Does Microsoft Have Brown Eyes?

Microsoft is attempting to change its corporate culture on standards. Wondering how to react to that attempt reminds me of events more than forty (40) years ago. Everyone knew about the assassination of Martin Luther King in Memphis, Tennessee. Only a handful of people knew about Jane Elliott's exercise on April 5, 1968 to teach an all white class about racism.

Elliott divided her class into students with blue eyes and brown eyes. Then she announced that the blue eyed students were superior in intelligence and got extra classroom privileges, while the brown eyed students were intellectually inferior.

It didn't take very long for signs of oppression of brown eyed students by blue eyed ones to begin. And, unlike in real life, she reversed the roles the very next day so that brown eyed students were intellectually superior and blue eyed students were inferior, with the same results.

You can watch the FRONTLINE documentary, a class divided, one of the most requested shows in FRONTLINE history.

I don't deny that Microsoft has a long history of broken promises and over the top marketing campaigns. It brought all of us closer together with universal experiences like the "black screen of death," which was followed by the compelling sequel, the "blue screen of death." The so-called "browser wars" are not exactly an edifying period in the history of technology.

The question we face is how to react to attempts to change at Microsoft with regard to standards? Microsoft is looking for all the advantages that flow from standards. And that is how it should be. Standards don't just have advantages for the "hold Microsoft down so we can compete" crowd.

I suggest that everyone reach out to Microsoft and see what the next six (6) to twelve (12) months brings in terms of progress on a wide range of standards. Both in OASIS as well as SC 34. Change by Microsoft should be judged on what actually happens and not what Microsoft says or what others say about it.

If we want a standards based Microsoft, we should consider Elliott's exercise and try changing ourselves.

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