

October 15, 2005

Here's this week's roundup of recent news what's up and what matters in technology, education, and culture.

First off, there must be some kind of strange, airborne virus called the "mergeritis" because a whole bunch of the stuff that mattered is related to different folks deciding to throw in together.

To begin with, there was the announced partnership of cooperation between Sun and Google. This is significant because it's a push to beat back the monopoly that Microsoft enjoys with its Office suite. Google -- who will likely be the most successful Web-based company for the next decade -- and Sun -- supporters of the open source alternative to MS Office -- look to pool their strength to move common applications like word processing to the Web. Their ultimate goal is to wrench control of our lives away from the desktop. In education, this would be a huge breakthrough for distributed and mobile learning as it would untether everyone from the physical computer.

As if not to be outdone, Microsoft announced its own cooperative venture with Yahoo. These two Web portal giants will provide complete compatibility between their rival messaging systems in a move to mitigate possible damage related to a potential investment in AOL by Google. The good news is that the Yahoo-Microsoft agreement will move us one step closer to what we all really want -- a common messaging protocol for all users, regardless of their preferred carrier.

And then there was the great learning merger announced by BlackBoard and WebCT. These two companies will pool their resources, a la the HP-Compaq merger, in an effort to find needed synergies in a crowded and competitive learning market. The reality is that, while these two companies fight about which platform has the best features, and while they do their best not to lose existing customers, competitors like D2L and open source groups like Sakai and Moodle will put big dents in the rosy picture BlackBoard and WebCT pitched to investors.

Of course, the biggest news for the past week had to be Apple's announcement of the new video iPod. It's big news because it means videocasting has arrived and it also marks an increased evolution towards microcasting and distributed entertainment. In education, this event portends even more radical approaches to distributed learning. As they say in showbiz -- "Stay tuned!"

And speaking of learning, everybody has been in a huff of late regarding science and math scores of students here in the United States. Bill Gates started it off at the beginning of the year and a recent article in the NY Times reminded us of what we all already knew -- Singapore, China, and India are our Daddy. They own us when it comes to Math and Science. So, what's the key? Well, to give you a hint, it has nothing to do with better books or digital materials. No, it's a simple matter of culture. The countries beating us stress intense discipline and hard work and there are unpleasant consequences for those who don't measure up. As one administrator from Singapore put it, they have rote learning down cold.

Well, that's this week's roundup. That's what's up and that's what really matters!

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