

Building cultural competencies - it's never too late to learn

Susan Faine, February 2022



One of the hallmarks of the COVID years has been the opportunities for online discovery and learning that have been tumbling out of the ether. Internationally and locally, talks, lectures, symposiums and conferences all pivoted (!) to online delivery, and seminars became webinars.

January 26 is one of the times in the year when the struggles of First Nations people to achieve social, economic and cultural equity come into focus. This year we reflected on the debates from a more informed vantage point, the result of our recent participation in two important professional development programs. The opportunity to benefit from such generous and thought-provoking structured learning is indeed an intellectual and cultural gift worth sharing. Both programs are ongoing and available for everyone, and we hope this article inspires you to look into taking them up yourselves.

'Building Aboriginal Cultural Competency' is a half-day workshop run by Melbourne's Koorie Heritage Trust

<https://koorieheritagetrust.com.au/visit-us/education/#cultural-competency>.

The program sets out to raise participants' awareness of Aboriginal culture and identity – how it has been (re)shaped by colonial administrations and policies that have in turn shaped majority attitudes and behaviours towards Indigenous Australians. It encouraged us to rethink our personal and professional engagement with Aboriginal people.

The second initiative we want to draw your attention to is AIATSI'S 'Core' cultural learning program, delivered to us in partnership with the Australian Museums and Galleries Association (AMaGA). This self-paced, ten-module program is geared for individuals but can also be taken up by any organisation or government department for its staff - <https://aiatsis.gov.au/about/what-we-do/core-cultural-learning>

Core cultural learning draws on a combination of materials and resources – historical documents, illustrations and media clippings, audio and moving image interviews – to bring us the voices and histories that our mainstream formal education has mostly side-stepped. Each module invites us to test ourselves and gauge our understanding of the material we've just worked through. It certainly is thought-provoking and confronting, and you might need more time than is suggested to get through it to your own satisfaction. Then there's a 'Continuing Your Journey' section, giving us resources to extend our learning in situ or remotely: films, books, reports etc.

The program sets out convincingly, and uncomfortably, the consequences for Aboriginal people of policies and attitudes from the early colonial era to today. It makes us reflect on and revisit our own attitudes and behaviours and wonder about changes we can make to our own lives, personally and professionally, that will bring about systemic change.

Becoming 'culturally competent' is sorely needed, but it is only the first important step. And as we learn more about caring for country, we can't help thinking how much better off as a nation, as a society we'd be if we listened to 'other' ways of doing things.

Whose Country are you on?

<https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/map-indigenous-australia>



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My work is with communities, people and their stories, objects and places. I encourage people to speak of their life as they have lived it.