

Program: U.S. Education – in Need of a Major Overhaul

Speaker: Dr. Richard Garrett, PhD, Eli Lilly and Company mgt. (retired); Assoc. Prof., Kelly School, IU-Bloomington, Sciencetech Club member

Introduced by: Self

Attendance: 117

Guests: Don and Carole Gartner

Scribe: Richard Garrett

Editor: Ed Nitka

Today's speaker developed an "academic" interest in US K-12 education in 2013. For several years, his son, who was then a teacher, called him (almost daily) to describe his day in class teaching fourth graders. Hearing these reports was very disturbing because of the inability of the teachers to do their jobs due to a number of disruptive children in each class. Garrett then persuaded the teachers to form into a study team and look into the underlying issues associated with managing their classes. This study was very interesting and revealing and led Garrett to write a book titled: *The Kids Are Smart Enough, So What's the Problem? A Businessman's Perspective on Educational Reform and the Teacher Crisis*. The book was published by Roman and Littlefield and was released in December of 2017.

This book could well have been the end of his journey, but curiosity about how other countries and great schools in the US do such a thorough and effective job educating their children remained on his mind. This question got the best of Garrett and he extended his research horizon. Today's presentation is a report on some of the findings of this new research.

The presentation begins with the title slide: "U.S. Education-In Need of a Major Overhaul". Immediately following the title slide is another title aimed at *sports minded listeners*: "Education: The World's Largest Competition – the Key to Future Economic Viability". A quote in the middle of this slide says: "The quality of schooling in a country is a reliable predictor of the wealth that countries will produce in the long run." This is Garrett's true focus as he researches and presents; how does the US approach measure up? Where are we headed as a country?

Garrett introduces the audience to the "Big Four" factors in education: Teachers, Reading, Intrinsic Motivation and Parents. Three of these four items are the focus of this talk. Though he points out that the vital role, both good and bad, of the parents, they will not be discussed. Their role is too complex for this short discussion. In his book, he does say the teachers identify poor parenting as one of the three root causes of disruptive children.

The next section of the talk was aimed at painting a picture of the US system. This is not a pretty picture; 25% of US high school graduates are functionally illiterate. The performance of US children on Department of Education assessment exams has not significantly changed in 49 years and that our country's performance on international assessments has flatlined at a less than a desired level. In addition, the US has 80,000

schools that lose instructional time due to the behavior of disruptive children. We can readily say that the condition of a number of our classrooms is downright deplorable due to disrespect and disturbing behavior. So, the US players on our educational teams are lacking necessary skills and are not internationally competitive. Lastly, in this section, he shows a demand vs capacity graph for the availability of future teachers. This chart shows that only one-third of the forecasted need will be available to teach. Schools of education supply will fall far short of need. As Garrett's research shows, teachers are the most important factor in educational success; it would appear that the US is headed for a major crisis in education.

In the face of these difficulties, a response of the US school system has been "widen the plate" and make "A" grades the most prevalent grade issued by US schools. For the school administration this is a win-win strategy. The parents and children are happy, the administration can laud their accomplishments and the heat goes away from focusing on them.

The next few slides dealt with why nothing is happening to correct these problems; the current players in education are the problem. There is an equilibrium of power amongst these groups that forces the leaders to fight to retain their power and in the process some of the children are sacrificed. This explains why nothing is happening to make the needed improvements!

Garrett then explained the role of reading and its relationship to intrinsic motivation. Why are we such poor readers? Is there something wrong with our children or is it us? Garrett concluded that all children can be taught to read; it just isn't happening. Without increases in student competency, one of the three essential ingredients of intrinsic motivation, students lose their motivation and "die on the vine".

Focus was then placed on what it will take to elevate our international standing. The primary driver of any improvement rests in the improved instruction of our lower socioeconomic classes. Most top-performing countries put a "full court press" on educating their lower classes and they are successful. This is the key to their international standing.

The really great international schools, depend upon and demand to have well paid and highly competent teachers. Their teachers come from the best universities and they are the leaders in their schools. They develop expertise that is constantly being improved because they emphasize Kaizen, never ending improvement. Daily, they "leave no child behind" in the way that they allocate time and resources.

Dr. Garrett presented a diagram depicting the four student tracks that are available in the best international systems. They adjust the path so that both student skills and desires are taken into account. Here is a key point: "In no advanced industrial nation do a majority of high school students go on to earn university degrees." In the US there is a strong movement to be sure all students are prepared to attend a university. In reality, this doesn't work. Only 1 in 10 lower strata students earns a university degree.

It is important that we have great professional vocational training for the remaining 90 percent.

Lastly, Garrett concluded with a long list of recommended changes to the US systems. Some may look at this list and say, it's impossible to do all those things. They could be right but without significant change, we should not expect our future students to be any different than the current crop.

Note: Garrett engaged a video producer to film today's presentation. The video, along with the integrated Power Point slides, will be posted on YouTube and Garrett's web site.



Dr. Richard Garrett