Paul’s Grammar School in Sydney, Australia, provides a world of exciting and challenging learning experiences for the students. Working from class web pages and with schools from a number of countries around the globe, these students use a wide range of technologies as an integral tool in the classroom.

The students have created discussion boards to assist with assignments, web pages to display their completed work, videos and powerful PowerPoint presentations to broaden their perspective on delivering oral presentations to the class and wider audiences. Each student is also compiling a file of work from different curriculum areas throughout the year to create a digital portfolio that will be included with their end of year report.

Technology is enabling these students to develop independence and greater responsibility for their own learning. It has changed the nature of the classroom and has enriched the learning environment exponentially.

Since educators first began to use computers in the classroom, researchers have tried to evaluate whether the use of educational technology has a significant and reliable impact on student achievement. It has been acknowledged that technology cannot be treated as a single independent variable, and is most effective when integrated into the curriculum, so that students are encouraged to use higher-order thinking skills, (such as thinking critically, analyzing, making inferences, and solving problems).

The most common - and in fact, nearly universal - teacher-reported effect of using technology in the classroom has been an increase in student motivation. Teachers and students are sometimes surprised at the level of technology-based accomplishment displayed by students who have shown much less initiative or facility with more conventional academic tasks.

Through the use of technology in the classroom, students are developing skills that will help to prepare them for a future world that is ever-changing. Through the use of technology, students are able to handle more complex assignments and do more with higher-order skills because of the supports and capabilities provided by technology.

It is important to realize that technology does not mean using computers alone, but rather that the best uses include a wide range of multi-media technologies, including video, photographs, discussion boards, web development, slide presentations etc. Experiences in developing the kinds of rich, multimedia products that can be produced with technology, particularly when the design is done collaboratively appears to initiate the greatest responses from the students who then experience their peers’ reactions to their presentations. Multiple media give students choices about how best to convey a given idea (e.g., through text, video, animation). Greater confidence in preparing presentations is also apparent as students are completing more professional-looking products and the developing
skills to use the tools required to manipulate the way information is presented. As a result, students in many technology-using classes are using and developing a wide range of skills previously not experienced in the "regular" classroom, but previously only occurring in specialist classes.

Students are encouraged to develop and work with a rubric that sets out the criteria required for all aspects of every task. In this way, they have ownership over the process of completing the activity and also a greater understanding of accepted responses within the task. This also helps to avoid common pitfalls encountered when using technology ie students sometimes get “carried away” with the creative side of technology and move a way from the content aspect. Because the rubric identifies all the components of the task that will be assessed, students are able to remain focused on the task as a whole. These rubrics are also published on the class web site so that parents have access to the same information – an important issue for those who support their students with their studies. You can view samples of the rubrics if you go to the class web site (spg7a) and visit the assignments links.

Students in the class are also working with schools in a number of countries around the world. They are sharing a range of activities and projects with these students including:

- Travel buddies with a school in Azerbaijan (see 7A web site for details of this project)
- Emails with schools in Austria, Azerbaijan and Finland
- World Project with schools from a number of countries globally – please visit the site for our project: http://www.geocities.com/worldproject2002/home.html
- International School Partnerships through Technology with a school in North Carolina. Please visit the site: http://www.ga.unc.edu/NCCIU/ispt/ to read more information about this project

The work undertaken by the students with other schools around the world not only provides opportunities to develop greater cultural awareness and understanding, but also to provide a springboard for ideas and an audience for completed works.

Throughout the year, all students in year 7 are compiling their own Digital Portfolios. These are a collection of works from all major curriculum areas showing development and accomplishment of a variety of skills and tasks. Each addition includes a reflection written by the student referring to the processes undertaken, approaches to learning and outcomes achieved. Samples of these portfolios can also be viewed on the 7A web site www.geocities.com/spg7a/7a.html

These Portfolios will be used as an adjunct to the written reports given to parents at the end of the school year. Their purpose is to support the report and to provide a more tangible record of the development of skills and the achievement of specified outcomes.

The students at St Paul’s Grammar School are using technology as an integrated tool in the classroom. Students and teachers have worked together to create a new learning environment in the classroom that supports flexibility, individual learning needs and styles and a greater level of independence in the learning process.

The results have been quite significant and appear to be having an extremely positive impact on all students – at all learning levels, students have become more interested and more responsible for their own learning; and teachers have taken on new roles as guides, supervisors and tutors rather than holding the central position in the classroom.

The use of technology has assisted the implementation of an inquiry based approach to learning where students are encouraged to become involved in creating, researching, exploring, problem-solving and experiencing the whole process of learning in an exciting and fulfilling manner.