



TV HITS RURAL NSW

Drummond Memorial Public School students are embarking on an ambitious project of Hollywood proportions.

By Kim Cotton

It's not often that students get to produce their own television programs. But along with students from three neighbouring primary schools at Rocky River, Niangala and Yarrawitch, the students of Drummond Memorial Public School are compiling a series of television-style digital programs that will air on the internet via a webcast in collaboration with the Department of Education and Training's technology hothouse - the Centre for Learning Innovation.

Drummond Memorial Public School principal Phill Roberts explains, "What we're aiming for is a series of short video programs

that replicate the way a TV station programs - news, local interest articles, documentaries, and a range of genres."

Not only is he seeing his students embark on an exciting technology based project, but his Year 5 and 6 students are also gaining better results in their state-wide tests.

"Their writing skills have lifted ... what we're finding is that so many kids want to write and want to construct texts whereas traditional pen and paper [methods] weren't working," he says.



Microsoft Australia's academic programs manager Felicia Brown says the union is a flexible one.

"Microsoft provides the resources, in this case \$150,000 and access to two dedicated technology consultants from education project management company dk2," Ms Brown says. "The schools then go about converting their technological wish lists into real outcomes for the students and teachers."

The projects are facilitated using software that allows the students to produce social media such as wikis, podcasts, blogs, as well as cool music scores, using the same interface irrespective of time, space and the computer platform each school may be using.

"The teachers just love it because they find the kids love the engagement, the activities, and the collaboration."

The work has almost been three years in the making, initiated by Drummond Memorial Public's former principal, Graeme Ross. The four schools are part of the Microsoft Partners in Learning (PiL) project.

In all, 28 NSW primary, central and secondary public schools across NSW are taking part in the three-year connected learning project. PiL is a \$US253 million initiative set up to bridge the digital divide between and within countries

by improving basic access to technology and training. It has been operating in the Department of Education since 2006.

Mr Robert says the project has opened up the world of learning for the teachers and the students who "can't wait to be part of it and communicate with other kids electronically".

Part of the project involved the students telling the geographic and social stories of their local areas based on the theme 'Journeys'. The students produced video clips and other "artefacts" documenting the journeys of local rivers. The video clips also include information on the geography of

the rivers' journeys and the stories of people who live along the river.

Mr Robert says the Microsoft project has bought together four "quite disparate and quite isolated" schools.

"There is a real [sense] of teamwork to the development and building of the project – building the vision to make sure it happens for the kids."

Anne Stevens, the Office of School's manager for planning coordination, says the project is realising the notion of virtual classrooms.

"Teachers are developing skills in organising and managing their

own teaching resources and approaches to teaching in ways that just weren't possible when I started teaching in the late 70s," she says.

"In those days you had a couple of manila folders full of fordigraph stencils that faded over time. Now the tools allow teachers to develop digital materials and learning objects, store them in ways that make them readily accessible and reusable with other people," she says. ■