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Reflections on the Pedagogy of Archaeological Field Schools within Indigenous Community Archaeology Programmes in Australia

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In this paper we investigate the pedagogy of archaeological field schools. Specifically, we explore the combination of tertiary level field schools and Indigenous community (or community-based) archaeology. Using a detailed case study of a rock art field school in Arnhem Land, Australia, we explore the processes and outcomes of combining archaeological field training with the ideas and methods of community archaeology. We discuss the relationship and unique challenges faced by such community archaeology field schools, particularly that of balancing the priorities of competing stakeholders. Our discussion illustrates the complexities of training students to work in an environment where cultural belief systems are still strongly linked to sites and landscapes. While the challenges are numerous, the outcomes, particularly for students, provide an unparalleled educational experience, one that cannot be obtained in any other learning format.

KEYWORDS rock art, teaching, field school, Australia, Indigenous, Arnhem Land, community, pedagogy

Introduction

Walker & Saitta (2002: 199) once made the apt point that, ‘although field schools form a central educational experience for many students, little has yet been written on the pedagogy of archaeological field schools’. Indeed, when they made this statement little had been written on the ideas and assumptions underlying archaeological field training at all. Most seemed content to view such training as the simple transfer of knowledge and skills. More recently, however, there has been a movement towards academic engagement with these activities (see, for example, Barkin, 2015; Baxter, 2016; Connell, 2012; Mytum, 2011; Perry, 2004). As Hamilakis (2004: 288) argues, such experiences are a ‘socially crucial and politically contested field of cultural production’ with ongoing and wide-ranging effects on the theory and practice of the discipline of archaeology as a whole.

In this paper we focus on the combination of two important elements of present-day archaeology — tertiary level field schools and Indigenous community archaeology. What happens when you combine archaeological field training with Indigenous community archaeology ideas and methods? While the concept of community archaeology is widely discussed in the international literature (see, for example, Atalay, 2012; Faulkner, 2000; Nassaney & Levine, 2009; Simpson & Williams, 2008; Tully, 2007), the relationship and unique challenges faced by Indigenous community archaeology *field schools* has had less attention. There are obvious exceptions, including Atalay (2008), Atalay, et al. (2016), Boytner (2014), Cipolla & Quinn (2016), Cosgrove, et al. (2013), and the work presented in Silliman (2008a). The work of Atalay, in particular, has inspired many of our own recent reflections on community archaeology and field training in the Australian context. We draw upon these theoretical ideas relating to community archaeology and the ‘decolonization’ of the discipline to contextualize the practical aspects of running an archaeological field school in remote Australian Aboriginal communities.

This paper uses a case study of a rock art field school in Arnhem Land, Australia, to explore the practicalities of incorporating a tertiary field school into Indigenous community archaeology programmes. We present a brief history of the field school, including a discussion of how it came into existence, an overview of the evolving teaching framework, and the theoretical underpinnings of the training. The outcomes and challenges are then explored with a particular focus on balancing competing stakeholder priorities and the human responses to these intensive periods of learning from the point of view of the students, Indigenous community members, and staff.

What do we mean by community archaeology?

It is important to contextualize what we mean by community archaeology in this instance. A general goal of community archaeology is to ‘replace the traditional colonial model of archaeological practice with a socially and politically self-conscious mode of research, aiming ultimately to incorporate different cultural perspectives in the interpretation of the past’ (Moser, et al., 2002: 221). Succinctly put, it seeks to diversify the voices interpreting the past (Tully, 2007: 155).

In its most general terms, community archaeology can be any project that involves working with people from outside the field of archaeology (Byrne, 2012: 27). Furthermore, Byrne (2012: 27) suggests three key categories for community archaeology projects:

- (1) projects set up and run by community groups themselves,
- (2) institution-led projects designed to engage communities in the consumption, production, and dissemination of the past, and
- (3) research-led projects which seek to involve communities from outside of the discipline.

The field schools discussed in this paper fall within the second category; however, there are important regional differences in the way community archaeology is understood and applied that impact upon these definitions and categories for many countries.

Marshall (2002: 212) argues that, while community archaeology is practised around the world, it is more ‘explicitly articulated’ as a set of practices in Australia and New Zealand with considerable agreement in these areas as to the nature of community archaeology. In these regions, community involvement, Indigenous knowledge and understanding, and the integration of these concepts are regularly (and increasingly) incorporated into academic research projects. This is the context for our own use of the term community archaeology. This is in contrast to the prevailing notion of community archaeology as any archaeology project with a public programme element (e.g. Shai & Uziel, 2016). Community archaeology in the United Kingdom and North America, for example, has become a widespread label applied to projects which involve or incorporate any community involvement, but are not necessarily driven by the community or aimed at integrating other stakeholder understandings into the interpretation.

Community archaeology in Australia

Community archaeology in Australia is said to be more explicitly articulated than in other areas (Marshall, 2002: 212). Indeed, in the experience of the authors it is more common than not for archaeological projects that involve Indigenous heritage to incorporate aspects of community archaeology. This, however, is more a statement of shifting ethics in archaeological research than a desire to align with community archaeology as a kind of sub-discipline or what Smith & Wobst (2005) and others refer to as the decolonizing of archaeology (see also Jackson & Smith, 2005; Smith & Waterton, 2009).

A number of researchers who are Indigenous/First Nation themselves, including Atalay (2008; 2012), Smith (1999), Watkins (2000), and Wilson (2007), have long called for more consultative and engaged research with Indigenous communities. As Wilson (2007: 321–22) points out, the relationship between Australian archaeologists and Indigenous peoples and communities has shifted from one of ‘informants’ to ‘collaborative partners’, and more recently ‘researchers’ in their own right. This more collaborative archaeology considers the socio-political factors impacting upon Indigenous communities and acknowledges historical and

contemporary struggles (McNiven & Russell, 2005). The level to which archaeologists engage with this movement varies enormously — from researchers continuing to ignore Indigenous rights to their heritage while making token efforts at consultation to genuine long-term collaborations with communities.

Greer, et al. (2002) further outlines the nature of the most common such engagements in Australia as consultative archaeology (reactive) versus community archaeology (interactive), the first being a process whereby the ‘archaeologist sets the research agenda and the community has the opportunity to react to this’ (Greer, et al., 2002: 267). While the community archaeology (interactive) approach incorporates the needs of present-day communities into the development of research questions, methodologies, and practices (Greer, et al., 2002: 268; see also Greer, 2014 for a reflection on the development of community-based archaeology in Australia, and Smith & Waterton, 2009 for a critical review of the use of the term community in archaeological and heritage areas).

Thus, the notion of long-term commitment to particular Indigenous communities is central to our understanding of community archaeology in Australia. We would argue that long-term ongoing collaboration with communities and individuals is an important element — as it is necessary to develop the trust and understandings for truly collaborative projects (see, for example, Colley, 2012; Field, et al., 2000: 44; Greer, et al., 2002: 268; Greer, 2014; McNiven & Russell, 2005; Smith & Wobst, 2005; Wilson, 2007).

Community archaeology field schools

If the aim of Indigenous archaeology is to work collaboratively with communities towards a decolonization of the discipline of archaeology [...] it is logical that future courses and curricula developed for undergraduate and graduate training will continue to address the issues of collaborative methodologies, incorporation of alternative (Indigenous and other) concepts of research and teaching about the past, and development of research designs that address community concerns. (Atalay, 2008: 138–39)

Most community archaeology programmes are based on research with very few incorporating teaching as the main focus, and fewer still providing archaeologists with tertiary-level training to work with Indigenous communities. Therefore, the complexity of developing Indigenous community archaeology field schools for university archaeology students is worthy of discussion and analysis.

Field schools are unlike other archaeological excavations in that one must try to balance what are often competing priorities among the stakeholders listed above, and all in the context of an educational experience. (Chilton, 2009: 148)

As Chilton points out, meeting the needs of a variety of stakeholders makes for a challenging experience. The rock art field school that forms the focus of this study encapsulates our community archaeology or collaborative Indigenous archaeology approach to archaeological research in Arnhem Land. It incorporates the idea that Indigenous communities have the right to engage with archaeological research

projects at all levels and that multiple ‘voices’ should be encouraged in archaeological research. As Silliman (2008b: 4) argues, ‘[...] these incorporations should also be fundamental elements of archaeological field schools that focus on Indigenous pasts, for in these complex intersections of teaching and research lies real potential to change the discipline’. With this context and background in mind, we now turn to our case study.

The field school story

History and aims

In Australia, it is common for universities to expect a minimum number of fieldwork hours for students to graduate from an archaeology degree. In many cases they achieve this by combining a series of specialist field schools often lasting for around two weeks each. During 2004, Professor Claire Smith was considering introducing a new field school as part of undergraduate training at Flinders University in South Australia. She approached May and Marshall (née Johnson) and suggested collaborating to run a field school in Arnhem Land. Smith had been working in the Indigenous community of Barunga, Northern Territory, since 1990 and May was working on her PhD thesis based in the Indigenous community of Gunbalanya, Northern Territory (May, 2006). Both had strong ongoing relationships with these communities and were dedicated to community participation in research and training. The original idea was to expose archaeology students to community-based fieldwork, as a number of researchers in the discipline felt that archaeologists were graduating without sufficient experience working with Australian Indigenous communities. Rock art was one of the key areas of focus due to our own research interests and the desires of both of the communities of Barunga and Gunbalanya with whom we work.

In 2004 the field school ‘Ethnoarchaeology in Aboriginal Australia’ ran for thirteen days with twenty students. The students were split into two groups, with each group spending half their time at Barunga and half their time at Gunbalanya (see Figure 1). This gave them the opportunity to experience working in two different Aboriginal communities and with researchers whose methods varied in a number of ways.

The first community — Barunga — is located about 80 kilometres south-east of the township of Katherine in the Northern Territory of Australia (see Smith, 2004). It has a population of around 250 people. It is located on the southern outskirts of Jawoyn Country, and the homelands of many members of the population are from surrounding areas, especially Ngalkpon lands, near Bulman in central Arnhem Land. The lingua franca is Kriol, an Aboriginal language that developed as part of colonial encounters. The second community — Gunbalanya — is also known as Oenpelli, and is located in western Arnhem Land. It has a fluctuating population of between 700 and 1000 people. The traditional Aboriginal owners of this area are the Mengerridje-speaking people. However, as the community was once an Anglican Mission, there has been considerable movement of people into the area from other parts of Arnhem Land and today the majority speak Kunwinjku (May, 2006).

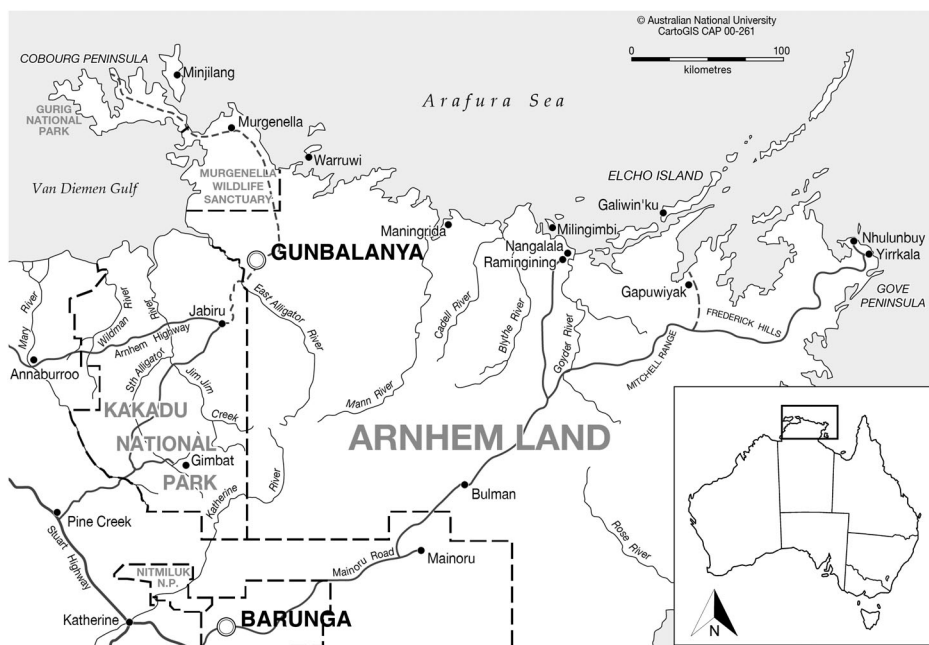


FIGURE 1 Location of Barunga and Gunbalanya (Oenpelli), Northern Territory, Australia. Map: Meg Walker

The ethnoarchaeology field school – Barunga

The aims of the original ethnoarchaeology field school developed by Smith were to:

- help students develop the practical and personal skills necessary to conduct field research with Aboriginal peoples;
- give students an awareness of the ethical dimensions of ethnoarchaeology;
- give students practical experience in working with Aboriginal communities;
- give students an understanding of Aboriginal relationships to the land, and;
- help students develop recording skills used in Aboriginal fieldwork, such as recording sites, rock art, and lithic assemblages, as well as creating field maps and site plans.

Cultural sensitivity and ethics were at the forefront of this field-based topic. This was reflected in the written themes (1) art and landscape, (2) Aboriginal people in their environments, and (3) the sophistication of Aboriginal social systems. An important part of the shaping of this field school is that students are taught by both university academics and local Aboriginal community members, who are paid at rates that are equivalent to teachers at a university. While Elders take the lead in welcoming students to the community and teaching about culture and the ethics of working with the community, middle-aged community members teach skills such as making a didgeridoo (from selecting the tree to the final painting), basket-making, and collecting bush foods (Figure 2). Key teachers over the years have been Peter Manaburu, Lilly Willika, Phyllis Wioynjorroc, Jimmy Wesan, Glen Wesan, Victor Hood, Guy Rankin, Trevor Atkinson, Melva Brinjin, Sybil Ranch, Margaret Katherine, Nell



FIGURE 2 Natalie Martin collecting Australian bush honey, known as ‘sugar bag’.

Brown, Ester Bulumbarra, Jeannie Tiati, and Joslyn McCartney. Young people often will accompany the group, especially when visiting rock art sites or swimming holes. In this way, the field school is able to help facilitate young Aboriginal community members strengthening their understanding of their heritage.

As this was an accredited undergraduate topic, particular guidelines had to be met in relation to assessment. In 2004 this included the submission of a field diary/journal and a community report, as well as the successful completion of a field-based test and teamwork component. The community report encouraged students to engage with a particular research interest while they were in the communities, reporting back to those they collaborated with in an appropriate way. The subject of the report could include anything from rock art analysis, to the production of didgeridoos, to the role of art in the township. These reports were intended to be a product for the local communities and students were expected to write and report in an appropriate manner for that audience (e.g. May & Johnson, 2004; 2006; 2007; 2008). In line with the aims of the field school, the publications that have arisen from this work primarily centred on the ethics of working with Aboriginal people living in remote communities (e.g. Jackson & Smith, 2005; Smith & Jackson, 2006; 2012; Smith, 2007), conveying the sophistication of Aboriginal cultural and social systems (Smith & Burke, 2007) or in response to political pressures placed on the community by the Australian government (e.g. Ralph & Smith, 2014; Smith, 2015).

Due to the distance between the two communities (Barunga and Gunbalanya) and the amount of time needed to train students in a minimum standard of archaeological site recording, the decision was made to develop a rock art-specific topic based solely at Gunbalanya. This was the starting point for the two-week ‘Rock Art Field School’ (commencing 2006), while Smith continued with the field school separately in Barunga. Many students would then enrol in both of these field schools, meaning they were able to spend a month working in two different remote communities and learning a broader range of skills.

The rock art field school — Gunbalanya

A new series of aims were developed for the rock art field school, these being:

- to make participants aware of the range of skills necessary to accurately and appropriately record rock art in Australia;
- to provide an opportunity for participants to learn about Aboriginal cultures from Aboriginal people;
- to make participants aware of the unique theoretical and political issues surrounding rock art research in Australia;
- to help participants develop the practical and personal skills necessary to conduct field research with Aboriginal people in remote Australia;
- to make participants aware of the complexity of Aboriginal cultures and the role of rock art in these cultural systems;
- to create a space for participants to explore the ethics of fieldwork in Aboriginal communities, and;
- to give participants an awareness of appropriate ways to disseminate their research findings for remote Aboriginal communities.

While some of these aims were linked to the earlier field school (i.e. community-based research and ethics), others show a shift towards rock art focused fieldwork and the advanced recording skills necessary to undertake rock art projects. To appreciate the richness and complexity of western Arnhem Land rock art, the field school incorporated seminars, informal interaction with Gunbalanya community members, and was directed towards in-depth practical recording skills necessary for rock art research within an archaeological framework (see [Figure 3](#)). Students were further encouraged to view rock art within its wider cultural and physical context. Holding the field school in one community for an extended period of time allowed students to develop stronger relationships with local community members and to tackle more complex community projects.



FIGURE 3 Rock art field school staff and students with Injalak Hill in the background, 2007.

Much of the field school was based around the important cultural site of Injalak Hill. Injalak Hill is an important sandstone residual in the landscape of western Arnhem Land and has been used for generations as an important place to shelter. It is surrounded by an environment replete with subsistence resources (including freshwater, saltwater and terrestrial animal species, bush tucker and bush medicine plants), as well as elements necessary to maintain cultural and ceremonial practices. Injalak Hill is the site of the creation ancestor *Wurrkabal* (freshwater Long-tom, *Strongylura krefftii*), with this story and many others represented in stone and as rock paintings in the many shelters covering this landscape.

Local community members were key educators for this field school, helping to introduce cultural protocols to the students, discussions about cultural knowledge, and working one-on-one with students to help with their community projects (see [Figure 4](#)). Specifically, these contributors included W. Nawirridj, G. Djorlom, Gabriel Maralngurra, H. Nawirridj, W. Djorlom, Thompson Nganjmirra, Joey Nganjmirra, Graham Badari, Heather Nawirridj, Isaiah (Benson) Nagurrurrba, C. Nganjmirra and C. Nawirridj.¹ The local community art centre (Injalak Arts) played a major role in supporting this field school. Students would often base their community projects on work they undertook at the art centre and would commonly draw upon the expertise of art centre staff (see [Murphy, 2005](#)).

Visiting researchers

One constant in the feedback from students after each field school was the benefit of visiting researchers joining the group. The visiting researcher arrangement developed inadvertently in 2004 when Smith invited a number of her archaeological



FIGURE 4 Heather Nawirridj teaching field school student Kellie Jansen how to collect pandanus for weaving baskets, 2006.

colleagues to attend, and has since involved many participants from around the world.² In 2006, Professor Ines Domingo Sanz from the University of Valencia, Spain, attended as a visiting researcher and has continued her association with the field school as a Director with May and Marshall. The majority of visiting researchers are expected to contribute to the community reports by conducting small-scale research projects during their stay. This has resulted in a significant body of work relating to art in Gunbalanya, as well as an exhibition at the Museum of Prehistory in Valencia, Spain, and several published journal articles (i.e. Domingo Sanz, 2011; Domingo Sanz & May, 2008; Domingo Sanz, et al., 2008a,b; Domingo Sanz, et al., 2016; May & Domingo Sanz, 2010).

Methods

Our approach to teaching this field school was to embrace flexibility and spontaneity — for example, if local women invited students to join them collecting pandanus (for basket-making) one day, we would simply shift our planned activities to another day. More than training mere external observers, we aimed for the students to have the opportunity to engage with the community and experiment with Indigenous cultural practices through mutual interaction and information exchange. Although this may appear to create a loss of control, in practice students learnt about other socio-cultural practices, which may or may not be directly related to rock art production and ongoing cultural connection with the art, but which provide an understanding of the society and the current context of this art.

Even though we follow a ‘western’ timetable for students to complete their work, we aim to raise student awareness of the differences between the ‘western’ concept of time and that of local Indigenous people, as part of their induction into a different culture. Our structure is generally:

- (1) 07.30–14.00: Working on Injalak Hill with local community members learning about the origins, the history, and role of rock art, as well as rock art recording, analysis, and conservation techniques.
- (2) 14.00–19.00: Student time to work independently with local community members.
- (3) After 19.00: Evening discussions and time to work on assignments. During the afternoon staff would work with students individually to assist them with research for their community reports. This took place all around Gunbalanya — from the school, to the art centre, to the homes of community members.

Research

Originally, the rock art field school was not intended to directly feed into an existing research programme but instead to assist with the documentation of sites. Over the years the Injalak Rock Art Recording Project (IRARP) evolved to incorporate student recordings made during the field school and staff reports on specific aspects of the rock art. The overarching objectives of IRARP are to document, analyse, conserve, manage, and interpret rock art from Injalak Hill in western Arnhem Land. Injalak became the focus of this research because of community concerns relating to the impact of tourism on the site and because of the density and diversity of its rock art.

IRARP explores how rock art can inform us about changes in human behaviour and human adaptations to changing environments over long periods of time in this region. In order to explore these questions and to meet the objectives outlined earlier, we are: (a) developing a baseline record of the rock art from Injalak; (b) developing a culturally appropriate computer program for archiving and disseminating information within the Gunbalanya community; (c) assisting with training in conservation practices; (d) developing a stylistic chronology for Injalak rock art; and (e) exploring the stylistic connections of the rock art on Injalak with the greater Arnhem region and beyond.

Several researchers have discussed the rock art traditions specific to western Arnhem Land (e.g. Brandl, 1973; Chaloupka, 1984; 1985; 1993; Johnston, et al., 2017; Jones, 2017; Lewis, 1988; May, 2006; May & Domingo Sanz, 2010; Taçon, 1989; Taçon & Chippindale, 1994). It is not the aim of this paper to reiterate these debates or to outline the research findings for IRARP. Yet, it is important to state that the assumption that western Arnhem Land is an area where most of the rock art has been documented and/or studied is incorrect. The majority of rock art has not been thoroughly documented, nor do we have a good grasp of the complex chronologies and their relationships with neighbouring regions. The main constraint of the current available stylistic sequences (such as Chaloupka, 1993) is that they are too general, as they aim to find similarities between rock paintings from a wide region. This means that the specificities of the groups living in this vast territory are not reflected, and as a consequence when recording individual sites, many of the motifs do not fit in any of the documented styles. Therefore, to understand changes in time and space in western Arnhem Land rock art, and how it reflects social identities, it is necessary to identify the specific sequences of individual sites and regions. The detailed recording undertaken as part of this field school directly relates to this aim and contributes to wider regional studies.

Discussion

Participation in an archaeological field school is often considered as a definitive moment in life, when students decide during its short timeframe whether to pursue archaeology professionally or to relegate it to a hobby, memorable story or simply something in the past. (Perry, 2004: 236)

The rock art field school offered students a rare opportunity to work with local community members on one of the longest rock art traditions in human history — the rock art of western Arnhem Land. The fact that these same community members continue to produce art today adds to the cultural context surrounding this community archaeology project. There is no doubt in our minds that field schools are an important training method for students working in disciplines that involved field-based work. For archaeologists, the opportunity to gain an insight into the nature of fieldwork in remote areas features highly in student feedback. This feedback also highlights working directly with Indigenous men, women, and children as a key learning experience for them. The skills learnt by students in a community context also make them better placed to respond to calls for archaeology to be

more relevant to the public (e.g. Matsuda, 2016; Okamura & Matsuda, 2011; Pyburn, 2011; Richardson & Almansa-Sánchez, 2015).

Ironically, the technical skills taught during the field school were appreciated by the students, but they were not the central talking point — it was the emotional and human response to experiencing life in remote communities that they remember.

In many field schools, students are sheltered from the ‘messiness’ of landowner negotiations, disagreements with avocational archaeologists, the wishes of local Native American tribes, and the like. However, sheltering students does not provide them with the kind of mentoring that they really need to do or to understand ‘real’ archaeology, whether they become future professionals or stakeholders in some other capacity. (Chilton, 2009: 149)

Our own reflections on the impact of this field school are several. Directing this field school perhaps became a little easier over the years, as we learned to pre-empt problems. Managing competing stakeholder priorities was challenging. These field schools have been physically and, even more so, psychologically exhausting. Being responsible for the physical well-being of students and their education in a remote location is difficult, but when you add the role of mediator (between Indigenous communities and students) to the mix it becomes even more challenging. As those who work in areas such as Arnhem Land (and who care about their relationships with local communities) will understand, introducing new people is challenging and often risky, and you are seen as responsible for the newcomer’s behaviour. During the field school we had to ensure the local community was happy with every one of the students all of the time. On every field school we risked our relationships with local Indigenous people to introduce students to field research — and occasionally we questioned why.

Following participation in the field school, a significant percentage of the field school students have returned to work in Arnhem Land or in other remote communities around Australia and internationally. This is something we have monitored with interest. Many returned to Gunbalanya to assist with other field-work, as employees of consulting firms, or as volunteers in local community organizations such as Injalak Arts. Four students have produced Honours theses or graduate research projects on rock art, while an additional three have completed their Masters research; there are currently at least seven students who attended the field school who are now undertaking doctoral research (at various institutions) on rock art. While some of the field school student groups have formed closer relationships than others, many continue to meet for reunions and to correspond with their fellow field school attendees. An important student network of emerging community archaeologists formed from these experiences and remains today.

The question of research is also important — was the rock art field school useful for our research programmes? The short answer is yes. Some of the recordings produced during the field schools could be used as part of research for IRARP and others were used for student research. However, much of the work undertaken in the two weeks was aimed at training and was not always of a standard or in a format usable for academic research. Other outcomes did emerge, including

community posters that remain on view today in Gunbalanya educating tourists on issues such as rock art conservation. Overall, we believe that, while there were clear research and community benefits, the core outcomes of this field school were the development of new skills for the students and the personal growth that came from their engagement with new people, new cultures, and new places. As long as the community were satisfied with the outcomes and the students developed their skills, then our primary aims were met. Does this field school then have a clear benefit for rock art? We would argue that until recently in Australia there was a shortage of students studying rock art, consultants with experience in rock art recording, and academics specializing in rock art. This field school, and others like it, have helped to change this.

In essence, the question remains — are community archaeology field schools worth the effort? In our opinion they are of immense benefit to students and can help prepare them for a career in archaeology. However, the pressure faced by communities and staff running the field schools is great and, with ever-increasing demands from universities to teach and publish, the biggest obstacle to make these programmes a success is the time needed.

Students experienced broad and unpredictable learning in these situations that may not be encountered in more traditional community archaeology projects. It pushed the limits for many students — with personal and emotional growth, challenges to their existing beliefs about Indigenous Australia, and physically demanding activities. It was obvious quite quickly that we must not ‘sweat the small stuff’ during these programmes — that is, students can learn to use a tape measure anytime, it is more important they live these diverse cultural experiences now. As such, this was not a simple transfer of knowledge but a lived experience that changed during each field school.

For community members, the field schools demonstrated their unequalled patience for anyone wanting to learn, and their love of sharing information about their heritage. They were also important for younger Indigenous community members in Gunbalanya to witness the respect being given to their Elders by the students and staff, including the employment of Elders as expert teachers by a university. As W. Nawirridj pointed out to us, this demonstrated that cultural knowledge is important and valued even outside of their own community. Witnessing these interactions has the potential to inspire local children to ask questions of their Elders themselves and to seek out more cultural knowledge. Community members would always include their own children and young relatives in the field schools for this reason (see [Figure 5](#)).

For the authors, developing the field schools has been a constant learning process, using trial and error to determine which methods work best in such situations. Many of the problems we encountered were predictable — such as issues relating to physical fitness of students and the challenges of climbing Injalak Hill every day for two weeks. Others were a surprise. For example, each of us became counsellors as well as lecturers, helping students cope with the emotional challenges of seeing the less pleasant aspects of life in remote Indigenous communities. Common feedback from students included the statement that they had ‘no idea’ about the history and the living conditions in remote communities such as Gunbalanya, and that the high school education system had failed them on many aspects of Indigenous history and



FIGURE 5 W. Nawirridj and daughter Sharon, Injalak Hill, 2006.

culture. Many students experienced an awakening of sorts during the field school, with various emotional responses. In hindsight, we could have been better prepared for these reactions and have equipped ourselves with the skills needed to best help students through these experiences.

Conclusion

As Nicholas (2008: 231) suggests, archaeological field schools with Indigenous communities are ‘places where different cultures, and their inherent values, worldviews, and attitudes intersect’ and ‘always present are multiple, sometimes contradictory viewpoints, even within the archaeological and Aboriginal community involved’. This article documents how, as a community archaeology project, our aims and methods have evolved over the years in response to community needs and student feedback. Our discussion has illustrated the complexities of training students to work in an environment where cultural belief systems are still strongly linked with sites and landscapes. As our Indigenous teachers demonstrated each day of the field schools, there are many ways to understand the rock art of Arnhem Land.

In this article we have focused on the combination of tertiary-level field schools and community archaeology. We have questioned whether the aims and methods of community archaeology (as understood in Australia) could easily translate to an educational programme. Using the rock art field school at Gunbalanya as a case study, we have explored in detail what happens when you combine these two areas. While the challenges are numerous, the outcomes, particularly for students, make it worth the effort and provide an educational experience unobtainable in any other learning format.

Notes

¹ For Gunbalanya, only an initial and surname are used where the individual has passed away.

² Since 2004 the visiting researchers have included: Prof. Martin Wobst, Prof. Robert Paynter, Prof.

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