

# Robot natural for kids, says Ryerson engineer

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A joint project between public and private sector engineers, PEBBLES is education's answer to the picture telephone but with complete mobility.

It requires no more skill to manoeuvre than a video game, according to co-creator Dr. Deb Fels.

"PEBBLES is operated with a game pad, which is very natural for children," said the Ryerson University engineer, who worked alongside experts from the University of Toronto and Tel-Botics in developing the video conference link.

"In addition to moving left and right, the unit can zoom in and out so that students can read the blackboard more easily.

"It's already been used by one child at Sick Kids Hospital. Because it's a television robot, it can also be used by deaf students who need to see each other in order to communicate."

The video conference link has been a work in progress for the past several years, said Dr. Fels. It costs roughly \$40,000 to produce each unit.

"There're still some kinks to be worked out, but we're hoping to get PEBBLES into the classroom as soon as possible," Dr. Fels added.

Friday's conference also featured a virtual ribbon cutting by Mr. Johnson using Specific Needs Opportunity Windows (SNOW) software.

SNOW — a full-scale computer toolbox that includes text to speech translation and Braille keyboarding — is already being used in several special needs institution throughout Ontario.

E.C. Drury's School for the Deaf is among those benefiting from technology upgrades. The Milton learning centre already uses an American Sign Language (ASL) computer dictionary and is currently installing visual PA links in every classroom.

"Recent technology has opened up so many doors for deaf students. The Internet in particular is so helpful. It basically offers them (deaf students) equal access to information," said E.C. Drury School for the Deaf principal John Vanderzand.

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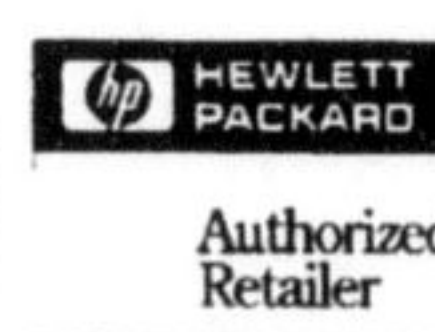
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## ANNOUNCEMENT TO ALL MEMBERS OF MILTON CHILDREN AND YOUTH CENTRE AND MILTON COMMUNITY AND INFORMATION SERVICES

The Boards of Directors of MCYC and MCIS are pleased to announce their official amalgamation.

The newly formed agency will be called **Milton Community Resource Centre.**

We are excited to have Heather Jackson assuming the position of Executive Director as of April 6.

We look forward to continuing to provide quality programs and services to Milton and the surrounding communities.

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