

VIEWPOINT

What Can We Learn From Apple And Nike—About Improving Schools? ㊦

by Tony Berkley

(NAPSA)—Look at an iPod or the award-winning new running shoe, the Free. Simple...cool...and there's a lot of science and engineering here.

Innovative corporations such as Nike and Apple know how to reach their school-age customers with products and services that expand minds and build bodies. They have a deep understanding of the needs and interests of young people—and a keen eye for design.

The business magazines are figuring out the lesson: Good innovation and design balances scientific analysis with artistic creativity. It's this combination that leads to success in the global market.

Can you imagine a lengthy public shouting match over the next nano or swoosh color? Probably not, because they...Just Do It.

How do these lessons translate into schools and the debates about how to improve education in the U.S.?

With support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, education leaders in Ohio, New Mexico, Florida and elsewhere are discovering new solutions to perennial school challenges by using a method called "human-centered design." Human-centered design starts from the premise that those closest to the problem—parents, teachers and students—may have good ideas for solving it. And since

they'll have to implement any solution, it's best to involve them early in the process.

For the education field, this is revolutionary. In typical school reform efforts, outside experts rule the day. Parents, teachers and students are rarely even consulted.

Our work took a different approach.

From parents, we learned that schools are intimidating and hard to communicate with. Teachers feel overwhelmed and don't always reach out like they want to. Students want to be engaged in ways that involve creative right-brain activities as much as analytical left-brain ones.

The first sets of designs have been published as "Tangible Steps Toward Tomorrow" and are freely available on the www.wkkf.org Web site. One surprise is how much these potential designs focus on connecting—connecting parents more meaningfully with teachers; students with one another; and classrooms to community resources.

Consider Massachusetts 2020, a Boston-area nonprofit that works with public schools to add an extra few hours to the school day. This simple, concrete innovation—a longer school day—opens up a wealth of new opportunities to connect and enrich. It gives teachers the time they need to really teach core subjects well and explore student interests as well

as their own passions. Modern dance, poetry, neighborhood history and other creative subjects round out the school's curriculum. The result: Students do better on tests and everyone feels more satisfied and engaged.

We know the United States spends more on education than any other country. We also know that our students lag well behind many industrialized countries in terms of academic achievement. Yet when we discuss education, the focus narrows to the traditional issues: teacher qualifications, state standards and achievement gaps.

It is not hard to imagine how forward-thinking companies such as Nike or Apple would react to this situation. Such corporations are well known for staying on the cutting edge through their commitment to design. Famously, their products balance research and engineering with great look and feel. And from Helsinki to Singapore, consumers know what these brands stand for and are willing to pay a premium.

In an increasingly global economy, we need a new vision for public education in America. Our young people may be carrying iPods and walking on Nikes. What they really need is a well-designed education featuring the most competitive skills—and the coolest brand.

• *Mr. Berkley is a program director at the W. K. Kellogg Foundation.*