GROUNDED THEORY
A Practical Guide

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About the authors

Melanie Birks completed her PhD titled *Becoming professional by degree: A grounded theory study of nurses in Malaysian Borneo* at Monash University in 2007. Melanie submitted her thesis by full publication, including a number of articles about grounded theory methods. Currently she is employed as a Senior Lecturer at Monash University where she has worked for the past 13 years. Melanie has a passion for both nursing and teaching. Her role in the School of Nursing and Midwifery involves programme coordination and teaching at both undergraduate and post graduate level, most significantly in the first year of the pre-service course and post-registration degree programmes. She has extensive experience in international education, having taught in Hong Kong, Singapore, Papua New Guinea and Malaysia. Her doctoral thesis employed grounded theory methodology to explore changes experienced by registered nurses in Malaysian Borneo as a result of undertaking study at tertiary level. Currently, Melanie continues to undertake research in areas of education and health. Her interest in research is reflected in her publication history, which includes journal articles and book chapters. Most recently, she has coauthored a research text for undergraduate students in the health disciplines, *Using research in healthcare practice* (2010) with Dr Jane Mills. Visit Melanie Birks’ website at www.med.monash.edu.au/nursing/staff/birks.html.

Jane Mills completed her PhD titled *Rural nurses’ experiences of mentoring: A constructivist grounded theory* at Monash University in 2006. Jane also submitted her thesis by full publication, including articles about grounded theory methods. Currently she is employed as a Senior Lecturer/Deputy Head of School in the School of Nursing, Midwifery and Nutrition at James Cook University, Cairns Campus, Australia. Jane has authored over 50 peer-reviewed journal articles in addition to *Community as partner: Theory and practice in nursing Australia/New Zealand edition* (2008) and *Using research in healthcare practice* (2010) with Dr Melanie Birks. To date, the large majority of Jane Mills’ research has been undertaken in the areas of rural and remote nursing, primary health care and general practice nursing. Jane has been the recipient of a number of competitive and contract research grants, including an Australian National Health and Medical Research Council Postdoctoral Primary Health Care Fellowship. Currently she supervises a cohort of postgraduate students, many of whom are using grounded theory. Visit Jane’s website at www.jcu.edu.au/nursing/staff/JCUPRD_052454.html.
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Through our own experiences of graduate study, we realize the challenges of undertaking higher degree research. In our academic careers we have witnessed graduate students struggle with understanding philosophical and methodological concepts and have ourselves experienced frustration and confusion when attempting to negotiate the intellectual hurdles encountered when producing research worthy of the awarding of a doctoral degree. In writing this text, we hope to demystify some of the complexities associated with grounded theory. A balance is necessary between engaging in the internal intellectual dialogue that is required and meeting the practical requirements of undertaking research at graduate level. We hope this book assists the reader in achieving this balance.

We wish to thank our eternally patient families for their support while we worked on producing this text. We also wish to acknowledge our research mentors Professor Karen Francis and Professor Ysanne Chapman. Indeed, Ysanne encouraged us to write this book. Our thanks also go to all those who shared their experience of grounded theory in the ‘Windows into grounded theory’ that feature throughout this text. In particular, we acknowledge the time given to us by Dr Barry Gibson and Professor Tony Bryant in the developmental stages of this book. Finally, we are grateful for the professional guidance of our publisher, Dr Patrick Brindle, and editorial assistance of Mr David Hodge at SAGE Publications.
Grounded theory is one of the most popular approaches to the conduct of research in the social sciences. Often, however, neophyte researchers struggle with the more complex element of grounded theory methods. This book is aimed at both beginning researchers, research students and experienced researchers from a variety of disciplines who are unfamiliar with grounded theory.

Birks and Mills discuss grounded theory principles, strategies and techniques using plain English. The authors have succeeded in reducing the complexity of grounded theory, demystifying this approach to research and making it more accessible and ‘user-friendly’. Throughout the chapters in this text, the reader will:

- Be provided with a broad overview of grounded theory from traditional and contemporary perspectives.
- Examine the evolution of grounded theory including an exploration of various philosophical and methodological influences.
- Grasp fundamental principles and major concepts of grounded theory using examples from a broad range of disciplines.
- Develop skills in the application of essential grounded theory methods for use in their own research.

Melanie Birks and Jane Mills draw from their own teaching, research and supervisory experience to produce a text that addresses the needs of students and researchers wishing to undertake a grounded theory study, or employ grounded theory methods within more diverse research designs.

Melanie Birks is a Senior Lecturer at Monash University with nearly two decades of experience in the academic environment.

Jane Mills is an expert qualitative researcher with extensive experience in the field of primary health care, currently working at James Cook University in Australia.