

A black and white photograph of three students in school uniforms walking up a set of stairs. The student in the foreground is wearing a cap and a dark shirt. The student in the middle is also in uniform. The student in the background is wearing a cap and a light-colored shirt. The stairs are concrete and have a metal handrail on the left side. The background shows a brick wall and a building entrance.

DEADLY DHARAWALS

*Culture, Connection and Play for
All Students*



KOONAWARRA
PUBLIC SCHOOL

ACKNOWLEDGMENT



INTRODUCTION



Ngangbi everyone and welcome

It is a privilege to gather here at Koonawarra Public School, a place where our students' learning is deeply connected to ngura (Country), ngay (family) and Dharawal (our people). At Koonawarra we strive to create an environment where every child feels wiyani (seen), budyari (heard) and proud of their cultural identity.

Today you are invited to experience the Deadly Dharawals program, a K-6 Aboriginal-led play-based learning initiative that integrates Dharawal language, culture and knowledge into everyday learning. Through hands-on activities, students connect with their heritage in meaningful ways while building social, emotional and academic skills.

As we move through today's session, think about how you feel using Dharawal words, engaging in the activities and learning in a culturally grounded way. At the end you will reflect and share "bula bula midha", one small thing you can do tomorrow in your role to make a positive difference.

Let us begin our journey together, honouring ngura (Country), celebrating Dharawal knowledge and embracing learning in a way that is both meaningful and fun.

PURPOSE

In order to keep Culture, we must give it away

When you learn Culture, you accept a great responsibility to share it

Doing something and getting it wrong is better than doing nothing and being stuck while right passes you by



LEARNING GOALS



Learning Focus - What will be in this workshop

Explore how mentoring, play and cultural practices strengthen social and emotional learning through the CASEL framework and neuroscience.

Experience and reflect on hands-on activities that support co-regulation, identity and resilience in diverse learning settings.

Professional Impact - What will I be able to do after the workshop

Implement culturally responsive mentoring and play-based strategies that foster connection, calm, and engagement with students.

Embed practices aligned with Closing the Gap priorities that build identity, wellbeing and stronger relationships in classrooms and early childhood environments.

STORY OF DEADLY DHARAWALS



- *1 small group* - Constrained test
- *4 groups per week* - Expanding the model
- *Every student at KPS* - Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal - Closing the gap
- *'On tour'* - Delivering in partner schools - Sphere of influence

- Welcome & focus on early learning (K–2)
- Deadly Dharawals = cultural + play-based program
- Led by Aboriginal staff on Country
- Structured, research-informed, not tokenistic
- Today: see pedagogy, frameworks, and impact

- Runs once per week, 1.5 hrs, 6–10 students
- Led by Lee Moran (AEO) & Zeke Wighton (SLSO)
- Session flow: welcome → yarning → language → practical → reflection
- Teachers/SLSOs observe & replicate
- Hands-on, immersive, culturally grounded
- 187 students have been through the program

- Started as one session per week with a select group
- Grew to 4 sessions per week across whole school
- Has had every student at KPS go through it
- Is now 'on tour' and rolled out at other schools who saw it/heard about it and asked for it

CULTURE , RESEARCH, PEDAGOGY



- *Australian Education Research Organisation*: Play-based learning that intentionally embeds Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, building cultural responsiveness and community partnerships.
- *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*: On-Country learning strengthens identity, deepens cultural connection, and enhances outcomes through culturally responsive pedagogy.
- *Deadly Dharawals*: A play-based, culturally immersive program led by Aboriginal staff, using yarning, songlines, dance, and art to build identity, language, and social-emotional development.

[Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives: Play-Based Learning and Intentionality:](#)

Emphasizes embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in early childhood education.

Highlights the importance of intentional integration of cultural knowledge.

Provides insights into developing culturally responsive practices.

Fosters partnerships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

AERO

[Strengthening Identities and Involvement of Aboriginal Children through On-Country Learning:](#)

Explores the 'On Country Learning' project focusing on Aboriginal connectedness.

Demonstrates how learning on Country facilitates deep learning.

Allows connection at the 'cultural interface' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and educators.

Utilizes culturally responsive pedagogies to enhance learning outcomes.

ERIC

Deadly Dharawals Alignment:

Offers a play-based, culturally immersive program led by Aboriginal staff.

Incorporates activities like yarning circles, songlines, dance, and art.

Promotes social-emotional development, language skills, and a strong sense of identity.

Embodies principles of intentional cultural integration and on-Country learning.

CULTURE, RESEARCH , PEDAGOGY



- *Self-Awareness* – recognising feelings, strengths, and identity
- *Self-Management* – managing emotions, calming, focusing
- *Social Awareness* – respecting others and valuing culture and community
- *Relationship Skills* – building trust, listening, and working together
- *Responsible Decision-Making* – making choices

CASEL

A research-based framework for social and emotional learning, guiding students to understand themselves, build relationships, and make responsible choices.

Self-Awareness: Students recognize their cultural identity and emotions through storytelling and cultural activities.

Self-Management: Engaging in structured activities helps students regulate emotions and behaviors.

Social Awareness: Collaborative tasks foster empathy and understanding of diverse perspectives.

Relationship Skills: Group activities promote teamwork, communication, and conflict resolution.

Responsible Decision-Making: Reflective practices encourage students to make thoughtful choices in social interactions.

CULTURE, RESEARCH, PEDAGOGY

- Clear learning focus
- Skills modelled
- Guided practice
- Understanding checked
- Learning broken into steps
- Reflection in yarning circles



"Explicit teaching is a structured, evidence-based approach where learning goals are clear, skills are modelled, students practise with guidance, and understanding is checked, supported by feedback and reflection."

- Staff set clear learning intentions for songs, dances, art, and cultural skills so students know what success looks like.
- Older Aboriginal students model activities and gradually guide younger or non-Aboriginal students to take the lead.
- Understanding is checked through questions, observation, and performance demonstrations during sessions.
- Activities are broken into manageable steps and connected to students' prior knowledge, local culture, and experiences.
- Guided reflection in the yarning circle provides encouragement, feedback, and gentle correction to support learning.

PRACTICAL: REFLECTION STICKS



- Support self-regulation, reflection, and connection for students.
- Provide a tangible tool that models co-regulation and cultural storytelling.
- Demonstrate how hands-on, creative activities build identity, engagement, and emotional literacy.

Reflection Sticks

Introduction (2–3 min)

- Explain the purpose: reflection sticks are a tool to help students pause, reflect, and regulate emotions.
- Link to cultural practice: storytelling and symbolism in Aboriginal culture provide meaning and connection.
- Encourage participants to think about personal symbols or colours that help them feel calm or focused.

Creating the Sticks (7–8 min)

- Provide sticks, paints, and markers.
- Invite participants to decorate their sticks with symbols, colours, or patterns that represent calm, focus, or identity.
- Walk around and observe – highlight creative expression and individuality.
- Drop reflection cues as participants work:
- “Notice how choosing symbols connects to your personal experience or story.”
- “Think about how this could help a child feel safe and understood.”

Modelling & Use (3–4 min)

- Demonstrate co-regulation: hold a stick, guide a short breathing or quiet reflection moment.
- Invite participants to practice in pairs or small groups.
- Emphasise that the stick is a support tool, not a punishment.

Debrief & Reflection (2–3 min)

Encourage participants to reflect:

- “How could this be used in a classroom or early childhood setting?”
- “Which CASEL domains does this support?” (self-awareness, self-management)
- “How does it connect to culture and identity?”

Share observations and key points about engagement and emotional literacy.

PRACTICAL: EMU CALLERS



- Supports cultural connection, identity, and engagement
- Builds rhythm, coordination, and social-emotional skills
- Support cultural connection, identity, and social-emotional engagement through movement, music, and storytelling.
- Make an emu caller and learn the associated dance

NOTE THIS ACTIVITY MUST BE DONE UNDER SUPERVISION OF AND/OR WITH PERMISSION OF LOCAL KNOWLEDGE HOLDERS/ELDERS

YARNING CIRCLE



- Pause and reflect on today's activities, culture, and learning
- Share insights and observations with the group
- Identify one small action to implement tomorrow

Discussion Prompts:

- What stood out for you in the practical activities?
- What is 'one small thing' that you will do tomorrow?

This is our chance to share what we've learned, reflect like the students do, and leave with one small action we can take tomorrow.

Let's pause and connect with what we've learned today from the activities, the culture, and each other.

Ask:

What stood out for you in the practical activities?
What is 'one small thing' that you will do tomorrow?

Each participant identifies one small, realistic action to implement in their role tomorrow.

Examples:

- *Introduce one Aboriginal word or phrase in a lesson.*
- *Use a short yarning circle or reflection moment with students.*

Incorporate a cultural story, song, or dance into a session.

Participants hold a reflection stick as they share to symbolise ownership.

CLOSING PLENARY



Thank you for fully engaging in today's Deadly Dharawals experience. You've sung, danced, spoken Dharawal words and explored cultural practices just like our students do.

Before we finish, take a moment to remember your "Midhang Marawaylang Thing", the one small thing you will do tomorrow to make a positive change in your classroom or school.

Learning like this is about connection, culture and action. Even one small step can make a big difference for your students and for their sense of ngura (Country) and identity.

Let's carry this energy forward and continue to embed culture, play and intentional learning into everything we do.