Chapter Three: Research Design

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided a review of the scholarly and research literature that currently exists, in relation to spirituality and pedagogical approaches in the early years. In analysing the literature, several gaps were identified; most significantly a lack of research that focused on early years educators' practices to nurture spirituality; also, few studies addressed young children's spirituality prior to compulsory schooling (under 5 years); and a clear gap arose with the unique context of Catholic childcare. These gaps have been articulated within the research questions guiding the investigation. This chapter explains and justifies the project's research design. It then outlines the methods used for data collection, participant selection, data analysis and the strategies employed to ensure reliability and trustworthiness. Finally, the ethical considerations and implications are outlined.

3.2 Research Questions

The aim of this study was to understand the experience of educators working in Catholic childcare centres, in relation to their understanding of nurturing children's spiritual development (aged 3-4 years). To achieve this aim, the investigation was guided by the following overarching research question:

> What are educators' practices for promoting the spiritual development of children aged 3 to 4 years in the context of Catholic childcare centres in Western Australia?

To address the overarching research question, the following sub questions were derived from the review of the literature:

Research Question 1:   What do educators understand by the term 'spirituality'?

Research Question 2:   What do educators know about promoting children's

spiritual development?

Research Question 3:   What practices are educators implementing, intentionally

and incidentally, to promote children's spiritual

development?

3.3 Conceptual Framework

The Conceptual Framework in Figure 3.1 illustrates the three areas of literature

reviewed in the previous chapter. The research questions that arose from that review

are illustrated to conceptualise the connection between the literature and this research
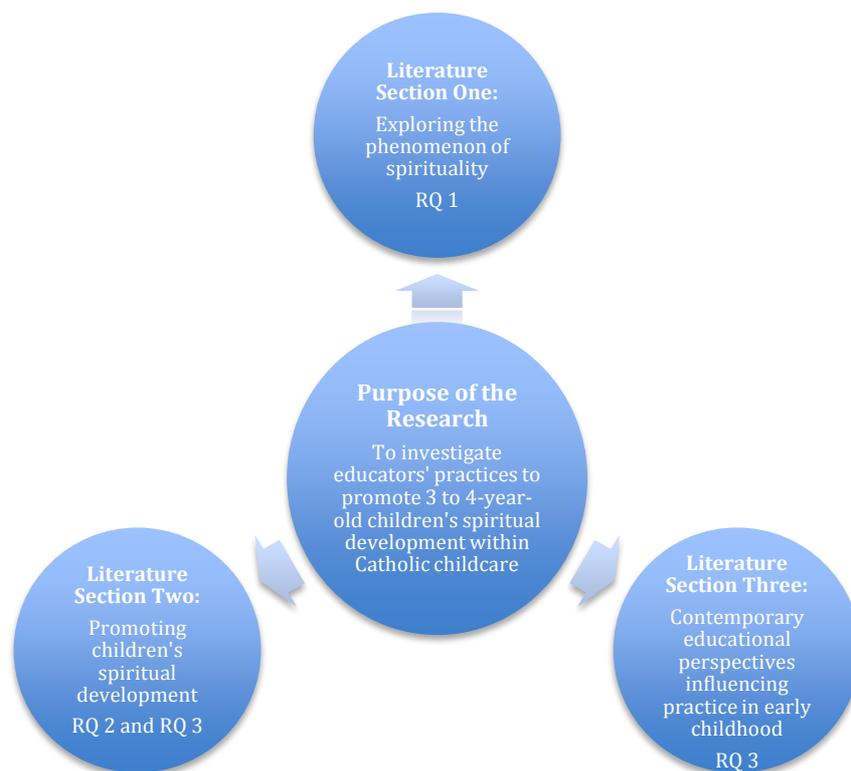
investigation.

Figure 3.1 Conceptual framework.

3.4 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework shows the approach taken to respond to each of the

research questions. In exploring possible research designs, a qualitative approach was

adopted as most appropriate due to the investigative and experiential nature of the

research questions. The methodologies and methods selected were informed through the qualitative design. Figure 3.2 illustrates that a qualitative design underpinned by a social constructivist theoretical perspective was employed. Within this theoretical perspective, a phenomenological perspective within an interpretivist paradigm was selected. The use of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was employed as a specific form of phenomenological approach (Smith, 2008; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Each of these components of the research design are explained and justified in this chapter.
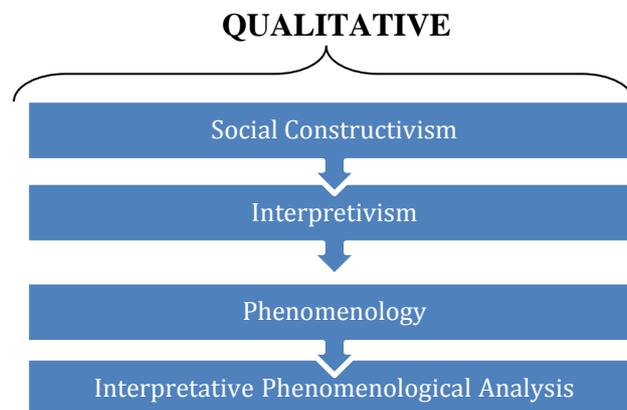
QUALITATIVE

Social Constructivism

Interpretivism

Phenomenology

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Figure 3.2 Theoretical framework.

3.4.1 Qualitative research.

Qualitative research is an inductive form of inquiry that acknowledges the complexity of social situations or events (Creswell, 2014). This approach to research is described by Creswell (2014) as "exploring and understanding the meaning individuals ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4). Taking a qualitative approach to research implies a focus on the interpretative and social sciences whereby the researcher explores a problem through the 'eyes' of the participant within their social context (Neuman, 2011). Qualitative research allows the researcher to "develop a complex picture of the problem...reporting multiple perspectives, identifying the many factors

involved in a situation and generally sketching the larger picture that emerges"

(Creswell, 2009, p. 176). In this investigation, *that* social or human problem is

articulated as the practices adopted by educators to promote children's spiritual

development.

Qualitative research typically involves a focus on processes and events, is

situationally constrained and recognises the role of the researcher in the research

process (Neuman, 2011). Qualitative research involves "the gathering, analysis,

interpretation, and presentation of *narrative* information" (Teddlie & Tashakkori,

2009, p. 6) and is concerned with "processes and meanings that are not experimentally

examined or measured" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 10). As a qualitative approach is

described as being "contextually laden, subjective, and richly detailed" (Byrne, 2001,

p. 372), the data are collected in each participant's setting (Creswell, 2014) and the

methods involve "data based on human experience... [which] is (sic) powerful and

sometimes more compelling than quantitative data" (Anderson, 2010, p. 2). It is

recognised that qualitative studies can "provide insight into the subtle nuances of

educational contexts" (Kervin, Vialle, Herrington & Okely, 2006, p. 37).

In essence, a qualitative approach to research provides a means for exploring an

individual's or group's experience of a phenomenon through narrative. Qualitative

designs involve the use of a small number of subjects who are examined in detail to

interpret the meaning of the phenomenon and this meaning is reported as themes. The

strengths of a qualitative approach lie in its ability to engage in depth with a subject

and to examine social processes (Babbie, 2011) and as such, the theoretical perspective

underpinning this investigation was social constructivism. Social constructivism views

reality as socially constructed (Sterian & Mocanu, 2016). Individuals are viewed as

evolving makers of meaning (Fleury & Garrison, 2014). This theoretical perspective

places significance on both the context of the investigation and on the subjectivity of the research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2013). As this investigation sought to understand the experience of educators to nurture children's spirituality within their own childcare centre, a qualitative approach was appropriate. There exist several approaches within qualitative research, and the most appropriate to this particular study was a phenomenological approach, through an interpretivist paradigm.

3.4.2 Interpretivist paradigm.

Most suited to this qualitative study was an interpretivist paradigm with a phenomenological perspective. A paradigm is described as a way of thinking, and within research, frames the process that will be undertaken and the methods that will be used (Neuman, 2011). An interpretivist paradigm is described as holding to the view that people use "constructs such as culture, social context and language to build our view of the world and that social reality is shaped through social interactions" (Gibbons & Sanderson, 2002, p. 9). Interpretivist research is therefore concerned with how people make meaning of their world and is largely based on the study of hermeneutics (Gibbons & Sanderson, 2002). Historically, hermeneutics involved in-depth inquiry of religious and literary texts and has since developed to focus on the study of parts of text in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the 'whole' (Neuman, 2011). Texts, in this sense, are viewed broadly, and whilst these could be in written form (such as books and documents), the term also extends to include conversation and narrative when transcribed (Neuman, 2011). The focus of an interpretivist approach is to uncover the embedded meaning within the text, and to understand the viewpoint it presents (Neuman, 2011). In interpretivist research, the emphasis is on process, rather than simply outcome, and the method is idiographic in that the researcher attempts to investigate a small number of subjects in detail.

The aim of this research was process-orientated rather than product-focussed as this research sought to investigate the practices that educators engage in to assist in the promotion of children's spiritual development. Interpretivist research is centred on action (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000) and can involve detailed observation of participants in their natural setting:

> The interpretive approach is the systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct detailed observation of people in natural settings in order to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds. (Neuman, 2011, p. 102)

Undertaking research within an interpretivist paradigm involves "the belief that facts are not things out in some objective world waiting to be discovered, but, rather, are the social constructions of humans who apprehend the world through interpretive activity" (Ferguson, 1993, p. 36). The role of the researcher within this type of research is to "begin with individuals" (Cohen et al., 2000) and theory arises as a result of the research; it is not presupposed, as was the case for this research.

In selecting interpretivism as the paradigm for this research, "it follows that the…methods include interacting with people in their social contexts and talking with them about their perceptions" (Glesne, 2010, p. 8). In the context of this research investigation, the interpretivist paradigm placed significance on gathering information through social interactions in order to ascertain how participants made sense of their world. The researcher in this study was concerned with gathering information through social interaction with the educators, within their world - Catholic childcare.

3.4.3 Phenomenology.

The interpretivist paradigm places focus on meaning making and process, therefore aligning with a phenomenological perspective. Phenomenology is concerned with 'lived experience' (Van Manen, 2016) and this perspective is interested in

"human experience and how the things that are perceived appear to the person" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 21). Phenomenology is centred on "thinking about what the experience of being human is *like*…and which constitute our lived world" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 11). A phenomenological approach "sees behaviour as determined by the phenomena of experience rather than by external, objective and physically described reality" (Cohen et al., 2000). This particular perspective is based on coming to an understanding, by the researcher, of the experience as interpreted by the participant. Phenomenologists centre their research on investigations that seek to interpret the participants' experiences of their lived world and adopting a phenomenological perspective entails acknowledging the subjective nature of the researcher (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

Phenomenology assumes that this 'lived experience' is shared (Babbie, 2011; Letts, Wilkins, Law, Stewart, Bosch & Westmorland, 2007). Phenomenological research accepts that "there is some commonality to the perceptions that human beings have in how they interpret similar experiences" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003, p. 437) and seeks out these commonalities through a process of engaging with participants. Phenomenology was appropriate to this study, as it sought to explore the lived experiences of educators, within the context of Catholic childcare, in relation to promoting children's spirituality. Furthermore, the aim of this research was to determine commonalities across participants' experiences, and therefore ascertain the shared nature of this experience, so as to address the research questions.

3.4.3.1 Variations within phenomenological approaches.

Edmund Husserl (1970; Husserl & Hill, 2008), regarded as the founder of phenomenology, studied the fundamental concepts of the sciences, such as psychology and physics, and how these appeared to people in their experience of the world (Husserl, 1970; Husserl & Hill, 2008). The work of Husserl (1931) laid the foundations

for phenomenological approaches that exist today, and whilst variations can be found among phenomenological approaches, all are based on the human experience of the world. Husserl's work, which largely occurred in the early 1900s, has been interpreted by more recent researchers who have added their own new insights. Cohen et al., (2000) for example, explained that Husserl's contribution to the field of phenomenology laid in his focus on investigating common sense assumptions with a focus on consciousness. Described as descriptive phenomenology, Husserl's (1931) approach was scientific in nature. Husserl asserted that lived experience could be scientifically probed to reach the true meaning of the participant's reality (Husserl, 1931; Husserl & Hill, 2008). He believed that commonalities between participants' realities provided for a truly scientific approach whereby a united description of the experience could be obtained, as explained in the interpretation provided by Lopez and Willis (2004). A key component of Husserl's (1931; 1970) phenomenology was his belief that all prior knowledge should be renounced, to enable an unbiased account to be gathered. In essence, Husserl's contribution was the focus on the centrality of the subjective experience. Thus this investigation sought to focus on the experience of educators in promoting children's spirituality.

Heidegger (1978) further developed Husserl's (1970) methods. Heidegger, as described by Cohen et al. (2000), adopted a more sociological context to Husserl's approach. Heidegger's (1978) phenomenological approach, rather than descriptive, was interpreted by Laverty (2003) as hermeneutic and interpretative in design. From this perspective, Heidegger (1978; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) believed that not only did experiences have a surface level interpretation, but they also contained a deeper, more hidden meaning. As with the work of Husserl, Heidegger's work has continued to be translated and interpreted since the mid 1900s. Lopez and Willis (2004) described

Heidegger's phenomenology as based on the premise that bias could not be completely eliminated and instead viewed the experience of the interpreter (researcher) as valuable to the meaning making process.

Although various approaches to phenomenology exist, Langdridge (2007) iterates common characteristics across these, summarising them as four key features:

1. A focus on human experience as a topic in its own right;

2. A concern with meaning and the way in which meaning arises in experience;

3. A focus on description and relationships rather than interpretation and causality;

4. Recognition of the role of the researcher in the co-construction of the topic under investigation and built on an understanding of the way in which all experience must be understood in context.   (p. 9)

As articulated by Langdridge (2007), adopting a phenomenological approach, through an interpretivist paradigm, emphasises the importance of the individual, of context and of meaning making, within the research. The researcher sought to gain a deep understanding of the lived experience of the participants in relation to their understanding of spirituality and their practices to promote children's spirituality. As the researcher has personal experience in educational contexts, it was more appropriate to adopt an interpretive style of phenomenology, whereby the role of the researcher was recognised. This process of acknowledging the researcher within the research was an attempt to limit bias and is described by Husserl (1931) as bracketing. The role of bracketing within the investigation is explained in Section 3.4.5 and within both the data collection (Section 3.7) and data analysis (Section 3.8) sections of the chapter.

A more specific theoretical approach to this research was selected that combined the phenomenological perspective with the understanding that such an approach seeks

to "explore the …experiences, ideas and feelings of participants" (Kervin et al., 2006, p. 37). Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was therefore chosen as most suited for providing a theoretical framework for this investigation. IPA is an established phenomenological approach within qualitative inquiry and furthermore, outlines a method for data analysis. IPA therefore provided the theoretical approach to the research and additionally determined the methods of data collection and the processes for data analysis.

3.4.4 Interpretative phenomenological analysis.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as a particular qualitative approach is concerned with both the lived experience of the participant and the role of the researcher. Smith (2004) described IPA as involving "…a double hermeneutic. The participant is trying to make sense of their personal and social world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their personal and social world" (p. 40). IPA is most commonly used within social psychology (Smith, 1996) such as studies that investigate social identity, and life traditions (Eatough, Smith & Shaw, 2008). IPA has been used within the general field of spirituality, such as research into adult spirituality (Joseph, 2014) and spirituality in connection to an outdoor education expedition (Jirásek, Veselský & Poslt, 2017) and as such, there is some precedence for its applicability to this research with early childhood educators. IPA is frequently selected for phenomena that are not easily measureable (Bonner & Friedman, 2011), as is the case for spirituality within the investigation. Obtaining an 'insider perspective' of a particular phenomenon is central to this approach. The 'insider perspective' in the investigation was gathered from the educators themselves, employed in Catholic childcare with 3 to 4-year- olds.

IPA is phenomenological in nature seeking to make sense of participants' experiences. As this study aims to understand the lived experience of educators in

relation to promoting children's spirituality, IPA aligns effectively. Unlike other theoretical perspectives, IPA recognises the important role the researcher plays in the process of the research investigation (Smith, 2004). IPA is described as a "dynamic process with an active role for the researcher" (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 53). Literature on IPA emphasises the concept of 'persons-in-context', the notion that the two cannot be separated and therefore research within this framework involves the social world of the participant (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2008). Likewise, the researcher cannot completely remove himself or herself from the context, or social world of the participant and instead must make attempts to remove bias through the process of bracketing, which is elaborated on further within the chapter. In essence, the researcher is trying to understand and interpret what an experience is like for an individual and this is complicated by the conceptions of the researcher.

IPA research approaches the investigation from the perspective of the participant. Larkin, Eatough and Osborn (2011) explained that IPA "aims to understand the lived experience of a conscious, situated, embodied being-in-the-world, where 'the world' is understood through respondent's involvement in it" (p. 330). From this understanding provided by Larkin et al. (2011), IPA "acknowledges that it is not possible to access an individual's life world directly because there is no clear and unmediated window into that life" (Eatough et al., 2008, p. 1771) and therefore, some sort of interpretative activity is required. In connecting to this study, IPA assisted the researcher in interpreting the experiences of the educators at the childcare centres in relation to their understanding of spirituality and their practices to promote children's spiritual development.

Theoretically, IPA is based on the premise that individuals' experiences are innately connected to both their thinking and their feeling (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

With this assumption, it is possible to observe the connection between IPA and the phenomenological perspective from which it stems. The connection among experience, thinking and feeling is described as a complicated one, as "people struggle to express what they are thinking and feeling…and the researcher has to interpret people's mental and emotional state from what they say" (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 54). IPA is described in the literature as having three characteristic features; it is idiographic, inductive and interrogative (Smith, 2004). Each of these features are outlined below and then illustrated within Table 3.1 in relation to this research.

3.4.4.1 Idiographic.

Smith (2004, p. 41) stated that IPA is "strongly idiographic". For a study to be idiographic, it must focus on the individual, understood as the individual participant or the individual case. IPA is described as idiographic as it requires a detailed analysis of each case or data set before moving on to the next. Fundamentally, IPA is idiographic at two levels: first, it is concerned with particular people in a particular context, and second, it is concerned with the detail through thorough and systematic analysis of the data (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). The process of IPA calls on the researcher to examine themes and to consider each individual case in depth. IPA usually involves a small number of cases to allow for this in-depth analysis to occur (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2008). The term 'idiographic' suggests that the focus is on the individual participant and the individual's experience, as opposed to the study of large generalities (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006).

3.4.4.2 Inductive.

The inductive nature of IPA refers to the conceptualisation of the participant as being an expert of their own experiences (Bonner & Friedman, 2011). As an inductive approach to research, IPA does not presume the experience, thoughts or feelings of participants but rather these emerge from the investigation (Smith, Flowers & Larkin,

2009). In this study, as is common within IPA research, interviews were utilised that followed a semi-structured format. In doing so, the interview provided for an in-depth account of the participant's experience whilst allowing for unanticipated responses and for the researcher to be flexible in questioning the participant. The inductive nature of IPA is also evident in the analysis of the data as themes emerge as a result of the data, rather than presupposing a hypothesis.

3.4.4.3 Interrogative.

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) identified the need for the researcher to look inward and to interrogate the self-first in an attempt to put aside personal assumptions. The interrogative nature of IPA is most evident through a process referred to as bracketing, and this is a distinctive feature of IPA. The process of IPA is also interrogative in that it seeks to investigate the experience as interpreted by the participant, therefore, the researcher uses a more flexible method of data collection that allows for probing of areas of interest as they arise (Smith, 2008).

Table 3.1.

Features of IPA Linked to the Research

Feature of IPA	Description of the Feature	Connection to the Research
Idiographic	# It is concerned with particular people in a particular context # It is concerned with the detail through thorough and systematic analysis of data	The research was concerned with the experiences of the individual educator – their understanding of spirituality and their practices to promote children's spirituality (aged 3-4 years). A small sample size was used, and the researcher met with participants within their context of Catholic childcare.

	# Involves a small number of cases to allow for this in-depth analysis to occur	
Inductive	# The conceptualisation of the participant as being an expert of their own experiences # Does not presume the experience, thoughts or feelings of participants but rather these emerge from the investigation	Semi-structured interviews were used that provided for an in-depth account of the participants' experience whilst allowing for unanticipated responses. The researcher was able to be flexible in questioning the participant. The analysis process provided for themes to emerge from the data rather than presupposing a hypothesis.
Interrogative	# Requires the researcher to look inward and to interrogate the self first in an attempt to put aside personal assumptions (bracketing) # It seeks to investigate the experience as interpreted by the participant, therefore, the researcher uses a more flexible method of data collection	A researcher journal was used to assist with putting aside any assumptions or preconceptions held by the researcher (bracketing). Several methods of data collection were utilised that provide for flexibility (semi-structured interviews, observations of educators' practices and documentary data - educators' planning documents).

3.4.5 Bracketing in IPA.

The process of IPA outlines a method for data collection and later, analysis, which recognises the role of the researcher. A key method for the collection of data within IPA is through semi-structured interviews (Drew, Raymond & Weinberg, 2006). The interview process occurs with individuals and the research involves only a small number of subjects to allow for an in-depth investigation to occur (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2008). IPA overtly acknowledges the role of the interviewer in the interview and through the process of bracketing, as a means of reducing researcher bias.

Bracketing is a key feature of IPA and assists the investigation in being interrogative. The concept of bracketing has its foundations in Husserl's (1970) phenomenological method, previously described. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) contributed to the understanding of bracketing by suggesting that "we need to 'bracket', or put to one side, the taken for granted world in order to concentrate on our perception of that world" (p. 13). This process is also referred to in the literature as 'epoche'. 'Epoche' calls on the researcher to put aside their knowledge of the phenomenon being investigated. In this investigation, the researcher was called to put aside previous experiences in education working with children aged 3 to 4 years. In consciously putting aside the researcher's own knowledge and experience, they are more able to ensure it does not influence the data (Smith, 2008). The process of bracketing is summarised by Ashworth (1999) as a practice "not to the turning away of the world and a concentrated detached consciousness but to a resolve to set aside theories, research propositions, ready-made interpretations, etc, in order to reveal engaged, lived experiences" (p. 708).

In relation to this research, the process of bracketing was employed to overtly acknowledge, and therefore attempt to limit, researcher bias. The researcher has worked in Catholic educational contexts with 3 to 4-year-old children and thus this

process recognised that the researcher may have shared experiences to those of the educators. In undertaking this practice, a researcher journal was utilised prior to and during each stage of data collection. The journal was used to record, for example: impressions of the childcare centres, staff and children; personal views on participants, their practice and their documentation; as well as any momentary thoughts that arose connecting the researcher's experience to the participants, which may have impacted how the researcher 'heard' the experience of the educator.

The process of bracketing is threefold: it involves initially selecting a theoretical perspective to underpin the bracketing process, chosen for this investigation as IPA; then it suggests that the researcher considers any shared experiences, pre-conceived ideas or assumptions in order to set these aside; third, this information that was bracketed is integrated in the sense that it is considered alongside the analysis of data (Gearing, 2004). Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) suggested that bracketing within the interview stage will assist the researcher to ask questions and probe the participant based on attentive listening to what the participant is saying, rather than a preconceived notion or concern held by the interviewer.

IPA was well suited to this investigation as it sought to understand and interpret the lived experience of a small number of educators who shared the experience of promoting the spirituality of children aged 3 to 4 years within Catholic childcare. Smith (2004) stated that if "a researcher is interested in exploring participants' personal and lived experiences…and in pursuing a detailed idiographic case study examination then IPA is a likely candidate" (p. 48). This study addressed the purpose of IPA and aligns with the tenets of this approach; furthermore the role of the researcher within this investigation was overt, and acknowledged through the process of bracketing. IPA was therefore a suitable research approach for this study.

3.5 Participants

The participants in this research included educators working with 3 and 4-year-olds within Catholic childcare in Western Australia. The characteristics of centres required for this investigation were that they catered for the long day care of children aged 3 to 4 years and were governed by the Catholic Education Western Australia [CEWA]. Three centres that met these characteristics existed at the time of this research. All three centres were invited, and agreed, to participate in the investigation. Therefore, three Catholic childcare centres formed the population for this research. As such, centres were selected purposively, meaning that a non-random sample was gathered by the researcher locating "all possible cases of a highly specific and difficult-to-reach population" (Neuman, 2011, p. 267). As a small number of cases were used, this aligned with the features of phenomenological studies, and in particular those that utilise IPA which focuses on a more in-depth analysis of each case (Smith, 2004).

As the focus of the investigation was on the experience of the educator, educators within the three childcare centres were approached to volunteer to participate in the research. Educators were therefore purposively selected to partake in the investigation. The qualifications of educators varied across the centres and within the various rooms within centres. These qualifications ranged from teacher (four-year university teaching degree) to educators holding a Certificate III (6 month traineeship completed through a TAFE/ Vocational Education Training Centre and undertaken whilst working at a childcare centre). To ensure commonality of experience across educators, the most qualified educator for each room, referred to as the lead educator, was selected to form the participant sample. The lead educator was either a teacher educator (holding a four-year university teaching degree) or they were working towards this qualification. In all cases the lead educator held responsibility for the planning, documentation and implementation of the 3 to 4-year-old program.

An overview of each of the three centres, including contextual factors and the number of lead educators within each centre, is outlined in the following sections 3.5.1 through to 3.5.3. More detailed contextual information regarding each of the centres is located in Chapter One.

3.5.1 Centre A.

At Centre A, children are arranged into 1 group of 3-year-olds and 3 groups of 4-year-olds. The 3 and 4-year-old programs are all led by a teacher, referred to as the lead educator, with additional educators assisting in the room. The 3-year-old program is offered for two days per week. The 4-year-old program operates five days per week. In Centre A, four educators formed the participant sample. Three of these were leading a 4-year-old program and one was leading the 3-year-old program.

3.5.2 Centre B.

At Centre B, children are in a free flowing environment that includes children from 2.5 years to 4 years of age. The 3 and 4-year-old Kindergarten programs are embedded within the operational hours of 6.30am and 6pm. In Centre B two educators formed the participant sample, sharing the responsibility for both the 3 and 4-year-old programs.

3.5.3 Centre C.

At Centre C Both the 3-year-old and 4-year-old programs are developed and delivered by a teacher educator, referred to as the lead educator. Before and after this time children either transition to the long day care rooms with different educators, or they are not on site. At Centre C three educators formed the participant sample. One educator was leading the 4-year-old program and two were leading the 3-year-old programs.

As each centre provides a varying number of rooms across the 3 to 4-years age range, and therefore also a varying number of educators, Table 3.2 illustrates the rooms and participants at the time of the investigation.

Table 3.2.

Participant Details

CENTRE	NUMBER OF ROOMS	AGE RANGE OF THE ROOM	NUMBER OF LEAD EDUCATORS
Centre A	4	3yrs x 1, 4 yrs x 3	4
Centre B	2	3yrs x 1, 4 yrs x 1	2
Centre C	2	3yrs x 1, 4 yrs x 1	3

Participants in the research were provided with a pseudonym, such as *Educator 1: Centre B*, to de-identify the data. This process is explicated in the following Section 3.6, along with the research methods and specific procedures followed for data collection.

3.6 Research Methods

The research methods utilised in this study were aligned to the principles of IPA, outlined in Table 3.1. Research methods within IPA should be ones "which invite participants to offer a rich, detailed, first person account of their experiences" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p.56). To ensure rich and detailed data, three research methods were employed:

- Semi-structured interview – with individual lead educators

- Observations of practice – of lead educators within their room, on 2 occasions

- Qualitative content analysis – of documentary data: educators' planning documentation for a two-week period

Figure 3.3 illustrates the research method adopted and data collected, in response to each of the three research questions. Research question one, *what do educators understand by the term 'spirituality'?*, employed the research method of semi-structured interview. Interpreting educators' personal understandings of spirituality required engaging educators in conversation, thus interview was the most appropriate research method. Data collected through semi-structured interview comprised of digital recordings that were subsequently transcribed.

Research question two, *what do educators know about promoting children's spiritual development?,* made use of two research methods. Utilising two research methods provided educators with the opportunity to both articulate and to demonstrate their knowledge. Semi-structured interviews were employed to engage educators in a conversation of their knowledge. Observations were employed to enable the researcher to interpret what educators knew through their daily practice about promoting children's spirituality. Data collected to address research question two consisted of transcribed interview data from the semi-structured interviews and observational records from the observation of educators' practices.

Research question three focused on the practices of the educator by questioning, *what practices are educators implementing, intentionally and incidentally, to promote children's spiritual development?* To comprehensively determine these practices, the research methods of observation and qualitative content analysis were used. Observations were conducted to determine the reality of the educators' practices, as opposed to what educators themselves understood them to be, when responding through the method of interview. Furthermore, observational data made available both the planned practices and incidental practices that arose throughout the day. Observational data were collected in the form of observational records. Qualitative

content analysis was employed as a research method for the collection of documentary data in the form of educators' planning documentation. Qualitative content analysis was the selected research method for the gathering of documentary data due to its text-based nature. The educators' planning documentation provided the educators' planned practices and formed the data set for qualitative content analysis.

The researcher journal is represented in Figure 3.3 as a tool used by the researcher to facilitate bracketing throughout each method of data collection.
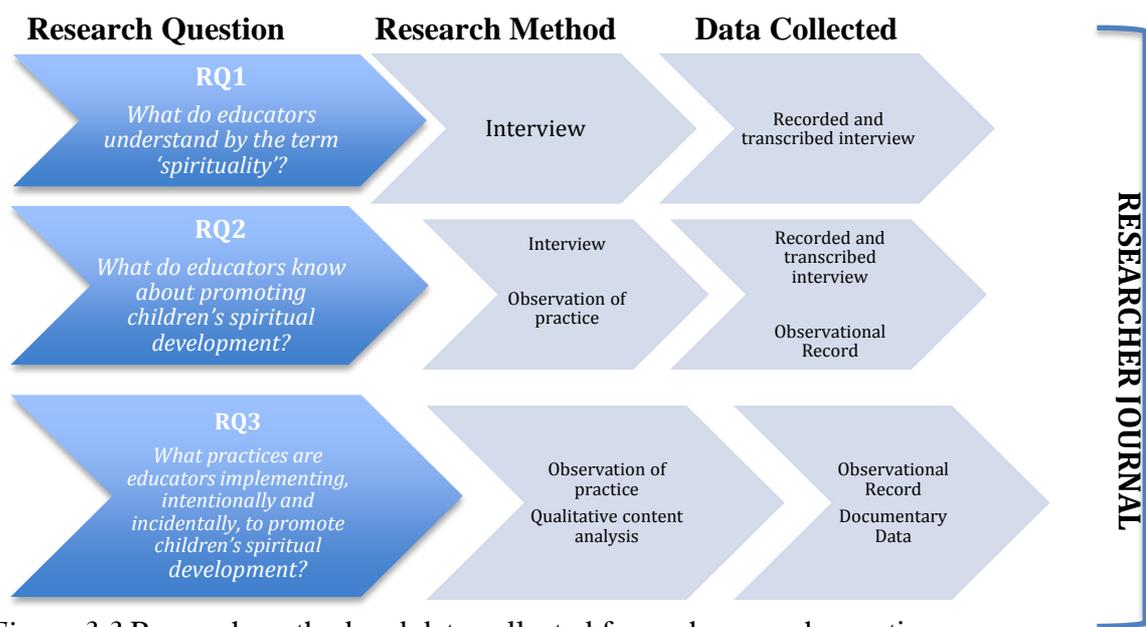

Figure 3.3 Research method and data collected for each research question.

Each of the research methods employed was qualitative in nature and utilised similar data analysis techniques. As qualitative approaches, all three methods are interpretative, naturalistic, situational, reflexive, flexible and focused on validity (Schreier, 2012). The following sections explain and justify the research methods selected for the investigation, in the order of the research question to which they respond (See Figure 3.3).

3.6.1 Semi-structured interview.

The research method of interviewing was used to address research questions one and two. Interviewing is used widely as a technique within qualitative research (Drew et al., 2006). Qualitative approaches explore participants' feelings, their ideas and their experiences (Kervin et al., 2006) so "it follows that the… methods include interacting with people in their social contexts and talking with them about their perceptions" (Glesne, 2010, p. 8). A qualitative interview "is essentially a conversation in which the interviewer establishes a general direction for the conversation and pursues specific topics raised by the respondent" (Babbie, 2011, p. 340). Whilst several forms of interview styles exist, there are seven generalised stages involved when employing qualitative interviews as a research method. These stages are described as:

1. Thematizing – articulating the purpose of the interview

2. Designing – creating the format for the interview. For example a structured or semi-structured style. In this research a semi-structured format was followed

3. Interviewing – undertaking the interviews with participants

4. Transcribing – creating a written text from the digitally recorded interview

5. Analyzing – uncovering the meaning in relation to the purpose of the study

6. Verifying – checking reliability and validity of the data

7. Reporting – disseminating the findings. (Babbie, 2011, p. 343)

Qualitative interviews can take several forms, from structured to un-structured formats. This particular investigation identified semi-structured interviews as the most appropriate format for gathering data from participants on their understanding of

spirituality and practices to promote children's spirituality. Semi-structured interviews involve the researcher having a set of prepared questions to guide the interview. However, flexibility exists in how these questions are phrased and ordered, therefore this type of interview considers the response of the participant (Drew et al., 2006). Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to follow topics as they emerge throughout the interaction and there is more respondent participation (Drew et al., 2006). This semi-structured format was most apt to this research as it provided flexibility, which is a key feature of IPA. Semi-structured interviews are commonly used within IPA research (Smith, 2008). The semi-structured interview, specifically in relation to IPA, is "a dialogue whereby initial questions are modified in the light of the participant's responses and the investigator is able to probe interesting and important areas which arise" (Smith, 2008, p. 57).

The chosen approach to this investigation, IPA, involves investigating how participants make sense of their experiences and the process of IPA "requires a flexible data collection instrument" (Smith, 2008, p. 57). The flexibility enables the interviewer to be guided, rather than dictated, by a set of questions. Smith (2008) suggested the following points be followed for conducting a semi-structured interview within IPA:

- There is an attempt to establish rapport with the respondent.

- The ordering of questions is less important.

- The interviewer is freer to probe interesting areas that arise.

- The interview can follow the respondent's interests or concerns. (p. 58)

Semi-structured interviews within the process of IPA are in-depth, taking usually an hour and therefore providing opportunity for the participant to become engaged with the topic (Smith, 2008). With this style of interview, the aim is to facilitate an

interaction whereby "for the most part, the participant talks, and the interviewer listens" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 57). As stated, a key consideration is that the participant feels at ease, and Smith (2008) suggested that time is taken at the commencement of the interview to ensure the participant feels comfortable with the interviewer.

There are several advantages to implementing a semi-structured interview format. This style of interviewing provides "greater flexibility of coverage...and it tends to produce richer data" (Smith, 2008, p. 59). Following a semi-structured format allows the researcher to adapt to the respondent, and to ensure the meaning behind the response is obtained. Its limitations are found in this same advantage – flexibility in the interview can lead to greater difficulty in the analysis process as interviews can vary considerably (Smith, 2008).

3.6.1.1 Semi-structured interview design.

The interview questions in their entirety are located in Appendix C. The following guidelines for interview format were utilised when constructing the interview schedule:

- Date, time, place, interviewer, interviewee

- Introduction

- Key questions

- Probe questions

- Adequate response time

- A thank you statement. (Creswell, 2009, p. 183)

The interview design adhered to the guidelines recommended by both Smith (2008) and Creswell (2009). Questions were divided into three sections that paralleled

the research questions, with the researcher cognisant that the structure may change due to the flexible nature of semi-structured interview as a research method. The three sections comprised: a focus on the educators' knowledge and experiences; a focus on educators' understandings and practices related to promoting children's spirituality; and a focus on educators' general pedagogical approach to the early years and their training. The first interview question aimed to engage educators in the subject of spirituality and to determine their reference point for spirituality, for example, their own personal experiences or understandings. The second question asked educators to articulate their understanding of the term 'spirituality'. Question three turned attention to children's spirituality, and how educators understood that children expressed their spirituality. Following this, educators were questioned on, generally, how children's spirituality could be nurtured and subsequently, what practices they believed they used in their room to promote children's spirituality. Given the Catholic context of the centres within the study, question six asked educators about their understanding of the relationship between spirituality and religion. Question seven focused on understanding the general pedagogical practices of the educator to engage them in a discussion on their beliefs and philosophy. To conclude, information was gathered from educators on the professional development they had received, if and how this had influenced to their current beliefs and practices and if they had received professional development specifically in the area of spirituality.

To assist in the success of the interview questions, the initially phrased interview questions were informally trialled. This process of testing the interview questions occurred with volunteers who were educators, although these educators were not within the same context as this investigation. As a result of testing the initial interview questions, final interview questions were reconstructed. As an example, interview

question one which had asked educators to recall a spiritual experience, was amended to include the elaboration of something they had witnessed, or read (see Appendix C).

3.6.2 Observation of practice.

Observation, as a research method, assisted in responding to research questions two and three. Observation within qualitative research is "highly flexible and covers a spectrum of activity" (Baillie, 2013, p. 4). Observation is often used to investigate 'what people do and how they do it' and so was well suited to this study whereby the researcher observed the practices implemented by educators to promote children's spiritual development. The use of observation as a research method also aligned with the features of IPA, providing both further depth and flexibility to the study. Cohen et al. (2000) articulated that observations are particularly useful in gathering information on the following:

- the physical setting (environment)

- the human setting (characteristics of individuals being observed)

- the interactional setting (planned, un-planned, verbal, non-verbal)

- the programme setting (resources, pedagogic style, curricula) (p.305)

Observations of practice can be undertaken following a rigorous framework or they can take an open-ended style (Kervin et al., 2006). Observations in this investigation adopted more of an open-ended approach whereby the observation guides "the researcher to a deeper understanding of what is happening as it is embedded within the context in which it naturally occurs" (Kervin et al., 2006, p. 85). In employing the method of observations within a qualitative framework, it is recognised that the researcher "cannot hope to observe everything; nor can you record everything you do observe" (Babbie, 2011, p. 345). The purpose of the observation was to record key circumstances and events and it is recognised that these "observations represent a

sample" (Babbie, 2011, p. 345). The observational template is located in the Appendix E. The template was constructed based on guidelines outlined by Cohen et al. (2000). These guidelines suggested that the observational record include contextual information such as place and persons involved; verbal and non-verbal interactions; a systematic description of the events as they arise; and reflections by the researcher on what is being observed.

The aim of using observation as a research method was to gain "valuable insights in to the life world of the participants" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 80). IPA is a process focused on the level of the individual, and as the observations undertaken as part of this investigation focussed on the practices of the lead educator, each observational record presented data on a specific individual, therefore appropriate to the design of IPA. In this investigation, observations were undertaken to determine both the intentional and incidental practices of the individual educator to promote children's spirituality. The strategy of observation utilised by the researcher was that of 'passive presence'. As the researcher was focussed on recording the educators' practices with the 3 and 4-year-olds, limited interaction was most advantageous to gathering accurate, uninterrupted data.

The purpose of the observation was to provide comprehensive data on current practices relating to the promotion of children's spiritual development. In comparison to the interview data, the observational data would contribute the reality of the practice, and provide opportunities not only for the planned and intentional but for incidental and spontaneous practices to emerge. Kervin et al. (2006) identified a key advantage of observational techniques as their ability to allow the researcher into the world of the participant and to therefore record information as it happens. Consideration, however, must be given to the intrusiveness of the researcher in the context of the observation as

well as the role the researcher plays in interpreting the events observed. The researcher journal, as a key feature of IPA, assisted the researcher in addressing the considerations identified by Kervin et al. (2006). Section 3.7.2.1 explicates the way the researcher journal was utilised to bracket information during the collection of observational data.

To ensure the credibility of the data collected through observation, the following quality indicators suggested by Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach and Richardson (2005) were employed to guide the researcher, as detailed in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3.

Credibility Assurance of Observations Linked to the Research

Credibility Assurance	In Relation to the Study
Appropriate setting	The researcher observed the educators' practices with 3 to 4-year-olds within Catholic childcare centres.
Sufficient time spent in the field	Allowing two days per centre provided in depth and detailed data.
Researcher is accepted in the site	The researcher made an introductory visit prior to undertaking the observations to introduce themselves to the centre staff. Educators volunteered to take part in the research.
Field notes systematically collected	An observational template was developed for use at each observation (Appendix E). A researcher journal, as a feature of IPA, was also utilised.
Sound measures are used to ensure confidentiality	All participants were de-identified and allocated a pseudonym. The research obtained ethics approval from a tertiary institution before commencing data collection (See Section 3.10).

Observational techniques are not commonly employed within an IPA approach to research (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). However, as Cohen et al. (2000) explained, detailed observation of participants in their natural setting is a key feature of interpretivist research. In this study, observations as a form of data collection were selected for their capacity to provide an insight into the shared experiences of educators in relation to their practices that promote children's spiritual development. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) stated that there have been cases where observational techniques have been employed in IPA, but it must be recognised that the analyses of such multifaceted social activities are complex. In this study, the use of observations alongside the other two forms of data collection (interview and documentary data) provided more comprehensive data on educators' practices, both intentional and incidental, to promote children's spirituality.

3.6.3 Qualitative content analysis.

Qualitative content analysis is described as a research method for interpreting text-based data (Pisarik, Rowell & Currie, 2012). Text-based data includes all forms of written communication, such as diaries, newspapers and policies as well as digital forms of communication (Schreier, 2012). Qualitative content analysis is used to quantify phenomena and is recognised in the literature as a research method in its own right (Schreier, 2012), although it is also a form of analysis (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). Qualitative content analysis is both interpretative and reflexive (Adams, 2012); a method best suited to investigations of a multi-faceted nature (Elo & Kyngas, 2008) and therefore well suited for this research alongside the methods of interview and observation, previously explained. Qualitative content analysis was employed in response to research question three.

Qualitative content analysis, as a research method, is utilised for "systematically describing the meaning of qualitative material. It is done by classifying material as

instances of the categories of a coding frame" (Schreier, 2012, p. 1). A coding frame provides a structure for categorising relevant aspects of the document and can be created in one of three ways: based on what the researcher already knows (deductive), by categorising themes as they emerge from the data (inductive) or through a combination of the two (Schreier, 2012). For this investigation, the third structure was selected whereby a coding frame was constructed prior to data analysis (see Section 3.8.3) and amended post-analysis (see Chapter Four, Section 4.4). Creating a coding frame in this way was characterised by determining main categories from the existing literature on spirituality (pre-analysis coding frame) and then allowing for categories to emerge through the analysis process (post-analysis coding frame). Essentially, the purpose of the coding frame was to provide structure and focus to this method of data analysis, explained in Section 3.8.3. An essential component of the coding frame is the construction of category descriptions as these explain the rules that are used to classify the data (Schreier, 2012). Category descriptions provide the following information:

- A name;

- A description of what you mean by that name;

- Examples;

- Decision rules (if needed when categories overlap). (Schreier, 2012, p. 95)

There are several advantages to using qualitative content analysis as a method and these are outlined by the United States General Accountings Office (GAO, 1996) in their paper, Content Analysis: A methodology for structuring and analysing written material. In particular, qualitative content analysis is unobtrusive due to it focus on the written form; it can cope with large volumes of material; is systematic; and can be used alongside other methods of data collection.

In this investigation, the educators' planning documents for a two-week period formed the documentary data for qualitative content analysis, explained in Sections 3.7.3 and 3.8.3. The aim of this research method was to understand the practices of educators that were planned for, explicitly or implicitly, through their documentation, in comparison to data collected through the interview or through the observations of their actual practice.

3.7 Data Gathering Strategies

As three research methods were utilised within this investigation, the researcher gave considerable thought to the sequence in which data would be collected, within each childcare centre. As a means to add depth to the level of questioning in the interview stage, observations of practice occurred as the first method, and simultaneously, documentary data (as a second method) was collected. The interview was the final method employed, sometimes occurring immediately following the final observation or alternatively scheduled as a separate visit to the centre. The timeline for data collection is illustrated in Figure 3.4.

Visit 1	Visit 2	Visit 3	Visit 4
• Introductory meeting with educators • Arrangements made for data gathering days/ times	• Observation of educators' practices • Documentary data collected (if available)	• Observation of educators' practices • Documentary data collected • Semi-structured interview with educators	• Semi-structured interview with educators (if a 4th visit required)

Figure 3.4 Timeline of data collection.

In this investigation the researcher met with each participant prior to any form of data collection. In addition, observations of practice occurred prior to the interview, as illustrated in Figure 3.4. Initial meetings (Visit 1) with educators were informal and

brief. These meetings occurred during the educators' work time, with children present, and it was at this meeting that initial introductions were made and dates and times were arranged for the subsequent collection of observational data and interview data.

The following sections outline the three data gathering strategies in the sequence of interview data, observational data and finally documentary data. This sequence is reflective of the research methods section (see Section 3.6) whereby the research questions have been used to determine the order that data gathering strategies are outlined. As such, although interviews were conducted as the final strategy, these are presented initially as interview data was collected in response to research questions one and two (See Figure 3.3).

3.7.1 Gathering of interview data.

Interview data were gathered in response to research questions one and two; to ascertain data on what educators personally understood by the term 'spirituality' and their knowledge of how to promote children's spiritual development. A key consideration when gathering this form of data is ensuring educators felt at ease for the interview (Smith, 2008). Meeting educators several times prior to the interview (see Figure 3.4) provided some familiarity between the researcher and educator and contributed to educators' feeling at ease. Furthermore, establishing rapport at the commencement of the interview and providing introductions in the interview were kept brief due to these previous meetings.

Interviews in this investigation consisted of a number of prepared questions (see Appendix C). However, as listening is a key component of the interview (Letts et al., 2007), the researcher also made use of probing and clarifying questions where necessary. For example, the first interview question was composed as follows:

1. Can you describe for me an experience of your own, or something you have witnessed, or read, that you consider 'spiritual'?

This question often required some think time for the participant as well as a variety of alterations and probing questions. These included, for example: Can you think of something that you would describe as spiritual? Perhaps a person? Or an event? It could be from your childhood? It could be from a movie? Following an initial response, further probing was often required including statements such as: Can you describe how you felt in that moment? What were some of the aspects/features you associate with that moment being spiritual? What was the context or environment of that experience? The researcher found that interview structure was noticeably varied as frequently educators' responses elaborated into topics of future questions, requiring the researcher to move flexibly between questions, rather than adhering to the set format.

As the focus of the interviewer, within IPA, is on the respondent, it was necessary to digitally record interviews. Recording interviews facilitated the researcher's active listening and ability to adapt future questions based on the participant's contributions. Smith (2008) supported this tool, "if one attempts to write down everything the participant is saying during the interview, one will only capture the gist, missing important nuances. It will also interfere with helping the interview run smoothly and with establishing rapport" (p. 64). Interviews, once digitally recorded by the researcher, were professionally transcribed to form the data for analysis. Digitally recording interviews facilitated maintaining rapport and ensuring the participant felt at ease and was a necessary component of the interview. IPA requires the transcribing process to occur at the semantic level (Smith, 2008) and, as such, the process of transcribing the digital interviews was outsourced to ensure accuracy at the semantic level. This style of transcription includes "all the words spoken including false starts, significant pauses, laughs and other features" (Smith, 2008, p. 65).

3.7.1.1 Researcher journal use during interview data collection.

A researcher journal was utilised during the interview stage of data collection to assist in the process of 'bracketing' (See Section 3.4.5). In engaging in this process of bracketing, the researcher is listening attentively to the words of the participant, and so attempts to bracket or remove their own pre-existing ideas (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). The researcher journal was utilised as a means for the researcher to question personal motives and possible assumptions in an attempt to limit personal bias.

The researcher journal was used most frequently prior to the commencement of the interview and at the conclusion, as opposed to during the interview. Before the interview commenced the researcher took time to note down her own thoughts or assumptions related to the childcare environment, expectations of the participant's responses and personal views. The researcher journal proved to be a useful tool in consciously identifying potential bias. An extract from the researcher journal, taken prior to an interview with Educator 9: Centre A, is provided as an example of the entries that were made to consciously note assumptions or bias by the researcher:

> I have just been re-introduced to the educator by another staff member who has said that the educator had many years experience across all levels of early childhood and is a quality practitioner – one of their best! This information that she is experienced has led me to make a judgement that she is going to have a well-developed philosophy of early years education and possibly be able to articulate this clearly. Also being an older educator, I have greater expectations of her ability to respond to the questions on spirituality, perhaps because I've associated age with greater experiences in life.

During the interview, the journal was used to record any interruptions that arose, or to pose questions that arose from a personal curiosity outside of the scope of the interview. The researcher recognised that in documenting this 'bracketing' process within the journal, the researcher was not unconscious of other sources of bias and

experience but rather could intentionally disengage this from the research investigation (Smith, 2008). During the final stages of analysis the journal information was utilised in a process termed de-bracketing (Bednall, 2006). The process of de-bracketing and the way in which bracketed information influenced the analysis process is explained within Section 3.8.

3.7.2 Gathering observational data.

Observational data were gathered in response to research questions two and three (*What do educators know about promoting children's spiritual development?* and *What practices are educators implementing, intentionally and incidentally, to promote children's spiritual development?*) to determine the correlation between what educators described about spirituality in the interview, and what they actually demonstrated they knew and how they promoted spirituality through their practice. To gather observational data the researcher spent two days at each centre (over a two month period), observing educators at Centre A, B and C, in the rooms catering for children aged 3 to 4 years. The number of educators and the number of rooms varied across each centre and these are outlined within Table 3.2. The researcher observed for the entire day, determined by the hours worked by the educator. In most cases observations occurred between the hours of 8am and 4pm. The purpose of the observational data was to determine the reality of educators' experiences; that is, to discover what actually occurred in the educators' rooms in relation to promoting children's spirituality, compared to data revealed from the interview phase.

Observations taken by the researcher in this investigation were inclusive of all aspects detailed by Cohen et al. (2000) within Section 3.6.2. The researcher recorded observations on the physical context of the childcare centre rooms; details on the educators; the verbal and non-verbal interactions between the educator and the children; and the pedagogical style and curricula being used. Observations were

recorded on an observational template (Appendix E) pre-formatted onto a WORD document to enable the researcher to electronically record observations on a laptop. The researcher found recording observations electronically was a more efficient way to record data quickly. The use of the laptop also allowed data to be easily amended. For example, to record data quickly, abbreviations were frequently used (for example 'E' for educator) and these were able to be corrected post observation.

In taking a 'passive presence' approach to collecting the observational data, the researcher was visible in the room of the childcare centre, however was as unobtrusive as possible. The researcher had little interaction with the educators during the observation (Kervin et al., 2006). When interactions did occur they were of a logistical nature, such as, the researcher requesting to move to a different location to increase visibility of the educator. The researcher moved between the indoor and outdoor environments as required to maintain focus on the educator's practices. At the conclusion of each observation, amendments were made to the observational templates, as required, to ensure readability during the analysis of data. For example, corrections were made to grammar and syntax and abbreviations were amended to their full terms. Observational templates were then provided with a pseudonym, such as *Educator 1: Centre B*, and printed.

3.7.2.1 Researcher journal use during observation data collection.
A researcher journal was utilised during the observational stage of data collection to assist in the process of 'bracketing' (See Section 3.4.5). The journal was used in a similar way to that of the interview stage of data collection. Predominantly, the journal was used prior to, and during the observation, as opposed to post observation. Bracketed information prior to observational data collection largely contained the researcher's assumptions of the educators' practices. The following is an extract from the journal prior to observing Educator 8: Centre A:

OBSERVATION #1: Educator 8

I've just arrived to observe Educator 8 for the day. It's 8.15 am and the children enter the room at 8.30am. I've already realised a challenge inherent in observing another educator's practice. A parent has arrived early to speak with the educator about her child. I am sitting well away from where the parent and educator are speaking but can hear their conversation. The parent is expressing concerns that her child isn't playing with other children. As an educator myself, I have dealt with similar situations and would not be handling this situation the way that the educator is. It is going to be important to continually bracket my own thoughts and opinions throughout the day to ensure that these don't influence the way my observational data is collected. When I analyse the data I can then revisit these comments and check for any influence of researcher bias.

In addition to the bracketed information recorded about the educators, the researcher also noted assumptions and potential bias based on contextual information at each of the centres. The following extract provides an example of bracketed information noted by the researcher prior to the observations at Centre B. The extract is included as a means of illustrating the researcher's consciousness of potential bias:

VISIT 1: INITIAL MEETING AT CENTRE B

The outdoor environment here is amazing. I'm really impressed at the large amount of outdoor space. There are two separate outdoor areas. One is smaller and is more of a natural environment – there's a veggie garden, sand and water play, native plants and pathways made of pebbles and wood steps. The larger outdoor area contains more traditional play equipment (sand-pit, climbing frames) and has space for ball and bike play. After viewing the large amount of outdoor space I'm very curious now as to how much they actually use it and in what ways. I will need to ensure my own views are removed from the data collection and do not influence the analysis phase.

Bracketed information noted during the observations related to the pedagogical style of the educator, the researcher's personal views on the opportunities educators' provided for children, the researcher's personal views on the indoor and outdoor environments and at times, questions for the researcher to follow up on with the educator. For example, the following are a sample of statements taken from the researcher journal: the educator talks over children frequently; the educator rarely praises children and instead reprimands behaviour quickly; and, enquire about whether the budgie in the room is a new addition or if the children are familiar with him. Information that was bracketed during the observational phase of data collection was revisited during the process of analysis, outlined in Section 3.8.

3.7.3 Gathering of documentary data.

The documentary data set for qualitative content analysis comprised of the lead educators' planning documents. Documentary data assisted in responding to research question three (*what practices are educators implementing, intentionally and incidentally, to promote children's spiritual development?*) in this investigation by communicating the practices that educators intentionally planned on the documentation for their room. Documentary data, in the form of planning documents that covered a two-week period, were collected from each of the lead educators of the 3-year-old and 4-year-old childcare centre rooms. It was recognised that educators' planning documents may contain both explicit and implicit reference to promoting children's spiritual development and this method of data collection added depth to the overall investigation by assisting in gaining a complete picture of the educators' practices.

The format of the documentation collected varied considerably. Some educators within a centre planned together on one document for a two-week period, therefore encompassing a large variety of activities, across various rooms and undertaken without restricted time frames. Other documentation was constructed by one educator,

weekly, and followed more structured time-tabled style formats. Table 3.4 presents the number of documents that were collected.

Table 3.4.

Documentary Data for Qualitative Content Analysis

CENTRE	NUMBER OF ROOMS	NUMBER OF LEAD EDUCATORS	NUMBER OF PLANNING DOCUMENTS OVER A TWO-WEEK PERIOD
Centre A	4	4	4
Centre B	2	2	1
Centre C	2	3	3

Prior to undertaking the research, it was recognised by the researcher that participants may attempt to modify their documentation at the point of invitation to participate in the research investigation. To pre-empt this, the primary school principal or centre director, whomever governed the management of the centre, was requested to take copies of the programming documents before the investigation commenced. Once consent was provided by individual participants, the principal or director passed the documentation onto the researcher in its raw form, at the time of the initial observation.

3.7.3.1 Researcher journal use during documentary data collection.

The researcher journal was a specific feature of IPA, used within the data collection and analysis of interview and observational data. The use of a journal to

collect field notes and researcher thoughts is also a feature of qualitative research more generally, to aid reflexivity (Flick, 2014). As such, the researcher journal was also adopted in the data collection and analysis of documentary data. Entries in the researcher journal when collecting and analysing the educators' planning documents were limited. No entries were made at the time of collection as documents were provided during the observational visits and entries at this time focussed on the researchers' assumptions or potential bias in relation to the educators' practice or the childcare environment. The following is an exert taken from the researcher journal, as an example of the bracketing that occurred prior to the analysis phase:

> PRE-ANALYSIS OF DOCUMENTARY DATA
>
> I have collected planning documents from the educators for qualitative content analysis. I recognise at this point that I will need to be mindful of my own bias regarding the way that educators plan. For example, as I have experience planning in early childhood settings, some planning layouts may be more appealing to me, or I may prefer a certain level of detail. In the analysis process, as a step prior to the final categories being determined, I will need to check that findings have not been influenced by my own thoughts and potential bias. In essence, the process of de-bracketing will be pertinent to the analysis.

3.8 Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred in the order of the research question to which the data set responded. All data were collected prior to undertaking any analysis. Interview data were analysed initially in response to research questions one and two; followed by the observational data in response to research questions two and three; and finally the documentary data in response to research question three. Undertaking data analysis in this sequence also afforded the researcher the opportunity to understand the educators' personal understanding of spirituality and the practices they employed before analysing

the observations of their actual practice and finally what they had intentionally planned through their documentation.

Two methods of data analysis were employed in this investigation: Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) and qualitative content analysis. IPA, detailed in Section 3.4.4, provided both the theoretical framework for the investigation and additionally, was the chosen tool for analysis of both the interview data and observational data. Qualitative content analysis, described as both a research method (See Section 3.6.3) and a method for analysis, was utilised for the analysis of the planning documents. The way in which data analysis occurred for each individual research method is explicated in detail below commencing with the interview data and then observational data. The process of qualitative content analysis of the documentary data is then explained. Chapter Four presents the findings from these processes of data analysis.

3.8.1 Interpretative phenomenological analysis of interview data.

Interview transcripts comprised the data set that were analysed using IPA. IPA research is focussed on attempting to understand the "content and complexity" (Smith, 2008, p. 66) of the meanings interpreted by participants, rather than the frequency of these meanings. In this investigation, transcripts were analysed to determine the participants' meanings and interpretations of spiritual development and their practices for promoting children's spiritual development. IPA as a theoretical perspective outlines a particular analytical process. This process of analysis involves a form of coding, whereby topics of significance are identified, termed 'flagging', and these are annotated on the transcript. The researcher analysed the data using the specific framework suggested by Bednall (2006) and which is particular to IPA. Bednall's (2006) stages are explained in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5.

Bednall's Stages of IPA

Stage	Description of the process relating to interview transcripts
Stage One: Iterative reading and 'flagging' items	Interview transcripts are read repeatedly and items 'flagged' as themes.
Stage Two: Establishing topics of significance	Items that were previously flagged are grouped together to form topics of significance, known as codes.
Stage Three: Establishing thematic linkages	Items that were identified previously as significant are re-evaluated and coding of themes becomes more refined. The focus of Stage Three is ensuring bracketing has occurred.
Stage Four: Examining the flagged items for meaning	Transcripts are revisited to check that the major themes have been identified and to determine their meaning. A list of super-ordinate themes is then created.
Stage Five: Reintegration or 'de-bracketing'	Any information previously bracketed is reconsidered (evaluating information collected in the research journal) to see if this could inform the interpretation of the themes.
Stage Six: Fashioning the units of the study	The meaning of themes is explored and any possible connections between themes are investigated. A list of sub-ordinate themes is then created, where appropriate, within the super-ordinate themes.

Bednall's (2006) process is consistent with IPA as it aims to "encourage reflective engagement with the participant's account. Inevitably, the analysis is a joint product of the participant and the analyst" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 80). The process is an iterative one that involves reading the transcript numerous times and annotating these as significant topics or themes emerge.

When all interviews were transcribed, Stage One of Bednall's (2006) IPA was undertaken by the researcher. Initially, the researcher listened to each of the recordings and checked the transcripts for accuracy, making amendments as required. There were some instances where an educator had named specific strategies that were incorrectly

transcribed. For example, Educator 1: Centre B spoke of FMS (Fundamental Movement Skills) in her interview, and this was transcribed as 'inaudible'. The researcher identified this and amended the transcript accordingly. In reviewing the interview recordings along with the transcripts, the researcher was also afforded the advantage of being immersed in the data. During this first reading of transcripts initial flagging of items occurred.

When the researcher was satisfied that the transcripts were an accurate record of the interview, the transcripts were again read. However on this occasion, they were read by interview question, that is, research question one for all participants was read, then question two, and so on, rather than each transcript in its entirety. The decision to analyse the interview data question by question was a means of determining what educators themselves both experienced and understood by the term 'spirituality', and to distinguish this understanding from what they perceived about children's spirituality and the way they nurtured this capacity (see Appendix C: Interview Questions). As the interview followed a semi-structured format that provided flexibility, questions were not always posed in the same sequence (see Section 3.6.1). To assist the analysis process, different colours were used for the analysis of each interview question. Colour categorising the flagging of items aided the researcher in locating responses to the same question across all transcripts. Appendix D provides a sample interview transcript from Educator 1: Centre B, that illustrates both the process of amending a transcript and the initial flagging of items that occurred by interview question.

Establishing topics of significance, Stage Two of the analysis, involved an iterative process whereby transcripts were read and re-read. Items previously flagged were checked, and their presence within other transcripts investigated. Stage Two also ensured that no items were missed during Stage One analysis. This stage consisted of

annotating the transcripts with flagged items, or codes, as they arose and this occurred for each interview question. Table 3.6 provides an example of the initial coding of interview question one, from the transcript of Educator 2: Centre C.

Table 3.6.

Example of Initial Coding of Interview Transcripts

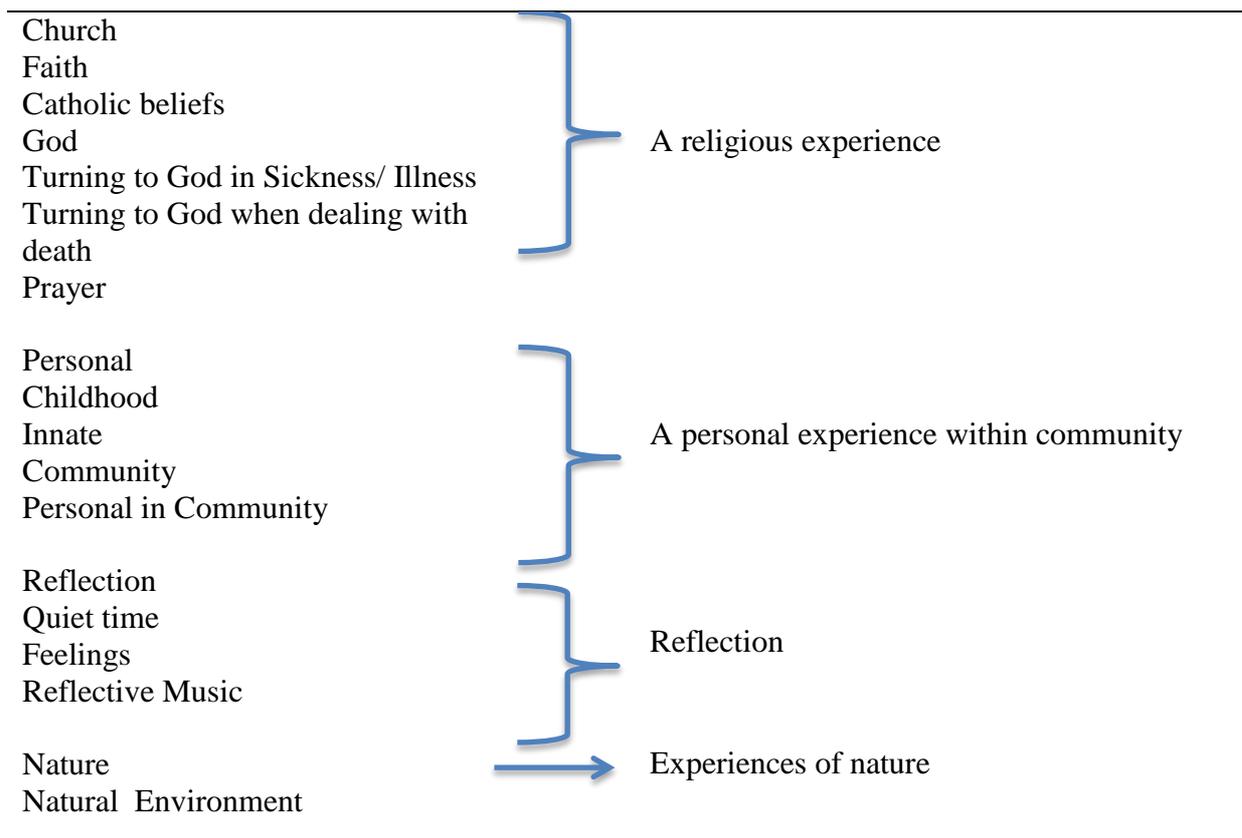| Initial Coding	Transcription
	Interview Question One: I'm wanting you to describe for me what you think spirituality is? And I thought as a start, you might do that by thinking about an experience that you've had that you might say, that was spiritual, and try and describe that.
Church Feeling	I mean I suppose when you're sitting in a church that you sort of get a, not a strange feeling but a feeling that sort of comes over you in that environment… [Researcher probes: So when you say a feeling comes over you, what type of feeling?]
Reflection/Reflective Quiet time	I suppose for me it's more of a reflection. It sort of makes you start thinking about things more or maybe just that you're grounded.

The drawing together of these initial codes occurred within Stage Three. For example, across the transcripts initial flagging of items revealed codes such as 'church'

and 'faith'. During Stage Three of the analysis these terms were grouped into a common theme, 'A religious experience', as this term was broader and inclusive of the range of codes. Following this amalgamation of codes, a list of major themes, referred to as super-ordinate themes within IPA, was created. The construction of super-ordinate themes, as a feature of the fourth stage of analysis involved re-reading transcripts to ensure that all items were flagged and that all codes were identified. Stage Four also required the researcher to consider the meaning of codes developed and to check that these encompassed the initial items flagged in Stage One. Table 3.7 presents an example of the list of codes that initially emerged, across all transcripts, in the analysis of interview question one and how these were amalgamated to create super-ordinate themes. This same process was undertaken for each interview question.

Table 3.7.

Example of Initial Coding of Interview Transcripts

Initial Codes from Question One Analysis	Super-Ordinate Theme
Interview Question One: I'm wanting you to describe for me what you think spirituality is? And I thought as a start, you might do that by thinking about an experience that you've had that you might say, that was spiritual, and try and describe that.	

Church
Faith
Catholic beliefs
God
Turning to God in Sickness/ Illness
Turning to God when dealing with
death
Prayer

> A religious experience

Personal
Childhood
Innate
Community
Personal in Community

> A personal experience within community

Reflection
Quiet time
Feelings
Reflective Music

> Reflection

Nature
Natural Environment

> Experiences of nature

Stage Five of the analysis process, as outlined by Bednall (2006), required the

researcher to engage in the process of de-bracketing. Bracketed information was

recorded in the researcher journal throughout the data collection and data analysis

phases as a means of being reflexive and limiting bias (see Section 3.9.1). At this point

of the analysis the bracketed information was revisited to ascertain any influence it

may have had on the way initial codes and subsequent super-ordinate themes emerged.

When the research journal was revisited in the process of de-bracketing, all comments

(such as the researcher's personal views and assumptions about the centres, educators

and their practice) were reviewed, not only those made regarding the interview

process. The following is an extract taken from the researcher journal prior to

interviewing Educator 6: Centre B:

> Educator 6 is very young and yet to complete her teacher education
>
> qualifications. She also isn't Catholic. I know this because she mentioned it when

she returned the consent form and was concerned that both her unfinished qualification and not being Catholic might be an issue. I'm not sure she is going to have much to tell me compared with her more mature colleagues. She has also already taken the view that my questions on spirituality are connected to being Catholic.

Re-visiting all comments made in the journal was a further assurance that potential bias from the observational data collection phase, for example, had not influenced the analysis of the interview data. The process of de-bracketing is referred to in Chapter Four only when the process provided deeper insight into the findings.

Although the bracketed information clearly illustrated the personal assumptions held by the researcher prior to interview, the researcher found that this information did not influence the analysis process in regards to the coding process and emerging super-ordinate themes. De-bracketing was a necessary stage within the analysis process and did provide some insight into the findings, presented in Chapter Four. For example, as mentioned in Section 3.7.1.1, comments were recorded in the researcher journal prior to the interview with Educator 9: Centre A. These comments related to the assumption that a mature and experienced educator would be able to more clearly articulate their philosophy and pedagogies. The researcher also assumed that the educator, in having more life experiences due to age, would be able to provide in-depth responses to the questions regarding her own spirituality. These assumptions proved to be incorrect. The findings showed that Educator 9's responses to questions on spirituality were frequently limited. At the conclusion of the interview with Educator 9: Centre A, the researcher bracketed the following in the researcher journal:

> It's interesting that she [Educator 9] wasn't able to articulate her practice very well. I wonder if this is because she didn't think that that was relevant to my questions or whether she was unable to make the connection between her

practice and the beliefs that underpin these. I'm also disappointed that she wasn't able to add more depth to her responses on spirituality.

In comparison, the researcher recorded the following post-interview comments after interviewing Educator 6: Centre B, whom the researcher had assumed would have little to respond (see extract in Section 3.8.1.):

> I'm quite surprised by that interview. Educator 6 seemed young and inexperienced and when she mentioned that she wasn't Catholic or finished her studies I thought it would limit her ability to answer some of the questions. Actually Educator 6 responded thoughtfully and was able to really clearly articulate her beliefs about early childhood and her own faith.

The super–ordinate themes, illustrated in Table 3.7, were further explored in Stage Six of the analysis. The super-ordinate themes, and the initial codes from which they emerged, were re-considered to determine if sub-ordinate themes were evident. Sub-ordinate themes, a term used within IPA to describe categories within the super-ordinate themes, were identified in several instances. These sub-ordinate themes were recognised as those initial codes that required further explanation of their own whilst contained within the broader super-ordinate theme. For example, within the super-ordinate theme, 'a religious experience', 'the sub-ordinate theme, 'health issues' emerged as several educators responded to interview question one with an experience that was religious but which involved a family member or friend who had been ill. Sub-ordinate themes were not evident within every super-ordinate theme.

Super-ordinate themes, and where appropriate sub-ordinate themes, were then written up for each of the interview questions into a narrative account. This narrative account is presented in Chapter Four: Findings. The aim of Chapter Four is to evidence the emergent super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes with examples from the data.

3.8.2 Interpretative phenomenological analysis of observational data.

Data obtained through observation were analysed using Bednall's (2006) stages of IPA. Bednall's stages of IPA, outlined in Table 3.5, were applied in a similar way to that of the interview data. Observational data, recorded on a WORD template, were printed and these formed the observational data set. Each observation was provided a pseudonym such as *Educator, 1: Centre B.* Stage One of Bednall's (2006) analysis, flagging of items, occurred by reading each observation in its entirety and annotating the document where items of significance, referred to as codes, emerged. This process occurred for each observational record. As new items arose in subsequent observations, previous observations were re-visited to check for instances of that item. This iterative process of cross-checking as new items emerged is detailed as Stage Two in Table 3.5. A sample of the initial coding of an observation is provided in Table 3.8. In addition, Appendix F provides the recorded observation of Educator 5: Centre A, annotated with initial codes.

Table 3.8.

Sample Extract of Initial Coding of Observational Record

Initial Coding	Observational Record
Belonging/ Identity Wellbeing	Children gather on the mat. Educator asks for the 'bell ringer' for the day. One child is upset – he can't find his name tag. Educator responds to the child; "I know who you are – you're Samuel. I won't forget you". The child looks up

	and smiles at the Educator then joins the rest of the class on the mat.
Friendship Relationships Social skills Belonging	Educator tells the class it's time to sing 'Hello Friend'. The children stand and hold hands. They sing the song "….hello friends, how are you?....I'm happy to see you….say hi to your neighbour"…"We're going to have a great day". Educator moves between children encouraging them to join in, saying "that's it John, sing with us". They clap hands and face a different partner.

Following the process of initial coding, Stage Three involved determining the meaning of the codes, ascertaining any overlap and consequently a refining of codes occurred. Bednall's (2006) Stage Four prescribed the grouping together of codes to form themes. A list of super-ordinate themes was then created at this stage of analysis. The super-ordinate themes emerged from the analysis of all observations. Table 3.9 illustrates an example of grouping initial codes into super-ordinate themes. Super-ordinate theme names were chosen as a broad term representative of the initial codes.

Table 3.9.

Example of Grouping Initial Codes into Super-Ordinate Themes

Initial Coding	Super-ordinate Theme
Belonging	
Music	
Security	
Friendship	Relationships
Relationships	
Social skills	
Conversation	
Identity	
Wellbeing	
Feelings/emotions	Identity
Self-regulation	
Resilience	

During Stage Five, de-bracketing of the information noted in the researcher journal occurred. The researcher journal was a means for the researcher to maintain a high level of self-consciousness. As such, revisiting all journal entries during the final stages of analysis ensured that assumptions, on behalf of the researcher, did not influence the findings. The de-bracketing process afforded the researcher a further opportunity to be reflexive by examining personal assumptions and views, such as those provided in Section 3.7.2.1, and ensuring these did not influence the way that data was coded and that subsequent super-ordinate themes emerged. For example, Section 3.7.2.1 provided an example of bracketing that occurred during the first observational visit at Centre B. During the de-bracketing process the researcher recognised her own personal bias toward the outdoor facilities at this centre and was

able to check that initial codes were not formed from the researcher's assumptions, rather, that these emerged from the data. The de-bracketing process caused the researcher to look analytically at the themes that emerged through the process of data analysis. The overtness of the researcher journal and the de-bracketing process acted as a safeguard against researcher bias. Information that was bracketed did offer some insight into the findings and these are discussed, where appropriate, in Chapter Four.

In the final stage of analysis, Stage Six, Bednall (2006) articulated the need to fashion the units of the study. This fashioning of the units is a comprehensive activity that involves looking at all super-ordinate themes and determining any connections between these. If appropriate, sub-ordinate themes, as topics within the broader super-ordinate themes, are formed. In the case of the observational data, all super-ordinate themes comprised sub-themes. The super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes are presented in Chapter Four: Findings and supported with extracts, as evidence of the emergent themes, from the observational data.

3.8.3 Qualitative content analysis of documentary data.

The final method of analysis employed was qualitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis was selected as an appropriate tool for the analysis of documentary data as it afforded an examination of practices that educators had planned for, both explicitly and implicitly within their planning documentation, for each of the rooms. The process of qualitative content analysis is described as systematic and flexible (Schrier, 2012). This particular form of analysis required the use of a coding frame. In this investigation both inductive and deductive methods were used whereby a coding frame was constructed prior to the analysis commencing, and then a post-analysis coding frame was created to present the findings as new categories emerged through the process of analysis. This form of coding frame is explicated in Section 3.6.3.

Babbie (2011) suggested that an initial consideration for this particular method is deciding on the units of analysis. For this investigation, the units for making descriptive comments were the planning documents over a two-week period, for each educator, across each room, across each centre. Figure 3.5 has been adapted from the work of Elo and Kyngas (2008) to illustrate the steps taken in qualitative content analysis of the educators' planning documentation. The red arrows in Figure 3.5 indicate the particular pathway adopted for analysis of the planning documentation.
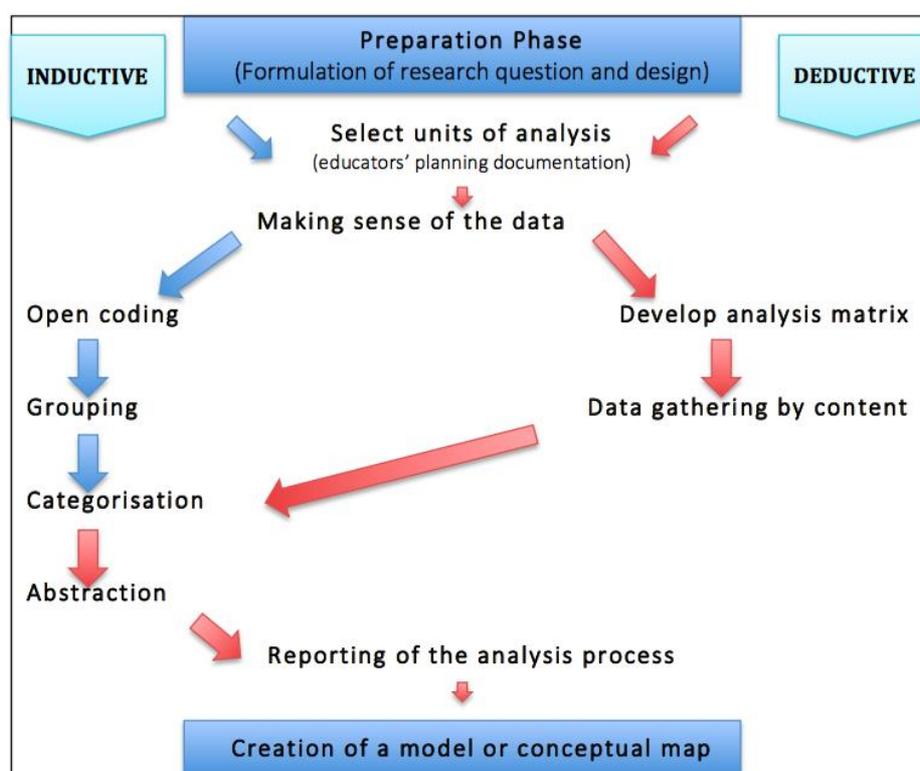

Figure 3.5 Steps in qualitative content analysis adapted from Elo and Kyngas (2008).

The chosen approach for qualitative content analysis involved both deductive and inductive methods. Following the selection of units of analysis, a coding frame was developed. The coding frame was constructed in the step 'develop analysis matrix' in Figure 3.5. Construction of the coding frame occurred through an examination of the literature on spirituality (see Chapter Two). Characteristics of children's spirituality that emerged in the review of literature were illustrated as 'main categories' on the

coding frame. These categories were then used to determine the practice of the

educator in promoting that particular characteristic of spirituality. Main categories

were identified as: relationality (with others, with self, with the environment; with a

transcendent); creativity and imagination; and wonder and awe. The pre-analysis

coding frame is presented in Figure 3.6.
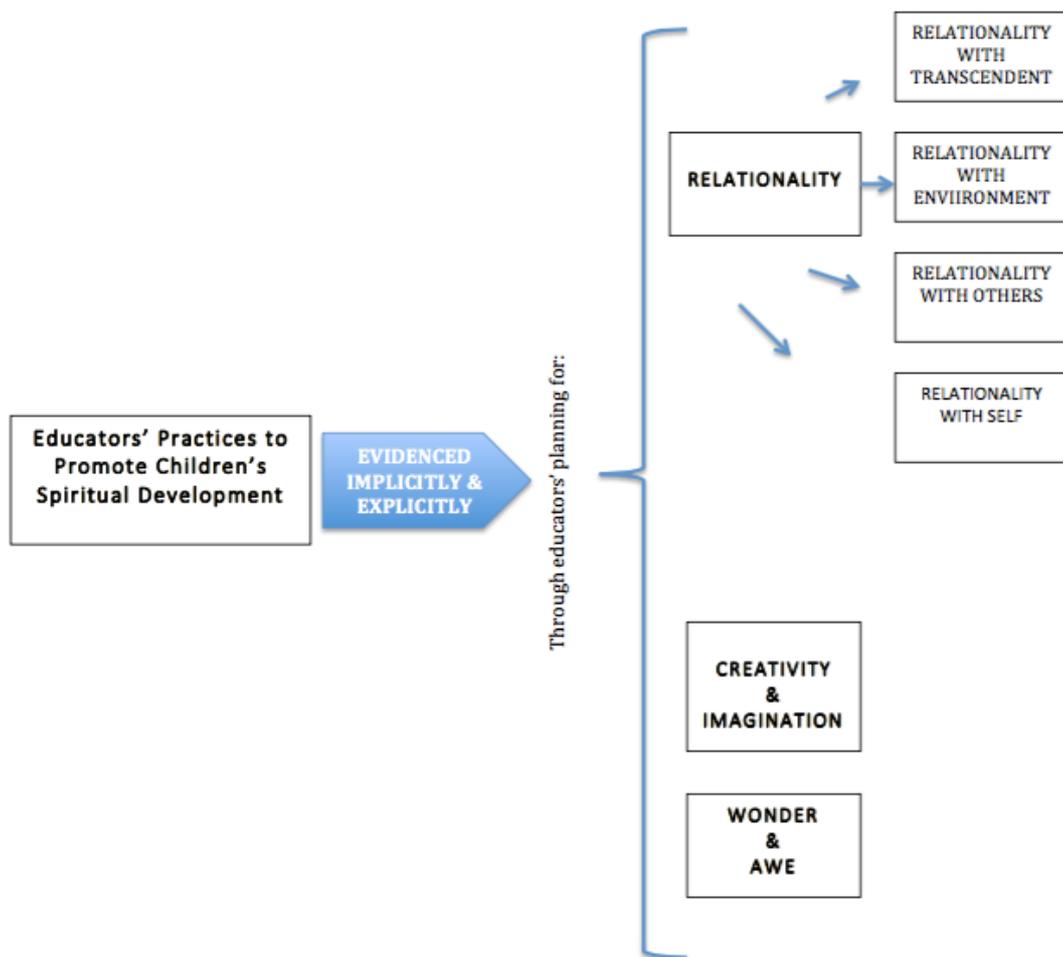
Relationality:

An awareness of the 'self' and the relationship of the 'self' to 'others'. 'Others' in terms of person, environment or a transcendent…..

➢ **Relationality with self:** construction of the self; identity development; development of resilience and wellbeing; the search for meaning in one's life.

➢ **Relationality with others:** relationships; connectedness to others; friendship; creating a sense of belonging; social skills.

➢ **Relationality with a transcendent:** the notion of going beyond the self; God; Jesus; prayer; creator, transcendence; questions about the soul, spirit, heaven; religious education.

➢ **Relationality with the environment:** involvement of children with nature; nature play; natural resources.

Creativity and Imagination: activities that encourage creative expression; the arts; opportunities to engage the imagination; imaginative play, dramatic play
Wonder and Awe: educator modelling of wonder; children expressing wonder and awe; delight.

Figure 3.6. Coding frame: pre-analysis.

Each of the main categories illustrated in the coding frame required a working description, referred to as sub-categories, and these were also constructed from the review of existing literature (Chapter Two). In the process of data analysis, the method of qualitative content analysis allowed for the coding frame main categories and descriptions (sub-categories) to be amended to take into account emerging categories through the analysis process. Any new categories that emerged, and subsequent changes to the coding frame, are outlined in Chapter Four: Findings (Section 4.4). The descriptions relating to the categories within the pre-analysis coding frame are outlined in Figure 3.6. The descriptions illustrate on what basis data within the documents were categorised.

The categories illustrated on the coding frame (Figure 3.6) were used to focus the researcher's analysis of the educators' documentation. The coding frame categories comprised the characteristics of children's spiritual development from the literature, and these were used to determine the practice of the educator in promoting this particular characteristic of spirituality. In the process of analysis, the documentation was read repeatedly to allow practices in the documentation to align to these categories, and to allow new categories to emerge. Documents were annotated where the category emerged and these were listed within a main category on the coding frame. This step is detailed as 'data gathering by content' within Figure 3.5. As the process involved less than 40 categories, categorisation occurred simultaneously, for one document at a time (Schreier, 2012). Categorisation involved ensuring that practices that emerged belonged within the category and were correctly grouped, by checking the category descriptions. An example of this process is provided in Table 3.10. In addition, Appendix H provides a sample planning document from Educator 3: Centre C illustrating the process of categorisation.

Table 3.10.

Example of Categorisation from Qualitative Content Analysis

Sub-category (description of practice)	Category Grouping
Making 'good' choices	
Treating others kindly	
Friendship	Relationality with others
Participation	
Social skills	
Prayer	
'God-talk'	
Wonder questions about God	Relationality with a transcendent
Teaching about Jesus	
Religious stories	

Qualitative content analysis suggests that when a single researcher is categorising materials, as was the case in this investigation, data should be analysed initially, left for a period of up to two weeks, and then re-categorised, to ensure all categories have been established, and this process was adopted (Schreier, 2012). Comparing the categories from first analysis to those of the second is an important component of this method of analysis as it provides a more comprehensive assigning of category meanings. For example, in the initial analysis process 'social skills' was identified within the main category of 'relationality with others'. In the second round of analysis 'social skills' was re-examined and as a result re-named to 'co-operation' to more accurately represent the category description. In addition, 'making good choices' became 'moral development' as a means of including a wider variety of evidence from the documents and representing the category description more effectively.

Following the process of categorisation, abstraction occurred. Abstraction is a means of formulating a description of the categories and is the step prior to reporting the findings (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). During the abstraction phase of data analysis the main categories, both pre-determined and emergent, were compared and contrasted to create a final set of main categories and sub-categories, with examples from the raw data. A post-analysis coding frame was subsequently created, as a model, to present the findings from the qualitative content analysis of documentation, and this is presented in Chapter Four.

3.8.3.1 Researcher Journal use during qualitative content analysis.

Notes made in the researcher journal, although limited, were revisited during the categorisation stage of qualitative content analysis (see Figure 3.5). This process of re-visiting the researcher journal to 'de-bracket' was similar to that undertaken during the analysis of interview and observational data. Whilst de-bracketing was not a specific feature of qualitative content analysis, the process was employed to maintain consistency in the research and analysis phases and to further ensure reflexivity in the analytical process.

During categorisation, planning documents were re-visited to check that emerging codes were a fit to their category description and to ensure no codes were missed in the initial coding for analysis. At this point, the researcher de-bracketed by considering information recorded in the researcher journal. The purpose of reintegrating information from the journal was to acknowledge the influence of the researcher and to therefore limit bias. For example, in the extract provided in Section 3.7.3.1 the researcher had identified potential bias regarding the format and layout of the planning documents in that those documents that were more aesthetically pleasing to the researcher may be investigated more thoroughly than others. To safeguard against this bias influencing the findings, the researcher, at this point, was conscious of

ensuring that all documents were thoroughly investigated for evidence of codes, and consequently that all documents were represented in the findings.

3.9 Integrity of Data Analysis

3.9.1 Reflexivity.

The term *reflexivity* refers to the "explicit evaluation of the self" (Shaw, 2010, p. 234) and is a process that acknowledges the interpretative role of the researcher. Reflexivity was a key characteristic of this research as this study employed qualitative techniques and the specific theoretical perspective of IPA. To be reflexive means to make an effort to understand the participants' personal worlds, as much as possible, by consciously recognising sources of bias. This process comes with the recognition that it is not possible to completely gain an insider perspective. However attempting to be reflexive is a step toward achieving this. The researcher utilised a variety of techniques across the data collection and analysis phases of the research in an attempt to be reflexive. Specifically, the use of the researcher journal to bracket information was central to being reflexive (see Section 3.4.5). Ahern (1999) explained that, "bracketing and reflexivity are fruit from the same tree. One must be reflexive in order to bracket…" (p. 410). In being reflexive, the researcher acknowledges that they are part of the same social world as the participant, and rather than attempt to eliminate this connection, the researcher is transparent in recognising the relationship and instead consciously puts it aside through the use of bracketing. In the investigation for example, the researcher was conscious that working in educational settings with children aged 3 to 4 years of age was a shared experience. Therefore, the awareness of shared experience was consciously examined so that any possible bias or assumptions about the educators, the curricula or the pedagogy were documented in the journal. The first two entries in the researcher journal, documented prior to any data collection, was

an attempt to note any taken for granted assumptions. These first entries were re-visited during the analysis phase in the de-bracketing process:

ENTRY 1: PRIOR TO CHILDCARE VISITS AND DATA COLLECTION

Whilst contemplating that the data collection will finally commence, I've begun to consider what assumptions the educators might make of me. In doing this, I've realised that this is actually a taken for granted assumption of my own. Given I'm going to be asking educators about the topic of spirituality, it is implied that this is a topic of interest to me. This may lead to the assumption that I am spiritual or perhaps for some, that I am religious. I am religious, and so I will need to continue to bracket this to ensure it doesn't bias how I hear and see the educators' practice as well as how I interpret the data. Similarly, as my research is conducted in 3 to 4-year-old settings, my own beliefs about 'quality practice' will need to be consistently bracketed, particularly during the collection of observational data.

ENTRY 2: AFTER FIRST VISIT TO *CENTRE A* TO ARRANGE DATA COLLECTION SCHEDULE

I've just met the educators at Centre A. This was visit #1 to give the educators some background to the range of data collection methods involved in the research and to organise times for these to occur. During this brief meeting I identified further thoughts or assumptions that may influence the data collection process (not previously identified in entry 1). When I was introducing myself as an academic in the area of early childhood it struck me that this may lead to educators becoming nervous of their practice, or perform in a way that they perceive I am looking for. Perhaps similarly in being a researcher, educators may respond in the interview with the answers they perceive I want to hear. Ensuring educators understand the purpose of the research and of my aim to gain a true insight into their experience will be critical.

In this investigation, the researcher was reflexive during the data collection and analysis phases by employing the following techniques:

- The researcher utilised a researcher journal throughout all stages of data collection to annotate any personal bias, experience and feelings about the centres, educators and their practice, to 'bracket' these from the data. This bracketed information was then revisited during the analysis stage;

- During the interviews with educators, the researcher avoided providing their own views of spirituality and instead asked open-ended questions to guide the participant such as: *"What was it about that experience?'* And "Can you explain why you might feel that way?" ;

- During the analysis stage the researcher was reflexive by acknowledging, through bracketing, that they have experience in education settings with 3 and 4-year-olds, therefore attempting to remove themselves from the data to ensure an authentic representation of the participants' perspective emerged;

- During the analysis stage, and as outlined in Bednall's (2006) stages of IPA, de-bracketing occurred to ensure that themes emerging from the data were not influenced by the assumptions of the researcher;

- Reflexive statements have been included in the thesis as a further means of overtly acknowledging the role of the researcher in the research.

3.9.2 Triangulation of data.

Three methods of data collection were employed within this investigation. The use of multiple sets of data is known as data triangulation. Triangulation "is typically a strategy for improving the validity and reliability of research or evaluation of findings" (Golafshani, 2003, p. 603) and strengthens research by combining multiple data collection and analysis methods. Essentially, triangulation " allows for multiple data sources to be compared and contrasted with each other to build a coherent analysis of data gathered within a research project" (Kervin et al., 2006, p. 87). There are several

advantages to multi-method approaches for data collection and Cohen et al. (2000)

stated these include an increase in reliability as the researcher has several means of

obtaining information; this limits the amount of bias. In undertaking multiple methods

of data collection, triangulation provides a layered aspect to the analysis, which is

considered advantageous within qualitative research, and this also increases validity

(Cohen et al., 2000). In this investigation, triangulation occurred through the

researcher's use of three research methods (interview, observations and qualitative

content analysis of planning doucmentation) to investigate educators' practices to

promote children's spirituality. Employing three methods afforded the researcher the

opportunity to investigate educators' practices from three angles.

3.9.3 Trustworthiness and dependability.

Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to the validity of the study.

Trustworthiness, or validity, is concerned with the processes put in place to ensure that

the data collected is accurate and authentic (Neuman, 2011). As the emphasis within

qualitative research is on capturing experiences and perspectives, validity is achieved

through offering "a fair honest, and balanced account of social life from the viewpoint

of the people who live it everyday" (Neuman, 2011, p. 214). Letts et al. (2007)

articulated four components of trustworthiness. These are detailed in Table 3.11 in

relation to this study.

Table 3.11.

Components of Trustworthiness in Relation to this Investigation

Component of Trustworthiness	Trustworthiness in this Investigation
Credibility	To ensure the credibility of the research, a variety of research methods and data collection, as discussed, were used. The ability to compare and contrast data is termed 'data triangulation' and this assists with the reliability of the research (Kervin et al., 2006). Additionally, in the process of coding within the data analysis phase, comparisons of themes were made by the researcher over time which assists reliability (Scherier, 2012). The researcher also made use of a research journal during the observation and interview data collection phase in an attempt to avoid preconceptions and bias influencing the process. In the process of IPA, this is termed bracketing and involves the practice of being reflexive.
Transferability	The context of the research, although specific to three centres and 9 participants, was sufficiently detailed to allow for comparisons to be made with research in other contexts.
Dependability	The procedures that were engaged for data collection and data analysis were documented, therefore providing an audit trail.
Conformability	This was ensured through the use of the researcher journal to attempt to remove bias. Also, as IPA is the chosen approach, bracketing of the researcher's ideas and perceptions occurred throughout the data collection and analysis phase of the research.

Dependability is a further consideration within qualitative research and is often termed as reliability. Reliability, or dependability, is concerned with the quality of the research in regard to how credible the methods of data collection and analysis were; it

is the extent that findings are consistent both over time and across the total population (Golafshani, 2003). Questions to determine dependability, as outlined by Babbie (2011) include:

- How defensible is the research design?

- How well does the evaluation address its original aims and purpose?

- How well was the data collection carried out?

- How well has the detail, depth and complexity of the data been conveyed?

- How clear and coherent is the reporting?

- What evidence is there of attention to ethical issues? (p. 443)

In this investigation, dependability was achieved by following the processes outlined within IPA. A key feature of this research design was the use of a researcher journal. The researcher journal, which included bracketed information, provided an avenue for the researcher to self-reflect at each stage of data collection and analysis, and therefore more able to ensure reliable, transparent findings from the research. Comments on the way bracketed information interacted with the findings are explained alongside the data presented in Chapter Four: Findings.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

The nature of qualitative research is such that it requires the researcher to become a guest within the context of the participant (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). It is therefore necessary that the researcher safeguards the well-being of the participants by ensuring that ethical standards are maintained. All methods of data collection, in this research, required formal consent from participants and the study obtained ethical approval through a tertiary institution, Australian Catholic University. Despite the researcher changing institutions during the investigation, subsequent ethical clearance was not required from the University of Notre Dame as all data collection had ceased

prior to changing institutions. To ensure ethical practice, the following steps were taken:

- Participants were provided with an information sheet and consent form that clearly outlined the purpose and direction of the investigation;

- Only participants who provided consent were involved in the project observed in practice;

- Confidentiality of identity was ensured as all data was de-identified and pseudonyms were provided in all forms of data collection;

- Participants were made aware that they had the right to withdraw at any time of the research;

- The researcher had no prior relationship with any of the participants;

- Research conformed to all ethical requirements outlined in obtaining ethical clearance.

Careful consideration was given to the ethical requirements of the research. Participants were invited to partake in the research; no one was obliged. Participants were advised that they could withdraw from the research at any time, without consequence.

3.10.1 Data storage.

Data collected through the research was, and continues to be, stored in a secure, locked cabinet accessible to the researcher only. Data stored includes a USB with interview recordings, transcribed interviews, programming documents and observational records. As per the requirements of the ethical approval, this data will be stored for a period of five years and then destroyed.

3.11 Reflexive Statement

The reflexive statement is provided at this point to situate the reader in the context of the researcher. In an attempt to overcome the difficulty in illustrating the

reflexive process, Langdridge (2007) suggested including a reflexive statement prior to the presentation of findings. Including a specific reflexive statement is a further endeavour to be overt in recognising any influence the researcher's context may have had on the research findings.

As the researcher, I acknowledge my own position within this investigation. I have worked as a teacher in Catholic early childhood settings, although in schools as opposed to childcare centres, for a period of 9 years. For the last two of those 9 years, I also held a leadership role within the school. This leadership position came with a particular focus on Religious Education and on developing and maintaining the relationship with the Parish. Following my time in Catholic schools, and the completion of post-graduate studies in Religious Education and early childhood, I commenced employment within a tertiary institution teaching pre-service early childhood teachers. I have been in this role for seven years, of which, during the past three, I have been engaged with this research. It is this experience of working with pre-service early childhood teachers, along with my experience in early childhood settings at Catholic schools that ignited my interest to investigate educators' practices to promote children's spiritual development. Given the nature of my own experiences, it was reasonable to expect that I would have assumptions and possible bias when collecting data. As required with IPA, the researcher journal was used to bracket this information at all stages of data collection. Bracketed information was re-visited as a component of the analysis of data.

3.12 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has explained and justified the research design used to investigate educators' current practices for promoting the spiritual development of children aged 3 to 4 years, in the unique context of Catholic childcare. A qualitative approach with a social constructivist theoretical perspective, and with the particular selection of IPA,

was chosen as most suited to this investigation. IPA was selected for its ability to recognise the role of the researcher, through bracketing, when exploring a new phenomenon and for its interpretative nature. The methods identified as most suitable for gathering data in response to the three research questions guiding this investigation were: interviews with educators working with 3 to 4-year-olds; observations of educators' practice; and qualitative content analysis of documentary data in the form of planning documents for a two-week period. As CEWA continues to provide childcare services, the way in which these centres support and enrich the spiritual development of the young children in its care is pertinent - pertinent to the mission of the Catholic school and to the lives of the children attending the service. As King (2013) articulated, "children…need examples and guidance…so that their spiritual awareness and imagination becomes awakened and ignited" (p. 14). The following chapter, Chapter Four, presents the findings from each of the data collection methods. These findings will then be discussed in Chapter Five in relation to the research questions that guided this investigation.