

My name's Dr. Michaela Spencer. I was aware of the Australian Centre here at Melbourne University when I first heard of this fellowship when my close colleague, Dr. Matthew Campbell, approached me about the fellowship program.

Myself and Matt have worked together previously. So he suggested that this was a really excellent way for us to continue our research collaborations together, broadening out from what we've done in the Northern Territory to also be working here in Melbourne and with the Australian Centre and through its interests and its resources and the particular debates and concern that it's connected into at the moment.

It's actually really valuable to be able to step out of your own context sometimes and see things from a different view. This is what I've really experienced in being here this month. It's been absolutely invaluable to just have this breath of fresh air. If nothing else, it's gonna help me go back to the work that I do refreshed and with a different viewpoint. It sounds intangible as something to come out of a visiting fellowship program, but to me it's been amazing to have the opportunity.

I've also really appreciated being able to extend another area of my particular interest, which is in rivers as sites of agreement making. This continues work that I've been doing with my friends and colleagues in the Northern Territory under Larrakia authority around Rapid Creek, where they've directed me and others as to around sites where there are important meeting places, important stories that were told and where politics was happening with and through the river.

I'm also indebted in this work to an international colleague, Endre Dányi, in his work thinking through rivers and parliaments as both sites of politics and coming here, I've set myself down along Merri Creek. I've found places where the salt and freshwater have connected. I've remembered how these are Wurundjeri meeting sites and thought through some of the ways in which rivers are actually participants in agreement making and what it means if we start from them, rather than from parliaments or government, in thinking about how we work together and how we do our politics. So that's been also a beautiful addition to some of the work that I've been doing here.

So in coming to this fellowship, I knew that I already had a history with Melbourne University. I actually did my PhD here. This was under the guidance of Professor Helen Verran, who I've worked with closely for many, many years. She supported me around actually learning how to do ethnographic work in policy context and she has also supported me to start working in the Northern Territory. So I felt like I was reconnecting with early sites of my learning here, and it was almost a coming home to this place 'cause there was a familiarity here in the buildings and the people and the rivers.



At the same time, I've also felt that this was a new chapter. So I would encourage anyone who is interested in exploring their work in new ways to actually consider this fellowship. The team here is amazing. I've felt so welcomed, and there's a huge amount of freedom that has been offered to me. I've been able to come to this fellowship and explore and find what's right for me to do here with the people who are here. And for me that's been really important. It means the work is grounded, it means it's relevant to the context that it's in. And I think it also means that others can come here and experience the same thing. So I found the spirit of the Australian Centre to be really nurturing of new ways of thinking and new kinds of work. They allow you to explore. They allow you to open up new connections, and in that way to actually explore things that I think I might not have discovered previously. So when I first arrived here, I did just start to cast around for what was interesting here. The work I've been doing here over this month has really helped Matt Campbell and myself to keep growing grant applications that we're working on together. These are oriented around the treaty education and micro-credentialing 'cause we've both got experience in that micro-credential work and lots of ideas about how to grow the capacities of these credentials and the way they're structured to actually have great impact within government organisations. Not just teaching content, but supporting bureaucrats to reflect on the situations in which they're in and the way that they are actually agents within their organisations and the small everyday activities that they can be doing to actually shift things, to align things better, so that new partnerships might emerge. So I've already had some connections with people at the Australian Centre and being here has just meant that those connections have strengthened, and I can see them continuing into the future. I think that's gonna be really important for our shared work together, and I'm glad that I've been able to nurture those relationships at this time and look forward to all the exciting work that we're gonna be able to do.

