

**THE FEILEACAN (BUTTERFLY) PROJECT:
EXPECTED TO DEVELOP BETTER WORKING PRACTICES WITH
STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

- *Media Lab Europe Collaborates with Central Remedial Clinic (CRC)*, Smart Lab UK, Rhodes Hospital UK, Montefiore Hospital NY and New York University*
- *Radical, Far Reaching Project Funded by National Disability Authority (EYPD 2003) to Deliver Technology Aimed at Supporting Young People With Disabilities*

Media Lab Europe today announced that it would be moving technology, aimed at assisting young people with disabilities interact, learn and better express themselves out of its innovation Lab in Dublin into the Central Remedial Clinic to gain user feedback which will assist it in extending the technology's usability and accessibility.

The project, called 'Feileacan' (or butterfly in English) will create a virtual world that facilitates participation in society in a way that was never possible before. It is expected that the project which also includes, Smart Lab UK, the Rhodes Hospital UK, the Montefiore Hospital New York and New York University will complete its first phase of development by late Summer 2003.

The interfaces which will be developed over the Summer will allow the students, through animated characters, like a butterfly or feileacan, interact and dance with real dancers and young people on the other side of the world. It is expected that this project, backed by the National Disability Authority and with support from international partners, will result in a global 'networked' performance at the 7th European Annual Disability Conference in Dublin in September this year.

Speaking about the project, Ken Haase, acting director of Media Lab Europe said, "Through the support of National Disability Authority and the infrastructure and expertise provided by Central Remedial Clinic and our other partners we are

delighted to be in a position where our research can begin to influence the lives of young people undergoing cognitive and physical rehabilitation."

"The technology behind the 'Feileacan Project' will give all young people with disabilities the ability to exercise control and express themselves in a virtual world. The interfaces being designed will allow them, through animated characters, like a Feileacan or butterfly, interface and dance with real dancers and young people on the other side of the world - an experience which unfortunately is difficult for them in the real world," Haase continued.

"We at the CRC are incredibly excited about the potential of Feileacan and sincerely believe its legacy will be radical and far-reaching in terms of how people all over the world work with people with disabilities," said Ger Craddock from the Central Remedial Clinic.

"Not only does this project offer an extraordinary opportunity to connect people who are thinking about technology in a different way (Media Lab Europe) and the needs of those with disabilities, but it also provides a fantastic opportunity for young people with disabilities to access the world of technology from which they can often feel excluded, offering them a route to more effective and creative self-expression.

We believe this project will allow the young people involved to find their voices and express whatever it is they wish," he continued.

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

*CRC School, Scoil Mochua in Clondalkin, St. Gabriel's School in Limerick and St. Clare's School in Ennis are also involved in the project

About Media Lab Europe

Media Lab Europe is a not-for-profit, international innovation laboratory. As the European Research Partner of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Media Lab, Media Lab Europe's approach to innovation provides a unique environment to explore advanced research and applications with no regard for the traditional divisions among disciplines. In tandem, its intentional focus on partnership with industry, academia and governmental organisations reflects the lab's commitment to collaborative research, to the creation of new technologies and possibilities and to the transfer of research results and applications out of the lab into worldwide use. For more information please visit www.medialabeurope.org <<http://www.medialabeurope.org>>

About Central Remedial Clinic

The Central Remedial Clinic is a non-residential national centre for the care, treatment and development of children and adults with physical and multiple disabilities. Services are provided for people with physical conditions ranging from the very rare to the more familiar, such as cerebral palsy, spina bifida, muscular dystrophy and arthrogyrosis. For more information on the CRC please visit www.crc.ie <<http://www.crc.ie>>

About SMARTlab (Site-specific Media ARTs)

SMARTlab is a research incubator and production centre facilitating a range of linked projects using innovative digital technologies in the service of site-specific live and media arts. Some projects are designed for and/or performed in non-theatre spaces with a particular emphasis on the site as a 'character' in performance, while other projects are culturally specific, made by international teams of artists and scholars in developing countries and urban areas, to be shared with audiences in the UK and worldwide. For more information please visit www.smartlabcentre.com <<http://www.smartlabcentre.com>>