

# winner of the 2004 ICTEV & ACCE educator of the year:

**CHRISTINE BENKE, BARWON VALLEY SCHOOL**

Christine Benke, Barwon Valley School, Geelong is the 2004 recipient of the ICTEV and ACCE Awards for Educator of the Year.

Chris Benke is an LT2 special education teacher, and is currently the Early Years Campus Coordinator at Barwon Valley School, Geelong, Victoria. Chris also works as a classroom teacher with a group of 7 young students with a range of disabilities including autism. Chris is a trained Early Years Literacy Coordinator, and has a strong interest in developing communication and literacy skills in non-verbal students, and in at risk students in the beginning literacy stages.

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past five years Chris has used technology to support student learning, particularly in the areas of language acquisition and emerging literacy. Chris embeds technology into key curriculum areas by creating motivating and effective learning activities for students with special learning needs. She has been an advocate of using technology to develop a range of integrated elearning and print resources, specifically designed to address the learning needs of individual students.

This philosophy is the basis of her CaBS Approach— Computer Aided Books for Students (originally called Talking Books). This includes the identification of specific learning objectives for each student within their Individual Education Plans, the Program Support Group format, and the Victorian and BVS School Curriculum documents. A range of resources is then developed, including enlarged texts, books and learning centre activities supported by multi-media programs developed on MS Power Point. The multi-media programs and resources incorporate digital photos of the students and their environment, which makes the learning activities personal, motivating, and highly relevant to each individual student. Programs are further individualised by incorporating the various communication systems used by different students, including written text, symbol systems and signs.

## IN RESPONSE TO AWARD CRITERIA

### RECOGNITION WITHIN OWN INSTITUTION

Over the past five years Chris has worked within her own school community, and the broader educational community to assist other teachers in gaining both an understanding of her approach, and in developing the technology skills needed to create these elearning resources.

### RECOGNITION OUTSIDE OWN INSTITUTION

Chris has presented papers at a number of conferences including the 1999 conference for the National Principals Association of Special Schools, the 1998 and 2000 and 2002 Statewide Victorian Special Schools Conferences, the 2001 Victorian Early Years of Schooling Conference in Melbourne, and at other Metropolitan conferences in Melbourne, including presenting at ICTEV professional development activities. Chris has supported schools across the Barwon South west region, and has spoken at many regional conferences in Western Victoria. She has also conducted workshops and in-service days for individual schools throughout Victoria and in Adelaide. Talking Books was also the focus for the Quality Teacher Program for a group of schools in the Western District in 2002-3.

In 2003 Chris ran in-services at Barwon Valley School that were attended by teachers throughout the immediate Geelong area. She also held PD activities in Warrnambool, and presented at conferences in Melbourne, and ran in-service activities for individual schools. This was in addition to running PD for Barwon Valley staff, and holding a series of nights for parents.

Chris has also developed a series of MS PowerPoint PD handouts and an accompanying CD that outlines skills covered in the PD sessions.

In 2003, two students from Barwon Valley School won a special award in the Australian Children's Music Foundation National song-writing competition. Their songs were developed as part of the CaBS literacy program at BVS, and were created using voice samples recorded in ms Sound Recorder. The songs were also incorporated into MS Power Point presentations.

In 2000 'Talking Books' won a National Achievement Award for Literacy, and was a finalist in the Education Trust of Victoria Technology Awards. In 2002 Chris won the Learning Difficulties Australia Bruce Wicking Award, in recognition of her innovative work with students with special learning needs.

## OUTLINE OF TEACHING EXPERIENCE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

2000 - Current

- Leading Teacher at Barwon Valley School
- Early Years Campus Coordinator
- Early Years Literacy Coordinator
- Information Technology Coordinator
- Group Teacher - Junior Students

1987 - 1999

- Group teacher, Hampden Specialist School working with students who have a range of disabilities including autism, Fragile X and Cerebral Palsy.
- Primary Campus co-ordinator responsible to, and deputising for the Principal.
- Higher Duties position. As a teacher with additional responsibilities, my duties included supporting Professional Development of staff in the area of Information Technology, and developing Curriculum Standards Frameworks documentation.
- Early Years Coordinator. In this position I have been responsible for overseeing the establishment of our school's Early Years program, including implementation of the literacy block, teacher inservice, parent information sessions, and co-ordinating resources.

9/83 – 12/86

Integration Teacher, Mentone Autistic Centre, Melbourne. I was responsible, through the Mentone Autistic Centre, for the integration of autistic children into kindergartens, SDS's, and regular primary and secondary schools in the South Eastern Region of Melbourne. During this time I devised and oversaw the implementation of behaviour management programs for teachers and aides and addressed conferences on autism and behaviour management.

2/83-9/83

Milparinka SDS Melbourne, Group Teacher

9/78-12/82

Southern Autistic Centre, Mentone, Group Teacher

5/78-8/78

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, Cairns, Qld Grade 2 Teacher

1975-6

Southern Autistic Centre, Mentone, Victoria Group teacher

1974

Sacred Heart Primary School, Mildura, Vic Grade 2 teacher

1972-73

Sacred Heart Primary School, Colac, Vic Grade 1 Teacher