

Reflections on a native title anthropology field school

Andrew McWilliam and Jodi Neale

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Cover photos by Andrew McWilliam. *Left to right*: preparing bush turkey in Gregory National Park; Yidumduma Bill Harney on Mennggen Country; field school participants with Larry Johns (third from left) on the former Bullita Station.

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Jodi Neale has over 10 years of native title experience working as an anthropologist with Aboriginal groups in Western Australia. She was a staff anthropologist in the Pilbara region for six years during which she managing a regional research section, trained new staff anthropologists and authored a successful connection report. She has since worked as a consultant on a variety of native title and cultural heritage projects. Her Indigenous descent contributes to her particular interest in the quality of native title research and decision-making processes. While currently a PhD candidate at the ANU she continues to work part-time as a consultant anthropologist and is on the board of the Centre for Native Title Anthropology, which she helped establish in 2010.

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Introduction

Anthropologists have a significant role in the functioning of the native title system in Australia, especially, although not exclusively, in undertaking connection research to demonstrate the evidentiary basis of claims. The Australian Government has recognised a lack of sufficiently qualified anthropologists to satisfy the requirements of the native title system in this regard and, to address the shortfall, has provided competitive grant funding for activities related to recruitment and training.

In 2010 the Australian National University (ANU) attracted funding from the Attorney-General's Department's Native Title Anthropologist Grants Program (NTAG Program) to support a native title anthropological field school and complementary on-campus workshop intensive. The field school was an experimental form of training designed to give anthropology graduates and early-career anthropologists a clearer understanding of work in the native title field. It was both novel and effective, primarily because its experiential approach provided multi-sensory and responsive solutions to diverse student needs. It allowed for concepts and theories in native title to be connected to daily realities and the pragmatics of research and interaction with Aboriginal people. This article focuses primarily on the field school component of the program as the novel form of training for native title anthropology but includes a brief discussion of the on-campus intensive.

Training and native title anthropology

The *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth), in s. 223, refers courts to the 'traditional laws' and 'traditional customs' of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and under judicial processes an examination of these laws and customs is essential to achieving determinations of native title. Overseen by the Federal Court, these processes thus require considerable information related to cultural practices and their historical and contemporary expression. This has become the domain of anthropologists, who undertake research and provide professional services by way of data analyses and expert opinions. Typically this targeted research involves field work with Indigenous claimants and, usually, an assessment of diverse secondary and archival materials. Anthropologists may then provide expert opinion in the form of 'connection reports' and relevant supporting materials that capture information for claims progressed by means of negotiation and agreement ('consent determinations') or reports and expert testimony to the court if a claim goes to trial. In fulfilling these roles anthropologists have become fundamental to the progression of native title claims towards determinations, and their services are likely to be in continuing demand over the next five to 10 years (DAE 2014, pp. 28, 57).

During and beyond this period of applied research, the post-determination setting will also increasingly demand anthropological skills and related expertise, whether provided to regional representative organisations,¹ through individual native title corporations² or by anthropologists as private agents (DAE 2014, pp. 4, 57, 74). Martin, Bauman and Neale

1 Including native title representative bodies (NTRBs) or native title service providers (NTSPs).

2 Prescribed bodies corporate (PBCs), registered native title bodies corporate (RNTBCs) or their precursors.

(2011) have highlighted areas of demand and broader applications for anthropological skills beyond claim work, particularly post-determination. As anthropological skills and expertise are recognised as necessary both now and into the future for the smooth running of the native title system, the capacity and experience of anthropologists working in the native title area are thus important to anthropology more broadly.

Martin's survey of the capacity of anthropologists in native title practice (2004, pp. 1, 11, 17) indicates that, while consultants and academic anthropologists who work in native title are older (53 per cent are over 50) and generally have higher degrees (72 per cent) and considerable experience, the majority of those working in native title representative bodies (NTRBs) are younger (58 per cent are under 40) and do not have higher degrees (70 per cent). The survey (Martin 2004, p. 1) noted that:

...older and relatively well-qualified practitioners dominate native title anthropology...while most anthropologists aged under 30 (over 80 percent) were women who did not have higher degrees. The demographic profile of native title practitioners posed a serious threat to anthropological involvement in native title work.

These indications reflect the situation that 'anthropologists are disproportionately an aging cohort with insufficient replacements evident in the next generation' (Martin 2004, p. 17). With more applied anthropological employment opportunities resulting from the establishment of native title legislation, an honours degree has become the common 'essential' qualification for work in many NTRBs. This means that most new employees lack experience in undertaking ethnographic research or, indeed, any relevant field work based training, and too often they have little if any experience interacting with Indigenous people.

In a pattern consistent with training for applied anthropology more broadly, training for native title anthropology has been rather haphazard and largely dependent on where an individual is employed. There has been minimal specialised training until recently (exceptions being the University of Western Australia's Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma in Applied Anthropology (Native Title and Cultural Heritage) courses, which ran from 2005 to 2012). Specialised training for native title practice is preferable due to the breadth and particularity of the required skills and knowledge. Martin categorises these as including 'a good knowledge of relevant ethnographic literature...fieldwork methods, archival and library research skills, report writing skills, an understanding of research ethics and...the ability to interpret legal and historical texts'. He also notes the need for general professional competencies, such as 'good interpersonal skills, managing contracts with consultants, excellent verbal and written skills, [and] good management and team work skills' in managing the complex relationships and politics within NTRBs, as well as capabilities related to general practice in native title, such as 'cross-cultural competence...knowledge of native title heritage and evidence law, and an understanding of processes such as mediation' (2004, pp. 3-4).

McGrath's more recent review of professional networks and training organisations interested in the professionalisation of applied practice since the 1980s indicates that 'the issue of better tertiary training...has been consistently and universally acknowledged as crucial to

improving the capacity of applied anthropologists.’ She found that for ‘the past 30 years Australian anthropologists have recommended better training to prepare anthropologists for applied work’ (2012, p. 72).

Trigger, an experienced practitioner and party to various attempts during the 1980s to put such training in practice, has offered a range of prospective strategies and methodologies to improve professional opportunities, skills development, recruitment and retention of anthropologists in the native title arena (Trigger 2009). The need for training options and the difficulty in providing such training have thus been recognised repeatedly over the years.

The Attorney-General’s Department established the Native Title Anthropologist Grants Program in response to such issues. It recognises that ‘[a]nthropologists are vital to the successful operation of the native title system’ and that ‘[t]he critical shortage of experienced anthropologists currently working in native title can lead to further delays in the resolution of claims and impact on the quality of native title outcomes for all parties.’ Thus its grants program ‘aims to attract a new generation of junior anthropologists to native title work and encourage senior anthropologists to remain within the system’ (AGD 2015).

Attracting anthropologists to the field of native title has been made harder by criticism within the discipline itself (Martin 2004, pp. 10, 33–5). Anthropology’s engagement with native title has generated numerous reflections on how the discipline is practised (for example, Edmunds 1994; Finlayson 2001; Glaskin 2003; Rummery 1995) but it has also attracted extensive critical debate about the disciplinary value of applied anthropology or consultancy versus academic practice (see Trigger 2011 and critical responses). There are, for example, regular anecdotes circulating about ‘incompetent or compromised anthropologists’ operating in the field (mentioned in McGrath 2012, p. 64). While this issue will not be further addressed here, it is worth noting that any programs that encourage high standards of research and careful maintenance of research ethics and integrity are a relevant response to such criticism and may serve to minimise the reputational risks that discourage graduates and experienced anthropologists considering work in native title.

In 2010 the federal Attorney-General’s Department offered an inaugural round of competitive funding to promote appropriate development activities. Since then, various training programs have been funded — from workshops, symposia, university courses and masterclasses to internships, fellowships and student placements (AGD 2015) — which represents a significant increase in specific training opportunities in this area.³ The program’s priorities include training and skills development for junior anthropologists, attracting graduates to the field of work, professional development and enhancing linkages between applied work and the academy. In responding to these objectives, a team from the ANU proposed and won funding for a two-week, modular, field based learning exercise in the Northern Territory, to be complemented by a four-day intensive workshop on campus. It was initially anticipated as a three-year program but funding revisions resulted in only a single iteration in 2011.

3 Grant recipients and funding priorities are outlined at: <http://www.ag.gov.au/legalsystem/nativetitle/pages/nativetitleanthropologistgrantsprogram.aspx>. An evaluation of the program is currently being undertaken by management consultants Nous Group.

This paper provides a critical reflection and evaluation of the inaugural field school. It is offered as a contribution and response to discussions about the recruitment and training of graduates and early career anthropologists within the field of native title. A field school is an approach undertaken more often in cognate disciplines such as archaeology than in the more individuated research situation of the anthropologist. Our approach was innovative because it provided a contextualised and experiential learning environment to address the complex skills and capacities needed for the native title field. As such it was a novel experiment in a form of specialised training for a particular area of applied anthropology.

Following an overview of the field school and its constituent activities, we reflect on the central themes and key elements that made the process both innovative and effective, as well as the challenges this form of training entails. This is followed by a brief overview of the workshop intensive that complemented the field school and the evaluation undertaken, including potential strategies for refinement.

The native title field school

The native title anthropology field school program was envisaged as a combination of interactive training and familiarisation with the context and content of anthropological work in native title at different degrees of complexity. It drew on a range of legal, anthropological and Indigenous expertise to provide a detailed program of phased learning. While it was designed and implemented as an integrated set of activities that combined classroom and field based learning, more weight is given in this review to the field component, as it well demonstrated the benefits of direct engagement with native title claimants and in-context training.

The field school was oriented to graduate or early career anthropologists either working or seeking work in the native title field. It was intended as an introduction to work in this field and a basis for students to critically engage with further, more specific, training. It thus touched on a broad range of relevant knowledge, skills and competencies similar to those outlined by Martin (see page 6). Content ranged from key concepts in native title and an introduction to anthropological models of Aboriginal land tenure and social structures, to the pragmatics, skills and methodological options for undertaking field work, as well as practice in cross-cultural interpersonal interaction. Beyond this, ways of correlating field information with written sources were touched on (and later expanded upon in the workshop intensive), as were the presentation and reporting of research findings. Significantly, the field school provided students the opportunity to experience the fascinations, challenges and discomforts as well as the energy and flexibility field research requires. Key to the program was the enthusiastic involvement of a number of Aboriginal tutors and guides upon whom much of the learning depended.

The themes were grounded in the particularities of the Aboriginal groups and settlement history of the Victoria River District in the Northern Territory, where the school was held, and oriented to native title work demonstrating connection primarily, although not exclusively, through consent determination processes. The aim was to use elements of one (Victoria River District ethnography) to illustrate the other (the anthropological role in responding to national native title requirements).

We focused on areas of contemporary Aboriginal life where such relationships might be productively investigated. These included pastoral histories and biographies, Aboriginal knowledge of local ecologies, seasonality and bush foods, kin terminologies and classificatory systems, narrative traditions, cultural and sacred sites, rock art and ceremonial life. To illustrate the nature and expression of these components of Aboriginal life we sought to devise a number of interactional consultations, interviews, discussions and participatory experiences through which aspects of Aboriginal 'laws and customs' might be demonstrated or expressed and which offered opportunities for the participants to engage directly with their Aboriginal guides.

The field school program

Planning and implementation of the field school and workshop intensive was led by ANU researchers Andrew McWilliam and Daryl Wesley, both with years of field experience working with Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory and combining the skills and distinctive research methodologies of both anthropology and archaeology. Subsequently Jodi Neale was brought into the team to offer a different gender perspective and to add her own comparative experience and knowledge of native title and Aboriginal cultural perspectives from the Pilbara region of Western Australia.

Eleven appropriately qualified participants drawn from around Australia were selected from a list of applicants who responded to national advertisements and announcements through relevant email based lists. Nine were young women, a feature that is consistent with the demographic profile of young native title anthropologists (see Martin 2004). They were enthusiastic participants. Some had backgrounds in work for native title representative bodies (NTRBs) or cultural heritage research and others were recent or near graduates in anthropology from Australian universities seeking to improve their practical experience in the field of Australian native title practice.

The field program ran from 13 to 25 June 2011 and comprised a one-day introductory workshop in Darwin, 11 days in the field and a subsequent debriefing day, also in Darwin. Reading and orientation materials were provided in advance. The workshop relied on generous contributions from a range of specialist practitioners, who gave detailed introductions on key issues in native title such as legal developments and the directions of government policy, the historical context of the Northern Territory, language and linguistic research, and Aboriginal cultural heritage protection programs. This constituted a full day of seminar-style sessions.

Field activities were conducted in the regional town of Katherine and selected locations in the Victoria River District, including Innesvale Station (Menngen), Victoria River, Timber Creek, the former Bullita Station, Limestone Gorge and Big Horse Creek on Auvergne Station. The first two nights in the field were spent at Menngen (old Innesvale), hosted by senior Wardaman lawman Bill Yidumduma Harney. Bill Harney has been teaching tourists, visitors and researchers about his Wardaman country and its mythic significance for decades. Through his storytelling and visits to art and ochre sites he is able to evoke the rich and abiding connections between people and land, including the intrinsic cultural understandings of country as spiritually charged, narrated and inscribed by ancestral agency. He

provided a broad and animated introduction to law and custom, in particular to Aboriginal ontology — the ‘Dreaming’, and the origins and formation of the world and everything in it.

Much of the field school took place in the Timber Creek area, where there are a number of established Aboriginal communities (Myatt, Gilwi, Muruning and Bula). The region reflects a distinctly pastoral history, beginning in the late 1870s, which initiated more than a century of dislocation and forced adaptation to changing circumstances for the Aboriginal population. Despite the violent displacements of the past, the Indigenous residents continue to express strong ties to country, language and ceremonial life, and assert various types of land- and language-associated groupings.

The activities provided diverse opportunities for students to interact with and be instructed by local people and to develop their awareness and understanding of questions relevant to native title research as well as their skills base. In this respect the group undertook a 40-kilometre boat trip down the Victoria River with traditional owners, who offered their perspectives on the areas that we passed, including ancestral mythologies, the significance of various topographic features, named locations and the associations of areas with certain individuals, families and languages. Beyond its substantive content the event provided a valuable example of cultural communication modes and manners among a mixed group of traditional owners, as various individuals provided information at different points and the degrees of comfort in speaking representatively varied between people and in relation to location and topic. The large crocodiles lining the muddy banks and launching themselves into the river were a talking point of mutual interest. The experiences provided insights for further discussion at camp and in the context of subsequent activities.

A site-mapping day was undertaken during which Traditional Owner Laurie Roberts led the group to a variety of places. These included historical camps, hunting grounds, waterholes, places associated with dreaming mythologies, and locations of early settler impact. At one visit to the inscribed boab known as Gregory’s Tree on the banks of the Victoria River, the place where AC Gregory and his exploration party made an extended camp in the 1850s, Laurie Roberts overlaid the recorded historical information with Ngarinyman-Wulayi memories of the events and discussion of the place’s sensitivity as a site of sacred mythology.

Each location provided stimuli for discussion of the history of the area and its Aboriginal connections. The information was invaluablely supplemented by being able to witness interactions among the Aboriginal guides, including those between generations, which revealed modes of knowledge transmission and the normative beliefs that are difficult to teach in the abstract.

In Timber Creek we also engaged in discussions with local retired pastoralists Lloyd and Camille Fogarty, who had begun managing nearby Auvergne Station in the late 1940s. As well as offering excellent insights into the rhythm of station life and the role of Aboriginal people in its operations, this exchange was a source of historical information on aspects of Aboriginal cultural life and practice through pastoralists’ eyes. It showed the alternative types of information that could be used to demonstrate native title, complement Aboriginal

oral histories and assist in the analysis of historical records — for example, the ways in which distinctive landed identities, such as ‘salt water people’ and ‘fresh water people’, were publicly recognised; the different pathways and river crossings people had used to access and leave the station; and the pastoralists’ recognition of cultural limitations to the areas of the property that individuals were willing to work. We also heard recollections of arranged marriages from Mrs Fogarty, who still recalls her distress over a young domestic worker’s ‘abduction’ by her Aboriginal kin. At the same time, gaps in the Fogartys’ knowledge about the beliefs, ceremonies and social lives of people with whom they worked — despite the time spent in intimate working situations, including months at small mustering camps — highlighted the degree to which pastoralists and Aboriginal people maintained social distance. The insights offered in these discussions showed how different kinds of information might be mobilised to generate explanatory frameworks for use in connection reports.

Various camp based lessons were also held at Timber Creek, each lasting one to two hours, with written material, exercises, demonstrations and discussions. Topics covered were intended to develop the students’ understanding of key concepts and provide skills to be practised during the activities of subsequent days. They included:

- native title and requirements of proof
- kinship and section systems (including common elements and variations)
- orthographic styles and variations, including practice in hearing and writing Aboriginal language terms
- gender and anthropological research
- GPS and mapping
- research methodologies.

Although sessions were planned in advance, the subjects of discussion ranged widely and provided students with an opportunity to initiate topics of interest about which they were confused or that derived from their field experiences. Regular reflective discussions sought to draw the experiential learning of the day back to issues relevant to native title research and documentation and to touch on potential modes of analysis.

The final three days were spent camping with a larger group of traditional owners (7–10) in Gregory National Park. Here again the informal direct engagement provided many opportunities for identifying expressions of enduring native title laws and customs. We were introduced to techniques for gathering bush tucker, including sugarbag (wild honey) and wild yam (bush potato). Our Aboriginal hosts also shot and slaughtered a ‘cleanskin’ (unbranded) steer and, later, a bush turkey. Observing the various methods for and approaches to harvesting wild foods, participating in their preparation and consumption, and discussing the pattern of meat distribution among kin and the seasonal aspects of bush tucker provided a multi-layered understanding of the importance of bush foods to contemporary Aboriginal diets and practical knowledge of the land and its resources. It also prompted discussion about options for documenting these types of activities and practices, relevant considerations around notions of continuity and change, and thus the relevance of these field events to the demonstration of native title.

The pastoral history of the area and its impacts on the Aboriginal population were further revealed in a visit to the old Bullita Homestead, which has been retained as a tourist site and small museum within Gregory National Park. Here Larry Johns, a senior Ngarinyman traditional owner for the area, regaled the group with stories of his childhood and youth on Bullita and nearby Humbert River stations. His recollections of pastoral life provided a lively personal accompaniment to the faded historical notes and photos on display as well as vivid insights into Aboriginal experiences of pastoralism. This provided an excellent opportunity to explore ways of analysing the correlations, distinctions and disjunctures between oral history and archival materials, which are sources commonly used in native title research, as well as the perspective previously provided by the Fogartys.

Several sessions were held at camp and their character in this context was quite different, as they involved our Aboriginal guides. Group interviews with Aboriginal participants on kinship relationships, terms and behavioural rules were undertaken and included demonstrations of how to document and map such information. Separate sessions on gendered knowledge, interaction and appropriate behaviour were also held. Supplementary lessons were offered on identifying archaeological cultural sites and artefacts, and there was an introduction to archaeological terminologies. The informality of the camp enabled many incidental discussions and interactions, both individually and collectively, between students and Aboriginal participants on a range of topics, which supplemented student learning and provided practice in cross-cultural interaction and communication.

At the conclusion of the field school the participants gathered in Darwin for a closing session to review and reflect on the experience and lessons learned over the 11 days. They were asked to develop short written summaries of their field notes, focusing on aspects of the experience that illustrated elements of native title and its practice. These would provide data for further case study analysis in a planned follow-up workshop (held from 12 to 15 September 2011).

Discussion

As Martin's report *The capacity of anthropologists in native title* indicates, native title anthropologists require a 'wide range of skills and knowledge in order to be able to undertake their work in a competent and professional manner' (2004, pp. 24–5). As noted previously, he lists a range of relevant competencies in anthropological practice, native title knowledge, and professional skills needed for work in NTRBs. In the field school and workshop intensive we sought to introduce these skill sets to participants as a basis for gaining more specific learning if and when they obtained work in the field. Field based training enabled us to broach a richer set of issues than any class based program would have and provided an appreciation of the relationship between national requirements, state based regimes and local realities.

Anthropology and native title

Our approach in the field school through dialogue and interaction with members of the Aboriginal community was designed to expose and interpret ideas, practices, memories,

mythologies, relationships and other aspects of society and culture in terms of the key elements required for the demonstration of native title. While native title is defined by the Native Title Act, and case law and applications are overseen by the Federal Court, our emphasis was on consent determination processes, reflecting the more likely potential employment tasks of our participants.⁴ Consequently we made use of various state government guidelines on the provision of connection materials for consent determinations. In particular we used *Consent determinations in South Australia: a guide to preparing native title reports*, published by the South Australian Crown Solicitor's Office (2004), but also equivalent documents from Queensland (Native Title and Indigenous Land Services 2003) and Western Australia (Office of Native Title 2006), as they reflected state processes and their variations as well as core legal principles. Key sections of the Native Title Act, such as s. 223, were also used to illustrate core definitions.

From an anthropological perspective we emphasised the central principle, or requirement, that there be an existing Aboriginal community (commonly defined as a group or society) who acknowledge and observe traditional laws and customs in relation to a defined area of land and/or waters and have continued to observe those laws and customs substantially uninterrupted since the acquisition of sovereignty by the crown.⁵

Insights and experiences during the field school were regularly referenced to this core principle to clarify how information gained in field work might be used to respond to the requirements of native title. The role of anthropologists in native title cases was discussed and subsequently explored more extensively during the workshop intensive, as were the general and particular challenges, limits and peculiarities of anthropological ethics in this legally framed context.

Aboriginal engagement

The willing engagement of key members of the local Aboriginal community was critical to the success of the field school. It enabled these key legally defined concepts of native title to be examined and correlated with relevant perspectives and manifestations of the sociocultural life of some Aboriginal people. We found that achieving an appropriate dynamic required a background of familiarity and trust between the Aboriginal participants and the field school team leaders. Most of the 11 Aboriginal participants had years of experience working on land claims and native title hearings, cultural heritage surveys and other government consultations. As such they were quite comfortable with intercultural exchange and the mock research context. They proved to be excellent interlocutors of their cultural knowledge and highly aware of the types of information the students would be seeking. At the end, several key guides said that they had enjoyed the event, indicating

4 Court directions on the provision of expert evidence (in particular Black 2009) and readings about experiences of giving evidence were provided as part of the workshop intensive.

5 This key principle was derived by reference to s. 223 of the Native Title Act and the connection guidelines from South Australia (Crown Solicitor's Office 2004, p. 7). There are a range of legal and other conceptual distinctions that elaborate upon this point, including the refinements of case law since 2004, some of which were considered during the workshop but are not addressed here. In the Northern Territory the year for acquisition of sovereignty is taken to be 1824.

particularly that they appreciated the attentiveness of the students and their interest in learning. It appeared that the Aboriginal participants had found the field school to be a novel and engaging activity in which their knowledge, experience and personal biographies afforded them respect and status as intercultural authorities and guides.

Reflective storytelling by Aboriginal participants was a mode of learning and information exchange that provided unexpected insights and added appreciation to a variety of topics. Larry Johns's recollections at Bullita Station, for example, were fine illustrations of this approach where benefits and learning are derived from situating people and places of significance in narrative proximity. These stories in conjunction with our interview with local pastoralists provided multi-layered perspectives from which students could appreciate both the shared histories and the emotional content of Aboriginal engagement in pastoral work and station life. Participants could reflect on the strong but often ambivalent relationship between white managers and Aboriginal station hands and domestics. They also had the chance to examine complementary sources of information and discuss their interpretation, the weighting of information and how to manage contradictions in connection research. Beyond this, the stories and interviews with local Aboriginal people informed discussions of how a researcher might approach the issues of continuity, change and adaptation in cultural practices to respond to the legal requirements that 'traditional laws and customs' be considered 'substantially uninterrupted' through such historical phases.

Experiential learning

Experiential learning is fundamental to the value of a field school. It has been indicated as a progressive form of pedagogy since being contemplated by John Dewey (1938) and subsequently developed into an educational philosophy that values the privileging of affect and subjectivity (Kolb et al. 2000). There is considerable literature on this pedagogical approach, but we simply reference the idea that there is strength in the embodied and multi-sensory nature of contextualised learning that goes far beyond simple instruction. It enables learning to be individuated and respond to diverse background knowledge and experience and the different learning styles of students. Importantly it encourages students to engage with the information and form their own interpretations and deeper understandings.

The interactions with Aboriginal people and practice in cross-cultural relations provided by both instructional activities and the informal context of the camp enabled students to gain some familiarity with the nature of field work, appropriate forms of behaviour and interactive skills. As noted, observational aspects of field research on topics like manner, behaviour and interactions among people and between people and land could be demonstrated and discussed. Understanding these behavioural elements is essential for effective recording and analysis of research data for native title. For example, field visits with senior Ngaliwurru leader Jerry Jones Manjiari and Ngarinyman-Wulayi man Laurie Roberts provided comparative insights into neighbouring Aboriginal traditions and material manifestations of the 'Dreaming' in the landscape. The manner of their

presentations and the serial nature by which they shared their knowledge provided insights into the systemic elements of culturally defined political authority as well as, arguably, normative pressures related to knowledge representation. Exploration of such topics is greatly assisted by a shared experience as a basis for discussion.

Indeed, the importance of the changing manner of individuals when providing information could be explored through experiences during the field school. For example, a young man spoke at one point about his belief in 'wild men' who, he explained, continue to reside in the bush where they watch people and punish those who behave inappropriately. He related these ideas while leading the students to the location of what he called a 'wild men's camp' following a relaxed discussion about hunting and other weekend activities. Significant in this experience was his progressively guarded tone of voice and manner when sharing this information. Later discussion examined the culturally relative categories of belief or truth, and spirit, land and person, and touched on potential modes of analysis for interpreting normative pressures to behave appropriately in country. Reflecting on styles of expression and interaction in the process of gaining information is very relevant to field research but cannot be equivalently transmitted or exemplified at a distance.

Another important element in the demonstration of continuity for native title is interaction between generations, and we were lucky to witness examples of the generational transmission of knowledge and pedagogical techniques as a boy was instructed by his grandparents about certain sites, the gathering of bush tucker, and appropriate terms and relations in the kinship system. The boy demonstrated his own cultural knowledge to the students and tutors at various times, including undertaking a 'welcoming' ceremony of introduction to land based spirits by wetting the students' heads from a spring, under the guidance of his elders. While we set a full schedule to pursue pre-defined areas of instruction, we found that much richness in the educational experience came from the complement of incidental, unplanned occurrences. Taking advantage of these opportunities highlighted the importance of flexibility and space for the unexpected during a field school experience.

An unanticipated but opportune component was the attendance of a Yolngu woman, Yini, as part of our catering team, together with her partner, Greg.⁶ Yini's lively presence not only gave students an opportunity to practise informal cross-cultural interactions at a one-on-one level (as well as learning the rudiments of a Yolngu dance) but also provided insights into the differences between local beliefs and laws and those of Yini's people in north-east Arnhem Land.

The benefits of contextualised learning were really brought home in an exercise to explore the local kinship system. Kin categories are used to order social relations and indicate behavioural norms. They are a culturally rich and important expression of 'Aboriginal laws and customs' and are commonly documented in native title research to demonstrate, among other things, elements of the normative system. The operational logic of kinship systems

6 Having a catered bush camp was beneficial in various ways, including enabling a more extended and focused bush experience. The flexibility and good humour of our caterers, along with their culinary skills, were very much appreciated and added significantly to the field school experience.

is, however, quite difficult to convey as an abstract set of relationships. While explanations, diagrams and discussions in camp based lessons were useful to illustrate their basic patterns, it was the living demonstrations of associated attitudes, behaviour and modes of expression by local people that were far more poignant and instructive.

These were experienced one evening in an experimental lesson in applied learning. Each of the Ngarinyman subsection terms (8 x 2 including gendered forms) was written on a separate piece of paper and handed to each of the students. All were then asked to figure out their relationships to one another and the Aboriginal guides at camp (for example, sister, brother, father, mother-in-law, spouse and so on) according to the logic of the subsection, or 'skin', system. The exercise involved much hilarity and conferring with one another and our Aboriginal hosts to work out who was who in our small group and the attendant behavioural expectations. The engagement and amusement of Aboriginal participants was plain to see, especially when discussing the social attributes of kin category relationships (such as joking, teasing and avoidance relationships and 'straight' versus inappropriate or 'wrong-way' marriage). The interaction brought alive the normative implications and social realities of the system. Rather than simply studying dry classificatory models, the students gained experience in the ways Aboriginal people practise kinship, its role in shaping social relations, and how the maintenance or transgression of certain rules may be expressed. The practical exercise was an excellent demonstration of the operational dynamics of the subsection classificatory system brought to life by our Aboriginal guides.

Experiential learning enables students to see abstract ideas manifested in action, practise their technical skills and engage actively with ethnography as an embodied form of research. The approach reinforced the understanding that demonstrations by Aboriginal people of their ongoing experiences of and relationships to country, generational transmission and normative systems and beliefs are difficult to teach in the abstract but are made manifest and thus more apparent through practice.

Student initiated topics

An important strength of experiential learning is that being in context allows students to identify, in relation to their direct experience, the topics that are of personal interest or seem confusing. This assisted the trainers to respond to the varied levels of background knowledge and experience among the students by bringing into discussion elements of field research that curricula developers may not anticipate and experienced researchers often presume — or forget they ever learned. Some of our participants had experience with field research while others had hardly left their city abodes. We could not have anticipated all that they needed to know, but the lived complexity of real situations meant that all the students could identify things they wanted to discuss or clarify. Student initiated topics became a very significant part of the field school.

A prime example was the inevitable slippage of the schedule, which required flexible re-arrangement of events and exercises. This was anticipated by the field tutors as a normal part of field research, but the consternation of many students took us by surprise. The

experience initiated new discussions about the realities of field work, the need for patience and flexibility, the management of expectations, and the importance of temperament and manner to the successful realisation of field research goals. Beyond this, it provided learning and insights into Aboriginal life worlds.

The degree of detail needed in field notes was another unexpected, student-initiated extension of a subject. Discussion included what metadata to include, the balance between observational notes and quotations for use in connection documents, and whether or not to include various types of incidental information. This also exposed the diverse techniques habitually utilised by the tutors and showed the varied ways in which this core research task could be undertaken. It thus helped to expose key considerations relevant to the creation of these crucial documents. Such considerations are particularly significant in the context of native title, where most field notes may be legally 'discoverable' by, or accessible to, respondent parties through the Federal Court if a claim goes to litigation. An individual's field notes in NTRBs are also likely to be used internally by other researchers over time, and thus transparency of information and analysis is highly important. This level of detail is rarely considered in the design of training for anthropologists.

Discussion, demonstration and experimentation

A key value of the field school was that it complemented regular lecture sessions to provide multiple modes of training that shifted from instruction and demonstration to practice and experimentation and then to discussion and clarification. The training provided a set of practical skills — from note-taking, mapping and interview techniques to cross-cultural communication, fieldwork logistics and an introduction to the analysis of various sources — that may be transferred to real time native title applied research. Although such diverse modes had been intended in the program's development, the extent to which they enhanced the learning experience went beyond our expectations, as a broad range of topics were covered and in more detail than the program design had anticipated. In large part this was due to the warm and generous interactions between student participants and local Aboriginal people.

While the interaction with and learning from local Aboriginal people was central to the point of the field school activity, a second key objective was more methodological. The field school provided a dynamic setting for demonstrating and practising a range of research techniques and approaches through interviews, discussions, site visits, bush camps and the river trip. Some of these techniques related to spatial and cultural mapping. Field exercises included reading map coordinates, using GPS units and converting between the two, and archaeological identification of occupation sites and material culture. A broader set of training sought to focus on the important research skills required of native title anthropologists — namely question and interview techniques and other styles of social enquiry, along with note taking and the underlying need to identify relevant information that might be brought to bear on the analysis and interpretation of data.

Evening campsite discussions were opportunities to reflect on observational aspects of research, drawing out elements of behaviour and interaction that students and tutors

had noted during the day. The discussions also considered how insights might be relevant, followed up in further research and/or incorporated into subsequent data analysis. In a 10-day field program there are obvious limits to what can be achieved in this respect, but the diverse range of Aboriginal interactions and field locations we were able to cover allowed for many issues to be discussed and their significance linked to the legally defined requirements for the recognition of native title.

Team based and flexible

The team based approach was a key design feature of the training. It presented a diversity of views from the tutors that could be considered and debated by the participants. Such debates reflected both the issues and challenges relevant to different areas of Australia and the healthy diversity of views among anthropologists themselves over methods, interpretive approaches and the presentation of analyses. They showed the variety of methodological options available to researchers and the creative elements of anthropological analyses. Positive feedback from the participants demonstrated that these efforts to illustrate method had revealed some of the ambiguities, complexities and creative challenges of native title research to articulate the evidentiary basis of claims.

One of the challenges for a field school of this type is to build flexibility and options into the activity program, because in all anthropological field situations variation to pre-planned arrangements is inevitable. This in turn requires good communication and understanding of objectives between the field school coordinators and the participating Aboriginal trainers, for which well-established relationships are a prerequisite. One effective way to manage unexpected change is to develop a number of conceptual modules (of two- to three-hour activities) that can be implemented in a variety of contexts or with a variety of participants and rearranged as required. Flexibility is a strength of the field program because while constituting a valuable lesson in itself it also allows for unforeseen new topics to be integrated into the program and used as learning examples.

On-campus workshop intensive

The native title field school was followed by a four-day workshop intensive held in collaboration with the ANU Centre for Native Title Anthropology in Canberra from 12 to 15 September 2011. The workshop offered complementary theoretical and conceptual training for the participants on key aspects of native title legislation and practice. It was designed around a series of presentations by specialist practitioners on different aspects of the native title field with support and moderation by the program coordinators. A summary of the workshop program is provided as an annex to this paper. The intention was to combine a broad grounding in key concepts of Aboriginal connections and rights to country with an introduction to native title law and the practice of anthropology in translating between Indigenous and legal forms of knowledge.

Toni Bauman of AIATSIS drew on personal experience to lead a focused discussion of real experiences in research for land rights and native title claims in the Timber Creek area.

Other presentations in what was an information rich program of learning included:

- a session on research ethics
- presentations on native title governance and the role of applied anthropology
- a visit to the AIATSIS Library, Family History and Native Title units
- a training session hosted by Paul Brugman of ANU on GPS and GIS mapping techniques and practice.

As a complementary, class based follow-up to the field school, the workshop intensive was true to its name and, in our view, left all participants with a deeper sense of the rich career opportunities and challenges of native title anthropology.

Course evaluation

At the conclusion of the program a number of targeted evaluations were made to assess what students had learned and the relative effectiveness of the different elements of the course. There was direct feedback through group discussion as well as more confidential responses to survey questions and several independently commissioned reviews of the organisation and impact of the program overall.⁷

The participants were enthusiastic and critical reviewers, offering a range of insightful and considered responses, the majority of which were highly positive and pointed to the value of contextualised learning and direct engagement with Aboriginal people. Criticism was directed mainly at the sheer volume of information that flowed from the experience and the challenge of linking native title concepts and objectives to the experiences arising from interactive participation with Aboriginal traditional owners. The latter concern could possibly be mitigated by expanding the structured learning modules in the field. However, in other respects it is precisely the 'information rich' nature of Aboriginal cultural worlds that provides the interpretive and corroborative grounds for native title claims and attachments. Introducing the participants to this complexity is appropriately an integral part of the exercise. It was intended as an introductory course that provided key concepts, a broad understanding of the field and a base from which students could critically engage with further, more specific, training.

There is clearly scope for further refinement, and the field school model could be developed in a variety of ways. The information overload indicated in some of the student feedback is a concern, and we believe that consolidating what students had learned from the field school prior to the workshop intensive would have significantly reduced the problem. While the class based intensive involved some such consolidation, the chance to focus on the theoretical elements and contexts of native title work was also valuable and a helpful complementary element of the process. Ways to address this could include:

- more strategic introductory programs
- a focus on a more limited range of topics

⁷ See, for example, Susiteno 2011.

- some form of certification or award that would require students to complete independent assessable tasks
- an additional workshop period dealing solely with data and issues from the field school
- limiting the broader contextual and theoretical discussions during the intensive to allow more time for consolidation
- limiting participants to those with prior native title experience.

Each of these options has its limitations; for example, it would be unfortunate not to provide a broad theoretical discussion of the nature, issues and challenges of work in native title if the program is to be considered an introduction to work in the native title area, or to limit the program to people with native title experience if part of its value is to encourage and assist graduates into the field. Any option would also have an impact on the workload of both students and tutors. The challenge is to balance the need to demonstrate the quotidian lived nature of Aboriginal attachment to land and country while linking interpretive elements to the legally defined requirements of native title, and through the same process providing appropriate training and information for employment in the native title arena.

Conclusion

The native title field school and workshop intensive provided a rounded experience for participants in the critical conceptual and practical knowledge in the field of native title anthropology. In this paper we have focused principally on the field school as the program's more innovative component. The program's most original and, we believe, effective elements were those built into the design — the power and flexibility of experiential learning; the diverse training techniques, including demonstration, discussion and experimentation; and the engaged Aboriginal involvement in the design of activities — and others discovered during the process, including space in the program for student initiated topics and the unstructured interaction between students and Aboriginal guides.

The complementary elements of pre-planned lessons and the experiential nature of the field school offered many benefits relevant to training for native title anthropological work. Fundamental to this was the opportunity for students to interact with Aboriginal people and to absorb and reflect on Aboriginal concepts and sensibilities that go to the very heart of anthropological interests in native title. Incidental to the aims of the field school, the experience also appeared to be an interesting and constructive one for the Aboriginal participants, a number of whom told us how much they had enjoyed it and said they would be willing to engage in further rounds of interactive learning. Beyond this, the lessons of the field school included integrated instruction in the cultural context and key tenets of field research; concrete and abstract field work skills, such as mapping and the use of GPS devices; note-taking, and observational and interpretational skills; and cross-cultural communication and the realities of field work logistics. The school offered a multi-sensory educational experience with opportunities for students to initiate topics derived from their field experiences. It also instigated debates among the instructors on the methodological options available to researchers and the creative elements of anthropological analyses.

Essential throughout was the close engagement with willing and welcoming Aboriginal advisers and hosts.

The evaluation by students demonstrated that the approach and material presented during the activities was effective and met the overall objectives of the program design. This finding was backed up by an independent formal evaluation of the activity (Susiteno 2011, p. 11). Though the field school was undertaken in one region of the Northern Territory, it was appreciated equally by participants working in very different cultural areas for its relevance to their own experience within Aboriginal Australia. We see no reason to privilege any region, and much could be gained by promoting similar styles of field based, interactive learning in different regions of Australia, both for the diversity and comparative value that could be elaborated. A key ingredient in this scenario would be that the anthropological field school guides and mentors have a close and trusting relationship with local native title groups.

Field school activities do require significant funding, and the present activity benefited from the support of the Attorney-General's NTAG Program. We believe there is a strong justification for further initiatives of this type as part of a coordinated program of training and development of near and recent graduate anthropologists interested in pursuing careers in the native title area. The practical skills developed through the field school methodologies have applications not only in native title connection research but also in the emerging fields of post-native title practice. Such a change in focus would of course require different activities to be undertaken, but we think the context and mode of training were the key strengths of this experiment and that they are apposite to the broader field of native title.

There is sufficient ongoing need for capable anthropologists in native title work to justify the provision of specific training opportunities such as have been seen since the advent of the NTAG Program, and on the same basis. The recent Deloitte review of native title organisations (DAE 2013) found that not only is it unlikely there will be less native title work undertaken by these organisations for the next five to 10 years but additional valuable areas of anthropological work are opening up in the post-native title field. A field school (or other field based training) is a very rich form of instruction that provides excellent introductory training to the field of native title research and could be redesigned for alternative purposes.

Increasingly the work of anthropologists is moving beyond the more narrowly defined role of preparing connection and expert reports and informing legal argument. As well as ongoing site mapping, oral history recording, genealogical research and so forth undertaken at the behest of native title holders, there is also research related to common law holders under the NTA and the challenges of governance, leadership and management of prescribed bodies corporate (PBCs), registered native title bodies corporate (RNTBCs) and Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA) committees. Anthropologists are also involved in heritage protection and support for third-party agreement making, such as with resource or infrastructure companies. The post-native title field provides new arenas for

anthropological practice, and we see a broadening scope for structured, field based training in aspects of applied native title anthropology.

Finally, we note that the principal purpose of professional training models such as the native title field school and the intensive workshop is to enhance relevant skills for younger practitioners to participate more effectively and confidently in the increasingly diverse field of native title anthropology. For a number of our field school participants this has translated into direct employment opportunities with Aboriginal land councils and native title organisations. In our collaborative work with the ANU based Centre for Native Title Anthropology, as well as through various other native title training programs now available, there is also scope to reinforce linkages between the academy and the applied field in a variety of productive ways.⁸

8 See initiatives developed under the NTAG Program.

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Annex: Native Title Workshop Intensive Program, 12–15 September 2011

Monday 12/9	Tuesday 13/9	Wednesday 14/9	Thursday 15/9
Session 1 9.00–10.30 am Key Concepts in Native Title: Society Past and Present Dr Pam McGrath (CNTA-ANU)	Session 1 9.00–10.30 am Governance in the Native Title Arena Dr David Martin (Anthropos)	Session 1 9.00–10.30 am VRD Reflections on Native Title Connections Jodi Neale (CNTA-ANU) and Dr Andrew McWilliam (ANU)	Session 1 9.00–10.30 am Resource Mapping and Cultural Landscapes Daryl Wesley (ANU)
Morning Tea	Morning Tea	Morning Tea	Morning Tea
Session 2 11.00 am – 12.30 pm Kinds of Rights in Country Prof. Nic Peterson (CNTA-ANU)	Session 2 11.00 am – 12.30 pm Land Claims and Native Title in the Timber Creek Area Toni Bauman (AIATSIS)	Session 2 11.00 am – 12.30 pm VRD Reflections on Native Title Connections (cont.) Jodi Neale (CNTA-ANU) and Dr Andrew McWilliam (ANU)	Session 2 11.00 am – 12.30 pm Visit to AIATSIS Library, Family History Unit and Native Title Unit Toni Bauman (AIATSIS)
Lunch Film: Eddie Mabo	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
Session 3 2.00–3.00 pm Ethics and Anthropology in the Native Title Era Dr Bill Kruse (CNTA-ANU)	Session 3 2.00–3.00 pm Native Title Law for Anthropologists John Southalan (YMAC)	Session 3 2.00–3.30 pm GPS, GIS and Mapping Training Mr Paul Brugman (ANU)	Session 3 2.00–3.30 pm Anthropology and the Resolution of Native Title Claims Prof. David Trigger (UQ)
Afternoon Tea	Afternoon Tea	Afternoon Tea	Afternoon Tea
Session 4 4.00–5.30 pm The Role of Anthropology in the Post-Native Title World Dr Pam McGrath (CNTA)	Session 4 4.00–5.30 pm Native Title Law for Anthropologists (cont.) John Southalan (YMAC)	Session 4 3.00–5.30 pm GPS, GIS and Mapping Training (cont.) Paul Brugman (ANU)	Session 4 4.00–5.30 pm Debrief and closing discussions Jodi Neale and Dr Andrew McWilliam (ANU)
		Workshop Dinner	

Anthropologists play a significant role in the native title system in Australia, especially in undertaking connection research to demonstrate the evidentiary basis of claims. Recognising the lack of sufficiently qualified anthropologists working in this area, the Australian Government in 2010 introduced the Native Title Anthropologist Grants Program to attract junior anthropologists to native title work and encourage senior anthropologists to remain in the system.

This paper describes a native title anthropology field school, held in the Victoria River District of the Northern Territory, that was funded through the grants program. Through dialogue and interaction with the Aboriginal community, the organisers aimed to expose and interpret ideas, practices, memories, mythologies, relationships and other aspects of society and culture in the terms required for the demonstration of native title. The field school was both novel and successful and points the way for future training initiatives in native title anthropology.

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