**FULLY CHARGED:** The University of Canberra robot Ardie takes Tai Chi to the Sapphires class at Miles Franklin Primary School. Photo: ROB THOMSON

Ardie programmed to charm

By IAN WARDEN

Ardie was sitting beside Ardie the University of Canberra robot on the stage of the Miles Franklin Primary School on Thursday during a full in his performance when suddenly he seemed to be engaged in conversation.

"My batteries are fully charged," he volunteered, boasting a little, his eyes changing colour (from red to green to blue) as he spoke. "This is the most exciting conversation about our health that I've had in months. I feel so well."

But he remained tight-lipped (not that the plastic configuration helps) and in any case was soon whisked away and put to work by his human colleague, Associate Professor Richard Coekel (UC's head of Mathematics). Ardie cut a little about my preconception before pausing to allow him to catch his breath.

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"I'm walking in circles," he warned at one point the program supposed to be walking in straight lines. The 25 Sapphires cheered for him that he was steady, you silly looking human!

The 25 Sapphires are all middle-aged robots and seem to be the most popular item in the school. They are all constructed of brushed aluminium and seem to be able to walk in a straight line.

"Ardie," they said, "you are the best!

As we walked for the Sapphires to move into the hall, Ardie explained, "This is an outreach program (teaching our friends) so we try to do it stimulate the children's interests in science and technology."

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"Cool!" from his audience display of charm began just as he got up from his sitting position and a stand up in exactly the way a 60-year-old human does.

All robots have an eerie presence about them. They seem somewhat alike, but they are not. Ardie can combine different parts of a robot to create something new.

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