high school: my results in all the core subjects were below the expected standards. My academic performance resulted in me being labelled as an underachiever. By year 10 I was no longer allowed to join in the mainstream classes; instead, I was sent to other areas around the school, such

as the library or canteen, because my teachers assumed that I could not learn and, anyway, would not do well.

After immigrating to New Zealand, I started to gain some tertiary qualifications, as I knew I was not as dumb as my school teachers had said I was. I completed my first degree, and completing this degree provided me with sufficient motivation to commence a master's degree. Interestingly, I performed better in my master's degree than I had in my bachelor's, and my results in both were better than those I had achieved at high school.

After working for five years as a teacher educator, I enrolled in doctoral study. I had come to realise that I had to find a solution for my reading and writing difficulties, because I could not easily recall content after reading articles. I have had these problems all my life, but I had put them down to having English as my second language. To be able to sign in for the disability resource service at the university, I had to be identified as having a disability. Now I carry two labels: I am a twice-exceptional learner; I am dyslexic but also a gifted learner. These labels give me access to resources, but I do not believe the labels relate to intelligence. The reality of resource funding is that if I need and want support, I have to be labelled; it is not about whether or not I want (or believe in) the label.

Over the years, I have been socially excluded by the invisible learning differences and labels given by my teachers. The negative constructions of dyslexia did not allow me to receive the same learning opportunities as other

children, who were able to achieve to their potential. There have been lots of struggles over the years, and lots of failures. However, I also appreciate that if I had not been labelled as dyslexic, I would not have been able to understand the gifted children in my research as well as I do. Likewise, if I had not been socially excluded, I do not think I would be able to fully appreciate the feeling of being excluded that many of the parents have described in this research.

When I began my research interests in gifted education 10 years ago, after my elder child was labelled as gifted, I watched as she became dissatisfied with the teachers in two different early childhood centres. The teachers always pointed out my daughter's weaknesses and how she acted differently from other children. The teachers did not understand her individual needs.

When my second daughter started day care, the same problems arose – but even worse. The teachers complained that she often bit the teachers and other children, and that she could not even manage to put her shoes on as she was day-dreaming in her own world most of the time. Later, when she started primary school, my younger daughter was placed in a small group, and she has specialist teachers for literacy, as she is performing below the expected level in the core subjects. There is no problem with my child's intellectual ability; the problem is that teachers place my daughter in the lower group because she cannot achieve what she is asked to do in class. Because of the treatment my daughters were receiving at their day care and school, I

decided that the topic for my PhD thesis could explore the way giftedness is socially constructed and the consequences of being labelled as gifted.

Chapter One

Introduction

This research investigates the social constructions of giftedness and the effects of the meanings evident in particular social constructions on children and their families in relation to inclusive education. In recent decades, a dialogue about inclusive education has been promoted in all educational contexts in contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand. According to Gordon-Burns, Gunn, Purdue, and Surtees (2012) and Selvaraj (2016), the government in Aotearoa New Zealand has advocated for inclusive education over the past three decades, where all children have the same rights to opportunities for learning and participation in their educational contexts. This thesis, however, argues that the needs of gifted children have not been explicitly included in the inclusive learning environment. Delaune (2015) said: “The inclusion of giftedness ... is challenged within Aotearoa New Zealand society” (p. 79). This thesis argues that giftedness has been constructed in many ways, and that each construction affects gifted children’s learning as well as the ways teachers and society view giftedness.

1.1 Focus of this research

This research explores the constraints on the provisions for gifted children within inclusive education practices. Even though teachers and society have the best intentions and, despite there being much dedication to, and advocacy for, inclusive education for all children, the term ‘giftedness’ is constructed and

interpreted differently in practice. In particular, this research focuses on the argument that giftedness is socially constructed, and each construction of giftedness has associated consequences of the meanings evident in particular constructions. The meanings associated with particular constructions of giftedness can be shaped by, or can shape, other constructions. There is always more than one social construction present at any given time, and some common sense constructions of giftedness will be presented in this thesis. I will also discuss how some constructions have the potential to cause greater impacts on gifted children than other constructions. In particular, I will look at some constructions that may be beneficial for gifted children.

Insights from the research participants' constructions raise a challenge to the conceptual underpinnings of teachers' and society's views and interpretations, about what catering for giftedness involves. These views and interpretations integrate with how gifted children are understood and discussed in social and political contexts. This challenge could assist in the development of a reconstructed view of giftedness that challenges the current dominant views. Menz (2013) describes how constructions are dynamic. This research provides evidence of the need to re-negotiate the teaching and learning of gifted children.

This research is framed by the theory of social constructionism. The theory is used as a lens for understanding how giftedness is interpreted and understood. In this research, the theory of social constructionism shows what participants believe giftedness is and what a gifted child should look like. Although the

research was conducted in Aotearoa New Zealand, it also involved research participants from other countries. Detailed information about the research participants is given in Chapter Three.

1.2 Background of the research – giftedness is a social construct related to intelligence

As mentioned in the Prologue, I have been interested in investigating the different interpretations of giftedness within inclusive education since I began my research on this 10 years ago. Interpretations of giftedness are various, and so it is interesting to see the ways in which the terms 'gifted' and 'talented' have been, and continue to be, constructed by society. For example, the Ministry of Education (2008) states that terms used to describe children who are gifted include “gifted, talented, special abilities, exceptionally able and highly creative” (p. 12).

While the concept of measuring intelligence has changed over time, the processes of measuring remain the major tools for making decisions about children, their learning opportunities and resources. This is despite Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) claiming that teachers can limit children’s abilities by relying on the normal distribution (bell) curve. This is because when using measurements to rank intelligence some assumptions are made around the distribution of intelligence along a bell curve. In the Handbook of Gifted Education, Colangelo and Davis (2003) wrote that Terman, who revised the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scales, believes that children who score well on the

test are highly intelligent and will become important contributors to society. Conversely, children who fell in the lower score range would need additional support in learning, as their scores indicate that they are not capable in all areas of learning (Skidmore, 2002). Another way in which the bell curve is being used is for the diagnosis of intellectual abilities, and neurological and psychiatric disorders, as well as scoring for personality (Gould, 1996; Skidmore, 2002; Wechsler, 1981; Woodcock, 1990).

A significant discovery that convinced me to investigate the social construction of giftedness is that there is no universally accepted definition that completely explains the concept of giftedness. This is because one definition cannot apply to all situations, but each definition can, by itself, have an impact on the place of giftedness in inclusive education (Wong, 2015). I have also found that many different terms can be found in the literature, and in society as a whole, to describe giftedness – for example, 'gifted and talented', 'intelligent people', 'able children', 'exceptional children', 'superior abilities', 'talented' and 'children with special abilities' – and these terms are often used interchangeably. There are 36 definitions of giftedness listed in the book *Gifted and Talented Children: A bibliography of the New Zealand documentation* (Marland, 1987), while George (1997, cited in McAlpine, 2004) identified 213 definitions of the concept of giftedness, leading McAlpine (2004) to say that it is pointless to hunt for any more.

To date, the literature on gifted education has not produced a single agreed-upon definition of 'giftedness'; there is neither a single universally accepted definition of the concept of giftedness nor of what the term 'talented' really means (Moltzen, 2011). This is perhaps because the meaning of giftedness and explanations of what it is to be talented, are dynamic and, therefore, can be interpreted differently by different people in different contexts (Borland, 1997, 2003; Connor & Gabel, 2013; Rimm & Davis, 2004).

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the two terms 'gifted' and 'talented' are usually used together; for example, in government publications, in the literature and, even, by educational professionals. This association between giftedness and talents, and the interchangeability of the two terms, is an indication of social practices. The explanation that differentiates between gifted and talented is embedded in society as a whole and in the education system, in particular.

Burr (2015) states that the common ways of understanding a concept are derived from how people construct it between themselves. According to the theory of social constructionism, as first described by Berger and Luckmann (1967), social constructionism is a theory that nothing is fixed. Hibberd (2005) said, "Social constructionism emphasises the historicity, the context-dependence, and the socio-linguistically constitute character of all matters involving human activity" (p. viii). The concept of social constructionism holds that the learning process requires interactions in social situations; in other words, learning involves more than one person and occurs during social

interactions between individuals. Thus, some constructions are interrelated and some are competing. People cannot stand outside, or above, society; rather, they become caught up in social processes, even if, sometimes, they are unaware of these interactions.

People have been exploring different ways to measure intelligence and, hence, giftedness, since the eighteenth century (Borland, 1997, 2003; Gould, 1996). Different groups have their shared views on giftedness, and these views reflected how people from that culture or society valued giftedness. This study argues that a person's construction of giftedness is often based on their shared understanding of knowledge and their experiences, but all constructions of giftedness create a set of consequences about particular meanings, which influence how gifted people are treated. Coysh (2017) said, "The ideas about how we understand the world ... come from our own experiences and shape the way we act and interact with each other" (p. 23).

Giftedness in children can be seen as a positive acknowledgement of their extraordinary abilities, or gifted children can be judged as problematic because they are different from other children (Cross, 2016; Wong & Margrain, 2015). Thus, this thesis demonstrates that different constructions have different consequences from the meanings evident in particular social constructions, and that each of these has a potential impact on a child who has been labelled as 'gifted'. To label a child as gifted involves many different constructions of giftedness, and these constructions may differ between contexts. The people

who decide whether or not a child is gifted make judgements based on a shared understanding of giftedness, and this construction will bring with it different expectations, as well as assumptions about that child who is labelled as gifted.

1.3 Rationale for the research

The decision to conduct this research came from a personal and professional concern about gifted education in Aotearoa New Zealand. My concern had been awakened by ongoing conversations about why the learning needs of many gifted children were not being met, despite the efforts of the Ministry of Education, and teachers and professionals, to advocate for gifted children in the early years of education and to promote inclusive practices. The rationale for this research is to explore some of the reasons why the learning needs of gifted children are not being met and to identify the obstacles preventing the effective implementation of gifted education for young children.

This research is built on that of Dean and Margrain (2015), MacIntyre (2008) and Walsh, Hodge, Bowes, and Kemp (2010), who were also curious about what could be done better for gifted children, the challenges not noticed so far, the questions that have not been asked, and the areas of gifted children's learning that have not been explored and addressed. Many researchers (for example, Alati, 2005; Arney & Scott, 2013; Davidson, 2009; Deed & Lesko, 2015; Macartney & Morton, 2013; Walford & Massey, 1998) argued that inclusive education is about providing all children with opportunities to participate in their learning contexts. Brock and Curby (2014), Callard-Szulgit

(2012) and Gonzalez-Mena (2011) said that teachers can enhance children's learning and development by understanding their learning needs and interests. However, this research argues that some children's learning needs are not met due to particular constructions of learning, as these constructions inform teachers' thinking about, and their practices with, gifted children and their families.

1.3.1 Education is a right, as well as a need

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), children not only need to be educated but also education is their right. To ensure that all children's learning needs are met, schools and teachers need to work together with families, and with support from the government and the community. The Ministry of Education's (2010) document *Success for All: Every School, Every Child* claims that the education system in Aotearoa New Zealand creates a "rightful place in learning" (p. 2). However, the primary argument of this thesis, as demonstrated by the research data, is that many gifted children cannot experience education as a right because of the effects of some common-sense constructions of giftedness. Later, this thesis will demonstrate the fundamental idea that rights in education are surrounded and influenced by a number of assumptions, including power. The rationale of the research was to explore the constructions of giftedness that have limited the education of many gifted children, often to the extent that these children are not receiving an education as a right. As mentioned previously, education is a basic

human right so this thesis will present new ways of approaching teaching and learning in the context of inclusive education.

1.4 Educational policy frameworks for inclusive education in Aotearoa New Zealand

This section provides a description of the educational policy contexts and documents used in this study and the Ministry of Education's requirements and legislative obligations for the early years of education. The New Zealand Government has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) and, in doing so, has demonstrated its commitment to the social and education principles espoused in the Convention. For example, article 29 states the importance of developing "the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential" (United Nations, 1989, p. 9). The New Zealand Government has reaffirmed this in its report *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Fifth Periodic Report by the Government of New Zealand 2015*, by stating that the government ensures "students' identities, languages, abilities and talents are recognised and affirmed and that their learning needs are addressed" (New Zealand Government, 2015, p. 16). Thus, in theory, children in Aotearoa New Zealand are being protected by the government's obligations under this convention. The sub-sections below provide some background about the gifted educational policies and documents, as well as the curriculum contexts of

Aotearoa New Zealand, through its official publications. These documents are significantly influential in how people construct giftedness.

Since 2000, Aotearoa New Zealand's Ministry of Education has been involved in a number of initiatives to support the education of gifted and talented learners, reflecting the government's commitment to these children. The Ministry of Education established a working party in 2000, comprising Ministry officials and representatives from Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to develop the country's first gifted education policy. The gifted education policy, *Initiatives* (Ministry of Education, 2002), was published in 2002. Over the next ten years, the Ministry of Education showed its commitment to giftedness in a number of ways (Riley & Bicknell, 2013); for example, gifted and talented students are now mentioned in the National Administration Guidelines, professional learning and development has been provided through Ministry of Education national contracts, several resources have been developed (Education Review Office, 2008; Ministry of Education, 2008, 2012), and the Ministry has developed the *Te kete ipurangi Gifted and talented* (TKI) (Ministry of Education, n.d.) website, and is continuing its commitment to this resource by providing national contracts to update the website (in 2018). NGOs catering for giftedness have developed over the past several decades; for example, the New Zealand Association for Gifted Children, giftEDNZ and the New Zealand Centre for Gifted Education. NGOs in different regions in Aotearoa New Zealand have also been working collaboratively for gifted children, their families, teachers and professionals.

Yet, this thesis argues that despite the best intentions, commitment, and advocacy attempts by many for inclusive education for all children, their efforts have been ineffective, because the needs of gifted children in Aotearoa New Zealand have not been explicitly responded to. Hornby (2012) explains that teachers, families and children continue to find challenges in how schools and society interpret the meanings of inclusive education and translate these into practice in Aotearoa New Zealand. Gordon-Burns and colleagues (2012) claim that “Discrimination in education has been hard to challenge and change in Aotearoa New Zealand, as in other countries” (p. 6). Arguably, the dialogue of participation for all children in the learning context has been a challenge in practice. The effects from the meanings evident in particular social constructions being excluded in the provision of inclusive education are significant for gifted children’s learning and development (Wong & Whitburn, 2018).

The following discussion explores five documents published by the Ministry of Education. Much of the discussion in this thesis refers to these documents, because comments from the research participants indicate that these documents influence how teachers, parents of gifted children and professionals construct giftedness. This section is divided into three sub-sections. The first examines the Ministry’s gifted education policy and gifted education documents; the second, the evolving early childhood curriculum; and the third, the national curriculum pertaining to primary and secondary-school-age children in

Aotearoa New Zealand. The key Ministry documents relating to gifted education are:

1. *Initiatives in gifted and talented education* (Ministry of Education, 2002, hereafter, simply called *Initiatives*);
2. Gifted and talented students: Meeting their needs in New Zealand schools (Ministry of Education, 2000; 2012; hereafter, simply called Meeting their needs); and
3. Nurturing gifted and talented children: A parent–teacher partnership (Ministry of Education, 2008; hereafter, simply called Nurturing gifted and talented children).

These documents are resources that have been developed as guidelines for schools, teachers and parents when supporting gifted children. Gordon-Burns et al. (2012) say that policies provide guidance to the education context in order to maintain the established commitments to education. Thus, Ministry of Education documents provide teachers and schools with guidance on how to promote best practice in gifted education. The writers of these documents are also immersed in the dominant constructions of giftedness and we will trace these constructions within various policy statements and guidelines. The gifted education documents will be presented in two ways. In this chapter, they will be used to explain the context of gifted education in Aotearoa New Zealand and will then be used as data in the three findings chapters.

1.4.1 *New Zealand gifted education documents:
a legal challenge to the exclusion of
giftedness in early childhood contexts*

As discussed earlier in this section, since 2000, the Ministry of Education has been involved in several initiatives to support the education of gifted and talented learners. The Ministry has set up working parties to support the education of gifted and talented learners, and reflecting on its commitment to an area of education that has, historically, been overlooked. To meet government policy, schools in Aotearoa New Zealand now have to develop and implement educational programmes for students who are gifted and talented.

Initiatives (Ministry of Education, 2002), is the first gifted education policy in Aotearoa New Zealand that shows an explicit commitment to supporting gifted and talented children in the early years of education – three out of the nine principles were about early childhood education. However, the primary focus is on school-age children, and the document is designed to give guidance to schools and teachers when developing strategies to cater for the needs of their gifted and talented students.

The resource document *Meeting their needs* (Ministry of Education, 2000) was distributed to every school in Aotearoa New Zealand, and it contains many principles in different sections of the document. Again, the primary focus is on school-age children. The revised edition of *Meeting their needs* (Ministry of Education, 2012) provides criteria for supporting schools to develop school-

based definitions of giftedness to fit the needs of individual school communities. The two editions of *Meeting their needs* (Ministry of Education, 2000, 2012) are downloadable from the *Te kete ipurangi Gifted and talented* (TKI) website (<http://gifted.tki.org.nz/>).

Nurturing gifted and talented children (Ministry of Education, 2008) was the first book published by the Ministry of Education to support both teachers and the parents of gifted children. Two pages in this book address the needs of gifted children in early childhood contexts. This book is also downloadable from the TKI website (<http://gifted.tki.org.nz/>).

These government documents and publications both share similarities and differences in their constructions of giftedness. Moreover, the fact that the constructions of giftedness in the earlier documents differ from those in the later documents illustrates how constructions can develop over time. In other words, these Ministry documents demonstrate that giftedness is a social construct.

1.4.2 New Zealand early childhood curriculum and the New Zealand curriculum

Both *Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mōngā mokopuna o Aotearoa* (Ministry of Education, 1996, 2017; hereafter, simply called *Te Whāriki*) and the *New Zealand Curriculum* emphasise inclusive education. These two curricula are the core education documents in Aotearoa New Zealand. In this section, I explore more deeply the Ministry of Education's commitment to

providing for all children. The first edition of *Te Whāriki* clearly states that the early childhood curriculum “is designed to be inclusive and appropriate for all children and anticipates that special needs will be met as children learn together in all kinds of early childhood education settings” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 11), while the recently-updated edition states:

A CURRICULUM FOR ALL CHILDREN

Te Whāriki is an inclusive curriculum – a curriculum for all children. Inclusion goes beyond gender and ethnicity to include a diversity of ability and learning needs, family structure and values, socio-economic status and religion. *Te Whāriki* holds the promise that all children will be empowered to learn by engaging in experiences that have meaning for them. This requires kaiako [teacher] to actively respond to the strengths and needs of each child and adapt or differentiate teaching approaches and environments accordingly (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 13).

Like *Te Whāriki*, the *New Zealand Curriculum* for school students puts a priority on inclusion, stating: “The curriculum is non-sexist, non-racist, and non-discriminatory; it ensures that students’ identities, languages, abilities, and talents are recognised and affirmed and that their learning needs are addressed” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 9). The curriculum focuses on inclusion, belonging and relationships; it also emphasises acknowledging and building on individual learning interests, strengths and needs. According to both curricula, teachers then need to develop an awareness of different learning paces and understand that there is no single 'right' way of teaching and learning. Teachers are not able to respond to children’s needs unless they are aware of what these

needs are. People in education have increased their awareness of the importance of including “every child.” This has, in turn, helped to increase children’s sense of belonging and participation in learning (Kettler, Overross, & Salman, 2017; Ministry of Education, 1996, 2017; Walford & Massey, 1998).

1.4.3 *The two evolving curriculum documents for early childhood education and school*

This sub-section examines the two editions of New Zealand’s early childhood curriculum: The draft revision of *Te Whāriki* was put out by the Ministry of Education for consultation in 2016 (Ministry of Education, 2016), and the revised early childhood curriculum was launched in April 2017.

In my research, I acknowledge the importance of both the 1996 and 2017 editions of *Te Whāriki*, our early childhood curriculum document. Although the 1996 edition has now been updated and replaced, it remains fundamental to my research because it is the edition that was current during the data collection phases of this research and, hence, it was appropriate to analyse the data and discuss the research findings in the context of the document that was current at the time. However, as we look to the future, it is also important to review the new edition of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017), as it is based on the latest research and shows the continuing social constructions of giftedness that can give teachers new insights into how to provide for gifted children in the early years. The 2017 edition of *Te Whāriki* is addressed to teachers to encourage children to learn in their own ways surrounded with the

support of their teachers and peers. Such a philosophy is consistent with my research findings, which place a great emphasis on the need for teachers to pay attention to children's learning needs and interests, as well as individual giftedness.

Te Whāriki was the first bicultural curriculum developed in Aotearoa New Zealand. The 1996 edition states that it is important that children in the early years be in quality social contexts where they are cared for. *Te Whāriki* is “designed to be inclusive and appropriate for all children and expects that special needs will be met as children learn together in all kinds of early childhood education settings” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 11). The curriculum is designed for *every* child and is built on understanding *each* child. Although the consultation document (Ministry of Education, 2016) does not specifically address the needs of gifted children, the *whāriki* is understood as a “mat for all to stand on” (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 10).

Te Whāriki means 'the woven mat' in Māori, the language of the indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand; it symbolises the way the four principles (empowerment, holistic development, family and community, and relationships) and the five strands (well-being, belonging, contribution, communication and exploration) of the curriculum are woven together to contribute to children's learning and development. *Te Whāriki* has had a significant influence in this research. The theoretical underpinnings of both editions of *Te Whāriki* are grounded by the socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky &

Cole, 1978) that children learn through interactions in broad social and cultural contexts. The emphases of learning and relationships in *Te Whāriki* align with the theory of social constructionism, as both hold the philosophical viewpoint that knowledge is socially constructed by interactions. Burr (2015) states that learning occurs through a social process that is influenced by the society or culture in which the learner lives. Therefore, children's learning is directly affected by how teachers construct learning. Thus, context plays a significant role in learning, because how children understand the world is informed by relationships with others in the same context. Thus, *Te Whāriki* is built on the philosophical viewpoint that learning and the construction of knowledge occur through interactions; that is, learning is created through cooperative connections between individuals.

Te Whāriki is a child-centred document with the underlying principle of empowering children's learning by participation (Ministry of Education, 2017). The curriculum describes the importance of meeting the needs of all children, including those with additional needs, promoting inclusive practices and celebrating individual differences, which is why catering for young, gifted children is often described in these terms. We have a curriculum that clearly explains the importance of meeting individual needs and differences, but my concern, as already indicated, is that the needs of many gifted children are still not being met.

According to the curriculum, teachers need to develop an awareness of different learning paces, and to understand that there is no single 'right' way of teaching and learning. Teachers are not able to respond to children's needs unless they are aware of what those needs are. The curriculum focuses on inclusion, belonging and relationships; it also emphasises acknowledging and building on individual learning interests, strengths and needs.

The meaning of inclusion in the curriculum encompasses both children and their families; it aims to ensure that all children will be in a learning environment that empowers them to learn and which engages them in experiences that can support their needs and interests. To implement the promises of *Te Whāriki*, the curriculum requires teachers to be able to respond to the strengths, interests, abilities and needs of each child and their families.

Both editions of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996, 2017) emphasise that relationships are necessary for children's learning and, of the four principles that underpin the curriculum document, one is about relationships and another is about family and community. In other words, half of the principles underpinning *Te Whāriki* consider connecting with people to be critical for children's learning, reflecting the high value the curriculum document places on relationships in education. The relationships and the environments children are in have a significant influence on their learning and development, with both editions stating that children learn through relationships with people. Thus, the early years of education in Aotearoa New

Zealand focus on promoting relationships with children and their families (Mitchell, Haggerty, Hampton, & Pairman, 2006).

This final sub-section examines the *New Zealand curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1992, 2007), which is the national curriculum for primary- and secondary-age children in Aotearoa New Zealand. Some constructions of giftedness in this research are associated with the *New Zealand Curriculum* because, like *Te Whāriki*, the school-age curriculum advocates for inclusion and learning differences.

The *New Zealand Curriculum* applies to all Year 1 to Year 13 students at English-medium state and integrated schools in Aotearoa New Zealand. The first edition of the *New Zealand Curriculum* was implemented in 1992, and the revised edition was introduced in 2007. The vision of the *New Zealand Curriculum* is that children need to be confident and resilient learners, and critical and creative thinkers (Ministry of Education, 2007). This thesis often refers to the 2007 version of the *New Zealand Curriculum*, because some of the research participants' comments relate to early primary school and similar contexts. Although this thesis does not focus on the eight essential learning areas outlined in the *New Zealand Curriculum*, I address those aspects of the curriculum that promote that the needs and interests of individual students should be recognised and addressed.

Mutch (2012) argues that teachers' views and practices change over time due to the climate of change in education. This climate of change includes the

curriculum, education systems, and the expectations of teachers, and reflect the needs of their communities. These changes are often driven by government policies and shape a school's practices. Teachers' constructions of teaching and learning within learning are influenced by the changing education system, as well as teachers' engagement with their communities. For example, the way teachers interpret the curriculum and how they construct giftedness are interrelated. When both student and teacher successes are measured by academic performance, then teachers tend to focus on academic results to determine the success of learning as education is driven by achievement data.

1.5 Process of inquiry

This research uses a qualitative methodology to explore the topic of the social construction of giftedness. Interpretative research emphasises the socially constructed nature of the research. The data collection process occurred over three different time intervals and used three different methods. The time involved in the data collection was 18 months. Each phase involved collaboration with the research participants. The first phase of data collection was an open-ended questionnaire of early childhood teachers. The second phase involved interviewing eight teacher educators, via Skype, who all worked in Aotearoa New Zealand. The third phase used social media: I established a closed Facebook group specifically to collect data for this research. An inductive approach was applied to the data analysis and grounded theory, because the aim of the research was to discover how the participants

constructed giftedness, not to use the data to predict the participants' perceptions of giftedness (see [Chapter Three](#) for a more detailed explanation and discussion of the methodology, methods, ethical considerations and other process aspects of the research).

1.6 Thesis structure

This thesis is presented in seven chapters:

Chapter One: This chapter has introduced and outlined the focus of the thesis. It presents the background of the research and explains why I chose to research the social construction of giftedness. Included in the chapter is a description of the Ministry of Education publications and the process of inquiry, as well as the particular terminology used in this research.

Chapter Two: The next chapter reviews the extant literature. The chapter looks in particular at different constructions of intelligence, relating this to the history of constructing intelligence. Included in the chapter is a discussion of the theory of social constructionism as a theoretical framework and the conceptual framework that underpins the research. The chapter explores giftedness in the context of inclusive education in Aotearoa New Zealand and the gaps in the research. The literature review chapter ends with the research aims and questions.

Chapter Three: This chapter outlines the qualitative research methods adopted in the research. It looks at the theory behind interpretative research methods,

and how the data are analysed linked with two conceptual frameworks. How the research participants were recruited, and the ethical factors that had to be considered during the research process, are also discussed.

Chapter Four: This is the first of three findings chapters. The chapter uses quotes selected from the data to illustrate how the research participants constructed learning and learners. The chapter focuses on constructions of giftedness as a fixed ability and able to be measured. This findings chapter implies that the participants' constructions of giftedness were directly influenced by the Ministry of Education documents. Gould (1996) and Skidmore (2000) state that ability is constructed through measurement and achievement. The effects of how ability and achievement are used to determine giftedness are explored, using the voices of the research participants with support from the literature.

Chapter Five: The second findings chapter uses quotes selected from the data to illustrate the different constructions developed by the participants about pedagogy for teaching and learning for gifted children, which is the theme of the chapter. This chapter explores the role of the teachers and the interpretations of the views of learners that relate to gifted children. This chapter indicates some effects from these constructions of giftedness for parents and children. The chapter indicates that the participants' constructions of giftedness and constructions of teaching and learning and extends the research conducted by Borland (1997, 2003) and O'Connor (2012), saying that the constructions of

giftedness create consequences from particular meanings that affect gifted children's learning.

Chapter Six: The theme of the third findings chapter focuses on the constructions of teaching and learning that relate to developing a learning community. The chapter uses quotes selected from the data to illustrate that many of the participants developed alternative constructions of teaching and learning that support all children and acknowledged that teachers are committed to engaging with children's learning. The meanings of social construction present in this chapter have potential effects on all learners, but this research is particularly interested in the children who are constructed as gifted. Some participants constructed teaching and learning related to teachers who have professional openness and curiosity and are keen to learn different teaching approaches to catering for differences. Ethics of care are associated with positive relationships with children and parents, which is one way of constructing teaching and learning for gifted children. The constructions related to ethics of care was informed by Hinsdale (2016), Noddings (2010, 2012) and Monchinski (2010). Ethics of care is underpinned by the belief that children learn better when they are cared for. The constructions of teaching and learning were extended to relationships, which is a key principle of *Te Whāriki* (1996, 2017). Much of the data showed that relationships are the central aspect of ethics of care.

Chapter Seven: The final chapter of the thesis examines the results presented in the three findings chapters, discussing and building on the participants' constructions of giftedness. This chapter provides a summary of the data collection methods, a summary of the three findings chapters and a summary of the consequences of constructions of teaching and learning. This chapter also discusses the two conceptual frameworks that inform particular interpretations of giftedness for gifted children and their families. Another section of this chapter illustrates the key contributions of this research, followed by providing implications for future research, conclusions and a critical reflection of the research.

1.7 Conclusions

In this chapter, I highlighted the focus of this research. The background of the research was introduced and established. The rationale for the research drew attention to the argument in this research; namely, that giftedness was socially constructed and that different constructions of giftedness affect gifted children, their families, and teaching and school practices. I presented the educational policies framework and the five major and influential publications by the Ministry of Education. The process of inquiry was introduced, as were the data collection methods adopted in the research, to explore the participants' constructions of giftedness. I also defined four of the particular terminologies that are frequently used in the thesis. Finally, I have outlined the structure of

the thesis, giving a brief summary of what can be found in each of the seven chapters.

Chapter Two

Theoretical and conceptual frameworks

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that inform the development of this thesis. The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section focuses on the discussion of the ontological position. The second section emphasises the theory of social constructionism, looking at how it is being used in other research and highlighting its benefits and implications. I then explore different constructions of intelligence and how these extend to learning, as another construction. After this, I discuss how meritocracy is a construction of intelligence that is shaped by constructions of giftedness.

This third section describes the two conceptual frameworks featured in this research, which were useful in interpreting and understanding meanings from the participants' stories. The three alternative models of teaching and learning (Smith & Barr, 2008), and the concept of ethics of care (Noddings, 1984) that inform the findings chapters, are described. The fourth and final section of the chapter discusses the current research gaps and concludes with the research aims and questions.

2.2 Ontological position

This thesis is underpinned by the theoretical framework of social constructionism (Burr, 2015) and is positioned within the aim that giftedness is

socially constructed (Borland, 2003; O'Connor, 2012). According to Burr (2015), "ontology is the study of being and existence in the world. It is the attempt to discover the fundamental categories of what exists in the world" (p. 104). The nature of knowledge is created by a shared understanding of reality. The ontological position of this research is that giftedness is constructed in different ways and that each construction illustrates consequences towards teaching and learning for gifted children. Everyday conversations are gathered and aligned with objects, ideas and behaviours to transform new knowledge. Thus, constructions of teaching and learning for gifted children are influenced by people's interactions.

2.3 *What is social constructionism?*

The theory of social constructionism is the notion that nothing is fixed because previously unquestioned certainties can change in social situations (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Certainties that can change include rules, norms, beliefs or laws (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). Social theory has been challenged by innovative approaches to the study of social sciences (Hibberd, 2005), which often refer to 'social construction' as their theoretical base (Burr, 2015). Mutch (2006) describes social constructionism as "a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge; historical and cultural specificity; a belief that knowledge is sustained by social processes; and a belief that knowledge and social action go together" (p. 185). Significantly, however, social construction differs from the idea of cognitive development, because the traditional notion of cognitive

learning is that learning is acquired through a series of steps, whereas social constructionism emphasises learning as a process by which people construct knowledge. From a social constructionist's point of view, human beings socially interact in every context (Burr, 2015). In making sense of the world, social constructionism insists that truth is created and not discovered (Pettenger, 2007). While meanings are socially constructed, people are born into a world of meanings where they eventually learn to accept some and resist others. Most of the time, people are unaware of the constructed nature of these meanings, and take them for granted as natural (Weinberg, 2014).

However, cognitive processes are influenced by individual sharing and receiving, and so the nature of reality is associated with how the world is being understood through such interactions. Thus, a central tenet of social constructionism is that knowledge is created through the interactions of individuals within a society. Burr (2003) states that "social constructionism insists that we take a critical stance toward our taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world, including ourselves" (p. 2). In so doing, social constructionists do not produce one fixed definition, nor do they necessarily confer different established meanings on a topic. Instead, knowledge changes over time, as it is socially constructed by people, their contexts and the culture. In turn, the way this knowledge is constructed influences people's practices and how they understand the ways in which the world operates.

While social constructionists can orientate people towards a particular discipline's knowledge, it can also pose significant challenges to norms and conventional understandings, as it attempts to move beyond traditional practices and place knowledge within the process of social interchanges (Gergen, 1985). As social construction is a process of inquiry, people need to accept that 'knowledge' and conventional understandings can change as new knowledge is socially constructed. As such, this can be a challenge for people who assume that their discipline area is firmly established in their field of practice and in society.

In *The social construction of reality*, Berger and Luckmann (1967) raised concerns about the nature and construction of knowledge. They believe that social interactions have a role in creating knowledge, but also hold that society combines objective and subjective realities, and that particular knowledge comes to have significance for society. As a result, the understanding of knowledge has become established into a regular, routine action, and its meanings have been taken for granted. Regularity and routines, thereby, become a pattern for forming general knowledge, with new knowledge becoming established in society until it is eventually deemed to be objective. The acceptance of this objectivity is then ongoing as the knowledge is integrated into different social situations.

Social construction does not tend to seek definitions but, instead, focuses on the *process* of construction; that is, how meaning is created (Burr, 2015). The

learning process requires dialogue in social situations, with learning involving more than one person and occurring during social interactions between individuals. Burr (2003) explains that “there is no single description, which would be adequate for all the different kinds of writers whom I shall refer to as social constructionists ... there is no one feature, which could be said to identify a social constructionist position” (p. 2). While different interpretations of social construction have some similarities, they have differences, which merely reflect how people show their understandings of reality. Indeed, the ways we understand the world and the beliefs we have are culturally and historically related. Knowledge is also dependent on the economic circumstances dominant in a society at a particular time. Since Berger and Luckmann’s (1967) seminal work, *The social construction of reality*, professionals in relevant disciplines have investigated if, and how, reality can be socially constructed. Yet, while a number of studies in anthropology and sociology have investigated and attempted to explain the concept, there is still little understanding of how knowledge is socially constructed (Hacking, 1999).

At its core, social constructionists view knowledge as constructed socially. It is not something that can be discovered, but it requires agreement between people that the knowledge they have constructed is real. Therefore, the development of knowledge is dependent both on people and the values of the society within which they live. Lahsen (cited in Pettenger, 2007) explained that, while reality is defined by society, it must align with people’s social experiences in their

everyday lives. People are not trying to learn scientific knowledge but, instead, are trying to make sense of what it is to be human.

2.3.1 Social constructionism, facts and power

Hammersley (1992) differentiates between natural science and behaviour. While the former can be seen as objectively representing the world, our experience of it — our behaviour — can be influenced by other people and the experiences that are meaningful to them. Furthermore, the ‘factual’ nature of scientific knowledge has been debated. Hubbard (1988) says that the process of making facts involves social originality: “Individuals cannot just go off by themselves and come up with their own brand of facts” (p. 1). This aligns with the idea that a person’s identity is given by other people. When people agree to accept facts and how to describe the world, they share the ‘facts’. In other words, facts are not a ‘truth’ but rather a part of our shared society. When people agree with facts, or a dominant person or system forces facts to be accepted, the facts become ‘real’ and ‘true’ (Bash, 2000; Burr, 2015; Francis, 1994; Gergen, 2015). The dominant person or systems are those who hold the power in society (for example, professionals or high-status officials in a government department like the Ministry of Education have a disproportionate influence on what society sees as facts.) An individual’s acceptance of a fact will also be aligned with their particular kind of education, training and subject specialty. The process of receiving knowledge about facts requires people to learn to obey rules, behave in a socially acceptable way, and to think and talk in ways that will enable them to gain their qualifications.

In the past, the people who were eligible to create knowledge and facts, and the people who made decisions, were usually only upper- and middle-class white men who had access to formal education (Hubbard, 1988). This group of society had opportunities to access education, and so received and shared knowledge (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). In more recent times, women and people from different cultural backgrounds have had greater access to formal education and, hence, have been able to gain qualifications. Even so, it is still overwhelmingly those who have power in society who dominate and frame this discourse. These people include government officials, politicians, professionals, and funding agencies, who influence decisions.

However, if the world is socially constructed by people then, inevitably, there will be tension, because there can be multiple interpretations of reality. If reality is always defined socially, it is people who define it (Hollander & Gordon, 2006). While people always think that their own idea and version will succeed and be better than others, it is the acceptance of their idea that gives it power. This means that knowledge is being formed and/or controlled by those in power: the people who are the most successful, the ones who are more powerful; those whose ideas will lead (Burr, 2015). And yet, in reality, these ideas are changeable, because ideas are constructed socially by the interactions of people, and change is conveyed by people interacting with each other (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Saraga, 1998). Social construction requires change (Motyl, 2010), and change involves defence and justification, while

allowing people to state their positions. Social construction, thereby, creates a form of interaction through which knowledge is developed.

2.3.2 Implications for research using social constructionism

There are some implications for researchers who use social constructionism as their theoretical framework. The first is that the theory of social construction holds that knowledge can be understood only through social interactions. Social interactions, such as participation, discussion, debate and negotiation, significantly facilitate the development of theory and practice in any field of discipline. This brings us to the second implication of the theory for research: the use of the theory of social construction implies an acceptance that knowledge is developed from a meaning shared by many people, and that constructions transform knowledge. So, while a particular construction will depend on what an individual (or society) understands that construction to mean, that construction will inevitably have consequences. These consequences of particular meanings may, for example, be positive for some people but negative for others, while being helpful in some contexts but not in all.

Social constructionists hold that knowledge is shaped by common sense, and that common sense and knowledge change over time through social interactions. This has implications for researchers who decide to use social constructionism as their theoretical framework because they need to accept that

a particular construction will not remain fixed forever. Of course, some constructions may last longer than others, but the theory of social constructionism states that, eventually, through social interaction, a construction will develop a new and shared meaning. Constructions change in both time and place. In the later chapters of this thesis, I will present research findings that illustrate how some constructions of giftedness are not helpful for gifted children and their families, and I will explore some new ways of interpretations of giftedness for the teaching and learning of gifted children. Thus, this thesis is an example of how constructions can – and should – evolve over time.

The following sections review the research looking at the interrelated social constructions of giftedness, intelligence and learning. I will look at how the concept of meritocracy shapes views of learning, working hard, and giftedness through research by O'Connor (2012), Borland (1997, 2003), Radnor, Koshy, and Taylor (2007), and Delaune (2015). These scholars have analysed social constructions of giftedness in their research projects, and reading their research inspired me to build on their findings and investigate areas of gifted education not yet explored.

2.3.3 Investigations into the social constructions of giftedness

O'Connor's (2012) study from the United Kingdom highlights the socially constructed nature of the concept of the gifted child in society, especially those

children who were identified as being academically gifted. Children who were academically gifted were labelled more negatively than those who were gifted in music or sport. O'Connor pointed out that teachers and society often held unfavourable stereotypes and/or lay unrealistic expectations on the child who has been labelled as academically gifted. She suggested that teachers of academically gifted children often pay more attention to their achievement outcomes than to their well-being. My research is similar to the research conducted by O'Connor, although her research focused on academically gifted children, whereas my research pays attention to giftedness, in general. O'Connor did not explicitly discuss the potential negative effects of the meanings evident in particular social constructions of giftedness on the child who has been labelled as gifted, which is a significant area covered in my research. However, her research, like mine, acknowledges that social constructions of giftedness come with inherent assumptions from parents and teachers.

Borland's (1997, 2003) research also focuses on social constructions of giftedness. He describes teachers' concerns about the use of the term 'gifted' and believes that giftedness is a concept that people have constructed or invented through interactions, rather than being a reality that has been discovered. Borland's position, therefore, is that giftedness is not a fact of nature or something that educators and psychologists have discovered; rather, it is a socially constructed concept, something created. Borland's research highlights that intelligence is an invented concept, a concept that did not even

exist until the nineteenth century. In his research, he argues that the socially constructed nature of giftedness is evident in how the definitions of giftedness are dynamic – they vary in different countries and across time. My research is an extension of Borland's research, in that his research did not explore the consequences of constructing giftedness. In my research I pay attention to different constructions of giftedness created by interactions between people in different contexts, and explicitly addresses the potential consequences of particular meanings and the effects of the different constructions of giftedness on children and their families.

Radnor et al.'s (2007) research looked at how schools in low socio-economic areas in London selected students for their gifted and talented programmes and examined the effects of the school's selection decisions on the students. They found that the concept of 'gifted' and 'talented' is problematic and recognise that 'intelligence' is being socially constructed and culturally defined which cannot be scientifically measured through intelligence tests. They found that children from disadvantaged backgrounds were doing better than they had done in the past, as the gifted and talented policy in the UK focused on inclusion and equity. However, their teachers and the student participants commented that middle-class children were advantaged when they enter higher-status or higher-education organisations. Their findings showed that although the government wanted to create a meritocratic society in which individual people worked on their own merit, in reality, meritocracy increases inequality, because rich and powerful people receive better educational opportunities than others do. Their

research relates to my research, as both research projects focus on giftedness in society, and claim that it is socially constructed. However, my research also argues that one construction of giftedness is that gifted children are able to attain high achievements without making much effort.

Delaune (2015) completed her Master's thesis on gifted education for infants and toddlers in Aotearoa New Zealand. Her research investigated different constructions of exemplary practice by teachers and parents, using a Foucauldian theoretical framework to explore different construction of giftedness, one of the few pieces of research that relates this theory to the context in Aotearoa New Zealand. Her primary findings are that the term 'exemplary' is constructed by the discourses of giftedness. The similarity between Delaune's and my research is that constructions can be created by people who are in power and who are constructed as 'experts'. My research extends Delaune's, as I argue that some constructions of giftedness are more influential than others because they are the constructions held by people with more power, such as Ministry of Education officials and other professionals.

2.3.4 Intelligence as socially constructed

The discussion in this section highlights the social constructions of intelligence. The way intelligence is understood is based mainly on the context in which the term is used. For example, Toga and Thompson (2005) have interpreted intelligence as “generally referring to competence and accomplishment; in neuroscience, intelligence is typically referred to as general cognitive ability”

(p. 3). Intelligence has also been constructed as academic achievement, cognitive abilities or intellectual function (Hernández Finch, Speirs, Neumeister, Burney, & Cook, 2014; Missett, Azano, Callahan, & Landrum, 2016; Reis, 2003). There has long been much debate about intelligence and the reliability and implications of intelligence tests (Ashton, Lee, Vernon, & Jang, 2000; Bolzinger, 1969; Fischer, 1996; Jacoby, Glauberman & Hernstein, 1995; Jensen, Kaplan, & Dolan, 2001; Richardson, 2002; Richardson & Norgate, 2014). The findings of this research, and the literature reviewed in this chapter, strengthen the argument that the concept of intelligence is ingrained in the way people interact with each other.

This section reviews different historical understandings of intelligence. While some current writing has been highly critical of these historical constructions, the continuing effects of these constructions remain (Gates, 2010). Indeed, this thesis argues that the use of intelligence as purportedly measurable with carefully designed tests strongly influences people's contemporary understandings of giftedness.

Since the eighteenth century, intelligence has been constructed as an entity that is measurable (Cianciolo & Sternberg, 2004; Dowe & Hernández-Orallo, 2012; Murphy & Breen, 2015), and constructions of giftedness began to appear (Moltzen, 2011). de Gobineau (2011) and Sternberg (2004) state that the history of constructing intelligence has focused on the importance of mental testing. In the past, scientific research has investigated the human body and

human races (Berger, 2005) and, in more recent times, research has looked at the potential associations between different sorts of intellectual abilities and social practices (Claxton & Meadows, 2009; Colangelo & Brower, 1987; Coleman, 2003; Cross, 2003; Gardner, 1983, 2006; Robinson, 1986). The following sections explore how constructions of measuring intelligence have evolved over time.

Several decades ago, Miles (1957) stated that psychologists could not agree on a definition of intelligence, and this lack of a universal definition still exists today. As Borland (2003) states, definitions and meanings of intelligence have changed over time and are still changing and being argued about. There are many arguments around how to define intelligence, but one of Miles's points has challenged my way of thinking about this issue: "By what arguments do we establish that one definition of intelligence is better than another?" (Miles, 1957, p. 153). I argue that the construction that giftedness as a static concept is inconsistent with the reality that measurements of intelligence have changed over time.

2.3.4.1 Constructions of measuring intelligence relate to constructions of the meaning of 'human races'

Historical research has generated much discussion about the constructions of intelligence that say the human body can be measured in different ways to determine intelligence; for example, how to measure height and weight (Gould, 1996; Sternberg, Jarvin, & Grigorenko, 2011). Galton (1925) claims that

intelligence could be determined by taking measurements and that the measurements should be aligned with statistics from scientific study. Galton's construction of intelligence began, in 1925, when he published his major work, a book entitled *Hereditary Genius*. He proposed that 'genius' is an advanced ability that is both inherited and integrated with behaviour. Galton was interested in measuring skulls and bodies and, in 1880, he developed the first instruments for identifying giftedness in intellectual capability. His constructions of intelligence are influential, as since the nineteenth century intelligence has been constructed as an entity that is measurable (Sternberg, 2012).

Some scientists have proposed an influential construction that intelligence can be used to compare different groups of people. Often these comparisons are between groups coming from different geographical areas or racial backgrounds (Dean, 1987). Indeed, racial classification has generated much debate and argument over the years, and the constructions of intelligence that relate to measuring race have evolved over time. Bean (1906) conducted a comparative study on the brains of black and white Americans. (Today, we would refer to Black Americans as African Americans, although, for the purpose of this literature review, I have retained the terminology used by Bean at the time). Gould (1996) found that the outcome of Broca's statistical work was a common belief that successful white males are superior to women, blacks and people from low socio-economic classes. Some constructions were also formed from other constructions of intelligence that relate to gender. LaPointe

(2013) argues that gender differences in brains have led researchers to conclude that men are more intelligent than women, and, using similar differences and judgement, that mature adults are more intelligent than the elderly, and whites are intellectually superior to other races. However, in Schiller (1992), Broca claims there was no single event of spontaneous evolution; rather, that evolution appeared in very different places and at very different periods.

2.3.4.2 Constructions of intelligence relate to society

Some constructions state that definitions of intelligence are based on scientific methods. An influential construction held by many people is that giftedness is an ability with a fixed quantity that cannot be changed. Feldman (2003), Schulz (2005) and Silverman (2013) argue that intelligence is often related to the process of measuring a person's 'so-called' IQ, which uses a number to determine different levels of intelligence. He has also said that meanings of intelligence have been refined since the early twentieth century, and IQ testing is now an important tool used to assess people's ability in many countries. Definitions and meanings can only show how the idea 'intelligence' is being used by a particular group of people or culture (Hernández Finch et al., 2014). Many researchers have explored the complexity of human intelligence, as well as how constructions of intelligence form the social and political aspects of defining and measuring intelligence (Sapon-Shevin, 2003; Shavinina, 2007; Turner, 2010). Thus, I argue that constructions of intelligence can be influenced and restricted by society and politics.

Another construction of intelligence was developed by Gould (1977), who stated that “geographic variability, not race, is self-evident ... the fact of variability does not require the designation of races. There are better ways to study human differences” (p. 232). Gould (1996) argues that there are two alternative beliefs about the bases of children’s performance: that performance is either determined by innate ability or is a function of the child’s learning environment. These alternative beliefs determine social policies and educational practices. For example, high-performing gifted children are lauded for their achievements (Pfeiffer & Stocking, 2000; Smith & Campbell, 2012), and students in the top classes are seen as gifted and have status due to their perceived merit. However, underachieving gifted children or those who do not fit the perceived profile of what a gifted child 'should' look like, can miss out on learning opportunities to support their giftedness (Kettler et al, 2017). Such assumptions are not based on fact, although, as research has shown, IQ and achievement do not influence each other (Arrow, Bowles, & Durlauf, 2000; Meroe, 2014); it is a construct made by people.

Social class is a significant factor in many constructions of intelligence; as Rindermann, Flores-Mendoza, and Woodley (2012) have explained, every population potentially shares a common gene pool. The alternative construction of intelligence illustrates that human behaviour is influenced by both 'nature' and 'nurture'; for example, the Ministry of Education (2008) has stated that an individual’s behaviour is influenced by both their genetic structure and by the

environment and culture around them. This acceptance of the influence of both nature and nurture has also, in turn, shaped constructions of intelligence.

Jensen (1996) constructed intelligence as something that has a hereditary basis and is not a result of cultural ancestries. Jensen's research still influences many people's view of intelligence, with a common-sense construction being that particular children are intelligent because of their family backgrounds. The historical view of the 'nature' side of intelligence has been to identify genes that are critical to intelligence. Even though assumptions have been made that a person's intelligence is related to their genes, Sternberg (2012) said, "To date, no genes have been conclusively identified and it appears unlikely that there will be any single crucial 'gene' for intelligence or even any small number of relevant multiple genes." (p. 504). In practice, geneticists can only estimate an approximate similarity in intelligence between people based on the genes they hold in common (Devlin, 1997). There are no absolutes based on a person's genome, which supports the tenet that the environment plays a role in determining intelligence. Jensen's is an example of an influential social construction. Indeed, some historical constructions of giftedness continue to be persuasive to this day and affect people's perceptions and the meanings they give to giftedness. Also, not all constructions of intelligence are just 'variations on a theme'— some constructions present quite different positions on intelligence to others (Borland, 1997, 2003; Gould, 1996).

Current definitions and meanings might not be relevant to how the word 'intelligence' has been used in the past and so could be used in the future. Piaget (1950) has described intelligence as “only a generic term to indicate ... forms of organisation or equilibrium of cognitive structurings” (p. 7). For McAlpine (2004) and Merrotsy (2013), many of the arguments about definitions and measurements are academic, but I also argue that *how* people measure intelligence is not necessarily important. Instead, professionals and people in society should focus their attention on how people *use* the word intelligence, and how people are treated as a *consequence* of being labelled under a particular construction of intelligence. Indeed, I would go further, and say that the meanings and the consequences of accepting the meanings, are key factors in their interactions and social processes. Constructions and understandings of intelligence influence how individuals think about intelligence and, even more importantly, influence how they act towards others whom they perceive as more, or less, intelligent than them.

Even today, in Aotearoa New Zealand, IQ tests still form the basis of standardised testing and their results accepted as evidence by schools (Ministry of Education, 2012; Moltzen, 2011). The use of standardised tests of intelligence is highlighted in the Ministry of Education documents (2002, 2008, 2012). The Ministry of Education and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the gifted education community endorse standardised tests of intelligence, and society trusts this medical model because it has been developed and is conducted by professionals – IQ tests still have a very powerful influence on

constructions of giftedness. I argue that if teachers were to rely on a construction of giftedness that aligns only with a narrow range of identification tools (such as IQ tests) to determine whether a child is gifted, then this narrow focus will affect how teachers support that child's learning and interests. Even the youngest infant identifies patterns and categorises information – that is how we, as human beings, learn. However, not everybody processes information in the same way, and no researcher has, so far, been able to find a valid and reliable way of classifying giftedness based on observations of patterns of thought and behaviour.

2.3.5 Learning is socially constructed

In the section, above, some constructions of intelligence were linked to achievement and success, while this section now explores the social constructions of learning, some of which align with the constructions of intelligence. People view learning differently in different contexts, but how people construct learning affects the opportunities, assumptions, expectations and provisions for learning. Just as with other constructions, some constructions of learning are interconnected, while others are contradictory.

2.3.5.1 Sociocultural perspectives

Smith and Barr (2008) claim that learning is essential for transmitting information through interactions with others, because when “learning is viewed as constructing knowledge with others, the key achievement in schools and classrooms becomes interdependence” (pp. 407-409). Learning involved

teachers' and learners' interactions and responsibilities. They also said that children's learning was embedded in an education system that had different layers, including legislation, policy, curriculum, teachers and society, and learning was influenced by how these support systems provided for the children.

Macartney and Morton (2013) believe that participation is an important part of learning. This construction illustrates that human learning occurs within a particular context. Morton (2015) extends this construction by saying that learning in Aotearoa New Zealand aligns with our sociocultural perspectives, and one construction of learning is that learning is a social activity, because children learn through interacting with others to create a learning community. Sociocultural perspectives are most pertinent in the Aotearoa New Zealand context, as the early childhood curriculum emphasises that learning communities involve everyone, as well as peers and teachers (Ministry of Education, 2017). Both participation and learning as a social activity – referring to the ideas of Smith and Barr, and Macartney and Morton – implies that learning must involve social interactions and relationships. Knowledge is gained from the experience of learning with others. I argue that this construction of learning may be unable to respond to individual differences, because children do not learn at the same pace. This construction could create limitations for learning; for example, some children may be framed as challenging, or their learning may not be considered as important as other children's. Thus, the significance of extending children's interests and

strengths could be ignored, with teachers paying more attention to solving challenges in the learning context (Hart, Dixon, Drummond, & Donald, 2004; Johnsen, 2003; Watkins, 2016). Morton (2015) states that learning may not be effective for some children when they are seen as placing an additional burden on their school.

2.3.5.2 Assessment

The previous construction of learning was about the learning gained through interaction, and this captures its sociocultural perspectives. However, how teachers determine whether learning is happening through interactions is based on another construction of learning: one related to assessment. Teachers need to create, or have at their disposal, assessment tools to display the outcomes of learning. The Ministry of Education (2011) states that “assessment is how we check that learning is taking, or has taken, place so that we can decide what needs to happen next. It looks back and it looks forward” (p. 12). In the same document, the ministry also stated that assessment is a process of learning, and learning that looks for continuous improvement. This construction of learning illustrates that learning is gained through – not determined by – the outcome of assessment.

Cowie and Carr (2009) explain that assessment “support[s] continuity in learning” (p. 106). Assessment is a process in this construction of learning and it needs to be ongoing. *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017) states that “assessment makes valued learning visible” (p. 63). A construction of learning

that focuses on assessment can have consequences that involve the learning opportunities provided for children. Morton (2015) asked: “Whose learning is valued, what is learned and who gets to be seen as a learner” (p. 21), indicating that personal judgement comes into play when an assessment is used as a tool to reflect on learning. If assessment outcomes are linked to specific criteria, then the assessment will be unable to reflect individual differences and, therefore, will not facilitate effective learning for children. Morton’s questions imply that children cannot be acknowledged as competent learners if they are not able to meet the assessment standards. I take this one step further by suggesting that assessments constrained by fixed criteria will not allow all children’s learning to be visible. This, in turn, means that some children’s learning may not be valued, and it might appear that they are not learning because their learning is not reflected in the assessment outcomes.

Learning is socially constructed because whether a child learns or not, and how much a child learns, is interpreted by teachers and through assessment criteria created by people who are influential in constructing children’s learning. In society, constructions of learning illustrate that some children are privileged with more opportunities to learn, while others do not enjoy that same privilege because some constructions of learning do not allow them to be provided for. The next section explores another social construction of giftedness associated with social constructions of learning.

2.3.6 Meritocracy and the social constructions

of giftedness

While there are differing views and definitions of 'meritocracy', how a person's success is defined by the social system in which they live, and how people can succeed, is based on their abilities and efforts (Brown & Tannock, 2009; Lohman, 2005; Meroe, 2014, Radnor et al., 2007; Tieso, 2003). People who are labelled with advanced ability are expected to be high achievers (Besjes-de Bock & de Ruyter, 2011; Heng, 2003; Jillian, 2010; Jolly, Matthews, & Ritchotte, 2014; Moulton, Moulton, Housewright, & Bailey, 1998). Many societies have an in-built hierarchy, with high achievers being given high status and those who are not in merit groups being given lower status. Lemann (2000) explains that meritocracy is more than a history of an educational strategy and a social experiment. The concept of meritocracy is linked to a chain of assumptions about the people who are selected, together with assumptions about the intelligence tests used in the selection process to determine who have these so-called abilities.

The concept of meritocracy is relevant to gifted education because there is an inherent contradiction in the assumptions on which the concept is based. In particular, the concept of meritocracy is allied with assumptions about those who are selected as merit-worthy through tests. However, research has shown that IQ and achievement have no influence on each other (Arrow et al., 2000; Guskin, Peng, & Majd-Jabbari, 1988; Meroe, 2014; Radnor et al., 2007; Sturges, 2011) – so, although the link between IQ and achievement is a common-sense construction, this is not supported by hard evidence.

Despite the common-sense constructions that judge people's intelligence based on their racial and family background, the determination of a person's success is based on their ability. This is because the concept of meritocracy is adjusted by the social group's view of which talents or abilities are important and may benefit society (Radnor et al., 2007; Young, 1958). Therefore, society must look at the process of identifying potential, meaning that those constructions of giftedness that relate to measurement have more influence (Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius & Worrell, 2011). Thus, intellectual abilities can be used to represent merit. Educational opportunities, in turn, tend to be offered to those who score well in tests, and educational success leads to well-paying jobs and high-status professions.

Achievement is another concept that significantly influences constructions of intelligence. Indeed, society has created many different constructions around the concept of achievement. Selden (2000) points out that achievement can be interpreted in terms of social class as well as from different cultural perspectives. Such constructions can divide the concept of meritocracy into two sub-categories: biological and racial meritocracies.

There is a common assumption that a person with a high-status job is always going to come from a privileged home and, therefore, will be intelligent because of parental influences as socio-economic status influences IQ scores (May, 2000; Meador et al., 2011; Radnor et al., 2007). Many people also assume that gifted children are found in middle-class families because middle-

class parents can afford to provide a stimulating learning environment (Radnor et al., 2007, Turkheimer, Haley, Waldron, D'Onofrio, & Gottesman, 2003). This construction is at odds with the concept of meritocracy, which says that people are rewarded for their efforts, and that social class should not be a contributing factor to an individual's success. Gould (1996) also disagrees with the construction that associated giftedness with social class, claiming that there was no relationship between a person's IQ and their parents' socio-economic status; that is, social factors such as socio-economic status cannot predict or control an IQ score.

Children are frequently placed into different groups depending on their abilities (Baudson & Preckel, 2016; English, 1934; Preckel, Götz, & Frenzel, 2010). Schools can become competitive because achievement is seen as a measure of merit. The results then risk becoming more important than the learning process, because schools focus on performance as a way to determine giftedness (Distin, 2006; Kitano, 2003; Nicpon, Assouline, & Colangelo, 2013). I argue that the common measure of merit maintains biases that are inherent in our society, so the reality is that not everyone is treated fairly (Selden, 2000; Swann, 2012).

There is competition and unequal access to, and allocation of, resources, opportunities and rewards across society, with those who are regarded as having lower ability, poorer health status and belonging to some ethnic groups are being treated differently from other groups who are seen as having higher status (Radnor et al., 2007; Rubenstein, Siegle, Reis, McCoach, & Burton,

2012; Souto-Otero, 2010). The intention behind intelligence testing was always to be fair, because leaders are now selected on the basis of their capability rather than their nobility. However, a closer examination of the biases that can occur in intelligence tests shows that the intention of meritocracy is that success is dependent on certain talents and abilities.

In terms of meritocracy in gifted education, providing for giftedness is important, but the effect of the gifted label (for example, saying that the child has 'merit') also needs to be considered. Meritocracy focuses on how a person's hard work and ability leads to their success, whereas giftedness is about people with an advanced ability that might help them achieve success. The common-sense constructions for both are similar, especially when people define the 'ability' that leads to success only in terms of achievement. Selden (2000) and Radnor and colleagues (2007) said that social context influences social attitudes and people's values and interests. If society sees that achievement can indicate giftedness, then that sends an important message to schools; namely, that schools need to focus their attention on enabling their students to achieve instead of catering for children's individual learning needs and interests (Wong & Morton, 2017). I argue that achievement is one of the constructions related to the meritocratic concept and, therefore, to defining giftedness.

2.4 Conceptual frameworks

This research draws on two conceptual frameworks; these are alternative models of teaching–learning described by Smith and Barr (2008), and the

concept of ethics of care, as designated by Noddings (1984). Bordage (2009) states that “conceptual frameworks can be used to cast development and research projects...” (p. 312). These two conceptual frameworks helped me recognise socially constructed discourses that interpret teaching and learning, and teachers and learners, in different ways. The meanings of social constructions of teaching and learning have led in to gifted children’s experiences in their learning environment.

2.4.1 Alternative models of teaching-learning

Smith and Barr (2008) describe three alternative models of teaching–learning based on their observational research in classrooms in Northern Ireland. The three alternative models can potentially move between a dominant and/or traditional approach to a more inclusive practice. The three models are: i) *learning equals being taught*; ii) *learning equals individual sense-making or developing a community of learners*; and iii) *learning equals building knowledge through doing things with others or co-construction or developing a learning community*.

Each alternative model is associated with three elements: the roles of the teacher and goals of teaching, the view of the curriculum, and the view of learning. These elements indicate how teaching and learning are promoted in the learning environment. There are one to several descriptors provided with each element; these descriptors describe what these elements are about and their meanings. However, not all descriptors in each element will be used in

this thesis. I emphasis only particular descriptors within each model that emerge from the participants' stories and inform the constructions of giftedness, and the constructions of teaching and learning for gifted children. The discussion, below, describes the models and elements utilised in this thesis.

2.4.1.1 Learning equals being taught model

Both the first and second findings chapters ([Chapter Four](#) and [Chapter Five](#)) will use the first model – *learning equals being taught*. Both chapters will use the same descriptors for role of the teachers, as being constructed as *experts*, and the goals of teaching *being to impact new knowledge, concepts and skills*, and the descriptors of the curriculum in the *learning equals being taught* model states the *curriculum as fact*. These descriptors also link to Skidmore's (2002) discourse of deviance, in which he describes teachers as having expertise and specialist subject knowledge and having a powerful influence on children's learning. These descriptors indicate that what children learn and how children learn are determined by their teachers, who are powerful in the learning environment. As a result, children and parents are submissive, as they need to rely on the teachers who are constructed as experts, and on their opinions.

Some descriptors of the view of learning in first model will be used across two of the findings chapters. Both findings chapters will use the applied descriptors from the *learning equals being taught* model, that are *cognitive dimension [is] stressed, learners learn by being told, learning is individual and affected by ability, which is seen as fixed, and learners acquire new knowledge in*

predictable and manageable stages. These descriptors indicate that the meanings of the view of learning are about ability being measurable and ability is fixed. Gould (1996) describes ability as being seen by some as a fixed quantity that cannot be increased. People have to accept that the scientific process, where knowledge is accumulated and new information discovered, means that the new findings may repudiate 'facts' from the past and result in the development of new theories that replace the old beliefs. Thus, what children can learn and how they can learn are dependent on how teachers measure children's ability to learn.

2.4.1.2 Learning equals individual sense-making or developing a community of learners' model

The alternative model *learning equals individual sense-making or developing a community of learners* is the second model of teaching–learning described by Smith and Barr (2008). This alternative model will only be used in the second findings chapter ([Chapter Five](#)). The descriptors of the role of teacher in this model used in this thesis will be same as that in the *learning equals being taught* model, in which teachers are constructed as *experts* and *role of anyone [teacher] helping (teaching) is examined in terms of how it helps the learner make their own sense*, but the descriptor of the goal of teaching for this model is *to facilitate discovery of new knowledge, concepts and skills*. The view of the curriculum in this alternative model is *curriculum as activity*. Here, children are treated as a community of learners because they are involved with the

activities offered by teachers, because they are constructed as experts in facilitating and helping children's learning.

One of the other descriptors in the *learning equals individual sense-making*, or *developing a community of learners'* model, which is the same as in the *learning equals being taught* model in that the *cognitive dimension [is] stressed*; this descriptor will be used in the second findings chapter ([Chapter Five](#)). Two other descriptors also adopted in this chapter will be that *students are engaged in active participation, exploration and research* and the *focus is still on the individual rather than the social processes in which the individual is engaged*. Smith and Barr (2008) describe children as a community of learners, as they act as a member of the learning community and they participate in the learning environment. Teaching and learning will take place with a group of people where more opportunities are created for them to engage with each other. However, the role of teacher in this alternative model remains one of the 'expert'; that the teachers are still dominant in controlling the learning and learning is still seen as 'individual'.

2.4.1.3 Learning equals building knowledge through doing things with others, or co-construction or developing a learning community model

The final, alternative model of teaching–learning described by Smith and Barr (2008) is that *learning equals building knowledge through doing things with others, co-construction or developing a learning community*. This alternative model will be used in the final findings chapter ([Chapter Six](#)), where it is

described as an alternative model that transforms into a democratic and inclusive learning environment for children. The descriptors of the roles of teachers in this alternative model will include *more equal power dynamics* and *teacher is viewed and views himself or herself as a learner*.

The descriptors being included in the final findings chapter ([Chapter Six](#)) are: *recognises that knowledge is constructed socially rather than individually, students operate together to improve knowledge and help each other learn through dialogue and co-construction stance moves us from viewing learning as an acquisition, whatever the commodity to be acquired, to viewing it as also becoming part of a community*. This alternative model of teaching and learning indicates that the learning environment is democratic and knowledge is constructed socially as teachers are seen as learners, too. According to Smith and Barr (2008), this alternative model illustrates that everyone is included in learning, and that a learning community is built to support children's learning. An inclusive learning environment is promoted in this alternative model where children have more responsibility in their learning, and "where learning is viewed as constructing knowledge with others," and the key achievement in schools and classrooms becomes interdependence (p. 409).

2.4.1.4 Connective pedagogy

A connective pedagogy can be developed through the descriptors of the second and third alternative models of teaching–learning. Corbett (2001, cited in Smith & Barr, 2008), maintains that if teachers want to create a learning environment

that promotes inclusion, the environment needs to be transformed beyond the dominant practices of the first model, where *learning equals being taught*. According to Corbett (2001, cited in Smith & Barr, 2008), children learn through connecting with others. Children need to make different connections that influence their learning. These connections include connecting learning to everyday life through different experiences; and that these experiences can be gained within and outside school. Knowledge is built, and learning is extended, through connecting with different support systems. The connective pedagogy aligns with the discourse of inclusion described by Skidmore (2002) that “every student has an open-ended potential for learning” (p. 120). Smith and Barr (2008) state that a learning community is developed when every child has ongoing learning opportunities that engage in a collaborative and inclusive way.

2.4.2 *Ethics of care*

The second conceptual framework that serves as the foundational guide for data analysis in this research – is the concept of *ethics of care*. The concept of *ethics of care* will draw on results in the third findings chapter ([Chapter Six](#)). This conceptual framework will illustrate how teachers’ caring behaviours inform constructions of learning for gifted children. The concept was formulated by Noddings (1984), and in her other publications that describe ethics of care, will be used in this thesis (1992, 1995, 2005, 2010, 2012, 2013). The concept of ethics of care significantly aligns with teaching

and learning and is a concept that fits with many of the participants' comments that will be in Chapter Six.

Noddings's (2013) concept springs from the notion that a mother taking care of her child is usually considered as a natural, not an ethical, action, because looking after their child[ren] is something that a mother is expected to do. *Ethics of care* in teaching and learning is a moral theory and teachers demonstrate moral behaviours in their practice. Teachers have an obligation to care for the children through their practice, and this obligation motivates teachers to take responsibility for that care (Bergman, 2004).

According to Noddings (1984), the ethics of care is a significant, fundamental element of the relationships in children's learning. Teachers respond to gifted children's learning needs and interests because they care for these children. Teachers assist children's learning when they have a caring relationship with them, and this is what teachers are morally required to do (Noddings, 2013). The third findings chapter will illustrate that the concept of 'care' is filled with a combination of physical and emotional effort and time. Other authors who have discussed the concept of ethics of care that will be used in this thesis include Hinsdale (2016), Monchinski (2010), Shelby (2003), Shillady (2012) and Whalley (2007).

2.5 *Research gaps*

This research addresses two major research gaps in the field of gifted education in Aotearoa New Zealand. The first gap is the limited use of social construction

as a lens through which to explore education. While there has been much research undertaken into defining and identifying giftedness in Aotearoa New Zealand, there has been little research into giftedness as a socially constructed concept. The major argument of this research is that giftedness is socially constructed or invented through conversations, rather than being a reality that has been discovered. The thesis also argues that social constructions of giftedness can shape constructions of teaching and learning. Such interconnected – and competing – constructions influence how gifted children are treated and how teachers view gifted children.

Researchers are increasingly showing interest in gifted children in Aotearoa New Zealand. Many researchers have been investigating different strategies to support the diverse needs of gifted children, at different ages and with different types of gifts (Ballam, 2016; Bevan-Brown, 1999; Delaune, 2015; Margrain, Murphy, & Dean, 2015; Moltzen, 2011; Riley, 2011; Tapper & Abbiss, 2015). However, researchers use the term 'giftedness' as if it is a universally understood concept, but because giftedness is a social construct (Borland, 1997, 2003; O'Connor, 2012; Pfeiffer, 2013), there are many different meanings and interpretations of the term – that ability is seen as fixed; ability is something that can be measured; therefore, teachers can see what children can meet the milestones sooner than the others. These meanings and interpretations can influence teaching and learning for gifted children – as will be evident from the research findings presented later in this thesis.

This research is framed by the theory of social constructionism and uses the theory as a lens through which to view how giftedness is interpreted and understood. There have been many different social constructions about human differences, and the theory of social constructionism shows how people understand the world is based on their everyday interactions with other people and how they experience the world (Burr, 2015). For instance, social constructions of disabilities have been invested substantially in the mental and social aspects of how teachers interpret children's behaviours and their performance of the different learning skills required in the classroom (Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2016; Hany, 1997; Skidmore, 2002; Tomlinson, 2004). Hacking (1999) and Mackintosh (1996) developed arguments about the social constructions of gender, with Hacking (1999) stating "undoubtedly the most influential social construction doctrines have had to do with gender ..." (p. 7). However, constructions of gender have been changing over time and are different between cultures and societies. Race is also a social construct, as human races have no biological bases (Figueroa, 1991). The constructions of race have been based on the relationship between racial stereotypes and performance that aligns with ability (Ford, 2003). The constructions of human differences show how social position can change as people interact with each other and share common experiences. However, social constructions of giftedness have not been explicitly explored, so this is the first major research gap in the field of gifted education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The second major gap is that little research has been conducted into giftedness and gifted education in the early years of education in Aotearoa New Zealand. While this research acknowledges the challenges that some gifted children and their families have in senior primary, secondary and, even, tertiary contexts when they carry the 'gifted' label, it is important for parents of gifted children in the early years that the teachers and teacher educators who work with these children in the early years have their voices heard. *Giftedness in the early years: Informing, learning and teaching* (Margrain et al. 2015) was the first academic book to focus on giftedness in the early years of education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The learning needs of young, gifted children have often been ignored because education in the early years is not performance-driven (Cathcart, 2005; Cathcart & Dawson, 1995; Sutherland, 2012). Unlike their primary and secondary school colleagues, teachers in early childhood settings focus on holistic development – education is about the whole child, not just their academic learning. For whatever reason, the fact remains that there are research gaps in investigating gifted education in the early years. Young, gifted children have a right to have their learning needs met, and teachers should support a strong foundation for gifted children.

2.6 *Research aims and questions*

This research acknowledges the challenges of providing for the needs of gifted children, but commitment to these children must be made if education is to be

truly inclusive for all children. The research aims to contribute to understanding about effective inclusive education for gifted children, their families and teachers. The order of the three aims is not an indication of the relative importance of one over the other, all are equally important to the research. In order to achieve the aim of this research, as given the literature, these three questions will be used:

1. What are the participants' constructions of teaching and learning that impact on how people view giftedness?
2. What are the potential consequences of the participants' constructions of teaching and learning that impact how people view giftedness?
3. What are the implications of new constructions for the teaching and learning of gifted children?

The answers to these questions are the subject of the findings, discussion and conclusion chapters of this thesis.

2.7 Conclusions

This chapter has explored and critiqued the literature about the theory of social constructionism, which provides the theoretical framework used in this research. Some constructions are more influential than others, because the people who created these constructions have an influential position in society. This chapter has also examined some potential benefits of drawing on the

theory of social constructionism. Some examples from previous research that have informed the development of this research have been examined. Past research has shown that people in society have developed their understanding of particular knowledge through interacting with other people, and that the meanings behind our understanding are influenced by society. The examples of the extant research, as discussed in this chapter, illustrate the importance of my own research, as this thesis explores and builds on the knowledge acquired from the earlier research.

The evolving views of intelligence and the past history of the measurement of intelligence illustrate that intelligence is constructed socially through interactions in society. The discussion in this chapter has clearly shown that measurement and IQ tests cannot fully represent intelligence – intelligence is not about a score in an IQ test. However, given the widespread use of IQ tests, it is most important to consider how people look at IQ and how an IQ score can affect a child. This chapter has explored how learning is socially constructed and that extends to meritocracy as one of the constructions informed by IQ, and how the concept of meritocracy relates to giftedness.

This chapter has also described the two conceptual frameworks being used in this research. These conceptual frameworks are used to tell a story in a way that makes sense of the data. The research gaps show there is a significant need to investigate the social constructions of giftedness. These research gaps have particular significance for inclusive education and, hence, motivated the

development of the research aims and questions presented in this thesis. The next chapter discusses the methodology used in the research: the three data collection methods to be used are explained in detail, as is the data analysis process. I will explain how the argument of the thesis developed and transformed during the process of analysing and interpreting the data.

Chapter Three

Process of inquiry – Methodology and research methods

3.1 Introduction

This research was designed to explore the social constructions of giftedness and the potential consequences of the meanings evident in particular social constructions for gifted children and their families. In the literature review ([Chapter Two](#)), I explored and critiqued the literature and other research that sought to theorise giftedness through the lens of social constructionism. In this chapter, I will explain and discuss how the theory informed from the chosen research methods, as well as how I carried out the research.

This chapter is divided into six sections. In the next section, I explain why I used a montage of methods and why an interpretive research method was chosen. Section 3.2 introduces the methodology and methods that I used in this research. I also describe three research participant groups, and the different methods used to collect data from each of these groups. Section 3.3 shows how the data were analysed, explains the inductive grounded theory approaches used for data analysis, describes the two conceptual frameworks and discusses the ontological justification, and the validity and reliability of the data. The ethical issues relating to the research are considered in section 3.4, including an explanation of previous connections with some of the research participants. Section 3.5 discusses some limitations of the research.

The research methods are connected to the three research questions. These are:

1. What are the participants' constructions of teaching and learning that impact on how people view giftedness?
2. What are the potential consequences of the participants' constructions of teaching and learning that impact on how people view giftedness?
3. What are the implications of new constructions for the teaching and learning of gifted children?

It was anticipated that the data collected from the first question would inform the analysis of data relevant to the second question, which was about how constructions of giftedness were related to actions and, hence, how gifted children were treated.

3.2 Methodology

The research focus for this study was to investigate the participants' constructions and meanings of giftedness gained through their knowledge, experiences and contexts. For this reason, the research required a qualitative research method. As Ronald, Jackson, Darlene, Drummond, and Sakile (2007) describe, qualitative research aimed to understand other people's experiences and this research sought information about people's interpretations of giftedness. Mutch (2013) explains that "qualitative research aims to uncover the lived reality or constructed meanings of the research participants" (p. 45). Therefore, I chose to use open-ended questions for the questionnaire, interviews and on Facebook to collect the participants' data – a method that

required interaction with the research participants themselves. I aimed to collect detailed views of the research when the participants shared their constructions of giftedness, so I implemented more than one research method to collect the data. The use of multiple data collection methods generated richer data, which, in turn, enabled me to better understand and then describe what giftedness meant, as well as the effects that some of the constructions of giftedness had on the different research participants.

I intended to gain a deep understanding of the participants' perspectives and knowledge through the use of an interactive data collection process. Mutch (2013) explains that qualitative research was an unstructured research approach where participants can direct the research. As I elaborate later in this chapter, the research focus changed during this dynamic, research process.

3.2.1 Interpretive research

Interpretive research has always been used in qualitative research because it explores how people interpret, provide meanings about, and understand, the world around them (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012). Interpretive research was vital to this research, as the goal was to better understand the world of human experience and practice through careful analysis and interpretation of the data. In particular, the research aimed to explore participants' constructions of giftedness; thus, it was research based around a humanistic approach. The research was underpinned by the associations people developed, their

interpretations and understandings of different meanings of giftedness through social interactions (Burr, 2015).

Through engaging with my data, I came to understand that there were many ways that people thought about, and reacted to, different understandings of giftedness; I came to acknowledge that giftedness was socially constructed in many ways. An interpretative research method needs to be used in this research because it draws on the everyday meanings of people. Interpretative research aligns with the theory of social constructionism, is embedded in the context of fluid social interactions, recognises that individuals create meanings and make sense of their world through continual social interactions in their contexts (Picardi & Masick, 2014).

The assumptions behind interpretive research are different from those of other approaches. The primary ontological assumption is that our reality is subjective; that is, the world is discovered through people's opinions and judgements (Wegerif, 2008). By assuming and accepting that the individuals participating in the research have their own realities, I had to assume and accept that more than one factor could influence the social parameters of the participants' responses in terms of constructing giftedness. The epistemological assumptions for interpretive research methods are about individuals' beliefs (Feldman, 2003). Interpretivists believed there is no specific pathway to the knowledge; rather, that knowledge was created by people's interpretations, and so reflected both the human experience and the context. Hence, the theory of

social constructionism has been applied as the theoretical lens for this research. People cannot separate themselves from what they know; it is not all about truth, prediction and control, but people develop their meanings and understandings of different concepts through social interactions (Burr, 2015). These epistemological assumptions form a sustained foundation for this research.

3.2.2 Researcher positioning

Most ITE programmes in Aotearoa New Zealand currently include giftedness components only very briefly, and any serious specialisation in gifted education happens only at postgraduate level. In Aotearoa New Zealand, people who want to become New Zealand-registered teachers have to graduate with an ITE qualification that leads to teacher registration. “Initial teacher education (ITE) in Aotearoa New Zealand is characterised by a range of providers (universities, colleges of education, polytechnics, private training establishments and wānanga)” (Kane et al, 2005). Therefore, as a teacher educator, I was hoping to design content for an 'ideal' ITE programme that would help meet the needs of gifted children and their teachers and would use contributions from the research participants.

However, the original research direction changed. After the initial data were analysed, I realised that the data were showing an important message; namely, that the participants had illustrated several constructions of giftedness, and these constructions affected how gifted children were treated by teachers and

society. After discussing these findings with my supervisors, I decided that, rather than developing an ideal ITE programme, I would explore constructions of giftedness and the consequences of particular meanings evident in particular social constructions. I acknowledge that changing direction is consistent with the dynamics of qualitative research – there is a need for flexibility, creativity and letting the research data lead the process. The change process was aligned with the publications of Biklen and Bogdan (2007) and Mutch (2013), who explain that the process of conducting qualitative research may lead to outcomes that were different from the initial goals of the research. They explained that in the early stage of research, researchers choose something they preferred to collect data about, but the data collected could be different from what was originally expected.

When I started my research interest in giftedness 10 years ago, like many of the participants in this research, I was deeply influenced by the Ministry of Education documents (2000, 2002, 2008, 2012) and discourses that said gifted children were identified by a psychological assessment. Another reason why I believed that giftedness was aligned with a number on the bell curve (normal distribution) was because my daughter's school required that I supply them with a psychological assessment report as evidence of her giftedness. However, the research participants taught me that giftedness was neither represented by a number in a psychological assessment nor a percentile on the bell curve.

At the beginning of the data analysis stage, I still assumed that giftedness was a fact. This belief was probably grounded in the Ministry of Education documents and resources, as well as the common-sense constructions of teachers 'measuring' giftedness. Although none of the participants specifically used the words 'social construction', their comments illustrated that giftedness was not a number that can be determined by a standardised test. As I read the data many times, I developed a better understanding of, and insight into, the data. By the third draft of the findings chapters, I was beginning to see that there were many constructions of giftedness and some of these were interconnected, while others were contradictory. I also became more aware that many teachers are passionate about working with gifted children and their parents; therefore, they demonstrate an ethic of care in their professionalism. After writing more than eight drafts of the findings chapters, I came to realise that people interact with others and create conversations about giftedness, and that the interaction is constantly affected both by the extent of each person's involvement and by the personal experiences they bring to the interaction.

3.2.3 Data collection methods

To investigate the participants' views, I chose data collection methods that facilitated human interactions. Through collaborative interaction with the participants, together, we constructed multiple, and sometimes competing, meanings of giftedness in different contexts. In the following sub-sections, I first describe the montage of methods, followed by a description of the three different research participant groups, then the different data collection methods

used to gain information from the participants in each group. The first data collection method was an open-ended questionnaire. I sent an invitation to teacher educators to participate in interviews while I was coding the data from the questionnaire. The last phase of data collection was via a closed Facebook group that was held after the interviews had been analysed.

3.2.4 Montage methods

According to Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault (2016), researchers use a montage of methods to enable them to make sense of their data. Traditionally, qualitative research has been dominated by interviews and questionnaires (Drew, Hardman, & Hosp, 2008). However, the best way to achieve my research aims was to use a montage of methods to collect the data; that is, I combined several different methods, including an online open-ended questionnaire, Skype interviews and a closed Facebook group. Applying a montage of methods encourages the researcher to explore the possibilities of different data collection methods. Using a montage of methods was important to this research, because I gained diverse perspectives on how different groups of participants constructed giftedness. These diverse perspectives, in turn, enabled me to understand how society views giftedness, and also the effects of the different viewpoints. The participants' data demonstrated how some constructions of giftedness were interconnected but some were competing, as well as how some constructions of giftedness can shape, and be shaped, by other constructions. The research was strengthened by such rich data from the participants. The

findings in this thesis will show that montages of methods have much to contribute to the range of possible ways of engaging with research participants.

3.2.5 Participant groups

Data were collected from three different groups of participants – early childhood teachers, teacher educators, and parents of gifted children – because I intended to gain diverse perspectives about gifted education in Aotearoa New Zealand. Details of the three participant groups and the research procedures used to collect data from each group will be discussed in the next four subsections. The data needed to be collected in a way that enabled me to analyse how participants’ constructions of giftedness might have been influenced by their views and meanings of giftedness. Thus, three data collection methods were chosen. The data were collected in a way that allowed for the rich complexity of language and experience to be captured.

3.2.5.1 Participant group one – early childhood teachers

The first participant group were all early childhood teachers working in a licensed early childhood setting, either as a teacher or at management level. I sought participants from a broad range of ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds, as well as from all genders; therefore, an email inviting participation in the open-ended questionnaire was sent to more than 2000 licensed early childhood settings on the Ministry of Education’s database. The introduction in the email encouraged the reader to forward the invitation to anyone they thought might be interested in gifted education. The group was a

self-selected anonymous sample: the teachers and managers chose to participate in the research because they were interested in being involved in the open-ended questionnaire, as well as being interested in gifted education, and they were not asked to put their names on the questionnaire. These participants came from different cities in Aotearoa New Zealand. Most of the participants completed the whole questionnaire, although some questions were not answered as fully as others.

3.2.5.2 Participant group two – teacher educators

Interviews were used to collect data from eight ITE programme leaders and teacher educators. Two of the interviewees were working at a university, and six were teaching at a polytechnic; all their institutions had been accredited to deliver approved training programmes that led to teacher registration. The programmes at the polytechnics were field-based programmes, and three of the participants were involved in distance-learning programmes. One of the teacher educators worked for a private polytechnic. Two of the participants worked in different regions but for the same teacher education provider. All eight participants were teaching in three-year ITE programmes, while one was also involved in a one-year graduate programme. Due to ethical considerations, I did not invite the programme leader of the ITE provider where I was working to participate in the research. It was quite challenging to recruit teacher educators who were willing to participate and be interviewed. The first few teacher educators who showed an interest mainly worked at polytechnics, whereas many of the university-based programme leaders and teacher

educators whom I approached declined the invitation to participate. There were also some people who initially agreed to be interviewed, but whose interview dates and times were never confirmed.

3.2.5.3 Participant group three – parents of gifted children and teachers of gifted children

I set up a closed Facebook group with the intention of recruiting practitioners and teachers in early-childhood and primary-school settings. However, while several teachers joined the group, the participants were mainly parents of gifted children and there were very few teacher educators who actively participated in the group. The group had 173 members by the time I closed it for data collection. Many of the participants live in Aotearoa New Zealand, but a significant number resided overseas, in countries that included the United States, Canada, Australia, Malaysia and India. Although the rationale for this research related to Aotearoa New Zealand, the inclusion of a wider group of participants meant that the research was able to capture the voice of participants beyond this country. The collection of a wider range of data was beneficial, because the voices of overseas participants can inform us as to whether their constructions of giftedness were different from the constructions of the participants who resided in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The participants' Facebook posts showed how their children were being treated because they were labelled as gifted. Such lived experiences made the research process very dynamic. The process of collecting data on Facebook was

engaging because of my personal and teaching experiences. The Facebook group members had encountered similar situations, so we could understand each other's points of view.

3.2.6 *Online open-ended questionnaire*

The quality of data collected from an open-ended questionnaire can only be as good as the questions in the questionnaire, so it was essential to frame relevant questions that would generate data that could address my research aims. According to Tracy and Ebooks (2013), an open-ended questionnaire can be used not only for academic research but also whenever people needed information or opinions from others. Alessi and Martin (2010) state that internet-based open-ended questionnaires were more accessible to participants and had simplified the process of inputting data. Researchers and questionnaire designers needed to be clear about exactly what information they were looking for, and the questions needed to be designed so they can be answered within a reasonable timeframe. The researchers also needed to have some idea about the knowledge, abilities and skills required to answer the questions and, hence, whether their potential participants will be able to complete the open-ended questionnaires. Participants may not fully understand the questions but the online nature of the questionnaire, unlike face-to-face surveys, meant that the participants could not ask the researcher for clarification of the questions. Bearing this in mind, I tried to minimise the use of academic terms in the questions in the open-ended questionnaire in case some of the participants were untrained teachers or still in ITE training. An open-ended questionnaire was

often a one-off activity, meaning that the researcher may not have another opportunity to interact with the participants and collect further data (Liamputtong, 2013). As I wanted to gain as much information from the participants as I could, I included my email address in the questionnaire in case the participants wanted to contact me for further discussion, but none of them made contact.

The reason I chose an open-ended questionnaire to be the first data collection method involving the research participants was that I needed to collect a considerable amount of information, to achieve a wide perspective of gifted education understandings and practices in early childhood settings in Aotearoa New Zealand. An open-ended questionnaire was an effective way to access large numbers of centre managers, head teachers, supervisors and teachers from different regions across the country. Their practical experiences and knowledge were very valuable in seeing how practitioners' perceptions of giftedness were both based on, and affected by, their practice. As my aim was to gain an understanding of, and information about, early childhood teachers who were currently working in Aotearoa New Zealand; the questionnaire target population did not include early childhood teachers working overseas. Thus, I distributed the questionnaire to the more than 2000 early childhood education settings recorded in the Ministry of Education database; that is, only to Aotearoa New Zealand-based early childhood education settings. The open-ended questionnaire participants were, therefore, a self-selected anonymous sample from all early childhood teachers throughout Aotearoa New Zealand.

This questionnaire aimed to solicit the constructions of gifted education of those who actually worked with gifted and talented children. It focused on the ways the teachers worked with gifted children in their daily practice. The questionnaire also asked those participants who were in training or who had completed their ITE training how much they had learnt about catering for gifted and talented children in their ITE programme, whether in Aotearoa New Zealand or overseas. (See [Appendix 8](#) for the list of questions asked in the open-ended questionnaire.)

According to Lewis-Beck, Bryman and Liao (2004), there are some disadvantages in the development and implementation of open-ended questionnaires. For example, some potential participants may have technological difficulties opening or answering the questionnaire, others may view the invitation as a spam email and delete it, or the design of the questionnaire may not indicate that it should be forwarded to the potential participants. In relation to this research, several participants may have found it difficult to access the questionnaire due to their lack of computer skills. Although the invitation to participate in the questionnaire was sent to all the early childhood settings on the database on the Ministry of Education website, due to reasons of access, many practitioners may not have received (and hence respond to) the open-ended questionnaire. For example, the emails at many early childhood settings are opened by the centre's administrator, not the teachers who were the potential participants for the questionnaire. Although the invitation asked the person who opened the email to forward it on to teachers

or managers in the centre, this data collection methodology relied on the original recipients' willingness to forward the invitation on. Thus, some practitioners may have missed the opportunity to participate in the research.

3.2.6.1 Designing the open-ended questionnaire

I designed 10 questions that responded to the open-ended questionnaire's aims. I discussed each of the questions with my thesis supervisors to ensure the questions were relevant to the research topic and could be easily answered by the potential participants. The participants were expected to be able to complete the whole questionnaire in 20 to 30 minutes. They were not asked to complete all the questions, although the open-ended questionnaire was designed so that each question led on naturally to the next.

After working through my supervisors' comments, I invited four early childhood teachers to test the questions in the open-ended questionnaire. The purpose of the pilot study was to get as much feedback as I could about the proposed questions, as I wanted to ensure that they would be authentic and realistic for the participants. The pilot study also enabled me to see whether the open-ended questionnaire could be realistically completed within the 20-minute time frame. I invited early childhood teachers rather than my work colleagues to test the questions, because the open-ended questionnaire was going to be used to collect data from early childhood practitioners, not teacher educators. The pilot study was useful, because the feedback that the four early childhood teachers gave me helped me to meet the needs of those who were

going to participate in answering open-ended. In particular, I used the pilot study to 'get a feel' for the depth of subject knowledge that I could expect to get from the open-ended questionnaire's participants, as well as their practical skills in my research area.

After I had modified the questions slightly based on the feedback I had received from the pilot study, the open-ended questionnaire was ready. As required by the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee (ERHEC) of the University of Canterbury, an information letter was placed in the first page of the open-ended questionnaire (see [Appendix 3](#)). Participants were required to tick a box on the first page to indicate that they were willing to be involved in the research. As soon as this consent was given, the questions appeared.

Once the open-ended questionnaire was complete and online, I emailed the first batch of 500 invitations to selected early childhood settings from the Ministry of Education's email database. To ensure that the participants in the sample reflected the population of all early childhood teachers in licensed early childhood settings in Aotearoa New Zealand, I adopted a sampling method.

3.2.6.2 Sampling

For my research, I wanted to invite participants from 500 of the more than 2000 licensed early childhood settings on the Ministry of Education's database. Because there were more than 2000 settings, I erred on the side of caution and rounded the population size up to 3000. The calculation for this step was then: 3000 divided by 500 equals 6. This meant I needed to obtain a random number

from one to six to determine which early childhood setting in each group of six was the one to be selected. For example, if the random number was four, then I would select the fourth, tenth, sixteenth, twenty-second, etc., early childhood setting on the list until 500 settings had been selected.

In this thesis, a qualitative approach to sampling method was used. According to Taylor et al. (2016), “They [qualitative researchers] define their samples on an ongoing basis as the studies progress” (p. 31). These authors interpret the use of sampling in qualitative research as open to the possibility of supporting the data collection process. Delamont and Atkinson (2011) state that this sampling technique allows “an equal opportunity to appear as the guiding perspective and to influence analysis” (p. 6).

Unfortunately, I received only 14 responses in the first two weeks of the questionnaire – too few to enable me to analyse the data in any meaningful way. This low number might be because my sampling method limited the number of potential participants. I understood that early childhood teachers have a heavy workload and that each day they are faced with different duties, but the low response rate (less than 3%) was disappointing. When I reflected on this data collection method, I realised that accessing the questionnaire might be a challenge – the participants had to use a digital device to complete the questionnaire – many teachers may not have been able to access the questionnaire easily due to their heavy workload, or the information may not

have been passed on to them. These challenges are more fully discussed under the section about limitations of the research.

3.2.6.3 Solving the problems

I had to decide whether to continue with the same sampling method and select another 500 settings from the email list or to send the invitation email to all of the early childhood settings on the list. As my aim was to get as many responses as possible from different regions across Aotearoa New Zealand, I decided to abandon my original data collection strategy of sampling and find a different strategy that would generate more data. After discussing the problem with my supervisors, I decided to send an invitation email to all the early childhood settings on the Ministry's database.

The second round of invitation emails was sent to all the early childhood settings on 15 April 2013, with a reminder sent on 6 May 2013. When the open-ended questionnaire closed on 10 May 2013, I had received 137 responses, of which 134 (98%) could be used for data analysis. The reason why I conducted an open-ended questionnaire with the teachers before the interviews with the teacher educators was because I wanted to get an overall view or perspective of what teachers really needed to be able to support gifted children in their early childhood settings. The open-ended questionnaire format enabled me to collect a substantial and wide-ranging set of data from practitioners, and I was able to use my analysis of the practitioners' data to inform me as to how best to approach the interviews with the teacher educators. The initial response to the

questionnaire was disappointing, but then, by accessing a larger number of participants within a short time frame, the open-ended questionnaire was able to capture information from participants in different settings and regions of Aotearoa New Zealand. The open-ended questionnaire stated that the participants could raise any questions or areas of inquiry that could be probed further, so I left my contact email for any further discussions with the participants.

3.2.7 *Skype interviews*

An invitation to participate in the research was sent to all programme leaders of ITE early childhood programmes in Aotearoa New Zealand, with the exception of those working at the Manukau Institute of Technology (MIT). Programme leaders and teacher educators at MIT were not invited to participate in the research because I work at MIT, I did not apply for the ethical approval to collect data from staff at MIT. I chose to collect the data from the teacher educators using Skype interviews because of the time and cost constraints of personally meeting with participants around the country. Janghorban, Roudsari, and Taghipour (2014) explain that Skype interviewing is to equivalent on-site to interviews because Skype provides both audio and video functions. However, the advantage of Skype interviewing is that this technique can reduce the time and financial constraints of conducting on-site interviews. The Skype interviews were recorded and no information was asked of the interviewees that could be used to identify them from the interview transcripts.

I chose to use open-ended interview questions to collect data from the programme leaders, because I wanted in-depth information about their constructions of giftedness, as well as their practices relating to gifted education in their ITE programmes. This data collection method allowed me to gather complex data that would not be easily obtained through an open-ended questionnaire (Gorard, 2001; Mutch, 2013). The interview format enabled dialogue and *kōrero* (discussion) between me and the programme leaders, albeit within the limited timeframe of an interview. This was a reciprocal process – not only was I able to obtain richer data and greater insights through conversation, but the interviewees were able to reflect on their practice and gain some new insights and information in terms of developing or monitoring their ITE programmes. Biklen and Bogdan (2007) explain that interviews produced rich data from the perspectives of the participants. The first-hand data from the interviews, therefore, gave me insights into the participants' views about giftedness and how their practices supported their views. I would not have been able to obtain such rich insights through questions that invited simple 'yes' or 'no' closed answers, which generate only minimal data.

Taylor et al. (2016) describe some potential weaknesses in using interviews for data collection. They say that because interview questions are largely open-ended, conversations can easily go off track and not be relevant to the research topic if the interviewer does not manage the interview situation. For example, participants can sometimes get distracted by conversations that are not related to the questions, or they might spend a long time on some questions and then

run out of time to fully consider or even answer that last question(s). This is a limitation of using interview for research, particularly if the interviews are conducted within a tight time frame. Another disadvantage is that the need for interviews in this research would limit the sample size. I was the interviewer and had to complete the data collection process within the planned time frame. Therefore, I could not invite a large number of programme leaders and teacher educators from ITE programmes in Aotearoa New Zealand to participate in this research. I did mention the proposed time frame of the interview, so the participants understood the duration of interview beforehand. I emailed the interview questions to the participants a few days before the interview so they had time to prepare. I tried not to interrupt the conversations, but there were a few times where I had to bring the participants back on track by gently repeating the interview questions during our conversations.

3.2.7.1 Setting up the interviews

I first searched for a list of ITE providers in Aotearoa New Zealand, then I searched for their staff list. An initial invitation email was sent to the administrator(s) of each teacher education programme, because I was unsure who the programme leaders were. As soon as I found the relevant interviewee, a personal email invitation was sent to them.

3.2.7.2 Conducting the interviews

Just as I did with the open-ended questionnaire, I discussed my proposed interview questions with my thesis supervisors and then invited two colleagues

to 'pilot' the interview process. The purpose of the pilot study was to test whether the proposed questions were relevant to the research aims, and to check that the interview itself would not be too time consuming. In the end, eight people were interviewed. All the participants in this group were teaching either giftedness or inclusive education components in their ITE programmes, although this had not been one of the criteria for selecting participants, and so had not been specified as necessary in the invitation email.

The eight interviews were conducted over three months, from September to November 2013. Due to distance, all the participants elected to be interviewed via Skype, rather than face-to-face or over the telephone. Each interview was set up for a time that was most convenient for the participants, and the interviews took place from the participants' offices. As mentioned earlier, using Skype enabled face-to-face interviews while reducing the time, physical distance and financial constraints that faced an interviewer who goes physically to meet with the interviewees. I employed the same participant recruitment procedure as I would have done for face-to-face interviews, but using Skype gave me the flexibility of locations when interacting with participants.

The interview structure consisted of five primary questions, with three to five sub-questions within each main question (see [Appendix 9](#)). The questions asked the participants about their understandings of giftedness, their knowledge of the gifted education documents, the Aotearoa New Zealand Government's support of gifted education, and ITE. Each interview lasted more than one hour.

Over the course of each interview, the participants explored what giftedness meant to them. Taylor et al. (2016) explain that using interviews as a data collection method was particularly useful, as interviews enabled the researcher to gain an understanding of the meanings behind the participants' experiences – and I certainly felt that I was able to understand the meanings behind what the interviewees said about giftedness. I was aware of a potential challenge when conducting open-ended interviews; that participants may wish to discuss areas that were not relevant to the interview questions. Fortunately, I did not experience this problem during any of the eight interviews.

3.2.8 *Facebook Group*

The last data collection method was through a closed Facebook group. Collecting data through social media was not in the original thesis proposal, so the original ethics application had to be amended. The amended application was approved in March 2014. The Facebook group started in March 2014, and data collection finished at the end of June 2014. After June, the group was still active, but I no longer collected information from the site for use in my research. This data collection method was slightly different from how the open-ended questionnaire and interviews were structured. The Facebook group discussion topics included the participants' views of giftedness, equality and equity and asked them to reflect on diversity, provision for gifted children in early childhood and primary school settings, and how teachers responded to giftedness. The initial sets of questions were different, and I did not add any sub-questions to each main question. The rationale was for me, as a researcher,

to step back and allow the participants partnership in terms of leading the data collection process.

I did not anticipate using snowball sampling, but the participants forwarded the Facebook link to their friends and through their networks; hence, the final sample group was largely a result of this snowballing process. Baltar and Brunet (2012) point out that using Facebook as a data collection method can expand the geographical scope of the research and increase the snowball effect. Many of the participants discovered the group by using the Facebook search engine, while others found it by searching their friends' lists.

Most of the participants who actively posted on the Facebook page were parents of gifted children; their children were already in an early childhood setting, in junior primary school or home-schooled. Some of the parents were gifted themselves. A few active participants were early childhood or primary school teachers. By the time the data collection was completed, there were 173 members in the Facebook group.

It was easy getting new members for the group – as described above, as existing members brought in new members themselves, without any effort on my part. One reason why it was so easy to get a large number of participants in such a short time period was because Facebook was accessible through phones, tablets and computers. As Hansen (2011) and Ackland (2013) state, postings on social media sites are not restricted by time and location; participants can contribute to the group whenever they are available. The accessibility and self-generating

nature of social media were the two key reasons why I chose to use Facebook as a way of collecting data.

As Ackland (2013) and Alshaikh, Ramzan, Rawaf, and Majeed (2014) state, a significant benefit of using social media as part of the data collection process was that social media sites can generate rich data. For example, researchers can use a closed Facebook group to capture data, which then leads to further discussion – which was certainly true in this case. The discussions between the participants clearly illustrated how giftedness was constructed socially and how the participants’ constructions were based on their experiences.

However, there are some potential challenges when Facebook is used as a research tool for education and social sciences research. According to Kosinski, Matz, Gosling, Popov and Stillwell (2015), the first challenge is that although the internet has become commonplace in many countries around the world, not everyone has access to it, and so this would limit the number of participants to those who are on the internet and/or have a device. As in the interviews, conversations on Facebook can easily go off track if the participants misinterpret the questions, or if they post a conversation that they think is more important to them. Another potential challenge of using Facebook to gain information from the participants for this research was that participants can be triggered emotionally by others’ comments.

During the data collection on Facebook, I needed to be aware of two potential challenges. First, I had to remove someone who tried to join as a member but

who was actually trying to sell sunglasses. I did not want the Facebook participants to be disturbed by issues not relevant to the research discussion. To reduce the potential for participants who were trying to buy and/or sell anything or who were judgemental, rude or mean-spirited, I addressed the purpose of the research in the description of the Facebook group. I set up the group as a closed group so people could only join by request and by my acceptance, as an administrator of this group. I paid close attention to each post to ensure the conversations did not go too far off track.

Secondly, another potential challenge was that I had to be alert to any disagreements between participants – they may have needed to be reminded to maintain a respectful manner. I was prepared for the possibility that some posts may affect participants emotionally because of their personal experience. This group was set up for collecting data from the parent participants and also to support and uplift each other as parents of gifted children in the gifted community.

3.3 *Data analysis*

As discussed in section 3.2, qualitative research allowed researchers to gain much information from their participants, so the researchers can develop an in-depth understanding of the research topic. Mutch (2013) explains that a qualitative methodology allowed researchers to gather rich information that was of interest. In the end, I had gathered more than 210 pages of data – I had not realised I had had so much interaction with the participants. The next step

was to repeat and refine the data analysis. Taylor et al. (2016) point out that researchers gained a deeper understanding of the meanings of the data by continually refining their interpretations throughout the data analysis process.

3.3.1 Grounded theory and inductive approach for the data analysis

After collecting data from the participants, I coded the data using terms similar to the responses from the participants. Often, I labelled the codes using the participants' actual words, and sometimes I used my own similar words. Next, I processed the codes, putting them into different themes so that the analysis became more organised. The process of collecting and analysing data simultaneously is the foundation of grounded theory. The data analysis then led to the formulation of other questions for the next phases of data collection. While analysing the data, I wrote memos to capture my thinking about the analysis and coding of the data, as I had to familiarise myself with the data. I wrote four memos: a memo about giftedness, one about social construction, and two about experiencing giftedness; the last two memos were mostly based on the data collected from the Facebook group.

A significant aspect of qualitative data analyses was to follow the inductive approach; *grounded theory*, an approach popularly used in qualitative research (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Strauss and Corbin have stated that grounded theory was about the discovery of theory from data. The approach used general patterns of analyses. In my research, I used a grounded theory approach to

examine the participants' constructions of giftedness. I aimed to develop new knowledge through the data I collected, where the previous theories did not reflect the data. The grounded theory approach has component elements (Birks & Mills, 2015), the first of which is initial coding of the data.

All the participant's data I had collected – the open-ended questionnaire, interviews and Facebook group – were transcribed by computer, using NCH software. I repeatedly read through all the transcripts and then coded the data into major themes. The coding into themes revealed that some constructions of giftedness were interconnected, some were competing, and some were more influential than the others. The next step in the analysis was to look for the similarities and differences across each theme and sub-theme, and this assisted me to develop the foundations for the three findings chapters.

Inductive analysis is evident in much qualitative research (Thomas, 2006). I did not want to make predictions about how the participants might construct giftedness; rather, I wanted to use different data collection methods to discover and explore the participants' constructions, as well as to gain an insight into the factors that might have influenced their constructions. Qualitative research is frequently confusing and requires creative and dynamic processes. When I changed the direction of my research, I experienced first-hand that the analysis of qualitative research involved ongoing discovery. As stated by Rossman and Rallis (2012, cited in Taylor et al., 2016), "Data analysis is an ongoing process in qualitative research" (p. 169), and that is the reason I chose an *inductive*

approach for the data analysis. The researcher must be aware, though, that when an inductive approach is used, there may be a change in the direction of the research as a result (Gay & Airasian, 2000). Encompassing the principles of the inductive approach, I explored the data from the first phase of data collection for patterns, and then used the themes I discovered to explore the topic further. As I analysed the data, I found myself changing my initial aims and theories – as expected in an inductive analysis process – until, after many iterations, I reached a conclusion and developed new theories.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) said, “The researcher begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data” (p. 12). Such procedures enable the researcher to create meaning from complex datasets through the development of the findings and discussion chapters. The primary purpose of the inductive approach was to allow me to explore the participants’ constructions of giftedness, and to allow the research findings to emerge from the themes evident the data. Inductive procedures enable the researcher to create meaning from complex datasets through the development of findings and discussion. This research was developed by the data contributed by the participants. My research will show that an inductive approach can provide a simple, straightforward set of procedures for analysing data that allows the researcher to produce reliable and valid findings.

I followed the guidelines about data analysis suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998). Thus, I used the inductive approach to conceptualise the teachers’,

teacher educators', the parents' constructions of giftedness, the parents' perspectives of their children's experiences, and to explore the potential consequences of the meanings evident in particular social constructions for gifted children. The inductive analysis process required the researcher to interact with, and compare, the data using codes, themes and subthemes, until a grounded theory was developed. The coding involves breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualising and putting the data into themes. The developing, ripping apart and redeveloping processes of coding are all part of the inductive approach and result in a grounded theory (Chong & Yeo, 2015). All stages of the coding involved a continuous comparison of the newly-resulting information with data from previous and ongoing analyses. Each type of coding produces different results and, in the second phase, the different codes were grouped together in themes that had common characteristics or traits for constructing giftedness. Sub-themes were created within each large theme. Thus, the common characteristics or traits became the core elements of the themes. The process of coding and the development of themes out of these codes help the researcher to develop a grounded theory.

Three main themes emerged in this study. The first theme is social constructions of giftedness and ability. This theme focuses on the constructions that giftedness has a fixed ability that can be measured. The second theme emphasises the social constructions of teaching and learning for gifted children. This theme explores how teaching and learning are understood when teachers are constructed as experts. The final theme of this study is divided into two

parts, these are social constructions of teaching and learning that support gifted children and developing a community. This theme discusses how participants' stories to produce evidence of developing a learning community to assist gifted children's learning. The second part of this theme focuses on the data that reflects on an ethics of care that supports gifted children and their families.

As explained in the previous chapter, when constructing the participants' stories, I used two conceptual frameworks as an analytical framework to make sense of data. The two conceptual frameworks helped me justify my research. Due to the grounded theory and inductive approach used in this thesis, two conceptual frameworks were gathered after the data have been analysed. I then used these two conceptual frameworks support and guide me to understand and make sense with the participants' stories. Ravitch and Riggan (2012) state that the conceptual framework aims to support and inform the research, and plays a key aspect in the analysis. Thus, the two conceptual frameworks provide an analytical lens to identify and examine aspects of participants' negotiations and interpretations of giftedness.

The first conceptual framework is Smith and Barr (2008)'s *alternative models of teaching and learning*. The conceptual framework was introduced in the last chapter. The participants' stories show how teaching–learning transforms different interpretations and assumptions about constructing giftedness. The three models are linked with the participants' stories in each findings chapter ([Chapter Four](#), [Chapter Five](#) and [Chapter Six](#)). These models are drawn into

the discussion in all findings chapters. The second conceptual framework was Noddings (1984)'s *ethics of care*. The concept of ethics of care was the conceptual framework to organise the themes for the final, finding chapters ([Chapter Six](#)).

3.3.2 *Ontological justification*

As mentioned earlier in the literature review chapter, ontology is the study of what kinds of things exist in the universe. Lather (2016) comments that the ontology of the analytical process should be more than “cutting and pasting of coding” (p. 127). Ontology provides opportunities to explore how participants negotiate the meanings of knowledge through the process of analysing the data. I agree with Lather's comment: ontology allows me as a researcher to understand how teaching and learning are constructed, how these constructions influence the way people view giftedness and gifted children, and how a person's view can be shifted and entangled with others'. In this data analysis process, I acknowledge that early childhood teachers, programme leaders, teacher educators and parents of gifted children were involved in contributing to the constructions of giftedness that showed how they understand and believe what giftedness is.

3.3.3 *Validity and reliability*

In qualitative research, validity is about the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data, the participants' approach, the extent of triangulation, and the objectivity of the researcher. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison

(2007), “Validity is an important key to effective research, if a piece of research is invalid then it is worthless” (p. 105). In my research, I approached the participants in a professional manner, I always appreciated their time and the effort they took to complete the open-ended questionnaire, an interview or make a post on Facebook, and I respected their comments. However, I acknowledge the subjective nature of the data, given that they were based on the participants’ opinions, experiences and perspectives, and that this subjectivity can create a certain degree of bias. Thus, I would not say that the data were completely valid, although I have tried to maximise its validity by ensuring that the data were both socially situated and culturally saturated. I collected data and presented them in terms of the participants, rather than me, as researcher. Although I did not agree with some of the participants’ comments – for example, when a construction of giftedness was not helpful in children’s learning – I tried to understand their understanding of the world.

LeCompte, Preissle, and Tesch (1993) and Mills and Morton (2013) claim that the qualitative researcher needed to be able to replicate the analytical process of refining, generating, comparing and validating constructs. I am confident that I recorded the data accurately, and that my notes and transcripts provide a true reflection of what actually happened. I did not strive for uniformity; indeed, I was thrilled to see how participants constructed giftedness differently. I acknowledge that the interview data could be interpreted in different ways, and so I sent the transcripts back to each participant to check that they were satisfied with the transcription, and to enable them to give any feedback if they

wanted to. None of the participants provided additional feedback after they had read the transcripts.

To ensure the research was conducted in an ethical manner, I considered potential ethical problems and mitigating procedures at every stage of the research process. A detailed discussion of the ethics in this research is presented in the following section.

3.4 Ethical considerations

Research ethics are 'the rules of practice' by which the researcher is responsible for the potential and actual participants (Tolich & Davidson, 2011). As indicated, an ethics application had to be made in order to conduct this research. The ethics application process is designed to respect people, because it aimed to protect and maintain the balance of the rights of both the researcher and the participants. Research should not cause harm but, instead, be beneficial to the participants, the researcher and the community.

To ensure that I was aware of the ethical issues concerning research involving human participants, I followed the principles and guidelines for educational research, as defined by the ERHEC of the University of Canterbury (2009). To demonstrate that I understood and was going to follow these principles and values, I submitted a full ethics application prior to collecting the data; that is, before the open-ended questionnaire was conducted. I also worked closely with the ethics committee at different stages of the data collection, as needed; for

example, when I wanted to add in the Facebook group to my data collection montage.

All researchers at the University of Canterbury need to apply to one of the different ethics committees at the University for Approval of their research; educational research applications go to the ERHEC. The process of completing the ethics application was useful, because it helped me to identify and clarify any problems that might potentially arise in the process of conducting my research, and to formulate ethical solutions that would eliminate or at least mitigate these problems. One of the requirements of the ERHEC was that all potential participants were given comprehensive information about the research project so that they can make an informed decision as to whether they wish to participate or not. To meet this requirement, as indicated earlier in this chapter, I sent a letter to all potential participants, clearly informing them that the original aim of the research was to potentially improve current professional practice. The information letter was attached to the email I sent to the early childhood settings selected for my sample and was also included the link to my open-ended questionnaire (see [Appendix 2](#)).

I sent an email to the programme leaders or programme coordinators of all teacher education (early childhood) programme providers in Aotearoa New Zealand, except the School of Education, Manukau Institute of Technology (MIT). As indicated earlier, I excluded this school because I did not apply for ethical approval to cover MIT. I also wanted to eliminate any possible ethical

problems that might arise from the participation of a work colleague, such as the collegial relationship potentially affecting the validity and reliability of data. I was aware that by sampling small ITE providers, the programme leader and teacher educators might recognise another's contributions. I addressed this issue by clearly stating in the information given to all potential participants that they would be guaranteed anonymity through the use of pseudonyms in the thesis, as well as in all publications and presentations arising out of the research. The information given to all potential participants clearly stated that anonymity was to be maintained in any presentation of data from the thesis, and in all other publications and presentations.

For the Facebook group, I posted detailed information about the research and how to consent to participate on the group's home page; this information followed the principles and guidelines of the ERHEC of the University of Canterbury strictly. If a parent, teacher or teacher educator wished to participate in the research, informed consent was implied when the individual posted a message on the Facebook page. Just as with the open-ended questionnaire, participants were allowed to request a hard copy of the information letter and consent form by post, or by an electronic copy through email.

I also, if requested, posted a hard copy of the information sheet and consent form to anyone who participated in the open-ended questionnaire or interview. The letter underscored the fact that the whole interview could be conducted either online or face-to-face. Participants were informed that they did not need

to answer all of the questions, and that the interview would be recorded. The interviews did not start until I had received the signed consent forms from the participants. Data and the associated information, including personal and contact details, were stored in an encrypted electronic database (Dropbox). The electronic data will be retained for a period of five years.

Consequences from the constructions of giftedness can influence how gifted children are treated by their teachers and society. The outcomes of this thesis will contribute to education and pedagogy, especially in the field of gifted education, and will also have relevance for social services agencies. The participants were informed that they would be able to access an electronic copy of the thesis when it was completed. They have been encouraged to access the thesis in order to support their practice and to advocate for gifted education in the early years.

As part of my commitment to ethical principles and values, I was aware of the need to be culturally sensitive. My research methodology was designed to ensure that no participant would be offended by the process or feel excluded because of their gender or cultural or religious background. It was a strong intention in my research to include participants from a broad range of ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds, as well as from all genders; hence, I sent the invitation email to all the early childhood settings recorded in the Ministry of Education database and placed no restrictions on who could join the Facebook group.

I recorded the interview conversations to make sure the information collected was accurate. If the participants had any questions about the study, they could contact me at any stage of the research (my contact details were included on the consent form and on the information sheet). If participants had a complaint about the study, they could contact my supervisors and/or the chair of the ERHEC, University of Canterbury.

3.4.1 Previous connections

I acknowledge the importance of the relationship between the participants and me, because this connection can influence the data collection process and outcomes due to risk factors such as bias and power relations. As previously indicated, to avoid any potential conflict of interest, I did not interview the programme leader and the teacher educators in the early childhood education ITE programme at MIT. Before and, even, after collecting the data in the open-ended questionnaire, I had not met most of the participants. Some teachers might have known me from the questionnaire, but I did not know who they were because the questionnaire was anonymous. As I was a teacher educator, I had previously met some of the interviewees through professional networking. The relationships formed during the data collection process, however, were purely those of interviewer and interviewee. I knew some of the New Zealand-based parents and teachers in the Facebook group, but I had no previous connections with or knowledge about the overseas Facebook participants.

3.5 *Limitations of the research*

Although the research was planned and set up thoughtfully and was closely guided by my thesis supervisors, I acknowledge that every research and human interaction has its limitations, and this piece of research was no exception. I am fully aware of the limitations of both my research methods and my interpretations of the research data. I am mindful that the data are all based on the effort and responses from the research participants, and that the data reflect that there are still limitations in the area of gifted education.

As the research progressed over the years, three limitations of the initial research design were exposed. The first limitation became evident quite early on. Although the invitation to participate in the open-ended questionnaire was sent to everyone on the Ministry's database, due to reasons of access, many practitioners may not have been able to receive and, hence, respond to the questionnaire. For example, the emails at many settings were opened by the centre's administrator, not the teachers who were the potential participants in the open-ended questionnaire. Although the invitation asked the person who opened the email to forward it on to teachers or managers in the centre, this data collection method relied on the original recipients' willingness to forward the invitation on to other people. Thus, some practitioners may have missed the opportunity to participate in the research.

The second limitation is that, unintentionally, but, not surprisingly, most of the participants were female. The open-ended questionnaire did not have a gender question, but it can be assumed that nearly all of the respondents were female, given that early childhood teaching is a female-dominated profession. Of the eight teacher educators who participated in the interviews, only one was male, while the posts on the Facebook group were exclusively from mothers and/or female teachers. Although male perspectives could be considered indirectly through at least some of the mothers' comments it would have been better if some fathers had also posted comments, as this would have given some male perspectives to the research and, perhaps, even changed the findings. Fathers tended to play a different role in family life from mothers, and so fathers' constructions could likely be different and have a different effect on their children's learning and development. Thus, male attitudes about giftedness are equally important for a comprehensive understanding of constructions of giftedness, and the potential consequences of the meanings evident in particular constructions.

The final limitation is that the data collection design did not include questions about the participants' cultural background. During the interviews, I could identify from their comments and appearance that two of the teacher educators were Māori (the other six were Pākehā, European New Zealanders), but I did not have any information about the cultural backgrounds of the practitioners who completed this questionnaire. I could infer some information about the participants from their Facebook posts, and presume that most came from white

(European) backgrounds, although there were also contributors from India and Singapore who were probably from a South-East Asian background. For me, I was born in Hong Kong, but have been living in Aotearoa New Zealand for 20 years. Cultural differences might have affected the nature of the information the participants shared with me, especially if they thought that I would have a different construction of giftedness because I come from a different cultural background to theirs. I was unable to analyse the data at a deeper level by comparing different cultural perspectives, because I did not have the raw data about the participants' cultural backgrounds.

3.6 Conclusions

This chapter has presented and explained the processes behind the development of the research. The strengths of the qualitative and interpretive methodologies that were applied to answer the research questions have been discussed. This chapter has explained the researcher's positioning and how my perceptions of giftedness changed after analysing the data. The participant groups and how data were collected and analysed have been described, and the inductive and grounded theory approaches to data analysis explained. The validity and reliability of the data and research findings have also been described in detail. Ethical issues have been identified and discussed.

After coding the data and putting the codes into different themes, I finalised the themes into three different areas: social construction of giftedness, social construction of teaching and learning and developing a learning community in

order to responding to giftedness. The three findings chapters that follow present these three different themes. The first findings chapter outlines a common-sense construction raised by many of the participants; namely, the relationship between ability and achievement, because giftedness has been constructed as of fixed ability. The second findings chapter presents the participants' constructions of teaching and learning that teachers are constructed as experts in children's learning. The final findings chapter discusses the alternative social constructions of teaching and learning that support gifted children, their families and teachers. The participants' comments showed that teachers demonstrated their commitment to supporting and responding to giftedness and how learning occurred. Teachers were willing to support gifted children as well as their parents.

Chapter Four

Social constructions of learning and learners

4.1 Introduction

The analysis of the participants' stories is interpreted and presented in three findings chapters. Each chapter explores the many ways of constructing giftedness and learning for gifted children through an investigation of the data collected from the open-ended questionnaire, Skype interviews and Facebook posts. Some constructions of giftedness were interconnected, some were dominant and some contradicted each other. The data consistently showed that constructions of giftedness created consequences, and that these consequences had particular meanings that affected children's learning and teachers' practice.

My chosen conceptual frameworks had a significant role in guiding the process of this research. According to Bordage (2009), "conceptual frameworks will help you clarify the nature of the problem and guide the development of possible solutions..." (p. 313). As already outlined, I used two conceptual frameworks to make sense of the data that structure the three findings chapters in this thesis. The three findings chapters drew on the two conceptual frameworks. The first conceptual framework used is the *three alternative models of teaching and learning*, as described by Smith and Barr (2008). This framework underpinned Chapters Four, Five and Six. The second conceptual framework used in this thesis was the concept of *ethics of care* (Noddings, 1984), which is presented Chapter Six.

Smith and Barr (2008) describe the three models and showed how teaching and learning can potentially move between a dominant and traditional approach to a more inclusive practice drawing on sociocultural views of the curriculum and pedagogy. Smith and Barr (2008) describe three elements, and each element has at least one descriptor that can be used to identify what model was being invoked. The three findings chapters showed how participants in my study drew on, or invoked, particular views of teaching and learning, and the effects of their meanings were evident in particular social constructions for understanding giftedness and gifted learners.

This first findings chapter explored the first model in the alternative models of teaching and learning – the *learning equals being taught* model (Smith & Barr, 2008). As explained in the literature review ([Chapter Two](#)), this model described a dominant perspective that learning equalled, or was dependent on, what was being taught by teachers. The descriptors in the three elements in this model included the *role of teachers* as 'teachers are constructed as experts' and *a view of the curriculum* with the curriculum seen as 'fact'. The descriptors under the *view of learning* include *cognitive dimension [is]stressed*, and *learners learn by being told, learning is individual and affected by ability, which is seen as fixed* and *learners acquire new knowledge in predictable and manageable stages* (Smith & Barr, 2008, p. 408). These descriptors aligned with the discourse of deviance, in which “intelligence is fixed and innate” (Skidmore, 2002, p. 121). In a discourse of deviance, people viewed ability as

a fixed trait which, in turn, shaped the teachers' determination towards children's learning.

This chapter examined how the research participants thought about giftedness and ability, and how their constructions of giftedness relating to gifted children were associated with the *learning equals being taught* model (Smith & Barr, 2008). Constructions of giftedness that related to ability as being seen as fixed were also explored. These constructions brought out other constructions that were interrelated or influenced by the dominant constructions of giftedness as a cognitive dimension that can be measured.

4.2 *Views of learning that ability can be measured for gifted children*

The participants brought to the research their experiences as teacher educators, teachers and parents. A belief held by many of the participants was that giftedness was measurable. In the *learning equals being taught* model, a descriptor of the view of learning in which the *cognitive dimension [was] stressed* (Smith & Barr, 2008, p. 408), which meant that intelligence can be measured because people cannot do much to change it. Skidmore (2002) describes a descriptor in the discourse of deviance that children can be categorised into different groups due to their different abilities. This descriptor aligned with the view of learning that stated *cognitive dimension [is] stressed and learning is individual and affected by ability, which is seen as fixed*. As these descriptors also underpinned the idea that ability was seen as real and can

be measured; therefore, people can label abilities as milestones and decide when a child has met these milestones, early or late or not at all. Accordingly, the discussion in this chapter is driven by the participants saying that measurement was an important aspect of the construction of giftedness. Skidmore (2002) explains how many teachers relied on measurements to determine an individual's educability. Ministry of Education documents frequently suggested that schools used IQ tests as one of the tools to measure children's abilities (Ministry of Education, 2000, 2002, 2012); these suggestions implied that giftedness was a physical characteristic that can be measured.

The construction of giftedness was complex; however, reaching milestones earlier than one's peers was one of the indicators that ability can be measured. Ami, a mother of gifted child, posted a question about how to identify gifted children: "... just trying to show early milestones ... what [do] others think in terms of identification ... is reaching milestones early a way to identify giftedness ... as opposed to 'academic' skills?" Another story shared by Belle, a programme leader, also constructed giftedness as being associated with measuring abilities so that people can label as gifted, children who reached the milestones earlier than other children, Belle commented: "They [teachers and/or parents] might say: A gifted child is a child who's already reading." Just because a teacher recognised that a child can reach milestones earlier than their peers, it did not necessarily follow that the teacher understood that child well, or their learning needs. Gould (1996) claims that once intelligence has been

accepted as a fact that was not changeable, standard procedures become involved, and professionals used these procedures to understand individuals. Likewise, Skidmore (2002) describes how many people constructed intelligence as “a fixed, innate ability in a normal curve with a ready-made explanation ...” (p. 121). A corollary of this construction was that, because it was immutable, intelligence can validly be measured.

The construction that giftedness was measurable, as illustrated by the research participants’ comments, led to the widespread practice of measurement as a way of identifying giftedness. Ali commented about the open-ended questionnaire by saying that she preferred to have standardised methods to measure giftedness: “It would be helpful to have a specific set of criteria to identify children.” Indeed, some of the research participants assumed that children were identified as gifted (or not) from being judged through IQ testing. Although some teachers preferred to use observational data, comparing the child with their peers to identify giftedness, the use of tools, such as standardised tests to measure ability was, nevertheless, a very common practice.

The literature review (see [Chapter Two](#)) included a discussion about how tests that allegedly measured intelligence were biased in favour of people from professional backgrounds. Data generated from the research participants’ comments have revealed that measurements were an important component in many people’s constructions of giftedness. Jessie’s (mother) experience was

that her son had to be measured to see whether he 'qualified' for the gifted group at school: "In order to qualify for what they call 'gifted' education (two hours once a week in a different location) he would have had to pass a standardised test in second grade." Jessie's story showed that the practice of measuring children's so-called abilities was very powerful, because it was also about defining children who were gifted or not. Skidmore (2002) describes "an alternative curriculum was provided for the less able" in his discourse of deviance (p. 120). Jessie's story can relate to this discourse, because gifted children were placed in another group *if* they met the requirement to attend it. According to Skidmore (2002), ability needed to be measured if teachers want to know whether or not a child met the criteria for the alternative group.

Kim, a teacher who also contributed to the open-ended questionnaire, stated: "Gifted is measurable. Gifted children think radically diff [differently], outside the circle and have thought patterns that were not the same as everyone else." Although Kim did not directly comment on giftedness as a fixed ability, her comment suggested that giftedness was measurable. Skidmore (2002) states that the concept of measurement, as informed by IQ theory, had a long history and was a powerful influence on the concept of 'educability'. A significant point to note here was that it was not which measurement tools that were used that were important, but how the teachers interpreted the results from whichever measurement tools they chose to use. The way teachers interpreted the measurement results, and what the measurement tools meant to them, have a significant effect on how the children in their classes were treated. Later in this

chapter, in section 4.2.3, the discussion shows that the practice of measuring giftedness informs the development of labelling the gifted.

4.2.1 *Giftedness is a different fixed ability*

In the data analysis, much of the data highlighted another construction of giftedness, that gifted children have a fixed ability, and that this ability was different from the abilities of other children who were not considered to be gifted. This construction aligned with a descriptor in the view of learning in the model described by Smith and Barr (2008) *learning equals being taught*: that *learning is individual and affected by ability, which is seen as fixed*. This element illustrated that everyone's ability can be measured; this section extended this statement on measuring abilities – that gifted children have another fixed ability.

Gifted children were seen as learning differently, with some data indicating that they have a different fixed ability. Ade, a teacher, shared in the open-ended questionnaire that gifted children were “[T]hose with an IQ in the top 3%, those with an exceptional ability ... significantly different to their age peers.” Elaine, another teacher, has responded in the questionnaire that gifted children have different abilities than other children as, “they may think things out differently, come up with different solutions and often move forward to new topics so quickly that others may not follow their thoughts.” Kay, an early childhood teacher, has responded in the open-ended questionnaire was that “Those with an exceptionality in the areas of art, music, physical ability, social abilities,

etc.” Another teacher provided a similar answer that “[giftedness is] a natural gift that is exceptionally different from peers’ ability in specific areas.” Participants’ construction of giftedness was that, because gifted children have a different fixed ability, their learning pace will also be different to those of other (not gifted) children. Rosie (teacher) responded in the open-ended questionnaire that “a [gifted] child is working at a different level or in a different space than others.” The construction that gifted children have another fixed ability seemed to have a powerful influence on determining who was different in the learning environment. Constructions of giftedness as a fixed ability influenced teachers’ beliefs about what the differences were and who can determine the differences, because they were constructed as 'expert' in the learning environment (Smith & Barr, 2008).

The construction of giftedness that gifted children have a different ability was at odds with the presumption presented in Ministry of Education documents, and accepted by many New Zealanders for years, that giftedness was a fact. Once a trait was measured, the outcome of the measurement was categorised; that is, the test result did (or did not) fall within the threshold of giftedness, as determined by the test. Such categories can then result in the test participant being labelled; for example, as gifted (or not). Much of the data reflected the feelings of many of the research participants – but the reality was that children were judged, measured and labelled, and the different labels were associated with different expectations (Moulton et al., 1998).

Some parents' comments linked giftedness to ability. For example, Tamara said, "Giftedness: someone with exceptional ability in one or more areas," while Suzi commented that "Giftedness is exceptional ability that an individual is born with. The individual could be gifted in any number of ways." Suzi's comment also highlighted another construction of giftedness: that giftedness was something a person was born with. Vic replied to Suzi's Facebook post thus:

To add to Suzi's description ... in terms of giftedness, I would like to also include ... exceptional abilities and/or qualities as well as demonstrated abilities and qualities. I would also like to add that these exceptional abilities and qualities may show very early or may develop later.

The comments contributed by Tamara, Suzi and Vic indicated some similarities between constructions that looked at giftedness in terms of ability. Three other teachers described their constructions of giftedness: "Gifted children with skills, abilities, knowledge outside of normal developmental limits," "Children who have ability to understand things quicker than normal children." and "Children who have ability to understand things quicker than normal children." Ange, a practitioner who contributed to the open-ended questionnaire, commented that the teachers in her centre relied on professionals to measure gifted children: "Education psychologist to assess child..." These quotes suggested that these stories aligned with the descriptor a *discourse of deviance*, as described by Skidmore (2002), where *there is a hierarchy of cognitive ability on which students can be placed* (p. 120). Because the ability was seen as fixed, teachers can distinguish the differences between children. If this were the case,

presumably measurements might become a tool for assisting them to understand children and cater for children based on abilities that have been indicated by the measurement results. There were 134 responses to the open-ended questionnaire about giftedness being seen as a fixed ability and that giftedness was measurable. These responses fell into three distinct themes expressed in common sense constructions:

View of learning in “learning equals being taught” model (Smith & Barr, 2008)	Common sense constructions for gifted children (Participants)	Example from the open-ended questionnaire of early childhood teachers’ statements
<p>Cognitive dimension stressed</p> <p>Learning is individual and affected by ability, which is seen as fixed</p>	<p>Gifted children have exceptional abilities</p> <p>Gifted children are intelligent in one or more areas</p> <p>Gifted children have capabilities beyond their age</p>	<p>“Children with the extraordinary capabilities beyond their biological age” (teacher).</p> <p>“A person that is exceptionally able in any one domain. This could be academic, sport, art, etc.” (teacher).</p> <p>“Exceptional in one or more areas beyond normal developmental expectations” (teacher).</p> <p>“A child demonstrating an aptitude/thinking beyond what it is expected for a child of their age” (teacher).</p> <p>“To me, to be labelled as ‘gifted’, the person has to be exceptional, not just slightly better than average” (teacher).</p>

Table 1: Common-sense constructions of giftedness related to a fixed ability

Whether a child was gifted or not, how gifted a child was, and what type(s) of giftedness a child has, were all determined by behavioural characteristics and a set of standard criteria and numbers, as well as by the person who assessed that child. Yet, despite the subjectivity of many test results, education professionals in Aotearoa New Zealand still commonly used the results of measurements to label children. Two of the elements of view of learning – *cognitive dimension [is] stressed*’ and *learning is individual and affected by ability*, which are seen as fixed,” as described by Smith and Barr (2008) – are still considered a significant approach in order to provide for individual learning. As McAlpine (2004) and Margrain et al. (2015) point out, “Standardised tests of intelligence or scholastic ability are amongst the most commonly used standardised test for identifying giftedness” (p. 107). Data generated from the research participants’ comments have revealed that measurements were an important component in many people’s constructions of giftedness. If teachers wanted to know about the child, the child needed to be assessed, and the common practice of measurement was based on the construction that giftedness was a fixed ability. Once a trait was measured, then the outcome of the measurement was labelled; for example, the test result did (or did not) fall within the threshold of giftedness as defined by the test.

4.2.2 *Categorising abilities by achievement*

As a result of constructing gifted children as having a different fixed ability, I argue that the first consequence of this view of learning was a cognitive dimension stressing that children were either achievers or non-achievers as a

way of distinguishing between gifted or non-gifted children. The quotes given below showed that achievement related to a construction of giftedness, because many teachers thought that this was what a gifted child was supposed to be – a high achiever, especially in academic areas. Lara (teacher) shared her view that gifted children were high achievers, saying that gifted children have “abilities noticeably outside of the norms for reaching academic milestones.” Likewise, Daena (teacher) believes that giftedness “means that child has an ability in certain areas such as academic.” I claim that having high academic skills was just one of the many possible constructions of being gifted – but many teachers were restricted by their construction that giftedness was related only to academic areas. This common-sense construction meant that gifted children who did not fit this criterion of high academic achievement were, therefore, not considered as gifted by their teachers. This is clearly shown in Belle’s (programme leader) story:

From my experience, a lot of preschool teachers, even lower primary school teachers, interpret being able to read, or being really good at maths, as being the kind of sole descriptors to use. So, while we haven’t got any children within our centre who can read, therefore, we don’t have any gifted learners.

The research data showed that giftedness was often thought of as a child showing exceptional abilities, which led to achievement and success. By measuring a child’s abilities and performance against those of other children, this construct of giftedness can be seen as one of dividing children into different categories. Tieso (2003) said that categorisation may not be helpful for children’s learning.

A typical response from the research participants was that gifted children were advanced in certain areas – this was how teachers knew they were gifted. Thus, children were divided into two main groups: gifted children with high achievement, and non-gifted and non-high-achieving children.

This construction of giftedness that related to achievement was reinforced by the Ministry of Education, which stated in its 2012 resource document for schools that high achievement was a sign of giftedness, adding that “the successful gifted” were those students who “achieve highly at school and are the group most likely to be identified” (p. 37). Selden (2000) claims that society was competitive and judged children’s intellectual ability. Selden also referred to a statement by Hollingworth that “the very intelligent are those who rise in the world of competition ...” (p. 246). However, some of the data reflected that many teachers have become achievement-driven because achievement was seen as evidence of merit. Results had become more important than the learning process for some parents – a point that many of the participants in this research found challenging.

Poppy (parent) challenged teachers on Facebook, saying that “All [teachers] did was gear everyone towards testing and many kids (gifted) get left out in the cold because they aren’t being challenged, only being taught to the test.” Yet, despite some dominant discussions among educator professionals, academics and concerned parents, the construction that giftedness was linked to high achievement was still widely held in society. The model of *learning equals*

being taught (Smith & Barr, 2008) was still commonly seen in society, where routine learning was judged by achievement. As described by Smith and Barr (2008), the role of teachers was constructed as being an 'expert' within this model of teaching and learning; thus, children were expected to be the passive recipients of learning. Gould (1996) explains that, in the academic environment, achievement was seen as a way to judge people's success and potential futures. Schools focused on performance as a way to determine giftedness, and achievement was used as an indicator of whether a child has learnt (or not).

In the literature review ([Chapter Two](#)), I illustrated how constructions of giftedness, and notions of what a gifted child was, have, for a long time, closely linked intelligence with academic achievement. Of the 137 early childhood teachers who participated in the national questionnaire, 97 related the meaning of giftedness to high achievement, saying that achievement indicated ability, and a gifted child was one who had an advanced skill or ability in one or more areas. For example, Lara (teacher) said that a gifted child achieved “at a level significantly beyond what might be expected from age peers in fields such as arts, technology, academic pursuits, athletics, sports and social action.” Lizzie (teacher) defined a gifted child as one who “consistently achieves above the typical 'norms' in one or more areas of learning and development.” Some of the comments on the teachers' open-ended questionnaire indicated similar constructions of giftedness; that is, using academic achievement as an indicator of a gifted child. It was important to understand these comments, because the

common social construction of giftedness – that gifted children were high achievers – influenced how gifted children were treated by teachers.

In the descriptor of view of learning *cognitive dimension stressed*, 'cognitive' was set within limited criteria; thus, gifted children may not be treated as gifted if they were not high achievers and did not meet the criteria within the measurable dimension. I argue that achievement was not a viable construction, because constructions of giftedness have evolved over time, and current constructions now challenged the traditional notion that giftedness was related to achievement. For example, Sternberg (2004) asserts that giftedness involved more than just IQ, and Gardner (1983) shows that there were different types of intelligence and that intelligence was not only academically orientated. The dynamics of constructions shaped perceptions and meanings about giftedness in ways that can lead (or did not lead) to provision for giftedness.

The theory of social constructionism carried with it the idea that the meanings behind a concept were shaped by history and social interactions (Burr, 2015). Olga's (teacher educator) quote, below, showed how construction that related to achievement can be influenced by history. The common-sense construction that giftedness in a child was related to academic achievement was also seen by teacher educators, in general, as 'common sense' (Baudson & Preckel, 2016). For example, Olga, said, "I grew up [with the] idea of people who were gifted having very high IQs. And so very high abilities in specific kind of areas like, you know, language or mathematics, those kinds of traditional academic areas

...”. Olga was brought up and undertook her teacher education in an environment where giftedness meant high IQs and excellence in academic areas, and this environment influenced how she looked at giftedness. Olga’s comment reflected that gifted children were high achievers, especially in academic areas.

Karen, who teaches in an ITE programme, sets out her traditional view of giftedness in terms of achievement indicating high ability, when she said: “... you’re talking about academic abilities that they [gifted children] are beyond the A [grade].” Maggie, another teacher educator, offered a similar viewpoint, saying that “giftedness is the word that they [education professionals] throw in there so that it can be related maybe more to academic things.” Her comment illustrated that people’s constructions of a gifted child were often couched in terms of academic achievement. Hernández Finch and colleagues (2014) said that most definitions of giftedness have high achievement in a given domain as evidence of giftedness.

The concept that gifted children have the ability to be high achievers was influenced by the Education Review Office in its 2008 publication (Education Review Office, 2008). This government document noted that many schools only paid attention to identifying children who displayed giftedness in the areas that led to high achievement; that is, schools frequently constructed giftedness only in terms of academic achievement. Murphy and Breen (2015) have a similar explanation, saying that due to the traditional expectations of gifted

children, as well as teachers' own meanings and understandings of giftedness, gifted children were assumed to be high achievers. The construction that linked giftedness with high achievement has always been influential, and this was reflected in the research data, which showed that many of the teachers and teacher educator participants expected gifted children to be high achievers.

The idea of measurement was a starting point for many constructions of giftedness, but it fell short when people related the measurements to the ability to achieve and to succeed only in terms of academic performance. In the open-ended questionnaire, Tarn said a gifted child was one who “[W]hen tested cognitively, achieved well above the standardised norm for age across all areas of cognition/numeracy/literacy.” Tarn’s construction of giftedness was that cognitive and academic abilities were measurable and led to success. Yet a school’s success was often measured only in terms of its students’ performance in the core subjects (Besjes-de Bock & de Ruyter, 2011). This meant teachers used measurements to drive those students who they saw as having more potential to be successful. However, success can be gained in many fields and through diverse abilities – academic ability and success was only one construction of giftedness.

4.2.3 Labelling the gifted through measuring their abilities

In this section, I present findings that the constructions of giftedness held by a number of the research participants involved labelling as a result of measuring abilities to identify giftedness. I extended the last section, because when

children were categorised between gifted and non-gifted, they carried different labels. This section was informed by a descriptor of view of learning in the model that *learning equals being taught* described by Smith and Barr (2008) that the *cognitive dimension [is] stressed*. This was because the labels were created by teachers, who were constructed as experts, due to cognitive function being able to be measured. Gates (2010) notes that labelling the gifted was a common practice in education: “Children are often categorised and labelled according to their intelligence quotient, standardised test score, or some other indicator such as a score in an off-level test” (p. 200).

Serena, a teacher, provided this response in the questionnaire: “They [gifted children] came with that 'label' which had been diagnosed by another professional organisation.” Such categories can then result in the test participant being labelled; for example, the child was gifted (or not), the child had a learning disability (or not). Gates (2010) said that the expectations of a child’s behaviours can change once the outcome of the measurement of giftedness was raised, “when in reality the child remains the same” (p. 200). Gifted children carried different labels about being gifted and these labels were linked with the construction that giftedness was a fixed ability that can be measured.

O’Connor (2012) states that labelling was developed because teachers were responsible for identifying gifted children, so they needed some criteria to distinguish whether a child was gifted or not. A number of the participants

commented about this associated issue of labelling. For example, one of the participants in the open-ended questionnaire, Rosa, said that “teachers need to be careful not to label children and to make assumptions about children who are gifted,” explaining that labels can restrict opportunities for responding to children’s interests and strengths. However, as O’Connor (2012) describes, the reality was that children were judged, measured and labelled, and different labels were associated with different expectations. And, as discussed earlier, the label and, hence, the expectations given to a child were determined by how their teachers constructed giftedness. According to the data from the Facebook participants, schools commonly used IQ tests to label children as either gifted or not gifted, as well as using other standardised tools, such as school assessments. Moselle (mother) used her experience as a gifted learner to criticise the education system’s use of standardised measurement of abilities: “It’s mass-producing brainwashed citizens ...” Some parents in the Facebook group talked about how their gifted child’s school measured their child’s abilities, then used these measurements to label their child to determine the provision of resources.

Many of the conversations held during the data collection processes have shown how a range of different elements can contribute to an individual’s understanding of the measurements and, hence, the labelling of gifted children. Heidi asked: “Is it fair to determine giftedness without considering different ... views on giftedness?” Her question highlighted that the labelling of common sense constructions of giftedness was still considering only standardised

measurements that recognised a fixed ability. It was not surprising, then, that there were some effects from the *cognitive dimension stressed*, as described by Smith and Barr (2008), because modern-day society was complex, and teachers were still dominant in forming what a learning environment should be.

4.3 *Effects of constructions of learning when ability can be measured for gifted children*

A number of the research participants were concerned that teachers cannot cater for different children's needs when the use of standardised measurements predominated in the education system. Ella (mother) was concerned that schools also 'buy into' standardised testing systems because ability can be measured. She shared a comment that her child experienced this at school: "The only thing taught is how to pass the tests and test-taking strategies... Standardised testing has its place but cannot be the be all and end all." As Silverman (2013) states, "When schools only recognise high achievement as indicative of giftedness, untold numbers of gifted children from diverse backgrounds are missed" (p. 5). As stated earlier, the link between giftedness and academic success was a common sense construction, with many teachers assuming that if a child was gifted then they must be doing well at school or, conversely, with teachers using success at school as a defining criterion for giftedness.

The research of Guskin et al. (1988) and Preckel et al. (2010) illustrated that when giftedness was strongly correlated with achievement it can have negative

consequences for the gifted child. Sarah's (mother) experience illustrated this concern: "My boy regularly has a meltdown because of expectations placed on him." Likewise, a focus on achievement at school can have the effect of creating an expectation of what a gifted child 'should' look like, linking giftedness to how successful the child was at school and how they can contribute to society in the future, and these expectations may have negative consequences for the gifted child who did not fit this particular construction. Gillian (mother) asked on Facebook, "I wonder how many of us have had bad experiences with our children that make us so much more proactive for others. Walford and Massey (1998) and Hart and colleagues (2004) all state that learning was supposed to be a positive experience. It was apparent that many constructions of learning about gifted children were not helpful for children's learning and that, in the school context, constructions of learning were predominantly created by teachers.

However, some of the data illustrated that there were many potential consequences of labelling children as gifted through measurement, because "[a] single number, test, or label rarely captures existing or potential excellence" (Friedman & Rogers, 1998, cited in Ford, 2003, p. 150). Beth posted on Facebook that a measurement was not enough to understand a gifted child, and may not be helpful for gifted children's learning:

A gifted child who is not consistently challenged does not have the opportunity to feel the process of learning – what it feels like to work through a problem, to work at mastering a concept, to hit bumps in the road of understanding or to fail and then recover. At

some point in the child's life, their ability to absorb information will be challenged by the information they are asked to understand. But without the skills of learning, they are handicapped. Many gifted kids give up, frustrated and feeling stupid or overwhelmed, at some point in their educational career.

The influence of scientific and psychological approaches to gifted education, such as the use of IQ tests, meant that scientific and psychological language was often found in the education system and was used to divide children (Connor & Gabel, 2013). This quote aligned with a descriptor of a discourse of deviance, as described by Skidmore (2002), that students can be grouped because of their ability. What children learn, how they learn and how teachers placed their students in different groups were informed by the results of the measurements.

Likewise, Nicki, a mother of a gifted child, was concerned about another effect of the education system's current focus on standardised testing: "[E]ducation has become a test-heavy, conformity-centred institution that is not designed to meet the needs of diverse learners." The parent participants' perspectives of their children's experiences indicated that such testing systems had negative effects on the meanings evident in particular social constructions for gifted children. For example, Jessie shared her frustration with an education system that focused on measurement: "I am a mom ... in NY, USA. I am also his [my son's] educator as the [education] system here completely left him in the dust to fend for himself and we pulled him out and now home-school him." I argue that measuring systems have negative consequences, and many of the participants commented how such environments did not help children's

learning. Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) state that all students came into the school system with different needs and abilities. However, measurement has become an influential construction, because many teachers assumed that the IQ tests can distinguish the differences between individual children (Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2016).

In fact, many of the parent participants raised concerns about the potential negative effects of gifted children being labelled as high achievers. Their comments and experiences suggested that the concept of gifted children being viewed as high achievers was not helpful for many gifted children's learning and development. There was concern that high achievement and lower achievement were being used as a proxy for gifted and not gifted, and about the dubious validity of such an assumption. In this research, many parents, teachers and teacher educators also shared their concerns about the practice of categorising children as a way of managing learning differences in the classroom. Some gifted children were, indeed, high achievers and met their teachers' expectations. However, not every gifted child was a high achiever. The theory of social constructionism would hold that correlating giftedness with high achievement was not a statement of 'fact' but a socially created assumption (Borland, 1997, 2003).

In general, reflecting on the stories I collected, constructions of giftedness that said that measuring intelligence and abilities was the way to distinguish giftedness have now become accepted by many teachers. The descriptor in the

view of learning in the first model of teaching and learning that *learning is affected by ability, which is seen as fixed* was commonly related to teaching and learning (Smith & Barr, 2008, p. 408). Ford (2003) states that “Standardised tests remain the primary instruments guiding decisions about students” (p. 149). Indeed, I would argue that a consequence of seeing ability as fixed was that many teachers relied on standardised measurement tools because they saw their results as useful guidance when providing for children’s needs and interests. A comment from Nicki (mother) was that the teachers’ judgment was not trusted, because they relied on measurement tools to enable them to work with different children in the class, rather than on personal observation: “Teachers don’t feel trusted to do the work they know, they need to [measure abilities] to meet the needs of all their students.” This quote illustrated that teachers were not confident they can provide for children’s needs without using these measurements. Yet, even though we know that human performance cannot be fully captured by a single dimension, a single number obtained from measurements too often determined significant educational decisions about learning (Johnsen, 2003) and led to unnecessary assumptions and judgements. This last point will be explored in the next section.

4.3.1 *Learners acquire new knowledge in predictable and manageable stages*

The way the participants used the word 'measurement' was crucial, because it was an indication of the teachers' practice. The participants' comments also indicated that measurements were related to judgement. Teachers used their judgement to decide whether a child was gifted, and, because teachers were perceived as experts, then their judgements were accepted by society. Terri (mother) pointed out that a judgement was made if a child did not meet the teachers' requirements:

So much of what is required in traditional schools is conformity – behaviour, discussion (must match the book!), answers, choral responses. There's a place for some conformity for safety's sake (no one can jump off the play set because it is not safe to do so), but in the classroom most teachers have kids all doing the same projects, at the same speed, with the same materials, and those who complete it differently, faster, slower, or just plain differently, are punished through grades or told they are being insubordinate.

Terri's comment showed that teachers' judgements were based on standardised criteria. What children learn was influenced by teachers. This comment aligned with two descriptors in the view of learning in the *learning equals being taught* model that *learners learn by being told* and *learners acquire new knowledge in predictable and manageable stages* (Smith & Barr, 2008). Learning contents were customised by teachers, who were constructed as experts in the learning environment, and children learnt from what they were told by the teachers. Teachers were interpreted as experts because the learning environment was predominantly teacher-centred and they instructed children's learning.

However, Jose put forward this argument: “[The] system does not support diversity, at all. It only gives the perception or veneer of doing such ... Also – intelligence is not [the] ability to copy/paste or remember things.” Some of the parents on Facebook expressed their concerns that some teachers paid too much attention to measuring abilities by believing that measurements were needed to determine giftedness.

Sarah, a mother of gifted children, argued on Facebook that, “Schools have a curriculum they need to follow, and many kids are treated like 'sheeple', not people. Individuality sometimes goes out the window.” Sarah’s story aligned well with a descriptor of the view of the curriculum under the *learning equals being taught* model of *curriculum as fact*, and an element of view of learning that *learners learn by being told*. This story illustrated that children learnt from within the confines of what they received from teachers, with teachers setting clear rules to manage children’s learning. This meant the learning environment was structured and children just followed. Chris shared her story on Facebook that children learnt obediently from fixed answers. She said:

All unfortunately true. To make it worse for our children to survive we have to teach them to 'play the game'. We openly talk about it, e.g. how to answer test questions, surviving/succeeding at school so they can go to uni [university] and hopefully, eventually have rewarding and challenging lives.

The stories from the participants showed that teachers were more interested in academic achievement, that teachers’ emphases were on producing outcomes. Heng (2003) comments that schools emphasised 'getting things right', and that

the aim of education was to create success, not to build an interest in learning. Chris talked about the school system in her Facebook post, her story showed children have to learn in a dominant environment where that aligned with a descriptor of the view of learning in the first model of teaching and learning that *learners acquire new knowledge in predictable and manageable stages*. This descriptor illustrated that children were taught similar contents within what teachers can control, because they were constructed as experts. However, children who did not learn the same speed, whether quicker or slower than other children, would limit their success because these children were not meeting the learning pace assigned by teachers.

An important assumption was that learning was meant to meet children's needs and interests, yet the parent participants reported that not all gifted children were having their learning needs met and/or that their gifted child was invisible, which would be consistent with the construction that gifted children did not need additional support. As Zoe (mother) said: "I think it all depends on the teachers." This quote illustrated that if the teacher's construction of giftedness did not acknowledge that gifted children were different, then the teacher will not be able to provide for their different learning needs. It is because teachers were constructed as experts (Smith & Barr, 2008) that they provided instructions to direct children's learning.

Ronald, a teacher educator, talked about what schools really taught children, and how children were grouped to fit into the education system well:

I agree, sadly all true. I personally think that our current NZ [New Zealand] education system is a process that does exactly what it needs to do – sort and categorise our babies into resources for every sector of our society.

Zoe and Ronald pointed out that the education system focused on the learning direction aligned with the model of *learning equals being taught*, as described by Smith and Barr (2008), but the children’s learning needs and interests were too often overlooked. Measurements were influential. This was because the Ministry of Education, which was used as a guideline for many teachers, illustrated giftedness as something that can be measured. According to the Ministry of Education, “liberal definitions [of giftedness] ... are based on a broad range of criteria. They adopt an inclusive approach that accepts a fairly high percentage (for example, 10 to 15 per cent) of the school population as having special abilities” (Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 13). The Ministry explained that conservative definitions related to identification based on an IQ score, whereas liberal definitions used a broad range of criteria, although these criteria still linked back to abilities in the highest percentiles of the school population.

4.3.2 *Gifted children are misunderstood*

The parent participants’ perspectives about their children’s experiences demonstrated that many constructions of giftedness make generic assumptions about gifted children and failed to address their needs. Because of this emphasis on measurement, even if a child was gifted, if they have not met the measurement criteria for being gifted they will not be treated the same as other

gifted children who have met the criteria, as noted by Terri (mother): “In my school, we have a TON of un-identified gifted students because ... many of them don’t test well.” Skidmore (2002) describes in the discourse of deviance that students were placed into different categories that were selected by teachers, and what and how children can learn was judged by teachers who were constructed as experts (Smith & Barr, 2008). Therefore, Skidmore (2002) asserts that students’ educability was limited by powerful influencers. Terri’s comment also illustrates inequalities in educational opportunities, because many gifted children did not meet the criteria of 'gifted', and so their access to learning different things can be restricted. Claxton and Meadows (2009) state that teachers’ measurements of giftedness negatively influenced their view of children, and Reis (2003) said that when teachers focused on categorising different abilities, it was difficult to see the differences between actual and expected performance; hence, some children continued to be problematic in class. Teachers may reward routine learning, but the effects can have a significant consequence on a child’s future and learning opportunities (Borland, 1997, 2003).

The parents who posted on Facebook said that, in their experience, teachers relied on measurements to describe children’s abilities, but these measurements were not fair to children. Hayley (mother and teacher) said on Facebook, “IQ tests are not a fair representation of giftedness ... especially when it comes to some forms of giftedness.” Through the measurement of the child’s ability and, hence, the judgement made about it, a child will be given different expectations

for learning. Claxton and Meadows (2009) and Hany (1997) claim that teachers' meanings of giftedness were often constructed around notions of competence and ability. Although education was supposed to help children to develop knowledge, skills and interests, access to equitable learning opportunities was a principle that underpinned all curricula. Once judgements have been made, equitable access may not be so easy to implement. Indeed, judgements can potentially limit opportunities for participation by the child/ren.

Many Facebook participants, in particular, shared their opinions about the measuring of giftedness. Some of the comments related to their own experiences, with mothers of gifted children sharing the challenges they and their children faced in an education system that relied heavily on judgmental measurements. For example, Terri (mother) described the school system as "squashing our innovators." Terri's comment reflected that children learnt by being told (Smith & Barr, 2008); hence the system did not support democratic learning. And parents were not alone in criticising the education system. For example, Borland (1997, 2003) and Hart and colleagues (2004) claim that although teachers always talked about different approaches to supporting children's learning the needs of gifted children were not understood due to different constructions of giftedness and how teachers viewed learning for gifted children within the model of *learning equals being taught*.

Sarah, another parent participant, expressed her view that the practice of measuring abilities actually punished children: "Lower abilities can't keep up,

muck up, get punished. Those with higher abilities get bored, which is also punishment ... There is no diversity in a class of 'sheeple'." This comment inferred that teachers failed to recognise the strengths of children, instead, focusing on the standardised measurement results – a practice that was not helpful for learning. For example, teachers might give assistance to help a child to fit in well with other children in the group, but not the assistance needed to develop that child's strengths and interests.

The practice of measuring children's IQ and abilities was not new, and, as discussed in the literature review ([Chapter Two](#)), the argument about how – or even whether – intelligence was measurable has persisted for a long time (Bolzinger, 1969; Skidmore, 2002). The predominant construction in society was that intelligence was something real, and that it had a physical (usually fixed) ability that can be measured within the terms of the IQ tests. Zoe (mother) cautioned about measuring for giftedness:

Giftedness ... is a diagnosis of a person who can do certain things – it's not a term I'm comfortable using, as it doesn't give justice to the person, but has the possibility of being misunderstood or interpreted in a way that is different to who it refers to ...

Zoe's story highlighted a construction of giftedness as a fixed ability, but she recognised this was a dominant construct because measuring ability was a way of identifying giftedness. Skidmore (2002) explains that society often looked for ways to explain normality and differences; scientists and educators; for example, used different cases to demonstrate how accurate their measurements were, and validated their measurements with IQ tests. However, the effect of

measuring abilities shaped what gifted children should be, so the learning needs of gifted children were often misunderstood.

More than 20 years ago, Gould (1996) claims that the common measurement practices were flawed – teachers used a number to determine children’s ability and potential. Yet much of the data in my study indicated that the practice of measuring ability was still commonplace in schools today. Referring to the data, the element of the view of learning in the *learning equals being taught* model (Smith & Barr, 2008) was still commonly applied in the current education environment. Even if giftedness was measurable, many would argue that the practice of measuring children was not helpful for gifted children. Zoe (mother) said that gifted children can be misunderstood, and that there was a risk that teachers misinterpreted these children. Even if schools were committed to providing all children with equal opportunities to achieve, gifted children were still affected disproportionately by the results of measurements. The research data suggested that teachers were using the outcomes of measurements to assign children into different categories, a practice that undermined children’s needs, strengths and interests.

As Colangelo and Brower (1987) and Walsh et al. (2010) point out, the label of giftedness created by an educational professional influences teachers’ views of giftedness, as does the teachers’ interactions with these professionals and, perhaps, with the parents of gifted children as well. I ask: if a child cannot meet the criteria to be labelled 'gifted', did it mean this child was not gifted? Indeed,

not all gifted children fit easily into a measurement rubric, as shown by Heidi's story of her gifted son's ability that was beyond the required dimension within an IQ test; thus, her son may not be seen as gifted:

My son is socially and emotionally gifted as one of his gifts. He has a thing about chocolate at the moment, and child slavery that chocolate companies cover up and gets quite upset over things like that. Also, during maths when being taught to tell the time he stood up and spouted off about how time is a place and it depends on where the Earth is around the sun's orbit or rotation as to what the time is. He still, however, cannot tell the time. How could you even cover that kind of thing in an IQ test? He makes connections where others can't see it, and cares deeply about the environment and people.

The meaning a person gave to giftedness was influenced by how the person constructed giftedness. Thus, as Kitano (2003) points out, some gifted children continued to be under-represented because they did not fit the measurement criteria for giftedness. Terri (mother) provided evidence for Kitano's assertion when she said: "Testing kids the way many do now does NOT support diversity, not of thinking, not of existence, not of ideas." To some extent, the comments from the research participants, as well as the documents published by the Ministry of Education, illustrated that if a child in our society needed to be judged as gifted, then the child cannot avoid being measured in some way. This measurement might happen through any of a variety of methods, but the data presented in this findings chapter appeared to indicate that measurements were an inevitable part of determining giftedness. The data also indicated that the measurement process created different constructions of learning; that is,

teachers used the measurement results to make assumptions about how children learnt and, hence, constructions of learning were created.

4.4 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have explored social constructions of giftedness, particularly those related to some descriptors of the view of learning in the *learning equals being taught* model. The primary argument of this findings chapter was that the research participants have constructed giftedness as a different fixed ability. When giftedness was constructed in this way, it followed that this ability can be measured and the measurement results used to categorise this ability, which led to categorising 'gifted' and 'not gifted'.

The participants' stories have shown there are different constructions of giftedness, and that this ability is seen as fixed. Many of these constructions related to the interpretation that ability can be measured and be judged by achievement. The chapter implied that the participants' constructions of giftedness were influenced by Ministry of Education publications (2008 and 2012), which encouraged the use of standardised measurement methods to identify giftedness. However, I am extending their ideas further by asserting that the construction of giftedness as a fixed ability was not helpful for teachers, their families and the children. This was because one potential consequence of ability being determined by a measurement tool was that children were then labelled and grouped together under those labels. Hart and colleagues (2004)

state that if teachers believed in ability-led learning, they used ability to categorise students.

Another major argument presented in this chapter was that there were different views of learning as a cognitive dimension [is] stressed for gifted children. This chapter also examined how the research participants thought about ability, and how their constructions of ability related to gifted children. Many of the research participants assumed that giftedness can be determined by measurement because their constructions positioned ability as something that was permanently sitting inside the child. Different types of measurement tools have been developed because of the many constructions of fixed ability.

As a result of the construction that achievement indicated ability, much of the data reflected that many teachers relied on achievement to determine giftedness. One outcome of this practice was that children will not be labelled as gifted if they cannot meet the achievement criteria. Thus, the construction that gifted children were high achievers was not helpful for many gifted children, families and teachers, because the construction that gifted children were high achievers has a corollary; namely, that children who were not high achievers were not gifted.

The requirement that giftedness must be demonstrated by high achievement can result in high expectations for the gifted child. Furthermore, the construction that gifted children were high achievers can bring with it the expectation that the reverse was also true; namely, that all high achievers were

gifted – but maybe they were not; maybe they were just hard workers. The final major argument of this chapter was fostered by the first two concepts in the chapter. In this chapter, I presented the finding that the descriptor view of learning in the *learning equals being taught* model that *cognitive dimension stressed* to divide children, created different constructions of giftedness and that this had effects on gifted children. The discussion in this chapter leads us onto the next chapter, which explores the findings related to the links between social constructions of teaching and learning for gifted children.

Chapter Five

Social constructions of pedagogy

5.1 Introduction

The first findings chapter (Chapter four) presented some constructions of giftedness, based on the relationship between ability and measurement. These constructions were informed by the *learning equals being taught* model, as described by Smith and Barr (2008), the conceptual framework for this thesis. According to Smith and Barr (2008) as described in the literature review ([Chapter Two](#)), the *learning equals being taught* model is the dominant model for teaching and learning; meaning that children are dependent on what teachers teach them. In this model, teachers are constructed as 'experts' and the goal of teaching is to impart new knowledge, concepts and skills for students' learning, because children and parents need to rely on teachers' opinions as they are interpreted as experts. The descriptors in the element of this view of learning that contributes to this model in this chapter includes: the cognitive dimension being stressed; learners learn by being told; learning is individual and affected by ability, which is seen as fixed; and learners acquire new knowledge in predictable and manageable stages. These descriptors illustrate the construction that ability is fixed, and children learn in an environment where learning is controlled by teachers.

This second findings chapter is informed by the same model, with the same descriptors, and is extended to include the second alternative model of teaching

and learning, which is *the learning is individual sense-making or developing a community of learners'* model. Smith and Barr (2008) describe this model as one where teaching and learning is understood to involve a group of people who share knowledge, and where opportunities are created to engage with each other. However, the descriptors for the role of the teacher associated with the second model to be covered in this chapter include, teacher remains constructed as an *expert*, and *is helping (teaching) is examined in terms of how it helps the learner make their own sense*. Above all, one of the descriptors aligns with the goal of teaching for this model, which is *to facilitate the discovery of new knowledge, concepts and skills*. Nevertheless, these descriptors indicate that learning was still seen as 'individual', because teachers were still the dominant people helping children's learning. In the second model, children participate in the learning process. As mentioned in the literature review, children comprise a community of learners, teachers are constructed as experts who facilitate learning, and learning still focuses on the individual. The two other descriptors' views of learning that are adopted in this findings chapter include *students are engaged in active participation, exploration and research* and *the focus is still on the individual rather than the social processes in which the individual is engaged*. In this chapter, I am extending the work of Smith and Barr (2008) through the addition of the role of learners for gifted children in the two models of teaching and learning.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section explores some constructions of teaching and learning that relate to the first model *learning*

equals being taught. The second section shows how constructions of teaching and learning relate to the second model where learning is an activity guided by teachers. The next section also discusses some of the consequences of these constructions of teaching and learning that affect gifted children's learning and development. In the summary section, a table summarises the ideas underpinning the constructions of the two models of teaching-learning, and weaves in some of the participants' comments about their experiences.

5.2 *Views of learning that learning equals being taught for gifted children*

Some research data from the previous chapter show that some constructions of teaching and learning are commonly linked to measurements, and that teachers draw on these constructions frequently and use different tools and forms of assessment when measuring their students' abilities and how they learn. This section retains the idea of learning equals being taught; that is, how children learn is based on abilities that the teachers perceive as being fixed.

Statements and discussion about learning appear in many areas of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996) and the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007). A foundation principle of *Te Whāriki* is: "The early childhood curriculum empowers the child to learn and grow" (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 40). However, the quote, below, indicates that teachers do not implement the curriculum in ways that reflect its primary goal of empowering children. Kate, a parent of a gifted child, reflects on a particular

construction of learning that “stuffs children into boxes” and applies this construction to all children:

Stuffing all of them into one box of a predetermined size isn't going to help them grow because, for a lot of them, that particular box isn't what they NEED. They need one that is more oddly shaped, with holes and connectors to other boxes (the ability to make connections between concepts that are meaningful to them), or one that has open sides (choice in process and product) so they can determine how far they go.

The view of learning associated with the first model to be covered in this chapter – and specifically, one of the descriptors for that view of learning described by Smith and Barr (2008) – that *learners acquire new knowledge in predictable and manageable stages* – links to the comment above that the learning needs of children are not being met. Children's ability to access opportunities to learn about different things are effectively being limited by teachers who set up the criteria about what learning is.

What can be inferred from Kate's comment is that children receive educational benefits when the constructions of teaching and learning are not managed by learning content that is premised on fixed abilities. However, Smith and Barr (2008) describe the *learning equals being taught* model as the dominant teaching and learning model where children learn within a predictable and manageable environment and teachers are constructed as experts who can determine what children learn and how they learn.

5.2.1 *Role of the teacher*

As mentioned previously, teachers play a dominant role in children's teaching and learning in the *learning equals being taught* model. Some participants said that teachers have the power to make an impact on learning, as well as the learners, in a particular situation. This section explores how the role of the teacher is dominant, and has an impact on what new knowledge, concepts and skills children learn, which aligns with the conceptual framework.

5.2.1.1 *Teacher is constructed as an expert*

The *learning is being taught model* describes a practice where the content of learning is 'taught' by teachers who are constructed as experts in children's learning, and who deliver new knowledge and skills to students (Smith & Barr, 2008). Teachers' constructions of teaching and learning dominate access to opportunities to learn about different things. Chris (mother) posted this experience of her daughter at school on Facebook:

[The construction of giftedness] wasn't so much an identification tool – the carers [teachers] did not think she was suitable for acceleration (they didn't see it) – but more so evidence that the carers [teachers] described her as “quiet, and socially immature”.

This quote shows that it is the teachers who decide whether or not a child is given opportunities for learning, and that this decision is based on the teacher's judgement. Chris's story suggests that her daughter's teachers did not think her suitable for an accelerated learning programme and so she was therefore denied an opportunity to learn different things. Further, the teacher's decision was

based on the perception that Chris's child was quiet and socially immature. This judgement suggested that the teachers were focusing on something that they thought the child was not good at, rather than recognising her strengths.

This story illustrates the expectations of learning set up by teachers, but also that teachers do not always understand individual children's needs and interests. Kitano (2003) and Wong (2015) claim that teachers needed to put more effort into understanding individual children, to build up children's confidence and to increase their inclusion into learning. However, access to opportunities for learning can be restricted if children are not understood – the teaching might not connect with what can be learnt.

Although *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996, 2017) emphasises supporting children's learning in a variety of ways, Belle, the programme leader of a primary and early childhood education programme reflects that learning still relies on individual teachers' direction and facilitation.

[*Te Whāriki*] has the potential to help gifted learners, but I don't think it's interpreted in a way that allows it to help gifted learners ... I think the fulfilment of *Te Whāriki* in the way that it was meant depends so much on teachers' knowledge of children and how they learn, and how to facilitate their learning.

In this model, while Smith and Barr (2008) report the curriculum is constructed as fact, Belle's comment reflects that the curriculum is based on teachers' interpretations of learning and who the learners are. I argue that when teachers' roles are constructed as 'experts' this means that children are learning passively, because the teachers are in charge of what the children learn. Moreover, this

means that the view of what constitutes learning is dependent on the new knowledge and information is provided by the teachers. The next section explores another construction of teaching and learning - when the teachers are constructed as the experts.

5.2.1.2 Teacher facilitates the discovery of new knowledge, concepts and skills

This section draws on the second alternative model of teaching and learning that *learning equals individual sense-making or developing a community of learners*. The role of the teacher associated with the second model to be covered in this section – and particularly, two descriptors for the role of the teacher are constructed as an 'expert', and 'to facilitate discovery of new knowledge, concepts and skills' (Smith & Barr, 2008, p. 408). In this model, teachers are still constructed as experts, they are in charge of what that actually entails. Belle (programme leader) commented:

Now this is what I mean by truly responding to the needs of the child. Often you go into [early childhood] centres and things are already set up on tables, and so we respond to your needs as long as they are kind of fitting in with the things that I've got available – you know, out on the tables. So, you can make a choice today, and I'll help you in the choice that you make: but your choice is not an open one ... your choice is from what I've got set up for the day.

Belle's story shows that while children are given opportunities to participate, what is on offer may not meet the children's individual learning needs and interests. The learning environment is set up based on the teachers' decisions.

Children's learning needs and interests, therefore, rely on the interpretation of teachers, who have the power to control the learning environment.

Belle continued: "If you [children] say something that's not within what we've [teachers have] set out, we'll [teachers will] say, 'Well, actually no, we can't do that today, because we haven't got this or we haven't got that.'" Again, Belle's story reflects the role teachers play in controlling the learning environment; teachers are constructed as experts who influence what new knowledge and skills children are exposed to. I expand this to say that children are passive learners who must wait for direction within a dominant environment

In the *learning equals being taught* model, learning is expected to happen in predictable stages. Teachers need to manage the learning environment, as they manage their students' learning because they are constructed as experts. Many participants' stories in the next section discuss the role of the learners, as set by teachers. The view of learning in the *learning equals teaching* model means that many teachers do not feel comfortable when they work with gifted children, who often do not learn in the predictable system set by their teachers.

5.2.2 *View of learners for gifted children*

This section discusses another construction where I expand from a view of learning that is closely tied to the *learning equals being taught* model. The participants described how teachers prescribe what should be learnt, so they are able to predict how children learn as well as what they learn. The following

discussion looks at the role of learners, and how gifted children do not fit with the expected role because they learn differently. When gifted children are not seen to fit within the expectations of the 'role' of learners there are some constructions that relate to different views of learning. This section discusses how a descriptor view of learning in the *learning equals being taught* model is that *learners learn by being told* and *learners acquire new knowledge in predictable and manageable stages* and I demonstrate how this view of learning relates to gifted children.

5.2.2.1 Learners need help, but gifted children are not expected to be helped

Learners are expected to be helped by their teachers, therefore, the descriptors in the role of the teacher in the second model describe teachers are constructed as experts and how anyone helping (teaching) is examined in terms of how it helps the learner make their own sense of information (Smith & Barr, 2008). However, some teachers perceive gifted children as not needing help, as they are already good at certain areas of learning in class so are expected not to need help for anything. Some of the research data reflect that teachers are, indeed, not making the effort to provide for gifted children because they think teaching is not necessary for gifted children who already know so much.

For example, Belle said: “People had the view, ‘Well, if you’re gifted, you’ve already got an advantage, so why should we do anything to help you?’” Belle’s comment illustrates that the concept of learning is often linked with the

assumption that teaching is not necessary for gifted children. These comments relate to the descriptors for the view of learning that *learning is individual and affected by ability*, which is seen as fixed in the *learning equals being taught* model. When teachers focus on those students who can be called 'good learners', who are perceived to need help with their learning, gifted children risk being overlooked. This means that gifted children are not being recognised within the group of 'good' learners, but they are considered not to need to be actively taught.

The conversation, below, illustrates, again, how gifted children are not expected to get help from teachers. This conversation also reflects the idea that ability is seen as fixed under the view of learning in the *learning equals being taught* model. Sarah shared about the impact of her son's teacher's expectations,

He found most of the work easy to begin with, so the teachers expected him to continue getting top grades, but when he actually didn't know something the teachers sort of didn't believe him ...
You are bright, talented, gifted, etc., so you do know how to do it.

This exemplifies how a construction can position gifted children as intelligent and: therefore, able to learn by themselves. A corollary of this construction is the expectation that gifted children do not need help so, if the child does not know something, their teachers do not believe them. Sarah's experience reinforces my argument that teachers should have an understanding of children as individuals, and not approach them with preconceived expectations and assumptions of what a learner is.

As previously acknowledged, Delaune (2015) states that gifted children are perceived by society to be 'privileged' because there is the expectation that they will be able to achieve with only minimal effort. In this section, my focus is on the construction of teaching and learning that says gifted children do not fit with the expectations of the *view of learning* in the *learning equals being taught* model, as described by Smith and Barr (2008), because some of the participants' stories illustrate that gifted children often do not need help.

Borland (1997, 2003) and O'Connor (2012) suggest that, historically, being gifted was seen as a positive attribute, because a gifted person was seen as being very intelligent and able. When children meet the criteria of being gifted, teachers think these children are very able and expect them to be able in class too. A consequence of this construction of teaching and learning is that gifted children are expected to learn everything by themselves; they do not need help at all and are not expected to need teaching.

The participants' stories also relate to the second alternative mode of teaching and learning that *learning equals individual sense-making*. In this model, a descriptor shows that teachers are still constructed as experts, and the role of the teachers is to *help learners make their own sense* (Smith & Barr, 2008). However, the examples below show that gifted children often do not fit in with the expectations of learners who are expected to need teachers' help. Delta (mother) made a similar point when she said, "People often assume that gifted children don't need any help or support." The assumption is that gifted children

already have the knowledge, which means that they are not recognised and, hence, not included as learners who need help. An analysis of Delta's comment reveals that some constructions of giftedness result in teaching being seen as not necessary for many gifted children. Belle's (programme leader) comment indicates the view of learning that teachers are constructed as experts who are in control:

We were saying New Zealand teachers would say that part of their role as a teacher is to help each child reach their potential, but then on the other hand they're saying, "But we don't need to do anything for gifted learners." So, it's a bit illogical.

Teachers are the ones who control the learning environment, so if they think they do not need to do anything for gifted children, these children may be deprived of opportunities that could provide for them. In the end, children are dependent on the expert's opinion and consequent decisions.

These assumptions that teachers do not have to do anything for gifted children do not necessarily always apply in reality (Wong & Margrain, 2015). The theory of social constructionism would say that this construction, along with teachers' other constructions of learning, are influenced by their interactions with other people's constructions of how gifted children learn and the expectations they also have of teaching gifted children.

Although Borland (2003) state that gifted people often hope to fit in by learning like other people, the reality is that gifted children are not always included because of the consequences of a construction of teaching that suggests that

gifted children are capable of learning by themselves and require no help. As discussed earlier, learning is constructed by people, including teachers, who are constructed as experts in children's learning (Smith & Barr, 2008). Therefore, the learning opportunities provided for a child will depend on how the teacher sees the child and whether the teacher believes the child needs to be taught (or not).

5.2.2.2 Learners need to work hard – meritocratic concepts in giftedness

Although none of the research participants specifically mentioned the word 'meritocracy', the key concepts and assumptions in meritocracy can be seen in their ideas about the consequences of a descriptor for that view of learning that the *cognitive dimension [is] stressed* (Smith & Barr, 2008). This is because people describe success based on their ability and achievement. As mentioned in the literature review, a common-sense construction of meritocracy is that achievement is seen to be the result of ability and effort, not position or birth (Souto-Otero, 2010; Young, 1958). Meritocracy is about how people's abilities, talents and effort can determine success (Souto-Otero, 2010; Young, 1958), and the ultimate measure of the concept of meritocracy is related to achievements. This means that achievement and success are measured by ability. The view of learning that relates to *cognitive dimension stressed* is that merit is determined by the students' abilities.

The social constructions of giftedness in this section display how some constructions of giftedness contradict each other. One teacher commented on the open-ended questionnaire, saying that “[Gifted children] consistently achieve above the typical 'norms' in one or more area of learning and development.” Brown and Tannock (2009) have said that meritocracy “welcomes people from all backgrounds” (p. 380). The concept of meritocracy assumes that privilege should not apply in society, because success is only gained by ability and hard work.

In a chapter I co-authored in 2016 (Wong & Morton, 2017), we argued that it is expected that children with, so-called, 'gifted' or 'advanced abilities' will not need to put in as much effort as others in order to succeed. A meritocratic society has leaders who are competent and capable, rather than people who have become leaders solely because they have been born to positions of nobility or privilege. Delta, a mother of a gifted child, shared: “I have friends who say, ‘Oh you are lucky your child is gifted, it must be so easy!’ Well no, not really!” Belle said that some teachers questioned whether they should even help gifted children because “they are already good at something.” Both comments highlight that the construction of giftedness is often linked with that of exception, and that such constructions can result in contradictions.

Working hard and the idea that achievement is the result of effort are two sides of the same coin in the construction of meritocracy. Hard work is associated with success; therefore, the effort of every individual has an equal opportunity to be recognised. However, Delaune (2015) said that gifted children in

Aotearoa New Zealand are perceived by society as being 'privileged', because there is the expectation that they will achieve with only minimal effort. Ana said in the open-ended questionnaire, "It's easy to think that [for gifted children] the years ahead will be studded with academic achievement and success." Murphy and Breen (2015) have written about a construct of the gifted child as one who "learns easily – only needs to be told things once or twice" (p. 19). However, it could be argued that this simplistic construction does not fit with the concept of meritocracy. The tension about meritocracy in the construction of giftedness is due to the common sense construction of giftedness in society that gifted children do not need help (Wong & Morton, 2017). This particular construction illustrates the idea that gifted children already learn more quickly than others and are expected to achieve well in school regardless (Wong & Margrain, 2015).

In the discussion above, I have emphasised that meritocracy focuses on how a person's hard work and ability leads to their success. I have also referred to the construction that giftedness is about advanced ability, as illustrated in Aria's (teacher) comment: "[Gifted children have] special ability. Have a specific strength for their developmental age and stage, e.g., maths." These two common sense constructions – of meritocracy and giftedness being about advanced ability – converge when people define the 'ability' that leads to success only in terms of achievement (Selden, 2000). In the concept of meritocracy, hard work is valued and seen as a measure of success, but because some participants' comments highlighted that there is a common assumption

that gifted children can achieve without hard work, they are seen to 'have it easy'. Another argument that was raised, above, is that students who have innate capacities (gifted) are not expected to work hard, because they are seen as able and knowing everything already. Delaune (2015) supports this argument, saying that there is the expectation that gifted children will learn more quickly than their peers.

Indeed, some data indicate that some teachers expect that gifted children do not need to work hard and can learn by themselves. Sarah (mother) said her child was “expected’ to be able to do the work,” whether or not she related to the tasks she had to complete; in other words, there was the expectation that gifted children will succeed at any given task. Furthermore, it is also argued that gifted children’s hard work is not necessarily recognised, because expectations of gifted children can create inaccurate predictions, especially about children’s performance (Missett et al., 2016). In the following section, I discuss the negative effects of the expectation that gifted children do not need to work hard and illustrate this with information contributed by the research participants and from the extant literature.

5.2.2.3 Gifted children are challenging; they do not learn in predictable and manageable stages

Another argument in this chapter is that gifted children often do not learn in predictable and manageable stages where this is a descriptor in the view of learning with the first model of teaching-learning (Smith & Barr, 2008). Narae responded in the open-ended questionnaire by saying that gifted children can

have problems: “They also have problems in other areas of learning.” This comment showed that not every gifted child can meet the criteria for the gifted label, because many gifted children do not learn within the expectations of learning. Nat (mother), for example, illustrates this point: “Well you often don’t treat [gifted children] like anything at all. And when you prove [the child’s giftedness], it can be very negative.” As Shavinina (2007) points: “The gifted perceive, understand, and interpret everything in a different way” (p. 35). Some teachers see gifted children as challenging, the teachers feel 'negative', and these children need to be 'managed' in order to meet the criteria for the teacher’s interpretation of being a good learner. Terri’s Facebook post illustrates this point and also identifies particular comments about gifted children, such as they are 'bad kids' and the 'high-flyers'.

It’s been very interesting to see what isn’t out there to help us identify these kids and get them what they need. In a traditional school, a traditional environment, they are often seen as the behaviour problems, the 'bad kids', and the 'high-flyers'. Really, though, it’s that their needs aren’t being met.

Some of the parent participants’ perspectives about their children’s experiences illustrate that gifted children are often seen as 'problems', because teachers, who want to be able to see themselves as experts in children’s learning, find that gifted children’s learning cannot be managed within what is ordinarily taught and told. Sadly, some teachers think of a child as a 'bad kid' simply because they are not learning at the teacher’s expected pace. For these children, learning can become challenging.

Both the teacher educators and parents commented that many teachers see gifted children as a challenge because they learn differently from other children. I argue that the challenge in the constructions of giftedness appears to come from this need to cater for differences. Maggie, who is teaching in a teacher education degree programme, shared an important premise:

So now I think what it means to me, is that *our gifted children can be the children that seem problematic to people*, and that their true interests and needs go undetected because we dismiss them as being a child with potential.

Further evidence supporting Maggie's comment may lie in Tamara's post on Facebook; Tamara, a parent of a gifted child, challenged her son's teachers about their attitudes:

He left that school, tried another but yeah, the teachers there had a lazy way of teaching ... so he came back to his local school. My first stipulation upon his return was for the staff to change their attitudes and accept that sometimes he needs help and can't actually do something.

Maggie's son was frustrated and had lost interest in learning. Whether a teacher sees this as an exciting challenge or a negative situation could be a reflection about how that teacher constructs gifted children. Many of the participants' constructions of giftedness related to how they viewed differences, but most teachers are not explicitly trained to deal with children who are 'different' (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). This has resulted in many concerning situations, even though the teachers may have the best intentions to promote inclusive practices. Suzi (mother) also shared how when the learning interests of her son were not met, he lost interest in learning:

He did really well in his first couple years of high school, too, but then hit nine and everything went pear-shaped. [He is] always in trouble, mostly for refusal to do some work, or as he put it, the boring parts of the work. Who cares about colouring in this or making title pages for that and so on and so on?

Some children who learn differently are not provided with the same learning opportunities as the other children, and sometimes, as the research data show, gifted children are ignored in the classroom. Suzi's story is an example of a child being ignored in class because his teachers were not providing for his learning differences.

Pfeiffer and Stocking (2000) agree that gifted children are seen as problems and say that this can affect their learning: "Unfortunately, this [teaching] practice often results in under stimulation, boredom and, even, disengagement from school, sometimes provoking the gifted student to engage in behaviours viewed as problems" (p. 86). This construction of learning for gifted children was not helpful for some of the research participants.

Teachers' attitudes reveal a deficit view of an individual child who is not behaving in the expected ways; this influences their constructions of teaching and learning and can contribute to their categorising gifted children as challenging. The discussion can be linked to Skidmore's deficit discourse (2002, p. 120) where is stated that: "The source of difficulties in learning lies in deficits of ability which are attributes of the student." This discourse relates to the discussion in this section because teachers think learning has become challenging and gifted children are seen as problems as these children do not

learn within teachers' expectations and within predictable and manageable stages.

Unfortunately, these assumptions are often problematic (for example, gifted children can be challenging in class) and create pressure because of expectations that are not helpful for children's learning and development. As mentioned in the previous section, gifted children are not expected to receive help from teachers as they are not expected need this. Much of the data demonstrated that children are grouped according to their patterns of behaviour and ability, and these behaviours and abilities are perceived from within the teacher's construction of learning for gifted children. Some research participants have indicated two ways gifted children display certain patterns of behaviour that teachers find challenging and these are discussed in the following two sections. First, gifted children like to ask lots of questions; and, secondly, gifted children can be opinionated.

5.2.2.4 Gifted children ask many questions

Belle (programme leader) provided an example of being a challenging learner was that gifted children asked many questions and can be demanding. The problem that teachers have was with the number and the kind of questions being asked. Belle said:

Often, I hear teachers saying, "Oh, you know I don't like working with that child, because they're just always asking you questions ... I say something and they've got another question; I answer them

and they've got another question. I'm driven silly by their questions."

This perception, that some teachers see gifted children as challenging to teach, is reinforced by Belle's next comment:

[Gifted children are] not being a nuisance, they're not being cheeky. Some people describe people who I know are gifted as cheeky, or know-it-all, or something; [but] they're genuinely wanting to learn.

Asking questions may be a way that children learn, as Belle explains: "... that's one of the key ways that a gifted learner learns: it's by asking questions ... it's one of the attributes of the gifted learner." Claxton and Meadows (2009) state that how teachers identify children who are gifted (or not) influences their view of those children. Belle's comment above indicates that some teachers do not like working with the children who do not make them feel comfortable with teaching, and hence, as a consequence of this particular construction – they perceive that gifted children are difficult. Teachers can feel challenged when gifted children ask questions they cannot answer – after all, they are supposed to be the 'experts' of learning. As Belle points out: the questions themselves need not be challenging, but the number and the kind of questions can make teachers unable to demonstrate themselves as constructed an expert in children's learning, and this has created the construction that gifted children are challenging learners.

The challenge for teachers appears to come from the need to cater for children's different learning needs. The parent participants' perspectives of their

children's experiences are that gifted children are perhaps perceived to be challenging and a problem in the classroom because their learning needs are so often misunderstood. This argument is consistent with O'Connor's (2012) assertion that many people view gifted children as not easy to work with because they do not understand their learning needs. Some teachers may accept as common sense the assumption that gifted children are challenging learners, especially when they experience a gifted child in their classroom who makes them feel uncomfortable.

This discussion of the view of learners frequently refers to a particular construction, namely, that provisions for gifted children can be limited. My analysis of the participants' comments highlighted that many gifted children are seen as already privileged in learning; they are perceived to already be high achievers and so do not need help. This construction of teaching and learning can be related to another construction: that children who ask a lot of questions are challenging. This can be a problem in the learning context when the kind and number of questions they ask fall outside their teacher's predictable and manageable stages. Thus, these two constructions show gifted children do not fit into the expectations for learners: gifted children learn more easily than other children, or they are challenging.

5.2.2.5 Gifted children are opinionated

Belle's comment below illustrates how a teacher's beliefs about gifted children can cause problems. Having opinions may not be a challenge, but the number

of opinions expressed, and opinions that teachers find difficult to deal with, means that gifted children can make teachers feel uncomfortable when working with them. Belle said:

[Giftedness can be] a problem when it becomes prejudiced. So, the mere prejudice is when you say, “Oh, they say this child is gifted, therefore they are going to be ... precocious.” Or they say, “This child is gifted; therefore, they are going to have a high opinion of themselves, and they’re going to be opinionated.” Now it’s become a prejudice, because we have an expectation of them based on what we believe about gifted learners.

Belle also said that there is a common belief among teachers that teaching gifted children can be challenging – a belief that is based on the teachers’ expectations of gifted children, and their constructions of how gifted children learn and how they express their ideas. In using a set of patterns for behaviours, teachers can determine whether a child is precocious or not. This practice of observing behaviours relates back to how teachers construct a gifted child, as shown by Belle’s quote: “So when we see those behaviours, we can say, ‘Well, there’s a possibility this child might be gifted.’” Such a practice may or may not be helpful, depending on the constructions the teachers are basing their observations on. For example, if a teacher has a construction that gifted children are opinionated, then this will result in a construction of teaching that teaching gifted children can be difficult. Hence, as a direct effect of the meanings evident in this particular negative social construction of gifted children by the teacher, learning will be challenging for the child.

5.3 Responses to ability which is seen as fixed

When teachers are working within the model of *learning equals being taught*, their responses to differences locate any problem within an individual child. In the discourse of deviance described by Skidmore (2002), ability is seen as fixed, so children can be placed based on their measurable ability. This discourse relates to a descriptor of the view of learning in the *learning equals being taught* model that learning is individual and has abilities that are seen as fixed (Smith & Barr, 2008). This section illustrates some participants' stories about teachers' responses to gifted children who do not meet the view of learning in the *learning equals being taught* model.

The consequences of viewing the *learning equals being taught* model relate to the second alternative model, which is *learning equals individual sense-making or developing a community of learners*. A descriptor of the second alternative model of teaching and learning is that the "focus [is] on the individual rather than the social processes in which the individual is engaged" (Smith & Barr, 2008). Gifted children involved in activities facilitated by teachers who are responding to learning differences are still a community of learners, but the learning is still individually-focused.

When some teachers are faced with a gifted child or children in their practice, the teacher's construction of giftedness for those children then emerges. This is evident in some of the research participants' comments, when parents commented on how practices at their child's school were guided and created

by the teachers. Here are some of the ways teachers respond to learners who are not learning within their expectations of learners.

5.3.1 First response - providing different resources for one child

One response identified in this research is that teachers used different resources as a way of responding to gifted children who do not learn in *predictable and manageable stages* as a descriptor of the view of learning model (Smith & Barr, 2008). But children are a community of learners, which is the second alternative model of teaching and learning. Thus, teachers are constructed as experts and create set of learning components to facilitate children's learning based on how the children's needs and interests are being understood and interpreted by teachers. Different resources are designed within the teachers' manageable systems, because teachers are still in charge of what children learn. However, some of the data reflect that this practice is not necessarily helpful for children.

The use of different resources as another construction of learning means that gifted children are provided with different resources from those provided to other children in the same learning environment. These are an attempt to recognise that gifted children have different learning needs, but such resources also carry with them the assumption that gifted children might be challenging or problematic in the learning environment. I argue that the appropriateness of any resource will depend on how schools construct the meaning of giftedness as well as the expectations of gifted children's learning.

Some of the research data show that providing for differences is commonly related to how teachers construct teaching and learning for gifted children. Participants believe that providing different resources is a way of managing having a gifted child (or children) in the learning environment. This shows that teachers provide different resources for one child as a response to the teacher's view of learning and how teachers respond to gifted children who are also treated as a community of learners. Research has shown that gifted children who lack appropriate learning opportunities are at an increased risk of losing interest in learning and of underachieving (MacIntyre, 2008; Rubenstein et al, 2012). I argue that because people see 'difference' as a problem when learning is different from the predictable stages set by teachers, there is an assumption that gifted children need 'treatment' to fix the 'difference'.

5.3.2 Second response - giving extra work

Another common response identified by several of the parent participants is that of giving extra work to gifted children. This construction of teaching and learning says that gifted children learn through a differentiated resource, but some data indicate that too often these resources just involve extra work and are not activities designed to meet gifted children's learning needs and interests. Merely providing extra work does not always facilitate learning new information and knowledge – too often, it is just more of the same. The experiences shared by the parent participants would suggest that, although this is a common strategy for teachers working with a gifted child, the practice is

not helpful. Teachers assume that gifted children have advanced abilities and/or can complete work more quickly; thus, these children are being told to do extra work. Ra (mother) shared her view about giving extra work as a way of responding to giftedness:

Ninety per cent of kids fit the norm, the other 10% need something more, be it extra help socially, academically, or with extra challenges (and not just extra work). I don't blame teachers for this, but it hurts our kids. It is hard to be in the minority.

Emma's (mother) post illustrates her disappointment that although her son is in a school that has a good reputation, the teachers are still managing his giftedness by merely giving him more work:

In my experience it did not help. My son attended a blue-ribbon elementary school in a top-rated district ... The gifted programme ended in the 8th grade and from there they pointed to the AP (assistant principal) track and insisted that he could get more of a challenge by them assigning more homework.

The parents expressed their frustration at this strategy, saying that giving extra work was not a way of providing for the learning needs of gifted children, nor was it a solution to their perceived 'challenging' behaviour in the classroom. The Ministry of Education (2012) states: "Differentiation aims to develop these [abilities] further ... Differentiation means being responsive to students' individual strengths" (p. 54). Yet, Kettler et al. (2017) made the comment that many differentiated resources provide limited challenges for gifted children's growth. Smith and Barr (2008) go further by saying that gifted children need a more flexible resource that supports their learning, as such; a programme that

provides opportunities for dynamic learning experiences. The parent participants see that the way their child is taught is not helpful. Indeed, some parents feel the different resources are actually limiting their child's learning.

Analysis of Maggie's comment, a mother of gifted child indicates that another construction of learning is that teachers should have a wide range of varied approaches when working with children with diverse needs, and it is more than just, "Hey, we gave him a different worksheet." Sarah agreed with Maggie: "Yes ... ahead of others in class, just give them another worksheet, which is just more work, not really catering for needs at all." She then added to the conversation, saying: "To me, what it should mean in the classroom is providing alternative diverse challenges. Not teaching to a fluffing the topic out." Maggie again: "Giving extra work without meaning or context is simply busy time." Megan went on: "I don't think giving 'extra work' is helpful for any student – when it is given to gifted students."

These quotes show how many participants in this research are not satisfied with the practice of giving extra work as a different resource to manage the gifted child. Borland (2003) and Cross (2003) claim that provision for gifted children has been a concern in many learning contexts. I argue that some data show that it is important that teachers of gifted children not only focus on extending their abilities but also on building up their confidence and interests in learning. Delta offered this suggestion: "I think it would be wonderful to see more support

systems ... in place to teach coping strategies and skills for developing confidence, etc.”

The following quotes from some of the research participants indicate that parents do not appreciate hearing that their children are being given extra work as a way of supporting their giftedness, because they feel this practice does not meet their children’s needs. Sarah (mother) described the Australian education system: “In a mainstream school it is hard to cater to the gifted kids, besides giving them extra or extension work”, while Elly (mother) said, “Extra work does not equal a challenge!!!”

However, as mentioned previously, Smith and Barr (2008) point out in *their learning is being taught* model that teachers are constructed as experts and so they influence children’s learning because they are the ones who deliver new knowledge. Teachers should cater for the gifted children in their classes by understanding each child’s abilities and interests; that is, resources should be tailored to the children's individual needs. It could be asked: how much do teachers understand about their gifted children before deciding on the differentiated resources selected for them? The Ministry of Education acknowledged the challenge of focusing on individual needs in its resource document on gifted education (Ministry of Education, 2012), saying: “A curriculum that is appropriately differentiated to address the diverse needs, strengths, and identities of gifted and talented students can seem a daunting task” (p. 12). Even so, it would be helpful for gifted children if teachers were

able to extend their children's learning individually, by designing learning opportunities based on each child's unique needs and interests.

5.4 Effects of different constructions of teaching and learning on gifted children

As discussed above, constructions of learning in the classroom view gifted children as being able to learn by themselves which is, itself, a consequence of the construction that gifted children do not need help and that teaching is unnecessary for gifted children. Not surprisingly, this has effects on gifted children who cannot reach their teachers' expectations. Sarah said: "Stress set in from all the expectations." Zoe (mother) shared her view that being a gifted child is about always being given expectations:

I never use it [the term 'giftedness'] if I can help it when talking about what my son's interests and academic abilities are. To me he is my son; I don't want him to be ... judged. People will see soon enough what he's capable of, but I also want him to get what he needs and deserves so he can grow – it's tricky.

The stress and feelings of being overwhelmed arise because the participants' children are misunderstood and/or misinterpreted by teachers due, in part, to the teachers' expectations and assumptions. Another consequence is that the strengths and interests of gifted children are often not recognised, nor their needs met, because these are not the focus of teaching and learning. This is especially so for children who are gifted in non-academic areas who can then be overlooked because their gifts are not so easily recognised in the academic

achievement-focused school system (Cathcart, 2005; Sturges, 2011). Brenda, a teacher of gifted children in the United States, commented:

It's evident that SOMETHING about them is gifted, and it's also evident that there is an area of struggle. Some may be developmental, and many have the 'something else' going on, and it masks the giftedness in many areas.

Skidmore (2002) suggests that some children's learning has been limited because of certain constructions of teaching and learning, while Watkins (2016) stated that "the overall effect is that learners' experiences as learners are hidden" (p. 28). Some parents participating in this research reported of struggling to receive support for their child to learn different things at school, which is another effect of setting up expectations for gifted children. The experiences described by these participants clearly demonstrate that many instances of giftedness have been overlooked because the evidence of giftedness is not related to the teachers' expectations. For example, Nat (mother) is not happy with how her child was treated by the teacher about the reading level he was at school because her child did not reach the expectations of teachers:

It will live forever in my mind the teacher's comment – "He's not that good, he really doesn't understand" as he burned articulately through books. She [the teacher] was very wrong. The following three years of literacy had him assessed at many years ahead in comprehension. In the end he read crap at school and real books at home, and [he] had a note in his report saying he should be encouraged to borrow more books ... ugh.

Many constructions of learning for gifted children take certain assumptions for granted, which are natural and historical at the same time. However, many of

the parent participants would like the teachers to be more aware of, better understand, and focus more on, their individual child's *interests* and *growth*, rather than making assumptions based on their constructions of teaching and learning for gifted children, in general.

Amelia (mother) believes that her child's teachers cannot perceive her needs: "Teachers don't get that one can be gifted and struggling at same time ... That is so the case with my #3. Now doing year 11." Sutherland (2012) explains that gifted children can struggle with learning just like other children do. I support both Amelia's comment and Sutherland's statement, and argue that gifted children struggle due to some common and dominant practices that have been set by teachers. This argument is supported by the research data, which show that gifted children are at risk of being misunderstood.

Although different constructions have appeared in this research, the participants shared some common assumptions about gifted children, their learning and achievement. For example, the participants talked about common assumptions concerning the teaching of gifted children and these have resulted in learning being a challenge for many of these children. Parents become concerned about their children's education and giftedness when they think the teachers see their gifted children as challenging and problematic. Some research participants, especially those who were parents, shared their feelings of the impacts of being labelled as gifted. Heidi, a parent, said:

Because of some educators' attitude I am almost embarrassed to tell people my son is gifted. It certainly hasn't been an easy road. What does it mean to me? Stress, heartache and worry.

This comment shows that the constructions of giftedness developed by teachers are disparaging for parents. Heidi's comment on Facebook also reveals how she does not want to let people know that her child is gifted, because constructions like this are not helpful and, once children are categorised as gifted, unnecessary expectations may arise and these perceptions cannot easily be removed. According to Cross (2016), the concepts of being gifted create problems or demands, which was not the parents' intention when they enrolled their child in school. Delta posted on Facebook that "I do feel that my son is just cruising along, as there is just not enough support or understanding within schools." Gillian (mother) then said:

I have been through this ... my GATE [Gifted and Talented Education], daughter has been DESTROYED my school [sic] ... it's taking ages to get my girl back. If I had known what I know now I would NEVER have sent Lizzy to school, I would have home-schooled from the start.

I argue that teachers' constructions of teaching and learning result in negative experiences for gifted children. Although Heidi, Delta and Gillian do not detail their children's experiences, the data illustrate that some teachers' constructions result in parents being unhappy with the progress of their children's learning. The data collected from the research participants suggest that some teachers' constructions of learning for gifted children have resulted in labels that prevent them from providing for gifted children. Some of the

stories shared by the parents and the quote mentioned previously support this.

Delta shared:

To be honest, I don't think there is enough support in any special needs area, but certainly VERY little for gifted children! People often assume that gifted children don't need any help or support.

Delta's opinion links to my earlier discussion about a construction of learning that gifted children are privileged learners, with its consequent assumption that they do not need help and, thus, there is not enough support provided for them. Pfeiffer and Stocking (2000) talk about gifted children frequently suffering from their learning environment, because "Teachers may feel that, because of [their] high intelligence, the gifted child will 'do fine' even without special attention or opportunities" (p. 86). I argue that gifted children's needs and interests are not explicitly addressed because teachers think they do not need to be taken care of. Zara posted on Facebook: "Education is getting equal opportunities to reach your potential – this should be available to all students. Not much to ask!" Chris sends her child to a private school, saying, "I pay for a private education so I can demand the education that my child needs to be their best." Two parents replied to Chris's post, asking why she had chosen a private school for her child. Chris replied:

The current public system has not achieved equity (my definition of fairness). They cannot offer what my child needs, they don't have the resources (time, people and things). I pay so I can be a customer (we do not have lots of money), so I can expect what they advertise. It's not fair that families without the money cannot access the same even if it was what their child needs.

The above quote illustrates a social construction of learning that is related to the purpose of education. This is because of social constructions of learning, such as gifted children learn easily and gifted children are challenging, means that parents are not confident about the education system – they cannot see their child’s needs being met. This construction of the purpose of education states that education is not fair to all children and their families, and that provisions for learning are based on the family having a way to finance it.

Nat posted on Facebook: “I don’t think my kids are deficient in anything except a challenge.” The parents’ Facebook posts reveal that gifted children and their families are vulnerable in the learning environment set by teachers, because the children’s learning needs and interests are not responded to. May (2000) assert that the impact of giftedness on the family needs to be addressed because “gifted children are not gifted in every area and are not successful at everything” (p. 58). As the data show, some constructions of learning can lead to frustration and stress not only for the child but also for their family.

5.5 Summary

The participants’ comments have revealed particular views of teaching and learning that the alternative models, as described by Smith and Barr (2008): *learning equals being taught* and *learning equals individual sense-making* or *developing a community of learners*. Many of these relate to the constructions of teaching and learning for gifted children. Gifted children are seen as learners who learn differently, which relates to a view of learning that says they do not

often learn in predictable and manageable stages that are facilitated by teachers. The participants' perspectives of their experiences are that teaching is considered unnecessary when the construction of learning relating to gifted children, is that they do not need help. The Facebook parent participants shared their experiences of having a child who has been labelled as gifted, and the expectations that come with common-sense constructions of teaching and learning for gifted children. Some parents' perspectives of their children's experiences indicated that the learning opportunities currently being provided for gifted children are far from equal, and that gifted children are still being prevented from accessing opportunities to learn different things.

This section summarises the discussion in this chapter, to date, and focuses on how teaching and learning constructions relate to Smith and Barr's (2008) two alternative models of teaching-learning as a conceptual framework. This section first presents a table that provides an overview of the two alternative models: *learning equals being taught* and *learning equals individual sense-making* or *developing a community of learners* and some descriptors for the role of the teacher, goals of teaching and the view of learning used in this chapter. I am also extending the two models, to something their models did not include, which is the view of learners for gifted children and some examples from the participants' comments.

Table 2: Common roles of the teacher, goals of teaching and views of learning

Alternative models (Smith & Barr, 2008)	Roles of the teacher and goals of teaching used in this chapter (Smith & Barr, 2008)	Views of learning used in this chapter (Smith & Barr, 2008)	View of learners for gifted children (extending the work of Smith and Barr, 2008)	Example from participants' comments
Learning equals being taught	<p>Expert</p> <p>To impact new knowledge, concepts and skills</p>	<p>Cognitive dimension stressed</p> <p>Learners learn by being told</p> <p>Learning is individual, affected by ability, which is seen as fixed</p> <p>Learners acquire new knowledge in predictable and manageable stages</p>	<p>Learners need help, but gifted children are not expected to be helped</p> <p>Learners need to work hard – meritocratic concepts in giftedness</p> <p>Gifted children are challenging: they do not learn in predictable and manageable stages</p>	<p>“I’ve got available ... out on the tables. So you can make a choice today, and I’ll help you in the choice that you make: but your choice is not an open one ... your choice is from what I’ve got set up for the day.” (Belle).</p> <p>“Well if you’re gifted, you’ve already got an advantage, so why should we do anything to help you?” (Belle).</p>
<p>Learning equals individual sense-making</p> <p>or</p> <p>Developing a community of learners</p>	<p>Expert</p> <p>Role of anyone helping (teaching) is examined in terms of how it helps the learner make their own sense</p> <p>To facilitate discovery of new knowledge, concepts, skills.</p>	<p>Cognitive dimension stressed</p> <p>Students are engaged in active participation ...</p>	<p>Gifted children ask many questions</p> <p>Gifted children are opinionated</p>	<p>“People often assume that gifted children don’t need any help or support.” (Delta).</p> <p>“The gifted programme ended in the 8th grade and from there they pointed to the AP (assistant principal) track and insisted that he could get more of a challenge by them assigning more homework” (Emma).</p>

The table, above, summarises the models of *learning equals being taught* and *learning equals individual sense-making* or *developing a community of learners*, and weaves them together with the view of learners for gifted children and the participants' comments in this chapter. Each comment reflects about how teaching and learning are constructed by the participants. The following section provides a conclusion to this chapter.

5.5.1 *Conclusions*

The participants' constructions of learning were notably similar to each other. Their stories reflected that when teachers were constructed as experts in the learning environment, they sought to control children's learning. However, much of the data indicated that many gifted children's needs were not being met, so teachers needed to facilitate different resources to manage these children.

Some constructions were contradictory; for example, some participants said gifted children learnt easily so did not need help, but teachers were still expected to respond to all children's learning needs and interests. To compound this problem, the participants also commented that teachers' constructions of teaching and learning for gifted children influenced the way they taught them. This idea of hard work led to another concept found in the discussion of giftedness, that of meritocracy. The meritocratic concept suggests that people who work hard will achieve, high achievers are the ones who will be successful in society, and gifted children are high achievers. However, it can be argued

that achievement is the result of hard work and high ability means that hard work is not necessary, which is in tension with the concept of meritocracy.

Some participants linked their views of learning to their experiences as mothers of gifted children, sharing the challenges they and their children faced in the education system, especially when their child did not fit well with the interpretations of the role of learners who were labelled as gifted. The effects of being misunderstood were not helpful for gifted children's learning and development, and the children's learning experiences affected their parents.

The data in this chapter show that one construction of learning for gifted children was that they are challenging and can be problematic in class. This point was very significant because, if some constructions of learning were dominant and influential, then children's learning and development can be compromised when teachers focused on some constructions of learning that were not helpful for gifted children. How a gifted child was treated by his or her teacher was dependent on the teacher's constructions of teaching and learning, because teachers were held to be constructed as experts in the learning environment. Indeed, the constructions of learning also affected the parents of a gifted child. Some Facebook participants noted that parents would rather their children were not gifted, because they did not want their children to be exposed to unnecessary judgments and unrealistic or demanding expectations.

5.5.2 *Next chapter*

The data indicate that teachers have to understand ways to accommodate the needs of gifted children and provide for their giftedness. This leads us to the next chapter, where many of the research participants illustrate some constructions of teaching for gifted children that focus on teachers' willingness to provide for children and their families. This chapter also explores the third alternative model of teaching–learning, as described by Smith and Barr (2008), that underpins the conceptual framework of this research that: *learning equals building knowledge through doing things with others* or *co-construction* or *developing a learning community*. Another conceptual framework used in the next findings chapter includes *the ethics of care*, as driven by Noddings (1984, 2013).

Chapter Six

Socially constructing teaching and learning as learning community

6.1 Introduction

The two previous findings chapters have discussed the difficulties many gifted children, their families, and teachers faced, because some constructions of teaching and learning impact on how teachers view giftedness and gifted children. The discussion in the previous two findings chapters drew on two alternative models of teaching and learning as the conceptual framework: *learning equals being taught* and *learning equals individual sense-making or developing a community of learners*, as described by Smith and Barr (2008). The findings in Chapters Four and Five presented teachers as experts; constructions of learning being affected by the notion of fixed abilities; and the presumption that *all* children should learn in manageable and predictable stages while being taught by their teachers (because learning was constructed as occurring in predictable stages). The data presented in these chapters have reflected that gifted children learn in an environment where the dominant constructions of teaching and learning draw on the views of teachers as instruments of learning.

This findings chapter made use of key concepts in Smith and Barr's (2008) third model of teaching and learning and Noddings (1984) *ethics of care* in analysing and interpreting the data. Smith and Barr (2008) have a third model

of teaching and learning that placed an emphasis on the importance of relationships. They named this model *learning equals building knowledge through doing things with others, or co-construction, or developing a learning community*. As discussed in the literature review (see [Chapter Two](#)), this model highlighted the interdependent nature of learning, where teachers, children and parents worked collaboratively to support children's learning. Several descriptors within the roles of teachers, and the views of learning described Smith and Barr (2008), were used to guide and strengthen the data analysis.

The second conceptual framework used in this chapter was the concept of *ethics of care*, as described by Noddings (1984). Noddings (2012) interprets 'care' as a connection between two individuals, and that the care is beneficial to each other. This concept focuses on 'care' as a fundamental aspect of teaching and learning. Children learned when they have teachers who cared for them. Teachers cared for the children in their care, and there were patterns of actions associated with this, so children and parents can feel that their children were cared for. In terms of teaching, ethics of care brings with it a moral responsibility to support children's learning and also the children's families (Noddings, 1984).

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section explores some constructions of teaching and learning through which teachers develop a learning community and where learning equals building knowledge through doing things with others. The second section focuses on the participants' stories

about the ethics of care where teachers are committed to creating relationships with the children in their care and also their parents. This research expresses a particular interest in children who are labelled as gifted, but the constructions of teaching and learning could apply to *all* children.

6.2 *Developing a learning community*

Nat, a parent of a gifted child, said: “Sounds like a normal day at school; however, there are moments of hope.” The first half of this comment was about days at school that children and parents were not excited about, but the second half of this comment suggested that sometimes there were different constructions of pedagogy and that meant children and families have different and positive experiences at school. Here, in the moments of hope, she was referring to a construction of learning and a construction of learners that made it possible for a teacher to attend to what is happening for *all* learners. Nat’s comment illustrates the focus of this chapter: that some constructions of teaching showed that teachers were committed to finding ways to meet the needs of the gifted children in their care. In doing so, the teachers’ constructions of teaching and learning will influence their commitment to creating such relationships.

The constructions of teaching and learning for gifted children presented in this chapter were different from those in the previous two findings chapters, in that teachers offered a learning environment that empowered democratic teaching practices. This learning environment related to the *learning equals building*

knowledge through doing things with others or co-construction or developing a learning community model of teaching and learning, as described by Smith and Barr (2008).

Some of the data reflected that some teacher participants expected teachers to be able to work with all children. For example, Claire, a programme leader of an ITE programme, claimed that “effective teachers recognise and respond to diversity and difference by enhancing learning and development in *all* children.” According to Smith and Barr (2008), teachers develop a learning community with creative opportunities to engage with, and also learn, from their children. I extend this statement by saying that teachers can work with *all* children if they were willing to interact with the children, create opportunities to understand about them and respond to their learning needs.

Viv (teacher educator) commented: “We do have quite a strong emphasis around their responsibilities as teachers: [they] should be able to work effectively with *all* learners,” and “teachers have a commitment to ensure that learning is successful for *all* children, they’re not just for the kids like them [teachers], for the kids who are easy-to-reach children.” Viv suggested that teachers find the kids who were ‘easy-to-reach’ children were the ones who looked like them. However, teachers were expected to be able to work with *all* learners, including the learners who did not look like them. The comment indicated that teachers understand that some children were not easy to work with, because these children were not like their teachers. There was also an

expectation that teachers have a responsibility and commitment to work with *all* children. Some constructions of teaching and learning state that teachers were able to work effectively with *all* children. For example, when teaching and learning were constructed as a learning community, as described by Smith and Barr (2008), knowledge was socially constructed in that teachers and students learned from each other. The next section explores the participants' stories relating to teachers being willing to learn about the gifted children in their care. Thus, teachers were learners and were open to learn about individuality. This statement was informed by a descriptor of the role of the teacher, that the *teacher is view[ed] and views himself or herself as a learner* (Smith & Barr, 2008).

6.2.1 Teachers are learners: professional openness and curiosity

When teachers were seen as learners, they also learned, were willing to be open-minded and were curious to learn about their students and the ways their students learned. The concept of openness was built into different approaches to teaching and learning (Deed & Lesko, 2015). Dee, an early childhood teacher, stated in the open-ended questionnaire: “[T]eachers learning to extend every child without having limits, learn[ing] about the level the child can achieve [and] to be[ing] able to facilitate learning that the child initiates.” Dee pointed out that teachers needed to pay attention to 'child initiatives', as these were learning dispositions that emphasised that learning was built when children were the centre of learning.

In her interview, Claire, a teacher educator, gave her opinion:

[Teachers have] got to look at the specific way in which a child might learn or in a way the child might respond to a different situation, and so that will cater for these children, no matter what their particular level, or their particular interest, or their way of beating this.

Claire identified the need for teachers to understand each child's individual learning pace and style. Her story reflected that if teachers wanted to respond to the children, they needed to understand about their children and how these children learn. According to Smith and Barr (2008), a descriptor of the teachers in the third alternative model of teaching and learning was that the *teacher is viewed and views himself or herself as a learner* (p. 408). Claire's comment revealed various constructions about teaching underpinning particular teaching practices, one of which was related to professional openness – being willing to inquire and explore new ideas. So, therefore, teachers will be able to respond to how children learn.

On TKI, the online website *for the New Zealand Curriculum*, teaching was described as 'inquiry', with further statements on the site saying that teachers were inquiry learners and needed to be open to different teaching approaches for student learning: "Teaching as inquiry is a fundamental part of ensuring success for *all* the students in your class" (Ministry of Education, 2016). One descriptor of the curriculum was that the *curriculum as inquiry* allows for learners to be given opportunities to take the ownership of inquiry (Smith & Barr, 2008) and, in this, learners included teachers.

As discussed previously, some of the participants demonstrated their dedication to professional openness and curiosity as a construction of teaching. They wanted *all* children to be involved in the context of learning, and teachers thought of different strategies to make participation and learning happen for every child. In the open-ended questionnaire, Mele, a teacher, responded in the questionnaire that teachers should have: “[A]n openness to gifted – inclusion! An understanding of the diversity of these children. An introduction of services that can support ECE [early childhood education] teachers with these children.” Mele’s comment relates to the construction of teaching and learning that supports openness towards gifted children. Inclusive approaches to education required showing “respect for diversity as a core” (Smith & Barr, 2008, p. 402). Alati (2005) believes many teachers who entered the profession wished to engage with children’s learning and make a difference in children’s lives. Even if the constructions discussed in the previous findings chapters concentrated on measuring abilities and predicting future achievement, many teachers were nonetheless dedicated to supporting gifted children’s learning by engaging their contribution as part of the learning community.

Monique, another teacher who completed the open-ended questionnaire, commented that teachers should learn from the parents: “We should learn from the parents, as they are the experts in the field of their child, so we can meet the individual needs of each child.” Here, teachers were learners, because they learned about the children from their parents in order to support the children’s learning. These participants’ stories also related to another descriptor of the

goal of teaching, that it has *more equal power dynamics* (Smith & Barr, 2008) because, in a learning community, children, parents and teachers shared common goals for teaching and learning. Every party has a responsibility for children's learning.

Lee-Anne and Steph are both teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand as well as parents of gifted children. Lee-Anne said on Facebook that teachers needed, “a willingness and a passion to learn and research more about these children.” Likewise, Steph, who has been running professional development courses for school teachers, said teachers should be “taking into account other points of view, using common things in new ways, individualising to meet learning needs rather than one size fits *all*.” These views of practising teachers illustrated a construction of teaching and learning that the teaching profession needed to be open to inquiry and to learn about *all* children. The third alternative model of teaching and learning described by Smith and Barr (2008) was that *learning equals building knowledge through doing things with others* or *co-construction* or *developing a learning community* and involved shared learning responsibilities, as teachers, children and parents learned from each other. Coleman (2003) states that knowledge was built by inquiry when teachers were trying to understand the learning context as well as their students. The data analysis process indicated that many of the teacher participants' constructions of teaching and learning related to supporting differences between children.

Indeed, some of the research data revealed another construction of teaching and learning; namely, that teachers provided for differences as fulfilment of diverse learning needs. Nat posted on Facebook that teachers “should ... provid[e] alternative diverse challenges. Not teaching to 'fluff' the topic out.” This construction showed that learning was more than a predictable process; rather, it needed to be making sense for children – which was different from the constructions of teaching and learning presented in the previous two findings chapters. Much of the data also showed teachers’ concern about the children’s needs and interests – teachers included them as a construction of teaching and learning instead of just making them fit into a predetermined environment.

Hayley, a teacher and a parent of gifted children, commented on Facebook: “We adjusted ... adjusted to suit her learning style ... Different and possibly novel ways of looking at things, applying different lenses to problems or issues.” This illustrated that teachers were willing to try to understand the child. Hayley’s story aligned with a descriptor in the goal of teaching in the third alternative model of teaching and learning that *someone promoting learning in this view will be helping learners engage in 'generative' rather than 'passive' learning activities*, as described by Smith and Barr (2008). Hayley and her colleagues were willing to find ways to meet their children’s needs and interests instead of providing a dominant teaching approach where children passively followed instructions from teachers.

Some participants indicated that teachers can learn from children by interacting with them. Terri suggested: “Ask them [gifted children] to apply the knowledge. Ask them to teach you [the teacher]. Ask them to explain how they got to a particular answer or bit of information.” Terri’s belief that teachers can learn from children aligned with the contribution from Hayley. She provided an example of teachers’ openness when she described how she and her fellow teachers followed a child’s interest: “We extended him by talking and having conversations, then following on from that ... we did follow interests of each individual child.” In her next post, Hayley also explained that teachers always learned by interacting with gifted children: “It’s always a learning curve that we as educators have to chalk [it] down to experience and learn from them. It takes reflection and lots of it.”

Hayley’s, Terri’s and Steph’s comments all illustrated the construction of teaching and learning that teachers were willing to learn about the individual children in their care. These participants showed how teachers learned through their openness, which allowed them to learn from experience as well as accommodating their differences when they were interacting with gifted children. The Ministry of Education (2016) states that learning about students was a cycle of action for teachers: teachers learned about different approaches and changed their practices to encourage success for students. These participants gave examples of how the third alternative model of teaching and learning, as described by Smith and Barr (2008), was implemented in daily practice. The teaching and learning environment was a place where a learning

community was developed. Support in the community included: “Children and young people supporting each other, teachers supporting teachers, parents/carers becoming partners in the education of their children, and communities supporting their schools” (Smith & Barr, 2008, p. 414). Power was not only predominantly held by teachers but also they joined in the meta-learning process (Smith & Barr, 2008). This construction described teachers as continuous learners and involved providing a flexible learning environment with different approaches to learning.

6.2.2 *Connective pedagogy*

The previous section focused on a construction of teaching and learning implying that teachers needed to be willing to learn and understand the individual child and to let that child lead their own learning as the first step of engaging in learning. In order to create a learning community, according to Smith and Barr (2008), teachers need to focus on connecting with each other as part of developing a learning community. From the discussion in the literature review, the second and third alternative models of teaching and learning included: *Learning equals individual sense-making* or *developing a community of learners* and *learning equals building knowledge through doing things with others* or *co-construction* or *developing a learning community* and this has informed ideas about developing of a connective pedagogy in this section. Next, I present the participants’ data to illustrate different social

constructions of teaching and learning that support gifted children's learning through making connections with others.

I support Macartney and Morton (2013) who suggest that learning required the children's participation. However, 'participation' was more than just physically turning up to the early childhood or school setting, it was about gifted children being involved and connected, as Macartney and Morton suggested. Hughes's (1997, cited in Smith & Barr, 2008) also suggested that "the most effective classroom activities were those that involved..." (p. 411). It was because learning was a reciprocal process that a learning community cannot be developed if the students' participation was not a part of this process.

In this section, I present data that show how some of the research participants use gifted children's abilities to encourage their involvement, which was yet another construction of teaching and learning. *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017) claims: "Children develop by participating actively in the opportunities that are available to them. These typically involved collaboration with adults and other children" (p. 36). The curriculum supported children's involvement, as everyone should be respected and valued in the education system. As Callard-Szulgit (2012) explained: "We can service *all* kids, including the gifted, without isolating anyone" (p. 14). Although the research participants did not explicitly describe examples, much of the research data reflected the importance of involvement as a construction of teaching and learning. In practice, this construction would mean that the teachers understood

that involvement was important for learning, and they were aware of, and practise, strategies that supported children's engagement.

Skylar wrote in the open-ended questionnaire: "We [teachers in the early childhood setting] have a group philosophy so *all* children could be involved, including the experiences of g/t [gifted and talented] children." *Te Whāriki* aligned with this comment by stating that all barriers to involvement needed to be removed, as *all* children have the right to be included in the curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2017). Skylar's comment related to the suggestion of Watkins (2004, cited in Smith and Barr, 2008) that learning was about "engaging the whole class contributions" (p. 411). Skylar's comment also reflected another construction of teaching: that teachers were willing to work together to support gifted children. This was a significant aspect in developing a learning community. In Smith and Barr (2008), the meaning of 'support' in 'supporting learning' included "children and young people supporting each other, teachers supporting teachers, parents/carers becoming partners in the education of their children, and communities supporting their schools" (p. 414).

In the following example, participants reflected on teachers' emphases on gifted children's involvement in learning activities and that children can learn from each other. According to Smith and Barr (2008), a learning community was an open-ended learning environment where new knowledge was gained through interactions that go beyond the teachers' directed teaching. Aria, a

primary school teacher, suggested that teachers needed to think of different strategies to encourage the involvement of gifted children:

They [teachers] follow the same process of working with a gifted child on their interests and strengths; in a group learning situation it may be harder for that child, but there are ways to keep them involved using their strengths. The other children can gain a lot from their special skills, too.

Aria emphasises that gifted children learned by being involved and their strengths can help other children in a group situation. This example indicated a learning environment where learning was gained through co-construction and negotiation. The story related to Smith and Barr's (2008) discussion that "successful schools focus on connections" (p. 414). This story showed that the connections can be made in multiple ways, such as teachers connecting with children, and children connecting with other children. I support the discussion of developing a connective pedagogy where teachers were resources, but children can also be resources in driving their own, and other children's, learning. Such constructions can enhance *all* children's learning, including the children who are constructed as gifted. Knowledge was gained when children were involved in taking responsibility for their learning, instead of being passively dependent on their teachers' direction, because they were seen as experts in children's learning.

Hart and colleagues (2004) advocate that teachers should discard the concept of fixed ability, thereby opening the way for creating multiple dimensions of learning systems and promoting a more positive view of human educability.

Based on some of the stories shared by the participants, this can be extended to creating a learning community where teachers were more open to new practices for gifted children. The extent to which teachers felt supported directly influences their efforts to support children's learning, because learning was mutual within connective processes. In order to provide for giftedness, much of the data showed that teachers were committed to demonstrating an *ethics of care* in their practice. The next section explores the stories that emphasise that 'care' is a significant aspect in the constructions of teaching and learning that support gifted children.

6.3 *Ethics of care in supporting gifted children*

In this section, I discuss how the constructions of teaching and learning identified in this research related to an *ethics of care* for gifted children. Although the participants did not explicitly describe their practices in terms of an ethics of care, much of the data showed evidence of this concept. Ethics of care was an area of professional practice in teaching that has been explored, and significantly influenced by Noddings. Noddings (1984, 2013) said that care was a basic need, because everyone wanted to be cared for. This illustrated an *ethics of care* (Noddings, 1984, 2013) that supported gifted children, and weaved in with the alternative models of teaching–learning *of learning equals building knowledge through doing things with others* or *developing a learning community* or *developing a learning community* as described by Smith and Barr, (2008). The construction of teaching and learning relating to an *ethics of*

care is that children can learn only if their basic needs are met, and so there is an ethical obligation for teachers to build relationships that have a caring focus, and to establish connections between themselves and the children in the learning community. This section explores the data that relates or reflects to both conceptual frameworks for this thesis.

6.3.1 *Recognising and responding to gifted children*

In this section, I discuss another construction of teaching and learning identified from this research, one that related to caring attitudes. Noddings (2013) states an ethic built on caring strives to maintain *the caring attitude* and was, thus dependent on, not superior to, natural caring (p. 96). There were some patterns of behaviours demonstrating the caring attitudes when teachers cared for children in their practice. The stories, below, reflect that recognising and responding to gifted children are a way that teachers show their caring attitudes to gifted children.

While I was analysing the constructions of teaching and learning relating to recognising differences, I noted another construction from Layla (teacher): “We recognise every child’s need, goal, and passion. I see all as being able to contribute to our programme, and I celebrate every child.” Selma (1998, cited in Monchinski, 2010) describes the care involved in an *ethics of care* as being directly related to the activity of caring, which involved recognising differences. Corbett (2001, cited in Smith & Barr, 2008) said that recognising

the diverse needs of learners can positively influence children's learning. I extend these statements and strengthen the *developing a learning community* model (Smith & Barr, 2008) by asserting that a learning community is sustained by a strong support system to help children grow. Mayeroff (1971, cited in Noddings, 2013) states: "To care for another person, in the most significant sense, is to help him grow and actualise himself" (p. 30).

In her interview, Claire described how teachers needed to be capable of responding to gifted children: "Teachers have got to be very strong [and] ... skilled in the way in which they respond to the things that they care and see and encourage [in] that learning." There was an expectation that the nature of the teaching profession meant that teachers cared for the children they worked with. This aligned with Noddings's (2013) suggestion that a mother taking care of her child was usually considered to be as a natural, not an ethical, action, because looking after their child was something that a mother was expected to do. Much of the data reflected that the caring attitude of teachers was a natural way to respond to children's needs and interests. *Te Whāriki* also emphasises caring for children as a construction of teaching. For example: "The curriculum integrates care and education and includes both specifically planned experiences and activities and interactions that arise spontaneously" (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 11).

Layla's and Claire's stories indicated 'care' activities: teachers cared for their children, so every child in that learning environment was recognised and

responded to. While, theoretically, it was possible to provide adequate and appropriate opportunities for gifted children to learn different things, in practice, this construction was interpreted as teachers needing to take responsibility for recognising differences. Linking with the discussion by Selma, Noddings (2005, 2012) explained that in order to show an ethics of care, teachers needed to engage in care-giving activities. Sarah, a parent of the gifted child, suggested: “Even the smallest acts of kindness and understanding from a teacher can help any child.” Sarah’s comment displayed a social construction of teaching and learning in which caring aligned with actions. In the third alternative model of learning, one of the descriptors of the view of learning, as described by Smith and Barr (2008) state: “Students operate together to improve knowledge and help each other learn through dialogue” (p. 408). Along with practising the openness and curiosity that was discussed in the previous section, it was equally important that teachers considered an *ethics of care* in order to co-construct knowledge and that learning involved helping each other and understanding gifted children’s learning needs.

An ethics of care within this construction of teaching and learning required commitment and effort to maintain the caring attitude that produced ethical behaviours (Hinsdale, 2016). Jaci, a parent of a gifted child, commented: “The intensity and sensitivity of gifted children and their asynchronous development need understanding and support, along with teaching them how to struggle to achieve.” Brenda, a teacher of gifted children in the United States, shared some of the practices in her school with the Facebook group:

We're not necessarily a school for the 'thoroughbred' gifted student, but welcome all. What we're working on is how to meet their needs through accommodations, strategies, etc., as well as giving them opportunities to go deep into content at a fast pace, AND we're trying to teach resilience and 'grit' to help them get through the hard stuff.

The story, above, showed that teachers did care for their children, including the ones labelled as gifted, they did recognise gifted children's needs, and they did respond to these children by helping them to get through difficulties. This was consistent with Noddings's description that 'care' required both receptive attention and responsiveness (Noddings, 1984). It also illustrates the potential of an *ethics of care* through another set of constructions of teaching and learning for gifted children: that the needs of gifted children can be responded to and learning can take place in a caring environment.

The participants' experiences indicated that care was a significant aspect of developing a learning community that supported gifted children and their families. As mentioned previously, the participants in my research did not explicitly address ethics of care in their stories; the concepts of ethics of care emerged from the data analysis, which revealed that many teachers were passionate about providing for gifted children. Eva explained her view of caring for children:

We all know children are unique, and therefore what will work for one child may not work for another. So, our education system needs to be responsive to this [gifted] difference. Granted, resources are limited, but there are some incredibly creative schools and teachers using these limited resources to maximum potential.

In terms of constructing teaching and learning, the research participants indicated that an *ethics of care* brings with it a moral responsibility to support children's learning. Brock and Curby (2014) provide support for my statement, saying that: "when teachers care for their children, the way they respond to gifted children is children-focused." In this construction, such responsibility included the concepts of duties, justice and rights, as well as responding to individuality. Some participants, especially the teacher educators, approached the issue of meeting individual needs for gifted children from a care perspective. For example, Claire (teacher educator) said: "It's that in early childhood... *all* children have particular learning requirements, and I think that the teachers need to be aware of that individuality, and that diversity." Although Claire did not explicitly discuss a caring attitude, her comments reflected that teachers cared for *all* children in their care. Teachers cannot be aware of children's needs and interests if they did not care for the children. If teaching and learning was about caring for every child, then gifted children should also feel that they were cared for.

Hinsdale (2016) points out that the word 'care' was often used in teaching. Ami shared that her child's teacher cares about her students: "[She] encouraged diversity in her students ... simply by running a programme that really allowed them the opportunity to diversely express interests." Targeting children's interests can promote learning and was a way of caring for children. Such practice indicated a construction of teaching and learning that emphasised children's interests. Hayley (mother can teacher) said:

Child-led with adults conversing and facilitating co-construction learning. I do find the dispositions are enhanced this way, or are these just easier recognised due to the small ratio? If a child asks for a resource then we get it for them ... Because it is a service that looks at each child and follows them and their interests, while adults are close by extending them.

This comment demonstrated that one form of providing care was tuning into children's interests, which was part of the construction that related to an *ethics of care*. Teachers cared for their children, and teachers' inner morality will guide them to teaching practices that included respect for children as a natural part of their profession's obligation to take care of children. Tronto (1993, cited in Monchinski, 2010) said that care involved thought and action, as discussed in an earlier section in this chapter. I extend Hayley's assertion that a descriptor in the role of the teacher in the third alternative model as "someone promoting learning in this view will be helping learners engage in 'generative' rather than 'passive' learning activities ..." (Smith & Barr, 2008, p. 408). Teachers helped children to access different things and provided for *all* children, including those who were gifted, according to their learning needs and interests. This descriptor reflected that teachers promoted a more equal sharing of power with a view of learning that "recognise[s] that knowledge is constructed socially" (Smith & Barr, 2008, p. 408).

I argue that a caring attitude was a fundamental component in constructing knowledge socially. Knowledge may not be socially constructed if a caring attitude was not a part of the dialogue, because, if the learning environment did not nurture compassion for one another, the needs and interests of gifted

children cannot be met. My argument was supported by the statement of Noddings (2013) who said: “I *care* for someone if I have regard for his views and interests” (p. 30). The construction of teaching that related to an *ethics of care* was clearly evident in the research data, which demonstrated that an ethics of care was embedded in daily teaching practices.

The construction of teaching and learning that related to an ethics of care was well understood and was influential in a variety of disciplines in different educational contexts, because teaching involved caring, and learning was built from caring actions.

The discussion in this section informed another construction of teaching and learning that supported gifted children in that a caring attitude was associated with caring relationships. Teachers needed to have a caring relationship with *all* children, so they can implement their caring attitudes to gifted children as well. The next section explores participants who shared their stories about having a caring relationship with teachers, and how this relationship supported gifted children’s learning and development.

6.3.2 *Relational pedagogies – caring relationships*

An analysis of the data has identified a construction of teaching and learning in which relationships were a central aspect of the ethics of care. In this section, I explore how relationships are central to developing a learning community. That teaching and learning were linked to caring relationships was raised many times

by the research participants (albeit, not always explicitly in those terms). Relationships were a core focus in the New Zealand early childhood curriculum, as well as a central aspect of an ethics of care (Noddings, 1984, 1992, 1995, 2005, 2010, 2012, 2013; Shillady, 2012).

The conversations that follow illustrated that a number of participants believed that relationships were important for teaching and learning. Karen, one of the teacher educators participating in this research, considered that knowledge was important, but relationships were also important. She shared her view that teachers should have a sustainable relationship: “They [teachers] really support sustainable relationships. So, there are a lot of things that you can do with knowledge, but do they build a sustainable [relationship]?” In the open-ended questionnaire, Maia shared the practices at her early childhood working environment, saying: “We have different ways of building relationships.” While Nora said: “We establish and keep building relationships involving the parents, and whanau, and having as much face-to-face contact as possible. I would do what I would for *all* teacher/child/parent/whānau relationships.” These comments showed teachers’ commitments to building relationships with children and their parents and, indeed, the data analysis also showed that some participants saw this as important for children and teachers. During her interview, Claire, a teacher educator, said: “The cornerstone of ECE [early childhood education] is relationships,” and Taylor claimed that “forming relationships is the essence of success for *all*.” A number of the research participants discussed relationships; that is, the teachers’ relationships with *all*

children. The quotations in this paragraph indicated that a learning community is developed through caring relationships; people cannot work collaboratively with each other if they were not working towards caring practices.

The examples, above, showed another construction of teaching and learning; that is, the concept of relationships was related to caring behaviours from teachers. Noddings (1984, cited in Noddings, 2005) claims that: “An ethic of care is needs-based. When I am caring in a situation, I am attentive – I listen to whatever needs are expressed – and, if possible, I try to respond positively” (p. 147). I argue that having a relationship can satisfy *all* children so they see that learning was happening; hence, relationships were the key to bridging the distance between misunderstanding and different constructions of giftedness. Bubeck (1995, cited in Monchinski, 2010) said that care was beneficial to others. When children and parents saw teachers behaving in caring ways, the opportunity for developing productive relationships and enhancing learning was maximised.

6.3.2.1 Relational pedagogies are influenced by New Zealand’s early childhood curriculum

Te Whāriki embodied the principle of relationships in both its initial and revised editions, stating that: “Children’s learning and development are influenced by the relationships they form with others” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 30). Indeed, the curriculum relied heavily on constructions of teaching and learning that related to the importance of relationships in the early years of education,

and how these relationships related to a caring focus on children's learning and development.

Several of the research participants, particularly those who were interviewed, mentioned the word 'relationship' in *Te Whāriki*. Teacher educator Claire believed that *Te Whāriki* showed the value of interactions and relationships:

Well, again I think it's very much what's already in *Te Whāriki* and our curriculum, about community interactions as teachers ... I learn how to develop and foster and further ... sustained relationships which you [the teacher] will need to do with children.

The teacher educator participants' frequent references to relationships could be because this construction is comprehensively embedded in the principles of *Te Whāriki* – as Claire noted, the early childhood curriculum “involves relationships.” The curriculum promotes relationships, and people involved in early childhood education believe that relationships influence children's learning and development. However, the contexts that linked to relationships with children can be varied. Nevertheless, the data illustrated how an individual's constructions were influenced by constructions created by influential people, such as people with power (Burr, 2015). Many participants viewed relationships as key to children's learning, because professionals in early childhood education in Aotearoa New Zealand were influenced by the constructions created by *Te Whāriki*.

Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996, 2017) states that children needed to expand their experience and their understanding of people, places, events and

things, through developing relationships with others. When discussing *Te Whāriki* during her interview, Ursula, a teacher educator, who often linked the curriculum to family and relationships, noted: “I think in the way in which... it involves relationships ...” Other participants in the research went to great lengths to explain the significance of teachers having relationships with parents and their children in the early years of education. They also mentioned the importance of relationships in gifted education as a construction of teaching and learning. As a result, developing relationships with parents and families was a common-sense construction of teaching in the early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*. As discussed in Chapter One, relationships were one of the four principles in the early childhood curriculum of Aotearoa New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 1996, 2017). *Te Whāriki* acknowledged that teachers needed to develop relationships with children and their families: “Kaiako [teacher] seek to develop mutually positive relationships with mokopuna [young people] and to work with whānau [family] ...” (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 13).

6.3.2.2 Relationships with children

The data demonstrated two areas within the constructions of teaching and learning that linked to relationships: the relationship between children and teachers, and the relationships between parents and teachers. Many participants indicated that both types of relationship were equally important in this construction. In this section I discuss how, when teachers have relationships

with gifted children, such relationships contain 'care' that supported gifted children's learning.

Comments from the interviews and in Facebook posts also showed that many of the participants consider it important that teachers developed relationships with their students and children: if the relationship was there, learning will happen. Erin commented on Facebook: "Without a positive relationship between a teacher and student, not much learning can happen in a classroom setting." In the open-ended questionnaire, Madi said that the teachers at her centre "focus on relationships with children so that we can ensure they feel confidence in themselves as a learner to direct and co-construct the learning with teachers and peers." This comment, again, suggested that learning happens when a relationship was created, that relationships can build children's confidence in learning, and that learning was shaped by co-construction. Gonzalez-Mena (2011) states that: "Relationships among adults in a child care situation influence the environment even though young children may not be aware of those relationships" (p. 182). This reflected the construction of teaching and learning that says it was the teacher's role to foster children's holistic learning and development. The data provided evidence that it was crucial that teachers' constructions included the importance of developing relationships with children and their families.

The following quotes are just a small sample of the comments teachers made in the open-ended questionnaire about how relationships can enhance learning.

The teachers' comments reflected Hinsdale's (2016) statement that "learning only takes place within and through relationships" (p. 5). Charlotte shared that "a close relationship was formed with the child, as they saw us as a great resource for them and wanted to be near us." While Ava wrote of the need to "see what signs those children will show, how to teach them to achieve their full potential, how to build a relationship with them, where to get [the] information needed." Neda posted on Facebook: "What is most important to me is that this [relationship] is considered in the way the teacher works with my child." These stories reflected a construction of teaching that linked to relationships as being a significant component in constructing learning. Another participant commented that teachers needed relationships in order to support children's learning, and that these relationships needed time to develop. In the open-ended questionnaire, Ruby shared: "[F]irst a relationship ... must be established and I spend a lot of time initially gaining this." Ruby explained how, if teachers wanted to develop a relationship with children, they first needed to willingly spend time with the children. This practice also applies to gifted children. Noddings (2013) notes: "[T]here might be time to develop the sort of deep *caring relationship* that could provide the basis for trust and genuine dialogue" (p. 196). Caring relationships were developed with time and effort and this nurtured trust through building understanding with each other. Only then will teachers be able to develop a better understanding of the children's needs and interests, which will, in turn, foster teaching and learning.

Other participants discussed relationships many times during the data collection process, stating their belief that relationships were the most essential component in supporting gifted children. Jaci, a teacher of gifted children and the mother of a gifted child, said teachers needed to understand the needs of gifted children:

I teach gifted children and ... I would like all teachers to know about gifted children ... [that they] need understanding and support, along with teaching them how to struggle to achieve – otherwise, they are deprived of the joy of mastering something that has required effort and perseverance. Also, they may not have the skills or confidence to tackle something challenging when it comes along.

This was what parents hoped to have, a construction that supported their child's learning and teachers who understand their child so their child will become a confident learner. Jaci's comment illustrated the importance of having teachers who both understand children and can guide them through challenging experiences. A *pedagogy of relationships* was an ethical obligation in the construction of knowledge (Noddings, 2010) and it enabled more possibilities for teaching and learning (Hart et al., 2004). Brock and Curby (2014) describe how, by having a positive relationship with children, teachers can influence children's motivation for learning, because the children feel supported to learn in these learning environments. Smith and Barr (2008) state that teachers enjoyed their work more and students were more interested in learning once building relationships was a focus in the school. As the Facebook participants came from several different countries, it was clear that a construction of

teaching and learning for gifted children that was about relationships was emphasised not only in Aotearoa New Zealand but also in many overseas educational systems. Through the data in this research, the participants reinforced the importance of relationships in education, especially in the early years of education.

6.3.2.3 Relationships with parents and families

This section explores the relationships with parents and families that enhanced teaching and learning for gifted children. Smith and Barr (2008) described that: “In a learning community, where equity and excellence developed together, an effective support system will be in place. Support includes: children and young people supporting each other, teachers supporting teachers, parents/carers becoming partners in the education of their children” (p. 414). Supporting children cannot be a solo effort – teachers needed to have input from parents. In the open-ended questionnaire, Amanda shared the practice she has in her early childhood centre:

We have found the foundation of the relationship which is established when the child enters the centre is the key. By establishing a strong reciprocal relationship with the parents/whānau [family] at the beginning, then you can build on this over time so that when or if a problem or issue arises the conversation is based on a sound relationship.

Bastiani (1993, cited in Smith & Barr, 2008) reinforce, “the tangible and lasting benefits to children when parents, teachers and students work together towards shared goals” (p. 415). Smith and Barr (2008) describe a democratic learning

environment that promoted a connective pedagogy that required parents/carers to work together to influence children's learning. Therefore, having a caring relationship with the parents was essential, as the teachers will then gain a deeper understanding about the children in their care and; hence, be better able to support them in their learning (Wong, 2015).

In another example, Olga, a teacher educator, supported the focus of teaching practice on relationships. In her interview, she said that teachers first needed to get to know the children and their families and, by doing, so they will get to know the children's needs: "... get to know the child, get to know their family, and get to know about our teachers in the setting for that child. And that it is important for [the teacher's and the children's] own learning." This is an example to point out that teachers need to get to know the child's family, because this knowledge is important for learning. This construction of teaching and learning was about the importance of developing relationships with the children and was supported by the curriculum and much of the research data indicated that teaching and learning can be sustained when teachers have a positive relationship with their students' parents and families. *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017) explains: "It is important that kaiako [teachers] develop meaningful relationships with whānau [family] and that they respect their aspirations for their children" (p. 20). Much of the data identified relationships with parents as a construction of teaching that can support children's learning. The two quotes in this section corroborated Whalley's (2007) statement that in the early years teachers can collaborate effectively with

parents if their relationship was positive. Smith and Barr (2008) also encourage schools to have more interactive relationships between the school and home – parents and teachers should work together. Their research reflects that teachers and parents should learn from each other can apply to promoting learning for gifted children and their teachers, who were seen as learners.

6.3.2.4 School–home communications

Some of the parent participants felt that in order to create a stimulating teaching and learning environment, teachers should first communicate with the parents. The section title was inspired by a quotation by Smith and Barr (2008, p. 415) that, “a co-construction approach to learning is sustained by school–home communications.” A successful school project conducted by Smith (1996, cited in Smith & Barr, 2008) involved schools and families in establishing an interactive relationship. I extend this statement: if teachers did not talk to parents and their children, they will not be able to understand them and, hence, will not be able to create a sustained relationship.

A story by Erin, who shared a post on Facebook about her son, suggested the importance of having positive relationships and effective communication between teachers and parents: “Positive relationships are critical to (and develop from) effective communication.” Erin’s post indicated how communication can strengthen the relationship, a construction of teaching and learning that was strongly emphasised in Smith and Barr (2008), Noddings (1984, 2013) and *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996, 2017) when it

stated that learning was fostered by mutual relationships between the home and the learning context. In the same post, before talking about the importance of relationship and communication, Erin shared:

My youngest child was frightened by his kindergarten teacher, and she couldn't 'deal with' him (her words). He kept saying, "Mom, I'll be good, I'll try harder." But, of course, it never worked. She also sabotaged the parent-teacher relationship by claiming that his behaviour 'issues' happened because I was a working mom. Just one example, of course, but a particular one of a lack of awareness or willingness to 'deal with' gifted kids. Positive relationships are critical to (and develop from) effective communication.

This story described how a parent-teacher relationship has been destroyed because the teacher focused on the gifted child's 'problem'. However, in the discussion of 'relational pedagogies', I want to emphasise that Erin's story has pointed out an important suggestion that the parent-teacher relationship was sustained by effective communication. Noddings (1984) explains that communication was an essential characteristic of a caring relationship. Erin's story showed that it was important for teachers to understand about the children in their care through connecting with parents and talking to them to find solutions to problems.

Aligning with other strands of *Te Whāriki*, communication was expressly mentioned in the context of one of the five strands of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996, 2017), with the curriculum acknowledging that communication was an integral part of teaching and learning. Teachers have to communicate with parents if they wanted to share information with them, and

parents relied on the information shared by the teachers to know what their gifted child was doing at school. The literature showed that effective communication can help parents and teachers work collaboratively to enhance children's learning (Arney & Scott, 2013; Hinsdale, 2016; Mitchell et al., 2006). Ursula (teacher educator) stated that having good communication with parents was vital, and that meant that teachers have to listen to parents:

I'm not really very sure about how that could be done, except by maintaining our good relationships between parents. It's communication, it's important that these people are listened to as a voice ... It's communication, and the teachers have the skills in which to communicate ... show the families what they might want to be doing with [the child], or how they might want to respond to their particular child.

Ursula also noted that teachers needed to proactively communicate with the parents of the children in their centres. Teachers needed to have the skills to communicate with them so they learnt about the children in their care. Ursula's views were backed up by Noddings (2013) who states that: "Everywhere in caring; they require appropriate thought, sensitivity, and open communication (p. 203)." Many participants said teachers were willing to learn about the children in their care and, as Ursula suggested, communicating with the parents was a way to learn about the children they teach.

Some of the parent participants indicated in their Facebook posts that they were generally happy with their gifted child's school and the essential aspect of this was good communication. Hayley, a teacher and a mother of gifted child, said, "It seems to be going well so far," and Zara posted, "Complex and hopefully

positive! Communicate, communicate, communicate! These relationships were so important if your child goes to school. The warmth from the teachers to the child helped, too.” Some data illustrated that when teachers cared for the children, they will use different skills and strategies to connect with the parents. These teachers’ constructions were that teaching and learning was sustained by communication and their relationships with parents.

Sienna responded to the open-ended questionnaire by sharing her centre’s practice of talking to the parents as the first thing the teachers did: “First we establish a dialogue between the parent and ourselves to create a shared understanding of the child’s giftedness.” In order to have a better understanding of individual differences, teachers needed to develop a sustained school–parent community that encouraged parents and teachers to communicate and share information with each other.

As Shillady (2012) states: “Teachers need parents’ support to be able to develop a closer communication between home and the early childhood setting.” In the open-ended questionnaire, Arianna (teacher) indicated that her centre was practising Shillady’s (2012) ideas of best practice – “We have honest, open communication with families” – as did Adalyn (teacher) in her description of the practices at her centre:

We discuss with parents their perception of the child’s learning, combining this with the teaching perspective, and from a shared perspective over the time they are at the Early Childhood Centre consider the area/s of knowledge/development/passion, their

learning styles and how we can best support the child. Ensure that communication is clear and open at all times.

The research participants' comments illustrated the significance of honest and open communication with parents as a significant aspect of constructing teaching and learning. The data analysis process indicated that this construction of teaching and learning was that teachers should include parents in the communication so they can contribute to their children's learning and development as a partnership. My argument that communication with parents was helpful for children's learning, was also expressed by Olga (teacher educator), who said that parents should be included in the setting – “We're talking about having a working partnership with families and whānau [family]” – although she was unclear how the children fitted into the process. Likewise, Vic's post on Facebook expresses a belief in the importance of communication with parents:

If parents/whānau [family]/carers are able to have open and constructive dialogue, they are able to be solution-focused on moving forward together for the sake of the child. This is extremely important in my view and experiences.

Having an open and constructive dialogue assisted learning. Both Smith and Barr (2008) and Noddings (1992, 1995) emphasis dialogue with parents as a powerful tool for promoting children's learning. In order to promote the third alternative model of teaching and learning, Smith and Barr (2008) explain that, “students operate together to move knowledge and help each other learn through dialogue.” I extend this statement so that 'students' can be replaced by 'teachers' and 'parents', as in “help each other learn through dialogue” should

not be limited to students only. Noddings (1992, 1995) also point out that people have more understanding of each other through dialogue, and Bergman (2004) said: “Dialogue, in other words, is the way to model the caring ideal in communication” (p. 154).

The data analysis process indicated another construction of teaching and learning, one that linked to communication. Claire emphasised parents’ voices in her interview: “It [supporting children’s learning] involves families ... recognise them ... and bring in the voices of the family ...” Her next comment indicated that learning occurred when the parents’ voices were heard, as this will support children with diverse needs. She noted that this involvement was also suggested in the curriculum: “As *Te Whāriki* suggests, in working collaboratively [with parents], we include many voices. I think [this] really does support *all* diverse children.” Smith and Barr (2008) explain that teachers engaged parents’ voices when they valued the skills and expertise parents brought to the conversation. Sharing responsibility for children’s learning equally with parents and families required effort, but it was educational reform that will deliver superior outcomes for teachers in terms of meeting children’s many and diverse learning needs.

6.4 *Consequences of being supported by teachers*

Once children felt that they were supported and have been looked after by their teachers, this positively influenced their learning. Hayley (mother and teacher) shared her childhood experience of having a caring relationship with a teacher:

I know from experience (my own), if a teacher made a connection with me, I was more inclined to make an effort. If they didn't, then I wouldn't. I have had a few teachers in the primary [school] that made an impact on me and they were the ones that 'got' me.

Hayley's comment showed that learning happens when children feel supported when teachers connect with them. The connection was like an invitation to learn, and it created more opportunities to have more connections. I assert that one consequence of being supported by teachers was that teachers created opportunities that enriched the connection and increased the degree of reciprocity between teachers and children.

Relationships enhanced the understanding of each other, including parents, as shown in the experience of Chris (a mother) in initiating contact with her child's teacher:

I find initial contact, questions, requests (from me to the teacher) are met with a defensive response until I prove that I am not "that mother." Once we have got past that, relationships have been very positive and I believe contribute greatly to a positive experience for my child.

Chris's comment illustrated another common sense construction of giftedness; namely, parents, especially mothers of gifted children, were often seen as "that mother" and were challenging to work with. However, Chris's remark indicated a construction of teaching and learning that showed that relationships between parents and teachers significantly influenced children's learning. As she said, once teachers get to understand the children and their parents, they no longer make the assumption that parents of gifted children were challenging to

work with. Children also can have a positive learning experience, which can build their confidence, resilience and willingness to accept challenges. Teachers, parents and children can work together towards shared goals for learning. Fullan and Stiegelhauer (1991, cited in Smith & Barr, 2008), acknowledged the role that 'conjoint' efforts played in a school's improvement. I extend this statement: 'Conjoint' efforts create access to opportunities to learn different things when teachers were willing to learn about, and respond to, their children's needs and interests, together with their parents' inputs.

Chris appreciated a teacher who cared for her child and nurtured her child's learning:

Thanks to a wonderful PP [pre-primary] teacher who helped rebuild DD's [child's name] sense of self, provided a safe environment and gently challenged her, DD is now in grade 1 (another wonderful teacher) and finally starting to show her true self.

Chris's experience was an example of how a construction of teaching and learning supported gifted children through caring attitudes. When teachers cared for children's well-being and provided a safe environment for learning, children will have confidence to participate. A safe environment for children was one that was not only physically safe but also, perhaps even more importantly, emotionally and psychologically safe. A safe environment enabled children to feel comfortable to take up challenges (Berger, 2005). *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017) describe a safe environment as follows: "Safe, stable and responsive environments support the development of self-worth,

identity, confidence and enjoyment, together with emotional regulation and self-control” (p. 26). Chris’s experience illustrated how children became confident learners when they were in a safe environment, which was a construction that supported gifted children. Some stories reflected that teachers’ caring for gifted children required no ethical effort but was a natural response.

The data identified that some constructions of giftedness, and teaching and learning, made it difficult for teachers to form caring relationships, not only with the children, but also with their parents. However, much of the data reflected in this findings chapter showed that there were positive outcomes if children were learning in a supportive environment. Teachers build caring relationships with the children, and relationships with parents needed to be reciprocal and built over time. Smith and Barr (2008) said that successful schools focus on connections (p. 414). Once the relationship was sustained, a strong and reciprocal relationship can empower children’s learning. The number of stories the participants have shared in this chapter showed the consequences of being supported. The way teachers showed that they cared, in turn, nurtured teaching and learning.

6.5 *Conclusions*

This section summarises the stories shared by the participants on the constructions of teaching and learning that supported gifted children and their families. First, the section presents two tables that provide an overview of the

elements of the two conceptual frameworks in this chapter – *alternative models of teaching-learning* (Smith & Barr, 2008) and *ethics of care* (Noddings, 1984, 1992, 1995, 2013). The table covers *learning equals building knowledge through doing things with others* or *co-construction* or *developing a learning community*. As with the overview tables presented in the previous findings chapters, the *role of the teachers* and *view of learning* were covered, accompanied by some examples from participants' statements to illustrate them. The next section presents the consequences of being supported by teachers and was followed by the conclusion of this chapter and a brief statement about the next chapter.

Table 3: Common views of learning/learners and teaching/teachers in a collaborative way

Models	Roles of the teacher and view of learning applied in this chapter (Smith & Barr, 2008)	Roles of the teachers and views of learning (participants)	Example from participants' statements
<p>Learning equals building knowledge through doing things with others</p> <p><i>or</i></p> <p>Co-construction</p> <p><i>Or</i></p> <p>Developing a learning community</p>	<p>More equal power dynamics</p> <p>Teacher is viewed, and views himself or herself, as a learner</p> <p>Someone promoting learning in this view will be helping learners engage in 'generative' rather than 'passive' learning activities</p> <p>Recognise that knowledge is constructed socially rather than individually</p> <p>Students operate together to improve knowledge and help each other learn through dialogue</p> <p>The co-construction stance moves us from viewing learning as an acquisition, whatever the commodity to be acquired, to viewing it as also becoming part of a community</p>	<p>Teachers are learners</p> <p>Collaborative learning through supporting children's involvement</p> <p>A learning community is developed by positive relationships with parents and families</p> <p>School-home communications based on a co-construction approach to learning</p> <p>Children learn through a caring relationship</p> <p>School-home communications are developed in a co-construction approach for teaching and learning.</p>	<p>"Teachers learning to extend every child without having limits, learn about the level the child can achieve [and] to be able to facilitate learning that the child initiates" (Dee).</p> <p>"They [teachers] follow the same process of working with a gifted child on their interests and strengths... there are ways to keep them involved using their strengths" (Aria).</p> <p>"... get to know the child, get to know their family..." (Olga).</p> <p>"Teachers have got to be ... skilled in the way in which they respond to the things that they care and see and encourage [in] that learning" (Claire).</p> <p>"Even the smallest acts of kindness and understanding from a teacher can help any child ..." (Sarah).</p> <p>"We establish and keep building relationships... I would do what I would for all teacher/child/whānau relationships" (Nora).</p>
<p>Ethics of care</p>	<p>Ethics of care for gifted children</p> <p>Caring attitudes</p> <p>Relational pedagogies – caring relationships</p>		

Table 3 summarises the models of *learning equals building knowledge through doing things with others* or *co-construction* or *developing a learning community* and the concept of an *ethics of care*. These models and the concept connect with participants' comments in this chapter. I merge the statements on the *role of the teachers*, *role of the learners* and *view of learning (participants)* between the three models and the concept, because the statements in many of the discussions are interrelated in this chapter.

The arguments in this chapter were built on two themes drawn from different constructions of teaching and learning for children, their families and teachers. In this research, I am particularly interested in the data analysis process, which indicated that socially constructed teaching and learning has led to different experiences for gifted children and, through, this I am learning that the meanings of these constructions have effects on *all* children. The first concept was that many of the research participants acknowledged that developing a learning community can assist gifted children's learning. This section explored the idea that teachers were learners, too, and that teachers were professionally open and curious to understand the children in their care. Many of the teacher and teacher educator participants also indicated that they would like to learn more about their children. This was very important, because teachers needed to be willing and open to accept and implement different practices if they were to create an effective learning environment that can fulfil *all* children's needs (Hinsdale, 2016; Smith & Barr, 2008). The participants, however, took this construction about teaching and learning for children one step further with their

comments suggesting that reflecting on a connective pedagogy that teaching and learning were built with teachers connecting with children and parents. Such connection created an invitation to learn and provided opportunities for more connections.

This final findings chapter examined how some constructions of teaching and learning were associated with an *ethics of care*. The views and experiences shared by the research participants demonstrated that caring was fundamental to the nature of teaching. Although they did not explicitly use the term *ethics of care*, many of the research participants talked about the importance of teachers caring for their students. There was the common comment that because gifted children were, in important ways, the same as other children, they also needed to be cared for. Teachers needed to seek different ways of responding in order to understand individual giftedness and to support these children. Some of the parent participants pointed out that teachers should care about the families of their students. The data in this chapter showed that many teachers were passionate about teaching and were dedicated to working with gifted children.

In order to demonstrate a caring attitude, the participants shared stories that illustrated another construction of teaching: *relational pedagogies*. An *ethics of care* was required to care for others because humans were interdependent. The experiences described by some of the parents, teachers and teacher educators in my research indicated that many teachers were willing to focus on,

and respond to, the needs of the children in their care and their families. This construction of teaching and learning said that learning was also for teachers. As Hinsdale (2016) and Noddings (1984, 2005) argue, a sustained and trusting, responsive relationship was an outcome of caring. Smith and Barr (2008) said that when teachers created a school–home relationship this can enhance children’s learning. Having a relationship with children and developing mutual communication patterns were significant ways of responding positively and constructively to giftedness.

Participants shared different constructions of giftedness, teaching and learning for gifted children in these three findings chapters, which drew on two conceptual frameworks. Their stories indicated many competing ways that giftedness was socially constructed (Borland, 2003). Each construction illustrated how giftedness and gifted children were being understood differently. These findings lead on to the next chapter, which discusses the findings and draws conclusions about how we can learn from the research participants’ experiences to develop new interpretations of giftedness in inclusive education.

Chapter Seven

Discussion and Conclusions – Moments of hope

7.1 Introduction

“Sounds like a normal day at school; however, there are moments of hope.”

(Nat)

The thesis has used the theory of social constructionism to explore the meanings people give to things and the effects of those meanings. In this thesis, I have argued that giftedness is not an entity that has always existed but, rather, a concept invented by people as a way to describe certain phenomena and to make sense of certain experiences. This argument highlights a significant message: that giftedness is socially constructed. As well, this thesis argues that each construction has consequences, and the consequences of particular meanings can impact on how gifted children are treated by their teachers.

To understand social constructions of giftedness, it is also important to understand social constructions of teaching and learning. Returning to Nat’s quote, “*There are moments of hope*” because sometimes teachers had constructions of teaching and learning that supported them to respond to her child’s interests, strengths and needs. These research findings indicate some possibilities for transforming different ways of teaching and learning for gifted children. This research provided such a significant contribution to knowledge

that two conceptual frameworks were used to inform some reconstructions of teaching and learning for gifted children.

The overall purpose of this research was to explore *how* the participants constructed the meanings of teaching and learning, and *how* these meanings influenced the way gifted children were interpreted in the learning environment. When teachers only think of ability as fixed, they may not recognise the learning needs and interests of gifted children, who are gifted in other areas, if these children do not fit into the criteria being measured. Likewise, a teacher who is not aware of individual needs and interests might interpret a gifted child's behaviour as challenging. If teachers acknowledge the need to develop a learning community, they are more willing to find ways to support children who are seen to learn differently from other children, including gifted children. Teachers interpret giftedness based on, and through, the lens of particular constructions. The research questions are grouped into three questions that are answered throughout the research findings:

1. What are the participants' constructions of teaching and learning that impact on how people view giftedness?
2. What are the potential consequences of the participants' constructions of teaching and learning that impact on how people view giftedness?

3. What are the implications of new constructions for the teaching and learning of gifted children?

7.1.1 About this chapter

The chapter starts by presenting the heart of this research – that giftedness is a construct – and noting how this research builds on the research conducted by Borland (1997, 2003). The chapter then summarises the data collection processes, as well as the three findings chapters associated with the key argument that giftedness is socially constructed. The findings also demonstrated how the participants constructed teaching and learning and how these constructions were reflected in the teachers’ interpretations of how gifted children learned. After the summary of the three findings chapters, I explain the consequences of constructing teaching and learning in particular ways and how the consequences of particular meanings impacted on gifted children. In the next section, I provide three forms of reconstructing giftedness that are shaped by the two conceptual frameworks. These include, effective teaching pedagogy involved with gifted children’s voices, and developing a sense of belonging in the learning community, and in relationships. The key contributions of this research are discussed in section 7.6. This chapter concludes with a summary of the research, followed by a reflection on how the focus of the research has changed over time. Finally, the chapter presents recommendations for future research, a discussion about the conclusions of this research and a reflection of how my beliefs about giftedness evolved over time.

7.2 *The heart of this research – giftedness is socially constructed*

The theory of social constructionism plays an important role in this thesis, as my participants constructed their own understandings and meanings of giftedness through interactions. And, at the same time, the existing social constructions influence participants' understandings of giftedness, and these understandings create effects in the ways how teachers work with gifted children. I was not seeking one 'correct answer' to describe giftedness, because the research participants would naturally define the term based on their shared knowledge, experience and contexts. This section discusses my argument that constructions of teaching and learning can be interrelated, even competing, as an extension of the extant research that influence gifted children's learning.

My research was inspired by the research conducted by Borland (1997, 2003). He argues that the concept of giftedness is socially constructed; that is, giftedness is a concept that people have constructed or invented through conversations, not a reality that we have discovered. Other researchers (Borland, 1997, 2003; Delaune, 2015; O'Connor, 2012) state that giftedness is not only a construct but also a construction. Moltzen (2011) points out that giftedness is not a single state that can be defined by anyone; therefore, the concept can change. McAlpine and Moltzen (2004) state that, "concepts related to giftedness and talent are dynamic and change over time" (p. 33). The different constructions of teaching and learning presented by the participants in

this research clearly showed that giftedness is not a fact of nature or something that professionals in education and science have discovered; instead, it is a socially constructed concept, something invented by people. Constructions are socially created by people; thus, they can be modified as they are not permanent. This thesis indicates giftedness can be reconstructed as the knowledge underpinning it can be challenged in different contexts.

Social interaction involves assumptions, which result in creating different constructions of teaching and learning as well as constructions of giftedness. Social construction is always linked to assumptions; that is, to a set of beliefs based on experience, contexts and knowledge about human beings and their relationships with the world (Gergen, 2015; Guskin et al., 1988). Some assumptions are more common than others, and different concepts of knowledge will inform different views. We use assumptions and concepts of knowledge to justify our behaviours and practices. The participants in this research demonstrated how they constructed giftedness using assumptions, and how their assumptions affected how gifted children were treated, as well as how others constructed giftedness.

The data also reveal that professionals, teachers and parents make assumptions in their endeavours to manage and control gifted children. The theory of social constructionism holds that constructions of giftedness are shaped by negotiating everyday social life, and that the process of such negotiations involves social interactions (Bash, 2000; Burr, 2015). This research reflects that

constructions are only temporary; that the process of constructing giftedness is ongoing. Constructions are created by people, and so constructions can be modified. This research presents reconstructions of giftedness that will challenge some of the current, dominant, long-held and influential constructions of giftedness. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966, p. 69 cited in Burr, 2015, p. 210), “The seemingly objective social world is constructed by human action and interaction.” Burr (2015) describes our experiences and contexts that allow us to have many possible meanings. As mentioned previously, constructions are potentially open to be modified and are changeable. Thus, this thesis aligns with the statement described by Burr (2015) that, knowledge can be reconstructed and transformed into different possibilities.

This thesis extends Borland’s research on the social construction of giftedness (1997, 2003), and the data in this thesis provided evidence that there were meanings and interpretations for children (and their parents) being constructed as gifted. One word can be interpreted in many different ways and so have countless meanings – more, certainly, than can be described by a simple dictionary entry (Gergen, 2015). No matter how hard academics try to develop theories to explain different meanings of the term 'giftedness', it is still difficult to pinpoint people in society’s everyday understanding of their experiences and knowledge and the consequences attached to each meaning. The socially constructed nature of giftedness is evident in the way meanings of giftedness and the effects of those meanings are dynamic – they vary in different contexts

and across time. The effects also impact on children's learning, as well as their parents' experiences about their child's learning. In section 7.5, I provide a detailed discussion of the parent participants' perspectives of their children's experiences, which demonstrates the consequences of the social construction of teaching and learning for all children. These consequences were introduced in the three findings chapters, illustrating how different constructions of teaching and learning influence the ways gifted children are treated.

This is where the concept of social constructionism comes to the fore, because it provides an alternative way to look at giftedness by weaving research and theories with 'common sense' understandings (Motyl, 2010). Social constructionism allows us to view and understand how different meanings and consequences of the word 'giftedness' change through social processes and interactions. The theory of social construction holds that interaction changes meanings (Burr, 2015). People learn from existing meanings, without realising that these meanings are constructed by people, so they take meanings for granted and mistake them for facts. When giftedness was constructed by the participants, they created meanings, and these meanings can be negotiated, changed and developed in different contexts and times.

After reading the extant research, as discussed in this thesis, the theory of social constructionism made me aware of the notion that teaching and learning, as well as giftedness, were dynamic constructs. This can present a challenge for people who assumed that their area of discipline and its practice in society were

already clearly established. I used the lens of social constructionism to analyse, interpret and present the research findings along with the two conceptual frameworks that provided alternative models of teaching-learning, as described by Smith and Barr (2008), and the concept of *ethics of care*, as described by Noddings (1984). By interacting with the research participants and analysing the data, I realised that giftedness had been interpreted in numerous ways by the research participants depending on their social interactions and the effects of their constructions of giftedness.

7.3 *Summary of the data collection process*

Data about the constructions of giftedness and the potential consequences of the meanings evident in particular social constructions were collected in three separate ways: through a national open-ended questionnaire, during face-to-face interviews, and via a closed Facebook group. Each of these data collection methods was described fully in Chapter Three and is summarised, below. Some of the key findings generated from each data collection method are also mentioned.

7.3.1 *Open-ended questionnaire*

The participants in the national open-ended questionnaire were all early childhood teachers and head teachers who had voluntarily agreed to take part in the questionnaire. Many had wanted to answer the questions because they were interested in gifted education; others participated because they had received the questionnaire invitation from their colleagues or friends. This

national open-ended questionnaire was a critical component of my data collection process and the answers collected generated important data for analysis. Most of the open-ended questionnaire participants constructed giftedness around the areas of intelligence and achievement.

7.3.2 Interviews

While the national open-ended questionnaire was designed to collect data from early childhood practitioners, the interviews were designed to collect more detailed responses from leaders and teacher educators in ITE programmes in Aotearoa New Zealand. The teacher educators' constructions of giftedness and gifted education were markedly different from those of the practising teachers who responded to this questionnaire. Teacher educators would prefer to see a focus on children's individual needs; they did not want children to be labelled as 'gifted' or put into different groups. The teacher educators also preferred to see a focus on building relationships with children and their families. This focus reflects one of the principles that underpins Aotearoa New Zealand's early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996, 2017); that family and community are central elements of the ethics of care practice.

7.3.3 The Facebook group

After the Facebook group was opened, the number of members rapidly increased. Not surprisingly, most members were parents of a gifted child or children, or were gifted themselves, although a few were teachers of gifted children. Even though not all the members posted comments on the page, most

of them 'liked' the comments other members posted back and forth. Members of the group often shared their experiences of being a parent of a gifted child or children. The findings of the Facebook group primarily showed that the parents wanted support from teachers, they did not like their child being labelled, and they did not want teachers to have a set of expectations of their child just because they were gifted. Many members told of their dissatisfaction about their child or children's school, saying that some teachers were not providing for gifted children. The Facebook posts emphasised the parents' frustration at the perceived lack of support, from teachers and society, for them and their children. The data showed that the constructions of giftedness created by teachers and professionals were not helpful for children's learning and development, so it was not surprising that many of the parent participants did not have confidence that the teachers were capable of meeting their children's learning needs. The Facebook parents' perspectives of their children's experiences illustrate that some teachers and the education system were failing to provide for individual learning needs affected the relationships between the parents of gifted children and the children's teachers.

7.4 Summary of the three findings chapters

The three findings chapters presented the research participants' constructions of giftedness, based on how they defined gifted children's learning and what teachers should do when they have gifted children in their classroom or early childhood setting. The participants' stories were informed by two conceptual

frameworks. The first conceptual framework includes three teaching-learning models developed from Smith and Barr's (2008) alternative models of teaching-learning. These models are *learning equals being taught*, *learning equals individual sense-making* or *developing a community of learners*, *learning equals building knowledge through doing things with others* or *co-construction* or *developing a learning community*. These models were used in the three findings chapters. The second conceptual framework is the concept of *ethics of care* developed by Noddings (1984), and this concept was used in the third findings chapter. A summary of each findings chapter is given below.

7.4.1 Summarising Chapter Four: social constructions of learning and learners

This first findings chapter explored social constructions of giftedness related to ability. A key finding was that the research participants constructed giftedness as a fixed ability. The model used as the conceptual framework in this chapter was the *learning equals being taught* model described by Smith and Barr (2008). The descriptor of the role of the teacher that particularly links with this model is that teachers are constructed as experts and the goal of teaching is *to impact new knowledge, concepts and skills*. The two descriptors of the view of learning used in this chapter, are *cognitive dimension stressed* and *learning is individual and affected by ability, which is seen as fixed*. Much of the data showed that giftedness was a kind of ability that was defined by measurement, because giftedness was constructed as a fixed ability that can be measured.

My analysis illustrated that many of the participants constructed giftedness as a fact that can be measured by a number or a score. Therefore, two assumptions were created: first, ability can be measured; and secondly, IQ tests were used to measure this thing called 'gifted'. Thus, giftedness, as socially constructed, was analogous to a physical trait that is measurable, as well as predictive of future performance in areas traditionally related to academic achievement. The constructions that ability is fixed and can be measured were supported by the Ministry of Education's publications, which recommended measuring ability as a way to identify giftedness.

However, different measurement tools contained different sets of criteria, and whether a child was identified as gifted might depend upon the measurement tool employed. Many of the participants shared that children were not seen as gifted if they cannot meet particular selection criteria. Some of the participants explained that constructions that related giftedness to a fixed ability and measurement were not contributing to children's learning.

Another key finding presented in Chapter Four was that giftedness was frequently aligned with achievement. The research participants indicated their beliefs that achievement referred to ability and, because gifted children have exceptional ability, they will, therefore, be high achievers. The finding that a common-sense construction of teaching and learning was that gifted children were high achievers was closely related to another finding: that the 'gifted' label came with expectations. Gifted children were expected to be high achievers, or,

looking at in another way, if a child was a high achiever then they must be gifted. The corollary of this argument, of course, was that a child who was not a high achiever cannot claim to be gifted.

7.4.2 *Summarising Chapter Five: social constructions of pedagogy*

The second findings chapter explored some of the different constructions of teaching and learning created by the participants. Constructions of teaching and learning related to what learning was, and how learning happened for gifted children. The data presented in this chapter reflected on learning and teaching that related to *learning equals being taught*, so the children learned what they were being told. The *learning equals being taught model* (Smith & Barr, 2008) was used again in this chapter but was extended to the next alternative model *learning equals individual sense-making or developing a community of learners*. The view of learning in this chapter was the same as in the previous findings chapter, that *learners acquire new knowledge in predictable and manageable stages*. This was because teachers were constructed as experts in children's learning and they had the power to control access to opportunities to learn different things.

It was evident in analysis of the participants' comments about the roles of teachers fit with the descriptor for the role of the teacher in the first and second alternative models of teaching-learning. Smith and Barr (2008) explore the view of learner that can potentially relate to *all* learners. Due to the focus of

this research, I was particularly interested in using their work to reflect about gifted children. The parent participants' perspectives of their children's experiences illustrated that these children often did not learn within teachers' expectations of their view of learners, as gifted children were constructed as being different learners from other children. Therefore, some participants shared that many teachers think gifted children did not need help for anything and were not expected to work hard. The participants had constructed gifted learners as learning more quickly and more easily than their peers. Learning became a challenge when learning cannot be interpreted within the expectations set by teachers. The data also revealed that many teachers saw gifted children as challenging to work with; for example, because they often asked lots of questions and they can be opinionated. In Chapter Five, I explored how the participants' comments highlighted that teachers used a set of patterns of behaviours associated with their constructions of teaching and learning that gifted children were problematic.

Analysis of the participants' comments highlighted the labelling of gifted children as high achievers, and the association of giftedness with the concept of meritocracy within some constructions of giftedness. The construction that related giftedness to achievement was an example of the meritocratic concept, within which people's abilities and efforts define success (Souto-Otero, 2010). The construction of teaching and learning mentioned in the previous paragraph is that gifted children have exceptional ability, but another construction of learning is that gifted children are different kinds of learners, and they do not

need to work hard to achieve due to their exceptional ability. These two constructions contradicted the meritocratic concept, because the participants' comments demonstrated that gifted children had exceptional abilities and so will not have to work hard to succeed. Thus, children were categorised as either gifted or non-gifted based on whether they were high achievers or not. This categorisation assumed, of course, that ability can be measured by achievement outcomes.

The third finding presented in Chapter Five is another construction of teaching and learning that shows that in order to manage children's learning, teachers, who are constructed as experts, create different activities that are guided by teachers. The second alternative model of teaching-learning (Smith & Barr, 2008) was used in this section. Gifted children were members of a community of learners, therefore, teachers, who were constructed as experts in the learning environment, used different resources in the learning context as a way to respond to this view of learning. Aligning with Ministry of Education publications (2008, 2012), many research participants commented that teachers provided different resources as a way of supporting giftedness. An example of providing different resources was giving extra work to gifted children as a way of supporting learning. However, some parent participants expressed their frustration at this practice, because they did not think that extra work can cater for gifted children's learning needs.

7.4.3 Summarising Chapter Six: constructing learning and teaching as pedagogies of relationships

The final findings chapter, Chapter Six, drew on the comments from many of the teachers and parent participants. It argued that many participants were willing to develop a learning community that supported gifted children, as teachers were committed to finding different strategies to meet the needs of gifted children. The third alternative model of teaching-learning was used in this chapter, *learning equals building knowledge through doing things with others* or *co-constructions* or *developing a learning community* model. Much of the data presented in this chapter demonstrated one of the roles of the teachers from Smith and Barr (2008) was that there was a *more equal power dynamic*. This is because some findings showed that teachers are also learners in a learning community.

The construction identified in this chapters is that most teachers have a professional openness, curiosity and desire to learn about gifted children. The connective pedagogy used in this chapter is that children learnt through connecting and interacting with others, as knowledge is socially constructed. This chapter also argued that the data analysis process indicated that in many teachers' dedication to supporting gifted children, they are often challenged by some constructions of giftedness. Teachers are probably unaware of some constructions of giftedness, and some constructions of teaching and learning limit the provisions for gifted children in ways that are helpful.

The second key finding was that constructions about teaching and learning for gifted children were associated with an *ethics of care* as informed by the second conceptual framework. Thus, the constructions of giftedness, learning and teaching were linked to those by Noddings (1984) about the *ethics of care*. The participants explained that teachers needed to care for gifted children and their families by focusing on each child's individual learning needs rather than making assumptions based on the 'gifted' label.

The final finding presented in Chapter Six was that analysis of the participants' comments highlighted that the development of caring relationships between teachers, children and their families was another construction of teaching and learning. Many of the participants implied that relationships were a way of responding to giftedness. The relational pedagogies aligned neatly with the other two findings presented in Chapter Six: that teachers were open to supporting gifted children, and that teachers demonstrated an ethics of care. I relate this pedagogy to *Te Whāriki*, as both versions of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996, 2017) focus on relationships. The research participants explained how having a positive relationship between children, parents and teachers supported children's learning. Some participants pointed out another construction of learning and teaching, that communication with parents was important to show how teachers cared for their gifted children, and this was a key element in creating a positive relationship between parents and teachers.

7.5 Summary of the consequences of the different constructions of teaching and learning

This section summarises the consequences of constructions of teaching and learning, and how these constructions influence teachers' views of gifted children as learners. This research builds on the research of Borland (2003) and O'Connor (2002) on the social constructions of giftedness by focusing on the consequences of such constructions, an aspect that both sets of research did not address. The two conceptual frameworks helped to unpack how participants interpret teachers' different constructions of teaching and learning. The participants' stories in the three findings chapters illustrated how each construction of teaching and learning has at least one consequence. Such consequences of particular meanings might be stimulating gifted children's learning, or, conversely, negatively influencing their interest in learning. The effects of the meanings evident in particular social constructions could impact on how teachers' view teaching and learning for gifted children. These consequences could, in turn, lead to other constructions of teaching and learning, or could create further consequences from particular meanings in how gifted children are being treated in the learning environment.

7.5.1 Consequences of ability is constructed as a fixed ability that can be measured

The construction that ability is fixed and measurable leads to the belief that children can only learn within a set of learning criteria. Indeed, much of the

data in the first two findings chapters ([Chapter Four](#) and [Chapter Five](#)) have indicated that knowledge is gained in predictable and manageable stages and that ability within each stage can be measured. This comes with the assumption that children cannot learn beyond these measurable learning criteria. Therefore, another consequence is that teachers' judge who their expected learners are based on how they perform within these predictable and manageable stages of learning.

However, many constructions of teaching and learning are not effectively meeting gifted children's learning needs and interests. Therefore, many gifted children are misunderstood when their experience of learning differs from their teachers' expectations. Some findings in Chapters Four and Five show that gifted children often do conform to what teachers expect learners to look like. In Chapter Four, gifted children are seen to have different abilities, and these abilities can be measured. Chapter Five extends the construction by focusing on how teachers facilitated learning when ability is seen as fixed. For example, gifted children are assigned different resources to those of other learners; in particular, they are given extra work. These provisions are the direct outcomes of constructions of teaching and learning that position ability as something that can be measured.

7.5.2 Consequences of teachers are constructed as experts

In the first two findings chapters ([Chapter Four](#) and [Chapter Five](#)) the accounts of many of the participants show that teachers are constructed as experts in

children's learning. This construction aligns with the first two alternative models of teaching-learning, as the descriptor of the teacher's role for both models is that teachers are experts (Smith & Barr, 2008). When teachers are constructed as experts, they dominate and control the learning environment, as much of the data in these chapters illustrate. This means that how children learn and what children learn are based on what teachers think the children should learn. Children are to passively listen and follow the directions given by their teachers. However, gifted children do not necessarily conform to these behaviours. On the one hand, when they are seen to have achieved a required measurement of learning, they are constructed as not needing help in all areas of learning. Conversely, gifted children may try to push their learning beyond the accepted measured boundaries, which is seen as challenging — they ask many questions and they are opinionated. The discussion in Chapter Five demonstrates how many teachers do not feel comfortable with the varied ways in which gifted children learn. Gifted children's learning dispositions can be seen to push against the construction of teachers as experts. As experts, therefore, teachers need to provide these children with different resources to manage their learning.

7.5.3 Emotional effects

Other consequences of constructions of teaching and learning relate to the emotional effects on gifted children. As mentioned in Chapter Five, Gillian, a mother of a gifted child, said on Facebook that "...my GATE [Gifted and Talented Education], daughter has been DESTROYED by my school... it's

taking ages to get my girl back...” And another mother, Sarah, said, “My boy regularly has a meltdown because of expectations placed on him.” The parent participants’ perspectives of their children’s experiences showed that gifted children can lose interest in learning or participating in the environment. This can lead to gifted children being seen as immature. For example, in Chapter Five, Chris, a mother of a gifted child, shared this on Facebook: “... the carers [teachers] did not think she was suitable for acceleration (they didn’t see it) — but more so evidence that the carers [teachers] described her as ‘quiet, and socially immature’.” This can also have a knock-on negative influence on the parents of gifted children. For example, as a result of her child being labelled as gifted, Heidi left a message on Facebook that said: “Because of some educators’ attitude I am almost embarrassed to tell people my son is gifted. It certainly hasn’t been an easy road. What does it mean to me? Stress, heartache and worry.”

7.5.4 Consequences of having a caring relationship with children

Nevertheless, some consequences of particular meanings can lead to positive outcomes for teaching and learning. These outcomes can support gifted children to participate in their learning environment. In Chapter Six, some consequences of teaching and learning have illustrated that teachers are willing to learn about their gifted children, and that they are committed to catering for differences. Some data in this research have shown that developing learning communities required teachers to connect with children and their parents.

However, in order to respond to gifted children, teachers need to develop a caring relationship with the children. With this in mind, I extend Noddings's (1984) concept of the ethics of care in relation to teaching and learning. To have a relationship with children, teachers need to implement different patterns of behaviours to indicate they understand they have obligations to care for the children in their classrooms or early childhood settings. Although teachers' behaviours and actions are not meeting with many gifted children's learning needs and interests effectively, and they are often not providing for those needs, they are still demonstrating their duties as teachers in their desire to provide for the children in the teaching and learning environment.

7.6 Using the two conceptual frameworks to reconstruct teaching and learning that transforms learning possibilities for gifted children

The analysis of the data was stimulated by two conceptual frameworks that were used to unpack the constructions and the reconstruction of giftedness, which allowed an alternative process to transform possibilities for learning. This section focuses on the discussion of what it might look like for gifted children, families and teachers when the two conceptual frameworks were used to respond to learning and teaching. Such a discovery, when the two conceptual frameworks are used to respond to teaching and learning, is an extension of Smith and Barr's (2008) and Noddings's (1984) work that was applied to reconstructing giftedness. This discussion and in the previous chapters made

significant contributions to the research in gifted education and also led to suggestions for future research.

The participants' stories and the literature, along with the Aotearoa New Zealand education documents, illustrated that many professionals and teachers were willing to work with children who were labelled as gifted. Many participants have indicated that the learning and teaching environment for gifted children aligned with the first and second alternative models of teaching-learning (Smith & Barr, 2008); that teachers are constructed as experts, what gifted children learn is based on what is being told and this is facilitated by teachers. The data showed that teachers cared for their children. There were patterns of actions associated with the 'care', that is what teachers *think* is suitable for supporting gifted children learning. However, what teachers *think* involved different meanings and assumptions that influenced how they interpreted giftedness. These actions were taken because teachers were constructed as experts in the learning environment, their role was to facilitate children's learning. However, these actions were not effectively catering for these children's learning needs and interests.

While reconstructing learning and teaching for all children, teachers can have different possible interpretations to enhance gifted children's learning. The discussion in the three findings chapters has led to two important areas: 1) effective learning pedagogy needs to include gifted children's voices; 2) developing a sense of belonging in the learning community; and 3)

relationships – a clue to developing belonging. Each of these areas will be examined in the following sections, underlining how this research has been strengthened by these two conceptual and theoretical frameworks.

7.6.1 Effective teaching pedagogy needs to include gifted children's voices

One of the most common situations in a learning environment among the stories shared by the research participants was that the voices of gifted children were not included. A significant contribution to knowledge, when the combination of alternative models of teaching-learning and the concept of ethics of care were used to reconstruct teaching and learning for gifted children, was that learning needed to involve dialogue with children. There was not a single conversation from the participants that gifted children's voices needed to be included in their learning. However, the data associated with the two conceptual frameworks reflected that listening to gifted children's voices was needed if teaching and learning for gifted children was to be reconstructed. Smith and Barr (2008) illustrated all children needed to have opportunities to share ideas and concerns. The participants' stories reflected that knowledge was built when teachers and children participated in interpreting their learning.

Due to the power relationships between teachers and children, much of the data illustrated in the first and second chapters ([Chapter Four](#) and [Chapter Five](#)) was that teachers were dominating the environment. Hughes (1997, cited in Smith & Barr, 2008) say, "the most frequent activities in classrooms were: listening,

answering questions from a book, answering teachers' questions and taking notes" (p. 410). Many of the participants' stories aligned with Hughes's statement. In many learning situations, teachers were leading the learning, not children. Learning in an environment where children were dependent on expert opinions and passively followed the direction of what they were being told. Thus, the children's voices were hardly ever included in the learning environment. This was because children were not considered to be of equal value to be able to contribute to learning. The first two findings chapters have clearly indicated that the pedagogy of 'learning is being taught' and/or 'learning is being told' had unpleasant effects on many children, including gifted children.

Smith and Barr (2008) described the third model of teaching-learning as well as a connective pedagogy, because children should be responsible for their learning. Corbett (2001 cited in Smith & Barr, 2008) argues that "the recognition of diverse learners within mainstream schools necessitated extending pedagogy (teaching and learning interactions and strategies) beyond being narrowly conventional" (p. 410). In order to reconstruct learning and teaching for giftedness, I am implying the connective pedagogy (Smith & Barr, 2008) that children should be involved in the planning, decision making and evaluation processes. Following Smith and Barr's (2008) work, and with specific reference to gifted children, the learning environment can be sustained by attention to gifted children's voices, so teachers needed to help gifted children to ensure these children's voices were included. Much of the data in

the third findings chapter ([Chapter Six](#)) have already illustrated that many teachers were dedicated to promoting collaborative learning between teachers and gifted children and teachers and parents. Teachers do not only focus on their role as experts but also, they are learners themselves (Smith & Barr, 2008). Therefore, the concept of ethics of care (Noddings, 1984) alignes with the connective pedagogy (Smith & Barr, 2008) demonstrates a reconstruction of teaching and learning for *all* children, including gifted children that, children gain knowledge surrounded by caring relationships and interaction with teachers and others.

7.6.2 Developing a sense of belonging in the learning community

Although none of the research participants explicitly stated that they and their children were not made to feel they belonged in the learning context, much of the data illustrated that many gifted children were not having a pleasant learning experience because of the social constructions of giftedness and how learning and teaching for gifted children was interpreted. The two conceptual frameworks used in the thesis inform a possibility of reconstructing teaching and learning so that *all* children, including gifted children develop a sense of belonging. Using these frameworks will provide a possibility of transforming or reconstructing teaching and learning for gifted children.

In this thesis I have woven together key concepts from Smith and Barr's (2008) connective pedagogy and the concept of ethics of care from Noddings (1984).

Using these newly-combined conceptual lenses I am able to make new interpretations and gain new understandings from the participants' stories. Thus, I am able to elucidate essential aspects about reconstructing learning and teaching for gifted children. First, having a robust understanding of gifted children by including children's voices is important, as discussed in the previous section. This gave children greater control and responsibility of their learning. Secondly, providing opportunities to learn different things through encouraging negotiation of shared meanings beyond home and school this leads to various possibilities to learn different things. Thus, learning and teaching were built by using the local community as resources to promote learning when learning and teaching were beyond the classroom.

The aspects discussed, above, showed a learning community that intended to connect learning with multiple ways of transforming teaching and learning that reconstructs giftedness by giving children a sense of belonging within the learning environment. Macartney and Morton (2013) point out that belonging meant that teachers should show a commitment to giving all children different opportunities to participate in their learning environment. The curriculum states that children and families should feel they belong and are able to participate in the learning environment (Ministry of Education, 1996, 2017). The participant's stories reflected that belonging for gifted children was recognition that they were connected, included and accepted as learners and active members in the learning environment.

Belonging, or *mana whenua*, is one of the strands in New Zealand's early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki*. "Belonging is nurtured through social interaction with kaiako [teacher] and other children and by respecting the achievements and aspirations of each child's family and community." (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 31). Indeed, the word 'belonging' appears in the curriculum many times, and so *Te Whāriki* sends a clear message to early childhood teachers to develop practices that encourage belonging and participation. I extend that to include that children should feel the educational environment is a secure and safe place to learn, and that it is a place where they are respected and cared for. It is also a place where they learn to take challenges and build resilience. The data analysis presented in this research reflected that children who were labelled as gifted needed to have equitable opportunities for learning different things, and these opportunities will have a broad impact on the everyday classroom and the identities of gifted children and their parents.

7.6.3 *Relationships – a clue to developing a sense of belonging*

In the three findings chapters, much of the findings indicated the importance of relationships between the children, their families and the teachers, many participants' stories reflected that relationships had a necessary influence on children's learning. The three findings chapters highlighted the message that gifted children often become marginalised when teachers paid more attention to children's abilities and achievements than what teachers should do to make sense of individuals. In order to implement the reconstruction of learning and

teaching based on what I have learned from my analysis, teachers should first focus on the relationships. This is an essential aspect in reconstructing learning and teaching for gifted children.

As discussed in the last findings chapter ([Chapter Six](#)), *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996, 2017) strongly emphasised relationships with the children and their parents; indeed, relationships were one of the key principles in the curriculum. Two examples were provided by participants showing that relationships were important in learning, Claire, a teacher educator, said, “The cornerstone of ECE [early childhood education] is relationships,” and Taylor commented in the open-ended questionnaire that “forming relationships is the essence of success for all.” Relationships are strengthened by the efforts of children, parents and teachers. Many participants showed that relationships were a way to respond to giftedness, as it helped teachers to have more understanding about their children and families, and assisted children to develop a sense of belonging. The discussion below describes the different aspects of developing relationships associated with the connective pedagogy and the concept of ethics of care that supported the learning community.

The participants’ stories reflected the importance of building relationships in teaching and learning, and this entailed three key practices: care, time and equal power when developing relationships with children and their families. As a result of what I learned from the participants some of the participants were working to reconstruct teaching and learning. They expressed their opinions

that building a relationship was a social process in which the teacher was responsive to the children's efforts and interpreted their abilities from an ethics of care viewpoint. Much of the data, especially in the third findings chapter placed a similar emphasis on relationships. This chapter showed that teachers needed to have a positive relationship with gifted children and their parents as this was essential in order to respond to giftedness.

In this section, I discuss what teaching practices can be implemented in order to form caring relationships based on some stories from the participants and the two conceptual frameworks. Some participants' stories illustrated that teachers cared for their children, so teachers demonstrated some behaviours to show that they cared for their children and these behaviours were not limited by some influential constructions of giftedness. One of the behaviours reflected by some participants' stories was that teachers were willing to spend 'time' with gifted children. These stories were particularly evident in the final findings chapter ([Chapter Six](#)); for example, teachers were prepared to spend time to learn about their gifted children, and teachers were enthusiastic about spending time to develop a relationship with gifted children and their parents. Developing a relationship required time and effort. Children can gradually feel they were cared for by their teachers' contributions to their learning. When teachers were committed to developing a relationship with children, the power differentials between learning and teaching were minimised. This was because teachers and children have a shared responsibility in a learning community. Therefore, reconstructing learning and teaching for gifted children was linked to

relationships, and a relationship was formed by caring attitudes, and teachers who were willing to spend time on nurturing the relationship and having equal power.

As discussed previously, education in Aotearoa New Zealand has always promoted having relationships with children and their parents through involvement and that children and their parents contributed to learning and teaching. The New Zealand gifted education publications (Ministry of Education, 2008, 2012) also encouraged teachers to invite children to participate, consult with parents and make any necessary changes as they went. The emphasis on children's and parents' involvement in the learning community aligned with the connective pedagogy (Smith & Barr, 2008) and the concept of ethics of care (1984), because children, parents and teachers can be resources for each other through collaborative involvement. Children and parents should take part in the learning process in educational settings, as this strengthened the relationships between the learning environment and the home.

7.7 Key contributions

Although some of the research participants resided in other countries, this research was primarily conducted in Aotearoa New Zealand. This research contributes significantly to knowledge in the education sectors. In particular, the research findings enhanced our awareness and understanding of the consequences of social constructions of teaching and learning from the

perspectives of teachers and parents and this applies to children who were labelled as gifted.

The research findings demonstrated new interpretations for gifted education in Aotearoa New Zealand; namely, that giftedness was a concept that people have constructed or invented through conversations and was not a reality to be discovered. These findings were also consistent with the statement in the Aotearoa New Zealand book *Gifted and talented: New Zealand perspectives* (McAlpine & Moltzen, 2004): that the definitions of giftedness have changed over time, and that different labels and assumptions were attached to the construction of giftedness (O'Connor, 2012). The research provided examples of the participants' different constructions of giftedness and has discussed how some constructions were similar and interrelated to each other, whereas others appeared to be contradictory.

This research, similarly, analysed the effects of different constructions of giftedness on gifted children's learning and development. This analysis of the consequences of constructions brought significant new perspectives to the field of gifted education in the context of inclusive education in Aotearoa New Zealand. Thus, the research makes several key contributions to the field of gifted education, which was the primary aim of undertaking this study. Although the contributions have been presented in a linear structure in the thesis, this structure should not be taken as indicative of their order of importance. Rather, all of the key findings of this research were equally

important to the Ministry of Education, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), teachers and parents of children who are labelled as gifted.

7.7.1 Gifted education in the Ministry of Education

This research informs how gifted children and their families are treated due to constructions of giftedness created by society. This research can inform the Ministry of Education that more attention needs to be given to gifted education in the context of the early years. As discussed in Section 1.5, the research data have clearly shown that different constructions of giftedness have consequences from particular meanings – both positive and negative – on children’s learning and development. The Ministry of Education needs to pay more attention to supporting gifted children’s wellbeing and in encouraging teachers to focus on making sense of individuality, rather than on the assumed needs of groups of children. Only then will gifted children in early childhood settings be able to build a strong foundation that will prepare them for school and their future.

Much of the data have illustrated that gifted children, and their parents needed support from teachers. The data have indicated that teachers were committed to developing positive relationships with children and their families. Thus, the Ministry of Education needed to give clearer directions to teachers about the importance of providing for individuality in early childhood settings and schools, as well as guiding teachers on how to develop working partnerships with parents. For example, the Ministry of Education could offer professional

development about gifted education to teachers and schools and publish more resources that focus on catering for individual giftedness and to developing relationships with children and parents.

7.7.2 Teaching practice

This research has identified constructions created by teachers and how they affected gifted children. The findings highlight the need for teachers to develop better knowledge about gifted education if they are to truly embrace the principle of inclusive education. A point was made in Chapters Four and Five with reference to Florian and Black-Hawkins's (2011) research on inclusive pedagogy that teachers need to expand their views about inclusive education. Inclusive practices did not mean only providing for children from a range of cultural backgrounds and for children with disabilities or the groups of children who are constructed as vulnerable but it also about including and providing for everyone – including children who are gifted. The way teachers developed strategies helps to increase the participation of all children, including those labelled as 'different' in the learning context. The findings in this thesis tell us that teachers must discard their constructions about measuring ability and achievement to determine giftedness and focus, instead, on learning for all. Teachers need to develop practices that respected every child and celebrated differences.

7.7.3 Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for gifted education

The research data illustrate that the professionals' and parents' voices are associated with their lived experiences and can be incredibly persuasive. The research findings indicate that NGOs involved in gifted education in Aotearoa need to listen to the voices of professionals and parents. The Ministry of Education (2012) pays much attention to identifying giftedness and differentiating gifted children in schools. However, the research participants have told us that gifted education was much more than just identification and differentiation. Organisations needed to advocate for gifted children and their parents, based on what the children and their parents needed. This research also informs us that NGOs should consider the significance of the relationships between parents and schools. NGOs should promote relationships to parents and schools as one of the key strategies for responding to giftedness.

7.8 Recommendations for future research

These findings and the analysis of the research have generated various implications related to the social construction of giftedness, the meanings behind the many different constructions of giftedness, and the potential effects of the meanings evident in particular constructions for gifted children. In the following paragraphs, which relate to the discussion of the above key contributions, I suggest alternative ways in which education professionals, and

society as a whole can become aware of the educational, emotional and well-being needs of gifted children.

The findings and analysis chapters and the discussion presented earlier in this chapter have provided insights into some of the consequences for a child from being labelled as gifted; for example, the child being expected to demonstrate that they were highly intelligent and to achieve high results at school. It was clear from the data that a teacher's construction of giftedness can also potentially affect the future of the gifted child in their care. This effect can be positive if the teacher believed in, and supported, giftedness, or negative if, for example, the teacher saw the gifted child's questions as just annoying behaviour.

As mentioned in the discussion of reconstructing giftedness, the primary implication of these research findings for future research is that there is a specific need to hear from gifted children directly. Future research should, therefore, explore how gifted children constructed teaching and learning, and how these constructions might affect gifted children's images of themselves when they were labelled as gifted. These constructions might affect how gifted children thought other people created meanings about giftedness. Some effects can be identified straight away, but many may not be, as the consequences of constructing giftedness might build slowly over time, with the cumulative effects becoming apparent only as the children became older.

The findings have already shown that there is a need to be aware of some of the potentially unpleasant consequences of being labelled gifted. To date, there has been little research undertaken in Aotearoa New Zealand that specifically taps into gifted children's voices. The participants in this research developed different meanings of giftedness and gifted children, and the effects of those meanings related to how gifted children are being treated. It would be valuable to include classroom observations and the voice of gifted children of preschool or primary-school age in future research. These data collection methods would provide an insight into those who are more or less likely to struggle with the impact of constructions of teaching and learning for gifted children as they progress through the education system.

In the literature review chapter (Chapter Two), I explored some implications for research using social constructionism in gifted education. After the data had been analysed, I came to realise that the implications of using social constructionism can go beyond the gifted education community. As mentioned in the section "Education is a right, as well as a need" in the literature review chapter, the education system in Aotearoa New Zealand advocates that every child has the right to learn (Ministry of Education, 2010). *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017) also mentioned that the early childhood curriculum is designed for all children. Employing the theory of social construction can open ideas on the margins. This thesis, for example, illustrates how knowledge of teaching and learning is socially constructed and how each construction has consequences for those involved in gifted education. Likewise, other areas in

education and the social sciences, such as disabilities, immigrants, gender and sexuality, family and policies, can be informed by the theory of social construction.

In the introduction chapter, I described article 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) which stated that education should allow children to develop to their fullest potential. This thesis reflects that social constructionism can be applied to all students who are labelled as different from other students. This thesis is one example that demonstrates that the many consequences of the reality being constructed reflect that not all children have the same opportunities to learn or access resources to assist their learning. It is important for social constructionists, educational practitioners and professionals to pay careful attention to the stories behind each construction; how the reality is constructed, and the consequences associated with each construction. Social constructionism also demands openness in the deconstruction and reconstruction of reality.

7.9 Conclusions of this research

To summarise, then, the research has collected a rich set of data. The participants' open-ended questionnaire responses, interview comments and Facebook posts demonstrated how they have constructed their understandings and meanings of teaching and learning that applied to how teachers viewed gifted children. Some constructions were dominant and influential, many were interrelated, and some contradicted other constructions. However, all the

constructions were partly developed by assumptions, and so this research explored how different people have different assumptions about giftedness, and how these assumptions informed the creation of labels. The research has shown that the participants' constructions were often based on assumptions about certain patterns of behaviour being associated with gifted children – and that this label was based on assumptions, not evidence.

The comments from many of the participants provided strong evidence that gifted education needed more support, in Aotearoa New Zealand as well as overseas. This was not to say that teachers did not try to cater for the needs of gifted children – as the data showed, many of the teacher participants also considered an ethics of care in their relationships with gifted children and their families. However, the research data clearly indicated that more needed to be done. It was hoped that the conversations that occurred during the data collection process have encouraged the teachers and teacher educators to think about the consequences of their constructions of giftedness, and the effects their actions have on both children labelled as gifted, and gifted children whose extraordinary abilities have not (yet) been recognised.

This research has argued that giftedness is socially constructed. The research findings corroborated those already published nationally and internationally (for example, Borland, 1997, 2003; Delaune, 2015; Moltzen, 2011; O'Connor, 2012; Pfeiffer, 2013). However, this research took the concept of the social construction of giftedness further, because the studies listed above did not

emphasise the effects of the meanings evident in different constructions of giftedness; that is, how different constructions can influence gifted children's learning and development, and how this, in turn, can affect the wellbeing of the children's families. This research detailed how social constructionism is more than just a phrase: it is about how knowledge is constructed by the process of interaction, and how consequences can arise from these constructions. Belonging and relationships were highlighted in this chapter as well, because they came out strongly in the research data, and also because their importance was emphasised in *Te Whāriki* and the *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1992, 1996, 2007 & 2017). Children and their families should feel they belonged in the learning community, as a sense of belonging will enable them to fully participate in all the opportunities the early childhood setting or school offers.

Just as constructions of giftedness evolved through social interaction, this research developed as I analysed the data. The participants' contributions revealed different constructions of giftedness, which, in turn, gave an insight into the participants' different value systems. Hibberd (2005) states that when one described, and attempted to understand, human nature, one realised that values were an integral part of social life. The research data revealed many different constructions and understandings of the meaning of giftedness. In particular, the participants' comments revealed that many different factors have the potential to influence their construction of teaching and learning for gifted children. I am arguing for another construction of giftedness, one with a more

useful underlying meaning: that giftedness is catered for by recognising individual learning needs and interests, and this is associated with a positive relationship between children, parents and teachers.

The research findings have already been summarised and discussed in the three findings chapters. The data supported the major argument of this research: that knowledge and an understanding of giftedness can be changed; that the word, 'giftedness', can have many different meanings for different people has already been stressed. These meanings can be modified, added to or shifted, depending upon how we looked at giftedness in different situations.

7.9.1 A crystallising moment – beliefs about giftedness evolved

It was enlightening to experience how to conduct qualitative research. I have learnt that the participants in my research have needs different from those I had originally expected them to have. The data have highlighted two key issues: first, parents and teachers place a heavy emphasis on the importance of consequences of the meanings evident in particular constructions of giftedness; and secondly, there was considerable concern about the gifted label.

Before I began this research – and like many of my research participants – my construction of giftedness was that giftedness was a known fact. However, as I began to analyse the data collected from the participants, I started to realise that giftedness was not a sub-set of intelligence that can be measured by standardised tools, and my beliefs and views about giftedness began to change.

I acknowledge that there has been a tension between writing about giftedness as a social construction even as I explored it as a 'thing'. I needed to write a number of iterations for each chapter in order to gain more understandings of the theory of social constructionism and how this theory was being revealed from the data.

These findings have taught me that some constructions of giftedness relate to belonging and participation, and this was associated with relationships. The teacher's role was to provide an environment where a child and their family felt they belonged. However, a teacher needed to understand the child before being able to create a responsive learning environment for them and their family. And to understand the child, the teacher needed to talk to the child, get to know their parents and create a relationship with them. Instead of labelling the child and having a set of expectations of 'the gifted child', the teacher should concentrate on individual giftedness, because every gifted child was different.

I recognise that there is no universal definition of giftedness. Social constructionists do not, however, tend to seek definitions. Instead, they focus on the process of construction; that is, how meaning is created (Burr, 2015). People have different interpretations of the meanings of giftedness. These meanings and interpretations are influenced by interactions from, and within, their experiences and contexts, as well as by some of the influential constructions of giftedness displayed by policy makers and the people who have the power to create these constructions. According to Berger and

Luckmann (1967), knowledge is constructed through social interactions. People understand the world through interactions in different social contexts, and their knowledge can change when more experience and more interaction with others occurred or through a change of contexts. This thesis argues that the social construction of giftedness had an important influence on human values and, hence, how gifted children were treated. I am mindful that Smith and Barr's (2008) three alternative models of teaching-learning and Noddings's (1984) concept of ethics of care are not the only models to transform possibilities for gifted children's learning. There could be other models that allow reconstructions and explore knowledge in different ways.

In this thesis, the theoretical framework of social constructionism has provided a way of understanding how knowledge and meanings were constructed. This research highlighted an even more important message: that it was important to explore the potential consequences of different viewpoints about giftedness, using the participants' constructions as indicators of the many different constructions of giftedness found within society as a whole. While it was helpful to understand how the participants constructed giftedness, it was critical that educators and policy makers understood the consequences of their constructions – and also how giftedness can be reconstructed to improve outcomes for both gifted children and their families.

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List of Appendices

Appendix One: Ethics approval	287
Appendix Two: Email invitation for potential participants - Open-ended questionnaire	288
Appendix Three: Information sheet and consent for potential participants - Open-ended questionnaire	289
Appendix Four: Information sheet for potential participants - Open-ended questionnaire	290
Appendix Five: Consent form for potential participants - Skype interviews.....	292
Appendix Six: Information sheet for potential participants - Facebook	293
Appendix Seven: The "About" of the group on Facebook site	293
Appendix Eight: Open-ended questionnaire questions	296
Appendix Nine: Skype interview questions.....	298
Appendix Ten: Facebook themes	300

Appendix One
Ethics approval letter



HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE

Secretary, Lynda Griffiths
Email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz

Ref: 2012/53/ERHEC

7 December 2012

Melanie Wong
School of Educational Studies & Human Development
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Dear Melanie

Thank you for providing the revised documents in support of your application to the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee. I am very pleased to inform you that your research proposal "Design experiments in developing an 'ideal type' of initial teacher education (ITE) programme that prepared student teachers to work with gifted and/or talented children" has been granted ethical approval.

Please note that this approval is subject to the incorporation of the amendments you have provided in your email of 2 December 2012.

Should circumstances relevant to this current application change you are required to reapply for ethical approval.

If you have any questions regarding this approval, please let me know.

We wish you well for your research.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nicola Surtees'.

Nicola Surtees
Chair
Educational Research Human Ethics Committee

"Please note that Ethical Approval and/or Clearance relates only to the ethical elements of the relationship between the researcher, research participants and other stakeholders. The granting of approval or clearance by the Ethical Clearance Committee should not be interpreted as comment on the methodology, legality, value or any other matters relating to this research."

Appendix Two

Email invitation for potential participants – Online open-ended questionnaire

Tena koutou

I am a PhD candidate at the College of Education, University of Canterbury. I am also a senior lecturer at the School of Education, Manukau Institute of Technology, Auckland. My doctoral study will investigate an 'ideal type' of initial teacher education (ITE) programme that prepares student teachers to work with gifted and/or talented, and/or twice-exceptional (gifted and learning disabled) children in early childhood settings.

I would like to invite early childhood teachers to voluntarily participate in an online open-ended questionnaire for my studies. Your email address was found from the email supplied list of the Ministry of Education. This should only take about 20 minutes.

The tentative thesis title is -

Design experiments in developing an 'ideal type' of initial teacher education (ITE) programme which prepare student teachers to work with gifted and/or talented, and/or twice-exceptional children in early childhood settings.

I would appreciate if you could forward this message to your colleagues or post on your staff noticeboard. Please simply add your contact details to question one so that I am able to contact you if you are a winner of the draw. The draw will take place on the 17 May 2013. Click on the link to start the open-ended questionnaire.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/MelsPHDSurvey>

Thank you very much in advance.

Nga mihi

Melanie Wong
PhD Candidate
College of Education
University of Canterbury
Christchurch, New Zealand

Appendix Three

Information sheet and consent for potential participants –

Online open-ended questionnaire

I am a PhD candidate at the College of Education, University of Canterbury. I am also a senior lecturer at the School of Education, Manukau Institute of Technology, Auckland. My doctoral study will investigate an 'ideal type' initial teacher education (ITE) programme that prepares student teachers to work with gifted and/or talented, and/or twice-exceptional (gifted and learning disabled) children in early childhood settings.

I would like to invite you to participate in my study. Your answers to the online open-ended questionnaire are vitally important to the study as I will use them to better understand practitioners' perspectives about gifted education, best practices and teacher education (early childhood).

You will be asked to complete four sets of short questions, all within the one open-ended questionnaire. This should only take about 20 minutes of your time. Please note that participation in this study is voluntary. If you do participate, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you withdraw, I will do my best to remove any information relating to you, provided this is practically achievable.

I will take particular care to ensure the confidentiality of all data gathered for this study. I will also take care to ensure your anonymity in publications of the findings. All the data will be securely stored in password-protected facilities and locked storage at the University of Canterbury for five years following the study. It will then be destroyed. All participants will be able to access an electronic copy of the project when it has been completed.

If you have any questions about the open-ended questionnaire, please contact me on melanie.wong@pg.canterbury.ac.nz. If you have a complaint about the study, you may alternatively contact my supervisors Associate Professor Missy Morton (missy.morton@canterbury.ac.nz) and Nicola Surtees (nicola.surtees@canterbury.ac.nz), or the Chair of Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

In order to progress through this open-ended questionnaire, please use the following navigation buttons:

- Click the Next button to continue to the next page.
- Click the Previous button to return to the previous page.
- Click the Save button to save any work on the open-ended questionnaire done at that point so it can be returned to later.
- Click the Exit the open-ended questionnaire button if you need to exit the open-ended questionnaire.
- Click the Submit button to submit your open-ended questionnaire (consent to participate in the open-ended questionnaire is implied by clicking the submit button).

The open-ended questionnaire closes on 30 June.

Appendix Four

Information sheet for potential participants – Skype interviews

Design experiments in developing an ideal type of initial teacher education (ITE) programme in preparing student teachers to work with gifted and twice-exceptional children in early childhood education settings

Online Information Sheet for Teacher Education Programme Providers

I am a PhD candidate at the College of Education, University of Canterbury. I am also a senior lecturer in the School of Education, Manukau Institute of Technology, Auckland. I am interested in developing an ‘ideal type’ of teacher education programme for preparing student teachers to work with gifted and twice-exceptional children in early childhood settings in Aotearoa New Zealand.

I would like to invite you to participate in my current study. If you agree to take part you will be asked a series of questions on:

- the definitions of giftedness, being talented, and twice-exceptional
- education policies
- teacher education
- the New Zealand Government’s support for gifted and talented education and twice-exceptional children and
- the first prototype of an ideal type of ITE programme

The whole interview will be conducted through Skype and will be recorded by the Evaer software program. It will take approximately 45 minutes.

Please note that participation in this study is voluntary. If you do participate, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you withdraw, I will do my best to remove any information relating to you, provided this is practically achievable.

I will take particular care to ensure the confidentiality of all data gathered for this study. I will also take care to ensure your anonymity in publications of the findings. All the data will be securely stored in password-protected facilities and locked storage at the University of Canterbury for five years following the study. It will then be destroyed.

Your input to the interview will contribute to the development of the second prototype of an ideal type of ITE programme. The results of this research may be used to evaluate programmes currently being used in early childhood education settings in Aotearoa New Zealand. The programmes would be evaluated against criteria that have been identified as part of an ‘ideal type’ of teacher education programme. The interview will also explore the extent to which the New Zealand Teachers Council monitors teacher education programmes with respect to including pedagogies for gifted and/or talented, and twice-exceptional children.

The results will be presented nationally and internationally at conferences and in academic journals. All participants will be able to access an electronic copy of the project when it has been completed but you will not be able to retract comments.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact me (details above). If you have a complaint about the study, you may contact the Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

If you agree to participate in this study, please complete the attached electronic consent form and return it to me by email by [day/month]. Please contact me if you would like to have a hard copy of the information sheet and consent form.

I am looking forward to working with you and thank you in advance for your contribution.

Melanie Wong
PhD Candidate
College of Education
University of Canterbury
Christchurch, New Zealand

Appendix Five

Consent form for potential participants – Skype interviews

Design experiments in developing an ‘ideal type’ of initial teacher education (ITE) programme in preparing student teachers to work with gifted and/or twice-exceptional children in early childhood settings

Consent Form for Teacher Education Programme Providers

I have been given a full explanation of this project and have been given an opportunity to ask questions.

I understand what will be required of me if I agree to take part in this project.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any stage without penalty.

I understand that the interview will be conducted by Skype and will be recorded by the Evaer software programme.

I understand that any information or opinions I provide will be kept confidential by the researcher and that any published or reported results will not identify me.

I understand that all data collected for this study will be kept in locked and secure facilities at the University of Canterbury and will be destroyed after five years.

I understand that I will receive a report on the findings of this study. I have provided my email details below for this.

I understand that if I require further information I can contact the researcher, Melanie Wong. If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee.

By signing below, I agree to participate in this research project.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Email address: _____

Please return this completed consent form to Melanie Wong through email by XXXX

Appendix Six

Information sheet for potential participants – Facebook

Design experiments in developing an 'ideal type' of initial teacher education (ITE) programme that prepares student teachers to work with gifted and twice-exceptional children.

Online Information Sheet for Facebook

I am a PhD candidate at the College of Education, University of Canterbury; I am also a senior lecturer at the School of Education, Manukau Institute of Technology. I am interested in developing an 'ideal type' of teacher education programme that prepares student teachers to work with gifted and/or talented children.

I would like to invite you to participate in my current study. If you agree to take part, you will be asked to give on Facebook your own views and understandings about,

- the definition of giftedness and being talented
- education policies and curriculum
- teacher education
- teaching practice, and
- the prototype of an ideal type of teacher education programme that is emerging from the research.

The Facebook page closes on 31 May 2014.

Please note that participation in this study is voluntary. If you do participate, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you withdraw, I will do my best to remove any information relating to you, provided this is practically achievable.

I will take particular care to ensure the confidentiality of all data gathered for this study, so I will ensure your anonymity in publications of the research findings. All the data will be securely stored in password-protected facilities and locked storage at the University of Canterbury for five years following the study. It will then be destroyed.

The results of this research may be used to evaluate programmes currently being used in the early childhood sector in Aotearoa New Zealand. The programmes would be evaluated against criteria that have been identified as part of an "ideal type" of teacher education programme. The research also explores the extent to which the New Zealand Teachers Council monitors teacher education programmes with respect to including pedagogies for gifted and twice-exceptional children. The results will be presented nationally and internationally at conferences and in academic journals. All participants will be able to access an electronic copy of the project when it has been completed but you will not be able to retract comments.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact me (details above). If you have a complaint about the study, you may contact the Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

If you agree to participate in this study, please post your response to the Facebook page. You can contact me if you would like to have a hard copy of the information sheet and consent form.

I am looking forward to working with you and thank you in advance for your contribution.

Melanie Wong
PhD Candidate
College of Education
University of Canterbury
Christchurch, New Zealand

Appendix Seven

The “About” of the group on Facebook site

The “About” of the group on Facebook site (closed group). This will be the introduction to the Facebook site

The Facebook page is a closed group. You have been invited because of your interest and expertise in early childhood initial teacher education. Please feel free to recommend colleagues whom you think might also contribute. There are three ways you can contribute to the discussion on this Facebook page:

1. When you post comments directly on the Facebook page, you will be able to be identified.
2. You can use the message option to send me a comment that you want only me to see.
3. You can use the message option to send me a message that I can then post anonymously on Facebook. This allows your comment to be open for further discussion.

Please see the attached information sheet below. If you agree to participate in this study, joining the Facebook page signals your consent. You can contact me if you would like to have a hard copy of the information sheet and consent form. If you are interested in being part of this discussion, please describe your interests and involvement in early childhood education and/or teacher education.

If you know anyone who would be interesting in joining the discussion, please invite them by typing in their email or Facebook’s name on the ‘invitation’ area on the right-hand side of the page. You can also invite them at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/gifted2eonlineplanet/>

It is intended that this Facebook group will create a stimulating conversation about our shared work.

Appendix Eight

Online open-ended questionnaire questions

There are four categories of questions to support and inform the development of an 'ideal type' of initial teacher education programme. The whole open-ended questionnaire will take approximately 20 minutes. Please type your answers in the comment boxes after each question. Thank you for your participation. All your comments are valued. The open-ended questionnaire is completely anonymous.

1. Defining gifted and talented

- What does the term "gifted and talented" mean to you?
- Have you encountered children who are gifted and talented? If yes, how did you know they were gifted and talented?

2. Education policies and curriculum

- Do you consider that gifted and talented children have special needs?
- Why did you answer yes or no? Please tell me in the text form field below.
- Does your early childhood centre have a policy for gifted and talented children? If yes, please tell me in the text form field below about what this policy is about and how does this policy support gifted and talented children? If not, is the policy of special education in your early childhood centre embedded for gifted and talented children?

3. Teacher education

- Were you taught how to support gifted and talented children when you were doing your initial teacher education programme? If yes, what was the content of your programme?
- Were you expected to be able to deal with gifted and talented children when you were on practicum? If yes, what were the criteria used by your programme assessors to indicate that you were successfully dealing with these children?

4. Teaching practice

- What provision does your early childhood centre provide for gifted and talented children?
- How do experiences within such provisions differ to those provided for children who are not gifted and talented?
- To what extent are the teaching strategies and learning experiences in your early childhood centre extending gifted and talented children and how do you know?
 - Who is involved in facilitating these?
 - Can you please provide an example that has happened which shows the kinds of learning experiences that were provided?

5. To what extent are the teaching strategies and learning experiences in your early childhood centre enriching gifted and talented children and how do you know?

- Who is involved in these?
- Can you please describe an example of the kinds of learning experiences you have provided?

Are there any other questions or areas of inquiry that should be probed? If yes, please tell me about the matter or question below and please also tell me what your thoughts are on that matter or question you may have.

Appendix Nine

Skype interview questions

There are two sections in this interview, the first section has four categories of questions to support and inform the development of the second prototype of 'ideal type' of initial teacher education programme. In the second section you will be invited to comment on the first prototype of ideal ITE programme.

1. Defining gifted and talented

- What does the term "gifted and talented" mean to you?
- What does the term "twice-exceptional" mean to you?
- Have you encountered children who are gifted and talented in your practice? If yes, how did you know they were gifted and talented?

2. Education policies

- Do you consider that gifted and talented children have special needs?
- Do you know there is a gifted education policy developed by the Ministry of Education?
- What do you think about the current gifted education policy developed by the Ministry of Education? Is it informative enough to guide and support early childhood settings in catering for gifted and talented children and their teachers?
- What should the gifted and talented education policy contain in order to support children, families and teachers?
- Does the current early childhood curriculum support gifted and talented children? If so, in what ways? If not, in what ways should the curriculum change?
- Should all licensed early childhood settings have a policy on gifted and talented education? Why? Why not?

3. Teacher education

- Do you think student teachers should be taught how to support gifted and talented children within teacher education programmes? If yes, what should that training include? If no, why not?
- Are the students in your teacher education programme expected to be able to deal with gifted and talented children when on practicum? If not, why not? If so, what are the criteria used by your programme to indicate that a student teacher is successfully dealing with these children?
- What theoretical and practical components do you think would be in an 'ideal' initial teacher education programme that supports student teachers to work with gifted and talented children?

4. New Zealand Government

- What should the Government do to support teacher education programmes to

make sure student teachers are able to deal with gifted and talented children after graduation?

- Do you think the New Zealand Government has provided support for gifted and talented education in early childhood settings?
- Do you think the Government should or should not support early childhood teachers to up-skill and refresh their knowledge of identifying and working with gifted and talented children through professional development/other training?
- What should the New Zealand Teachers Council do to ensure all initial teacher education programmes support student teachers to cater for gifted and talented children after they graduate?

5. The first prototype of ideal ITE programme

- What do you think about the first prototype of the ideal ITE programme which was developed by the information from the online open-ended questionnaire?

Appendix Ten

Facebook themes

Theme One- Meanings of diversity (first month)

Theme Two - Fairness (second month)

Theme Three – Definitions (third month)

Theme Four – Relationships (fourth month)

Theme Five – Government (fifth month)

Theme Six – Initial teacher education (sixth month)