Chapter 3 - Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology used in the study and the rationale for its inclusion. A brief history of grounded theory (GT), data collection, analysis and ethical considerations will be described. Methods broaden and magnify the researchers' view of their chosen field and, thus, expand and deepen what one learns of it and knows about it. The researcher aims to see the world from the participants' perspectives and experiences, to the extent possible, by carefully choosing methodologies appropriate to the study. Qualitative research promotes flexibility which allows the researcher to follow themes and cues that emerge. Grounded theory methods (GTM) increase this flexibility and give more focus than many alternative methods (Charmaz, 2006). Charmaz (2006, p.15) recommends using '*a keen eye, open mind, discerning ear and steady hand'* to bring the researcher in touch with the study.

3.2 Research Design

One of the potential problems faced by the social science researcher is the overwhelming range of research cultures and standpoints. Research is a complex task which requires rigor and thoughtful, thorough planning if the research is to be worthwhile and effective. Every element of research should not be arbitrary but planned and deliberate, if it is to be credible, legitimate and practicable (Cohen *et al.,* 2007). The choice of an optimal research design is critical in qualitative interpretive studies, where generation of theory is the objective. Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest the processes *'should be chosen, planned, carefully executed and documented comprehensively*' (Mavetera & Kroeze, 2009, p.13).

3.3 Ethical Considerations

Non-maleficence (do not harm) is enshrined in the Hippocratic oath, in which the principle of *primum non nocere* (first of all, do not harm) is held as a guiding precept, so also with research (Cohen *et al.,* 2007). This researcher recognised the sensibilities of others, their rights, the need for courtesy and consideration, their well-being and dignity and any risks or harm involved for participants. Participants were fully informed of their privacy and confidentiality, anonymity and non-traceability ensured to conduct research with honesty and integrity (Bradley, 2010*a*.). The researcher's intention was to promote a trustful relationship with participants to produce precise, rich information without any negative impacts on the participants. The researcher ought to be open-minded in terms of being impartial, unbiased, neutral and having no vested interests (Hart, 2006).

Blumer's (1969) advice to '*respect your subjects'* reminds the researcher to preserve the participant's dignity even if questioning their perspectives, experiences or practices. Respect for participants pervades data collection and shapes the content of the data. Respect is demonstrated by displaying genuine interest their views and practices, and trying to comprehend life from their viewpoints, without judgement, assessment or evaluation. Data held either manually, recorded or electronically, will be destroyed by shredding or deleting as appropriate following completion of this study. Participants had the right to withdraw from the research at any time.

3.4 Reliability and Validity

The grounded theory method (GTM) itself contains correctives, i.e. coding, that reduces the likelihood that researchers merely superimpose their preconceived notions on the data (Charmaz, 2006) and constant comparative analysis. Gasson (2003, p.67) recommends that unlike hypothesis testing, *'no inferences, prejudices or the association of ideas'* are entertained when GT research is utilised. The constant comparative model

inherent in GTM enhances consistency and validity of the findings; by the researcher's continuous interaction with the data during the rigorous analysis process. This process ensures that the presuppositions and biases that are always present in the data and the analysis process are recognised and minimised. However, Hertz (2003, p.474) states '*how tricky perception is and how deeply rooted assumptions and ideological preferences can challenge even the most ardent efforts at openness*'.

Evidence-based interview strategies helped the researcher go beyond surface data, and questions were shaped to obtain rich material, avoiding preconceived concepts (Charmaz, 2006, p.33), and increasing reliability. As a qualitative researcher, sensitivity is required to perceive the subtle nuances and meanings in the data and to recognise the connections between concepts. Both objectivity and sensitivity are necessary for making discoveries (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.42-43). In qualitative research, objectivity means openness, a willingness to listen to and '*give voice'* to respondents, and representing these as accurately as possible. It is therefore important to interview and/or observe multiple and varied representatives; a process of varying data-gathering techniques and approaches known as triangulation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.44). Triangulation assumes that the use of more than one method will confirm the validity of the concept by converging data from the different methods and give a more complete description (Knafl & Breitmayer, 1989) of the concept than can be had from using a singular method (Denzin, 1997; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). It also assumes that the accuracy and reliability of the different methods can be assessed and measured against each other (Hart, 2006).

3.5 Grounded Theory

3.5.1 History of Grounded Theory

Glaser and Strauss (1967) first described the Grounded Theory Method (GTM) in their study of dying patients. GTM is a research method that aims to discover new theory that is 'grounded in the data', and deals with theory generation rather than theory testing.

Olivier (2004) proposes that GTM commences with observation of the field of interest, and the subsequent theory slowly emerges from what is observed in the data. Data are gathered systematically and analysed as the study progresses. Despite Glaser and Strauss diverging over time, many common characteristics exist between their versions of grounded theory, including theoretical sampling, the constant comparative method, coding and categorising, memo writing, and theory generation, '*all of which occur simultaneously throughout the research project'* (Jeon, 2004, p.251). Because of GT theories real-world orientation, they are particularly appropriate to social sciences including healthcare research, by adapting an interpretative stance.

3.5.2 Research Statement

Contrary to Glaser and Strauss (1967), and Glaser (1992); Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest that researchers should have a preliminary theory or research statement to start from; lending some parameters and outline to the study in the initial stages. They argue that, in the absence of such a research statement, the researcher could be overwhelmed with multiple facets to investigate in the research project. However, in formulating such a research statement, the researcher must structure it *'in such a way that it leaves flexibility and freedom for an in-depth exploration. It should not restrict the investigator but should function solely as a guide'* (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.87). As this research progressed, the scope of the research statement was narrowed and focused. In this study, the researcher set out to investigate the possibility of integrating the processes of transformative learning in end-of-life spiritual care education.

3.6 Qualitative versus Quantitative Methods

Qualitative research *'involves broadly stated questions about human experiences and realities studied through sustained contact with persons, producing rich, descriptive data*' (Boyd, 2001, p.16). The methods used by qualitative researchers exemplify a common belief that they can provide a deeper understanding of social phenomena than would be obtained from purely quantitative data. The qualitative method examines connections

and patterns between phenomena as they occur in social interaction, whereas quantitative methods measure and analyse relationships between variables. Those who critique research on spirituality in healthcare comment on the problems of methodology, definition and ethics (Sloan *et al.,* 1999; Edwards *et al.,* 2010). Qualitative research is considered the optimal means of understanding sensitive multifaceted areas such as spiritual care (Patton, 2001).

3.7 Data Collection

Grounded theory (GT) is a style of analysis where data collection and analysis interact. It can start with an area of interest, with the researchers being led wherever the data will take them, thus providing new perspectives. In this segment, I will outline my chosen data collection strategy.

3.7.1 Population

In the universe of inquiry, the population is the large general group of many cases from which a sample is selected. The population in this study is healthcare professionals and other relevant caregivers directly involved in any aspect of the provision of end-of-life care, both in acute hospitals, community based services and in the home environment.

3.7.2 Sampling

The choice of sample size and which sampling strategy to adopt must be mindful of the purposes of the research, the research statement, the population, resources, the time scale and constraints on the research, the methods of data collection, and the methodology. The sampling chosen must be appropriate for all of these factors if validity is to be served (Cohen *et al.,* 2007). The sample is a smaller and more manageable set of cases, sharing certain characteristics, selected for study

by the researcher from the much larger population. It implies that the group selected will be typical (or representative) of the larger population. The sampling frame is clearly explainable to show that it is accurate, current, complete and free of duplicates and biases in the way in which it was constructed (Hart, 2006).

3.7.2.1 Sample Size

Generally, qualitative sampling consists of small sampling units studied in depth (Holloway & Wheeler, 1996). Patton (1990) insists that no guidelines exist for sample size in qualitative research; therefore a dichotomy of opinion presents the social science researcher with a dilemma in choosing the sample size. Wolcott (1994) asserts that the wish for a large sample size is rooted in quantitative research, where there is a need to generalise. He maintains that a large sample size in qualitative research does not enhance the research, indeed it can do harm as it may lack the depth and richness of a smaller sample. The sampling process differs in GT research, where '*sampling of specific data continues until each category is saturated*' (Cutcliffe, 2000; Higginbottom, 2004, p.12).

3.7.2.2 Convenience or Opportunistic Sampling

The researcher used opportunities to secure participants who were nearest or most convenient for the study. People and places must be available and accessible; therefore the sampling strategies adopted can impact the entire study. However, Holloway & Wheeler (1996) would argue that to some extent, most sampling is opportunistic and arranged for the convenience of the researcher. In this study, the researcher utilised the participants attending Unit 3 of the *Sacred Art of Living and Dying Healing Anamcara Programme* on 15th & 16th November 2010 as an opportunistic sample.

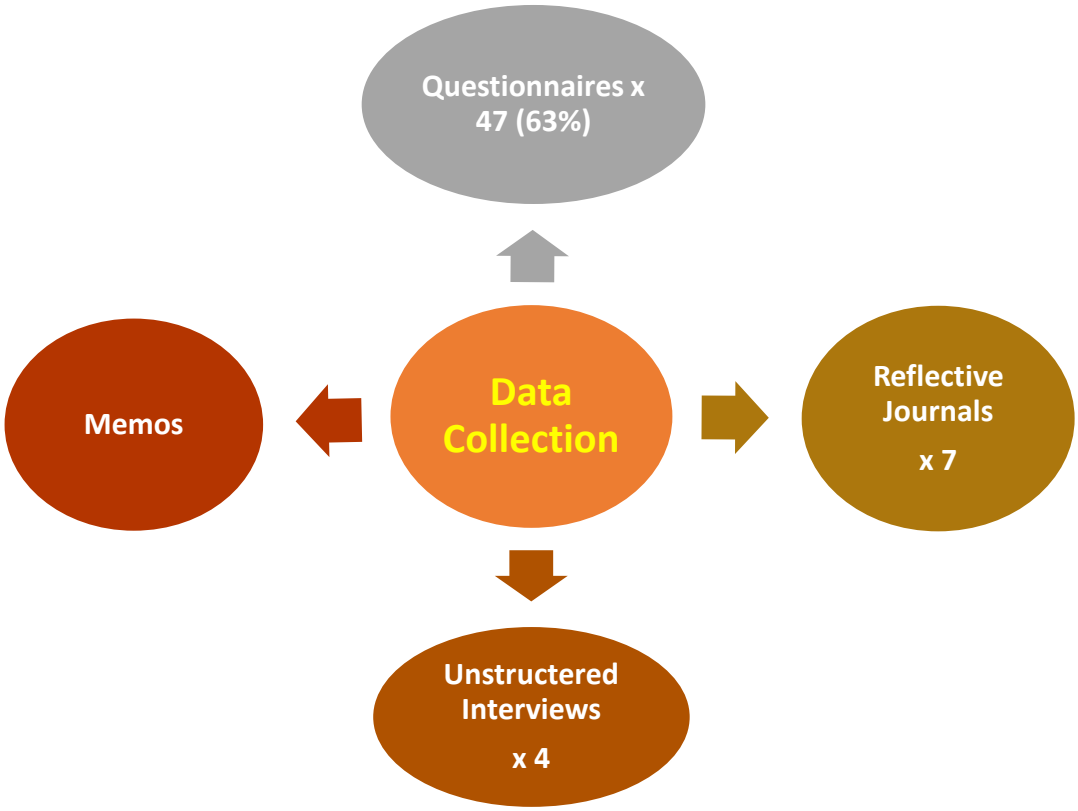
3.7.2.3 Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical sampling technique drove interviews with individuals deemed key informants. Key informants were selected based on their role and/or knowledge. Initial sampling in GT, as described above, is where the researcher starts, while theoretical sampling directs where to go for further data. It pertains only to conceptual and theoretical development; it is not about representing a population or increasing the statistical generalisability of results (Charmaz, 2006). One of the strengths of this sampling method is that participants have knowledge and experiences of the phenomenon in question (Robson, 2002).

3.8 Methods

A variety of methods were utilised (triangulation) to increase reliability and validity of the findings (Figure 2: Data Collection). A recommended approach to initial data-gathering is to identify respondents with a broad, overall knowledge of the field under study. This helps the researcher to form an extensive baseline of concepts that can be further investigated at later stages. As the basic framework of GT was evolving, specialists in variety of settings were interviewed in an effort '*to increase the theoretical saturation of the generated theory*' (Mavetera & Kroeze, 2009, p.13). With this in mind, the researcher started with a questionnaire, and subsequently utilised unstructured interviews and reflective journals.

Figure 2: Data Collection



3.8.1 Questionnaires

3.8.1.1 Pilot Testing of Questionnaire

The questionnaire was developed and pilot tested in advance of the initial data collection to ensure validity, reliability and usability by the sample group. Testing was conducted among the researchers' peers, a group of educationalists; and the end-of-life committee who are a multidisciplinary group. The questionnaire was pilot tested by fourteen individuals, and this assisted the researcher to refine questions. Appropriate amendments were made following feedback at the piloting stage (See Appendix VI - Questionnaire [Draft] and Appendix VII - Questionnaire [Final]).

The questionnaire was a combination of both closed and open questions (See Appendix VII - Questionnaire [Final]). Open-ended questions enable respondents to write a free

account in their own terms, to explain and qualify their responses and avoid the limitations of pre-set categories of response (Cohen *et al.,* 2007). Dichotomous, yes/no questions were used to force respondents off the fence on some issues, (for example question 11: "*Has your participation in this programme impacted your awareness in the area of spirituality?*"); therefore providing a clear unequivocal response. The questionnaire commenced with closed, unthreatening, factual questions, moving to open-ended questions that sought responses on opinions, attitudes, perceptions and views, which may include sensitive or more personal data (Cohen *et al.,* 2007). The instrument was viewed through the eyes of respondents as much as is possible, in order to anticipate sensitivity.

A Likert scale was used for question 7: "*How would you rate your satisfaction with the Sacred Art of Living and Dying Healing Anamcara Programme under the following headings?"* It included adjectives congruent with the programme and its philosophical underpinnings of transformative learning, for example, "self-growth", "self-awareness" and "transformation". The researcher was conscious of the sample being a multidisciplinary, heterogeneous group, therefore every effort was made to construct jargon-free questions, and to minimise ambiguity rather than eliminate it altogether, as Cohen *et al*. (2007), suggest is impossible.

The questionnaire was distributed to all 75 participants attending Unit 3 of the *Anamcara Sacred Art of Living Programme*; and returned on completion of day 2 of this Unit, 16th November 2010. Cohen *et al*. (2007) suggest that the presence of the researcher is helpful in that it enables any queries or uncertainties to be addressed and typically ensures rapid completion, a good response rate and enables data collection from many respondents simultaneously. On the other hand, the researcher was aware of her presence being a potential threat, where respondents may feel uncomfortable about completing the questionnaire and the researcher exerting a sense of compulsion. This was minimised by deliberately not allocating time to completing the questionnaire,

therefore reducing any perceived obligation to do so; and also the option to return in the post. There were 47 questionnaires completed and returned, giving a return rate of 63%.

3.8.1.2 Questionnaire Cover Letter

The cover letter indicated the aim of the research, conveyed its importance to respondents, assured confidentiality and encouraged replies (See Appendix VIII - Cover Letter for Questionnaire). It also set out the return procedure, i.e. boxes placed at the room exits, or for those unable to complete and return on the day, a stamped addressed envelope was provided. The letter introduced the researcher and my contact details, set out the benefits of the research, indicating the rationale for choosing respondents and how results will be disseminated. Respondents were thanked in advance for their contribution. On the day of the questionnaire distribution, the researcher presented a brief synopsis of the research to the potential respondents from the podium, based on the information in the cover letter.

3.8.2 Interviews

Unstructured interviews were chosen by the researcher, as they promote conversation and allow the participant to control the fluency and content of the interview (Duffy *et al.,* 2004). This type of interview, although formal and guided to some extent, allows participants freedom to share their experiences and narratives, as there is no set sequence of questions. The strength of this method is that it increases the salience and relevance of questions, and the interview can be matched to individuals and circumstances (Cohen *et al.,* 2007).

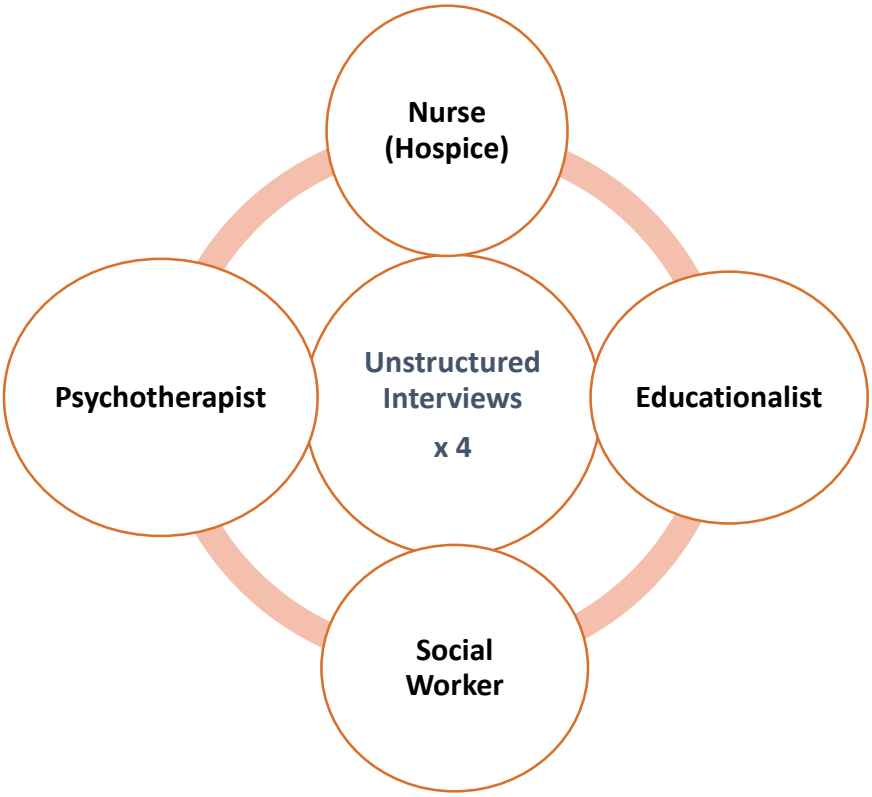
The more the researcher wishes to acquire unique, non-standardised, personalised information about how individuals view the world, the more one veers towards qualitative, open-ended, unstructured interviewing (Cohen *et al.,* 2007). Oppenheim (1992) notes that these interviews frequently cover emotionally loaded topics and, hence require skill on the part of the interviewer to handle the interview situation (for example, Interview Respondent 1 got upset during the interview: Appendix IX - Coded Interview). The researcher had anticipated the likelihood of such an upset occurring, because of the nature of the subject being studied, and efforts were made to protect the respondents by adhering to ethical principles, and utilising communication skills. Unstructured, one-to-one interviews enable respondents to talk freely and emotionally, and to have candour, richness, depth, authenticity and honesty about their experiences (Cohen *et al.,* 2007). This does not mean, however, that the unstructured interview is a more casual affair, as in its own way it also has to be carefully planned. Charmaz (2006) asserts that '*the first question may suffice for the whole interview if stories tumble out'* (p.29). One question was asked to commence each of the four interviews. Subsequent questions were chosen carefully and asked slowly to foster the participant's reflections. GT researchers must be alert and active in the interview in order to elicit and probe interesting leads (Gordon, 1987; Gubrium & Holstein, 2001). The researcher had back-up questions and examples of probing questions prepared prior to the interviews, which were used as appropriate to the interviews (See Appendix X - Interview Questions [Preliminary and Back-up]).

Informed and written consent was obtained prior to conducting the interviews (See Appendix XI - Interview Consent Form). Data were collected via four unstructured interviews lasting between 22 and 43 minutes (See Table 1/Figure 3: Unstructured Interviews). The interviewer took steps to render the interview as a positive, pleasant and beneficial experience and to assure participants of their own worth and the importance of the topic (Cohen *et al.,* 2007), (See Appendix XII - Guidelines for Conducting Interviews). I introduced myself and the research aims at the outset, explaining the purpose, scope, nature and conduct of the interview, the use to be made of the data, ethical issues, likely duration; so that the interviewee was left in no doubt as to what would happen during and after the interview. The interviewer set the scene and thanked the respondent in advance. The interviewer invited questions and interruptions and also cleared permission for recording (Cohen *et al.,* 2007). It was considered inappropriate by the researcher to take notes during the interview, as this was a one-to-one where listening would be compromised by the distraction of writing.

Table 1: Interviews

Respondent's Grade	Date of Interview	Duration of Interview
Nurse (Hospice)	14 Dec 2010	43 minutes
Social Worker	12 Jan 2011	30 minutes
Psychotherapist	01 Feb 2011	25 minutes
Educationalist	10 Feb 2011	22 minutes

Figure 3: Unstructured Interviews



Interviews were at the respondent's preferred location and time, ensuring they provided privacy and convenience for the respondent. A "*Do Not Disturb*" sign was placed on the door of the room where the interview was taking place, and phones/bleeps were switched off to ensure no interruptions. Recording equipment was explained to the participants and switched on prior to conducting the interviews. Audiotapes arising from the interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Transcripts were given a code number and identifiable material excluded to maximise confidentiality. Interview transcripts were then compared with the audiotapes to ensure accuracy. Finally, transcripts were analysed by the researcher and returned to participants for verification and comment.

3.8.3 Memos

Memos were completed by the researcher immediately post interviews to capture any non-verbal communication, including mannerisms and behaviours that occurred during the interview. Memo-writing constitutes a crucial method in GT because it prompts the researcher to analyse the data and codes early in the research process. Writing successive memos throughout the process kept the researcher involved in the analysis and helped to increase the level of abstraction of ideas. Memos catch thoughts, capture comparisons and connections, and crystallize questions and directions to pursue. Through conversing with oneself while memo-writing, new ideas and insights arise. Noting these emergences provides '*insight into the type of questions and data that still require exploration*' (Charmaz, 2006, p.72). The researcher kept a notebook throughout the study, in which any ideas, observations or emergent theories and their possible relationships were entered; using both text and diagrams to record information. Producing memos was spontaneous, and they were written in informal, unofficial language for personal use by the researcher, for example, '*she emphasised the words 'self', 'me' and 'I' when taking part in the interview by speaking louder and pausing before continuing'*.

3.8.4 Reflective Journals

A reflective journal is a window into what is important to the person keeping it. A journal *'can tap into intuition, being a safe place to get to know yourself and discover who you are'* (Grason, 2005). It can be cathartic to write about experiences in a diary or journal (Moore, 2010). The researcher choose this method as it is an integral part of the *Circle of Trust*, therefore utilised by, and familiar to, programme participants. The concept of journaling is also congruent with transformative learning and the programme under investigation in the study. Seven journals were voluntarily submitted for coding by the programme participants.

3.9 Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study conformed to the tenets of grounded theory. GT uses an iterative approach, which requires cycles of concurrent data collection and analysis, *'in which the results of the ongoing data analysis inform the subsequent data collection'* (Byrne, 2001; Kennedy & Lingard, 2006, p.104). Completed questionnaires, interview transcripts and reflective journals were analysed using the constant comparative method. Wilson *et al*. (2002) assert that this is the elementary method of data analysis in GT.

Data were coded, interpreted and scrutinised using several layers of analysis to generate the substantive theory. Three basic coding types were utilised: open coding, axial coding and theoretical coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Charmaz, 2006). A quality GT study '*has codes that fit the data and the practice area from which it is derived, the data then fall naturally into place'* (Weathersby, 2008, p.54). Researcher depth of sensitivity toward data analysis cannot be overemphasised, and the researcher was cognisant of Atkinson's (1990, p.22) advice to '*be open to what you have and where it takes you'*. Theoretical playfulness allows grounded theorists to try out ideas and to explore where they may lead. Coding is the first part of the adventure that enables one to make the leap from concrete events and descriptions of them to theoretical insight and possibilities. GT coding is more than a way of sifting, sorting, and synthesising data, as is the usual purpose of qualitative coding; it begins to unify ideas analytically (Charmaz, 2006, p.71).

3.9.1 Initial Coding

Throughout the process, data are compared with data, and then data with codes. Coding means categorising segments of data with a short name that simultaneously summarises and accounts for each piece of data (see Appendix IX - Coded Interview). Consistent with a GT emphasis on emergence, questions about codes arose from reading the data rather than emanating from an earlier frame applied to them (Charmaz, 2006, p.45). The

goal was to remain open to all possible theoretical directions indicated by the data. Later, axial coding pinpointed and developed the most salient categories in large batches of data. Careful attention to coding furthers attempts to understand acts and accounts, scenes and sentiments, stories and silences from the research participants' view (Charmaz, 2006). Codes are provisional in that they can be reworded to improve the fit; however, compelling codes capture the phenomenon and grab the reader (Charmaz, 2006).

Glaser (1978) suggests coding using gerunds, which help the researcher detect processes, stick to the data and use words reflecting action. Staying close to the data, comparing data with data, moving quickly through the data and starting from the words and actions of respondents, preserves the fluidity of their experience and gives the researcher new ways of looking at it (Charmaz, 2006); for example, '*recognising'*, '*learning'*, '*questioning'*, '*influencing'*. (See Appendix IX - Coded Interview).

3.9.1.1 The Impact of Language

Codes are created directly from what is seen in the data, and they emerge as the data are scrutinised and meanings are defined. Language plays a crucial role in how and what is coded; and in this sense no researcher is neutral because language confers form and meaning on observed realities. Coding inspired the researcher to examine hidden assumptions in her use of language as well as in that of participants. Participants' perspectives usually assume much more than what is immediately apparent, therefore '*we must dig into our data to interpret participants' tacit meanings, and close attention to coding helps us to do that'* (Charmaz, 2006, p.47).

3.9.2 Axial Coding

The purposes of axial coding are to sort, synthesise, and organise large amounts of data and reassemble them in new ways after initial coding (Creswell, 1998; Charmaz, 2006). These codes are more directed, selective, and conceptual than the initial coding, for example, '*recognising the medical model in end of life care', 'utilising the spiritual health assessment'*. It requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorise data incisively and completely. However, the move to axial coding is not entirely a linear process, but rather exploring data afresh. The strength of GT coding derives from this concentrated, active involvement in the process; data is acted upon rather than read passively. Through continuous analysis, new threads for analysis become apparent. Events, interactions, and perspectives come into analytic purview that were not apparent before, and checks the researchers' preconceptions about the topic (Charmaz, 2006, p.67). Initial coding fractures data into separate pieces and distinct codes. Axial coding is Strauss & Corbin's (1998) strategy for bringing data back together again in a coherent whole. However, although intended to obtain a more complete grasp of the studied phenomena, axial coding can make GT cumbersome (Robrecht, 1995).

3.9.3 Theoretical Coding

Theoretical coding is a sophisticated level of coding that follows axial coding. Theoretical coding may hone the study with a sharp analytic edge, and add precision and clarity, making analysis coherent and comprehensible (Charmaz, 2006, p.63). During this phase the researcher developed the story line and interpreted the emerging theory. The researcher has asked and answered questions of the data to describe the central phenomenon. Through providing trustworthiness of the story line, emergent theory is largely accomplished (Scott & Howell, 2008).

3.9.4 Constant Comparative Method

Constant comparative methods (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) were utilised throughout the research to establish analytic distinctions, and thus make comparisons at each level of analysis, to make analytic sense of the material and challenge taken-for-granted assumptions. The researcher looked for how respondents understand their situations before judging their attitudes and actions through one's own assumptions. Through careful, thorough coding, the study fits the empirical world that crystallise participants' experience (Charmaz, 2006, p.68).

3.9.5 Theoretical Saturation

Theoretical saturation refers to the point at which gathering more data about a theoretical category reveals no new properties nor yields any further theoretical insights about the emerging grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). Figure 4 below outlines the final categories and overarching theory which emerged from the data.

Figure 4: Categories and Overarching Theory

Transforming Spiritual Care		
Perceiving Spiritual Care	**Transforming Practice Settings**	**Integrating Learning to Life**
Reflecting	Contributing to Multidisciplinary Settings	Awakening
Enhancing Self-Awareness	Impacting Practice	Transforming
Differentiating Spirituality from Religion	Using Spiritual Health Assessment	Relating to Self and Others
Trusting the Learning Environment	Acknowledging Challenges to Spiritual Care	
	Identifying need for Educational Programmes in Spiritual Care	

This concludes the methodology section, and the following chapter will present and discuss the findings of the research.