

Play, Progressive Education and the Gary Plan

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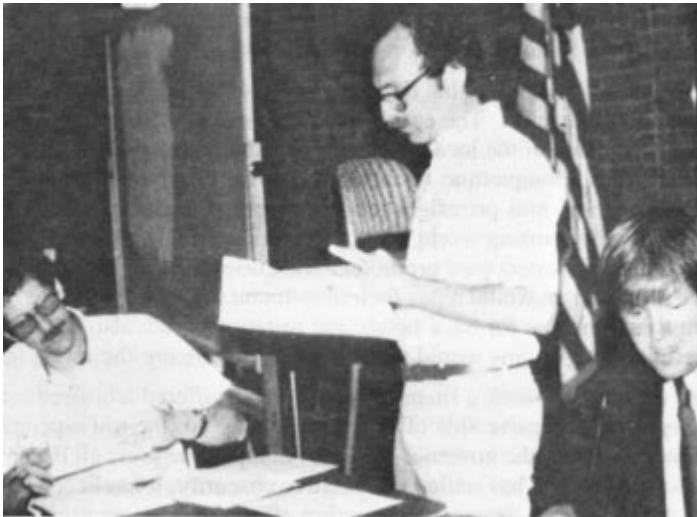
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In 1906 the United States Steel Corporation established Gary, Indiana as a new industrial city. During the first three decades of the twentieth century Gary exhibited a phenomenal increase in its population that included new immigrants. As a result of industrialization, immigration, and rapid urbanization, Gary closely paralleled the socio-cultural changes that occurred in other emergent American cities. To accommodate the new industrial state, new approaches to the conduct of societal institutions was evident, and this was especially apparent in the changing function of education.

In 1908 William A. Wirt was hired as the Superintendent of schools of Gary, and it was in Gary that Wirt gradually built an innovative school system that captured national attention. Wirt devised a diverse curriculum to prepare youth for the new emerging industrial state, and a significant part of Wirt's innovative curriculum was occupied by sports, games, and play activities. Wirt referred to his system as a work-study-play school, but it was also termed as the Gary plan and platoon school. Wirt contended that the social, political, and industrial changes forced upon the schools to recreate the old value system of farm life.

The Gary plan embodied the progressive view of the purpose of a social institution. It was the ideal meeting ground for the two different and somewhat contradicting groups of progressive educators namely, the social progressives and the administrative progressives.

The purpose of our discussion deals with the influence of industrialization on establishing the work-study-play concept in education and the value that play had on preparing youth to serve the industrial state. The Gary plan did not solely deal with youth but incorporated its concept to include adults by utilizing school facilities as evening community centers for adults.



Newly appointed Journal editor Steve Reiss, along with Jules Tygiel and Randy Roberts, prepare for their special evening session.