Talking English: making connections in rural NSW

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Conversations about Hamlet, Blade Runner, Frankenstein, Romantic literature, Strictly Ballroom, and Wilfred Owen flew between high schools in western regional NSW last week when University of Sydney lecturers visited the country to talk about HSC texts.

Professor Will Christie, Atilla Orel and Dr Olivia Murphy from the Department of English visited Coonabarabran High School to stimulate students' enthusiasm for English. Their talks about essay writing and poetry and the way literature is taught at the University were transmitted live via video conferencing to 150 students at 16 other regional high schools.

"The students were very receptive and engaged," said Professor Christie, Chair of the Department of English.

"Being there in person sends a message to the students about the University's accessibility. I was delighted my younger colleagues could join me as great examples of the next generation of researchers and teachers actively engaged with the texts the students are studying," he added.

The visit came about after Mary Doolan, the Head of English at Coonabarabran and an alumna of the University, contacted Professor Christie to ask for notes from a lecture he had given in Sydney on HSC texts. During their conversation, they decided a visit to the school would be a liberating experience for all concerned.

"Undoubtedly, the students benefited from the expertise and passion of our guests," said Doolan. "Their lectures challenged students to keep reflecting on and 'stretching' their own understanding as they prepare for their HSC English examinations.

"Additionally, tangible contact with the University of Sydney was a great outcome for students who, due to distance, find it difficult to get to know the University via open days, student lectures, and the like."

The visit was supported financially by the Department of Education’s Country Area Program, and was transmitted live to regional schools including Cobar, Mudgee, Broken Hill, Forbes, Gulgong and Narromine.