

Program: The Kids Are Smart Enough, So What's the Problem? A Businessman's Perspective on Educational Reform and the Teacher Crisis.

Speaker: Dick Garrett, PhD, Operations Research, Northwestern University Attendance: 82

Guests: Jane DeVoe, Martha Boon, Kait Karr

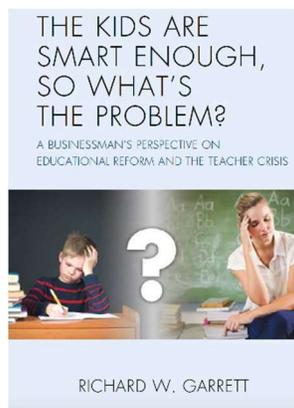
Scribe: Dick Garrett

Editor: Ed Nitka

On October 17, 2016 Dick Garrett made a presentation to the Club with essentially the same title. At that meeting he presented ideas that he hoped he could turn into a book. Fortunately, the manuscript was picked up by Rowman and Littlefield, and the book was launched during December 2017. Here is the summary from the back of the book; it is the most efficient way to quickly summarize the contents:

There is a national crisis in education, and it's not the highly debated philosophical discussions or heated political arguments we are used to hearing. Survey data establishes the fact that classrooms throughout the nation suffer from the presence of a small percentage of misbehaving students. Teachers are illequipped to deal with these disruptive students, resulting in lost classroom time and demoralized educators who are perpetually blamed for the students' bad performance. The root cause of these misbehaving children is not a lack of intellectual ability, but a lack of character and grit; the important non-cognitive skills required for success in life. The Kids are Smart Enough, So What Is the Problem? is a book of hope with surprising practical solutions revealed by listening to teachers, learning from data, and looking for the root cause. This book will help you to discover how struggling students can be reached and teachers encouraged.

Here is the front cover for the book:



US educational performance on the exams that are given to students throughout the world is mediocre at best. The US ranks 38th in math and 24th in reading. This has been the case for a number of years.

The book presents two graphs from periodic surveys of US performance in math and reading for 9, 13 and 17-year-old students. The surveys are conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress. These graphs illustrate that there has effectively been no improvement in math and reading scores in the last 41 years. Garrett emphasized such flat performance is evidence of a systemic problem somewhere in our US Vol. 99 No. 5 February 5, 2018 Page 3 educational system. He pointed out several possible candidates as the cause of the systemic problem: teachers, school boards, administrators, etc. There were issues with each, but they did not rise to the systemic level. Another candidate is the children themselves. There is evidence in a 2004 study titled: Teaching Interrupted, published by a think tank in Brooklyn called Public Agenda. Their data indicates that the problem of a small group of children spoiling the class for the balance of the students exists in 70 - 80%

of all US public school classes. He believes that this is the systemic problem that has been responsible for many of the issues that plague our educational system.

In March of 2013 Garrett organized a study with four fourth grade teaches at a school here in Marion County, Indiana. A quick summary of this study showed these conclusions:

Students in any classroom can be split into 3 groups – Engaged, Followers and Disruptive - split is made on behavior, not intellect

On the average, 23% of each of their classes were disruptive students – 6 children

Lost time per day for each Class – 62 minutes of which 46 min. were for disciplinary issues

This lost time represents a 28% loss of instruction time each day for each class

These disruptive children are lacking character and grit, skills usually taught by parents

The root causes that explain the lack of skills for the disruptive students are: parents, custom, and by choice.

These results quantify the impact of disruptive children on the teacher's job of educating the children. It is terribly wrong for this group of disruptive students to deprive the balance of the class, students who are amenable to education, from an opportunity to learn and excel.

Garrett proposed that all of the disruptive children be separated into a single classroom that will have two teachers, one to focus on character and grit and the other on traditional educational topics.



Dick Garrett