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**Dan Swinney**

**Manufacturing Renaissance**

**dswinney@mfgren.org**

**Note: This is a draft and not for distribution. I’m eager for your comments and suggestions.**

**An Organizing Experience Integrating Manufacturing,**

**Race, and Community and a new Vision of Development**

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| *"Peace cannot exist without justice, justice cannot exist without fairness, fairness cannot exist without development, development cannot exist without democracy, democracy cannot exist without respect for the identity and worth of cultures and peoples." -*Rigoberta Menchu, a Guatemalan Indigenous leader and winner of the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize |

New Organization of draft:

1. I’m a good organizer whose career spanned 2 qualitatively different periods in our economy.
   1. I did well with the Alinsky tradition
      1. Define the Alinsky Tradition
      2. 1965-66—civil rights movement
      3. Anti-war movement
      4. Labor movement—UE, USW
      5. Didn’t require an understanding of wealth creation
2. Early 80s--Recognized that the world was changing dramatically and that traditional approaches to organizing no longer worked.
   1. Impressed with the superficiality of the right and the left
   2. Formed MR to dig more deeply
   3. Spent 15 years focused on plant closings.
   4. A Shift in the social contract (define SC and describe the shift
   5. This period culminated with the writing of Building the Bridge—recognizing a fundamental shift in our society, and the need for a new social contract.

**Summary**

This is a story of our efforts to adjust an organizing style to what we recognized as a fundamental shift in the US economy and the US social contract. The conditions in inner city communities in Chicago have been deteriorating for 30 years. They are the “canary in the mine” in warning the rest of society what is to come. The traditional approach to organizing for community development aligned with Saul Alinsky or John L. Lewis of the labor movement no long works. In this paper, I summarize our strategic assumptions, our direct experience with the Manufacturing Connect program in Chicago, and what we have learned. This is an approach to organizing for a new paradigm of development. The goals and objectives are different. The partners are different. The standards for success are different. Organizing against the excesses and oppression in our society is required, but not sufficient. The conditions in our society demand that we articulate and organize in support of a new vision of development. At the core of this vision is the recognition that manufacturing is the essential means to solve fundamental social problems such as poverty, the crisis in our communities, and the crisis of the environment.[[1]](#footnote-1) As such, manufacturing must be profoundly tied to social inclusion and participation.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The audiences for this paper are organizers in community, in labor, and in politics.

And before you read the paper, take a moment to see the short 4 minute video about this work at this link: <https://youtu.be/AW6eirGakhg>

**Introduction**

Manufacturing Renaissance was formed in June, 1982 in response to the loss of manufacturing companies and thousands of manufacturing jobs in the late 1970s and the early 1980s. In the 1980s, over 3,000 manufacturing companies in Chicago closed resulting in a loss of 150,000 manufacturing jobs. The loss of these jobs had a disproportionate impact on the African American community[[3]](#footnote-3)--a community that had made profound contributions to the development of the manufacturing sector. Manufacturing had been the major opportunity for African Americans to enter the middle class—even if at the lower rungs. Workers in manufacturing had good wages, benefits, stability, and protection in union contracts. The loss of manufacturing jobs for the African American community was particularly devastating as Black people’s options were limited in light of the many forms of discrimination and exclusion in American society. What was true for the African American community was true for American society as a whole in the most severe form.

We formed as an organization to understand what was going on in the manufacturing sector. Was “manufacturing dead” or did the sector face problems that could be solved. For 15 years, we worked on behalf of local government in Chicago—particularly the Harold Washington Administration, for unions, for community-based organizations, and states including Illinois and New York. We studied particular companies that were in crisis. Some companies should have closed and weren’t worth spending financial or political capital to try to save them. But the overwhelming majority of companies—probably 80%--closed for reasons that could have been addressed. This included large publicly-traded companies being driven into the ground or pushed abroad by the short-term financial strategies of Wall Street. It also included thousands of small companies that had problems including ownership succession that could have been solved by aggressive and innovative local government and the community development community—who instead were passive and focused on the symptoms of poverty rather than the causes of poverty.

The crisis in manufacturing in urban communities was the “canary in the coal mine” for American society. It was a signal that a section of the private sector had unilaterally changed the social contract. Rather than continuing to serve as the leader in developing our countries’ productive capacity, it’s powerful financial sector began to cannibalize the very industries that had been the focus of its investment for decades if not centuries with a disproportional impact on the African American community. Through our work in our first 15 years, we became absolutely confident that manufacturing is a viable in our society if it’s challenges are addressed with creativity and timeliness. Manufacturing is not dead.

In August 1998, I wrote *Building the Bridge to the High Road* and summarized what we had learned in our investigations, and what should be the steps going forward.[[4]](#footnote-4) Following are the central points.

1. *A significant section of the business community has turned to speculative and short-term investment, which has led to expanding destruction of the world’s productive capacity.* This qualitative change in the forces of production is being driven, in part, by new information and electronic technology. This is what we call the Low Road. We now have the space and need for a High Road vision of development. The High Road seeks the best use of human and material resources and is made possible by values that affirm the broadest distribution of wealth and human development as an objective of the economy. The safety and development of **all** people is the realistic objective of this strategy.

2. *The question of who guides and drives the production and control of wealth as well as its redistribution is central to this strategy.* There must be a fundamental change in the social relations of production and in those responsible for the creation and control of wealth and developing our productive capacity. The strategy demands that the labor and community social movements transcend the politics of opposition and the limits of advocating **only** redistribution of wealth. Instead they must take responsibility for the creation of wealth, the starting of companies and the creation of jobs, welcoming the responsibility for good management, productivity, and efficiency as well as justice. We recognize the positive aspects of the market and use them, just as we see and oppose its negative aspects.

3. *The High Road strategy requires recognizing and working with**all the stakeholders in the company, the community, and the economy.* We embrace sections of the business community as tactical and strategic allies even as we identify and oppose those in the business community that degrade our communities and the human condition. In this context we recognize an important distinction between those who seek a fair return through increasing our productive capacity and those who seek it through speculation.

**A New Direction:** From this point going forward, MR shifted its attention from being an organization that was reacting to the crisis in what were once industrial communities to an organization promoting a development vision that could re-build communities.

Our focus was on the West Side of Chicago and the African American community. The roots of MR are in the civil rights movement and the struggle of the Black community for democratic rights, inclusion, and participation.[[5]](#footnote-5) The bulk of our experience since our formation was on the West Side including a major campaign around the closing of Brach Candy Company in partnership with some 60+ organizations. We recognized that de-industrialization had the severest impact on the Black community. And the opposite was the case. A successful strategy to advance a new vision of development had the greatest chance to take hold in the Black community and inspire similar movements in other communities and finally change on a national level—very much in the way that the Civil Rights movement in the South became the model for the struggle for democratic rights of all people. Our focus on the Black community was driven by a commitment to justice as well as a strategic recognition that success in our work could have an impact on all communities and be part of a movement for national change.

We saw firsthand how communities like Austin were disproportionally damaged. Once there were 20,000 manufacturing jobs in the Austin community. Now there are 2,000. The City lost 57% of its industrial base. Austin lost 90%. Unemployment in the city is 6.4%. In Austin, it’s 30%. On the West Side, jobless rates for African-Americans ages 20-24 hovers between 53-73%[[6]](#footnote-6), with those living in poverty and extreme poverty at 51.3% of all residents.[[7]](#footnote-7) In Illinois, only 1% of manufacturing companies are owned by people of color, while 99% are owned by whites[[8]](#footnote-8)—a striking indicator of a persistent pattern of exclusion—that is also visibly present in the Austin community. In the last year, 765 people mostly on the West and South sides of Chicago including 3 of our own were murdered. The conditions are a stark reminder that old approaches to community organizing and development don’t work and new approaches are demanded.

We believed that ready or not, the social movement for fairness, justice, and equality needed to recognize that the traditional Saul Alinsky and John L. Lewis model for organizing was no longer effective. A new model needed to be embraced. We saw that model in Mondragon in the Basque region of Spain[[9]](#footnote-9) and Emilia Romagna in northern Italy. To argue for justice and fairness is required but not enough. The social movement needed to engage the challenges of driving the creation of wealth in addition to demanding a more equitable distribution of wealth. This became the focus of Manufacturing Renaissance.

In the late 1990s, we recognized that American manufacturing had changed. Low skilled work had been moved off-shore. The American companies that remained shifted to high value-added or advanced manufacturing. Their workforce at all levels needed a higher level of education and training then had been required in the past. We recognized what is called the “skills gap.” Our public education system had become de-industrialized over the previous 30 years while manufacturing had evolved into far more complex processes and products. Manufacturing companies couldn’t find enough people with the skills they needed to compete. Thousands of jobs were going unfilled in Cook County while thousands of people, particularly in the inner city, were desperate to find decent paying jobs with benefits.

We saw this skills gap as an enormous opportunity to begin the practical work of rebuilding communities like Austin guided by a different paradigm of development. Through intervening in the education system linked to the manufacturing sector, we could follow a path that was similar and inspired by the Mondragon Cooperative Corporation experience.

**Our Approach**

In the late 1990s, we became deeply aware of the fact that manufacturing had changed. Low skilled work had been moved off-shore and area companies had shifted to high value-added manufacturing or advanced manufacturing. This kind of production required a more highly skilled and educated workforce. Companies couldn’t find the talent they needed to remain competitive. In 2000, we partnered with the Chicago Federation of Labor and secured a $750,000 grant from the US Department of Labor to study the relation of the public education system to the manufacturing sector in Cook County.[[10]](#footnote-10) We found that the education system had become totally disconnected from the manufacturing sector resulting in thousands of jobs that paid on average $60,000 a year when you include benefits going unfilled. Companies couldn’t compete without the talent they needed and thousands of young people as well as adults had no clear path to great careers in manufacturing. This is the “skills gap.” Today in the Chicago area, there are 15,000 to 20,000 jobs in manufacturing going unfilled while the unemployment rate in the inner city, and particularly among young people is soaring with devastating consequences.[[11]](#footnote-11) Today, 43% of young Black men between the ages of 16 and 24 are neither in school or working.As part of our study, we took a delegation to Europe to study the German, Dutch, and Danish approach to education linked to the manufacturing sector and found “off the shelf” approaches that could close the skills gap in American communities including the use of national skills standards and certifications and the dual education system that provides extensive exposure and work in manufacturing companies while a student completes their academic education.

Our report borrowed from this best international practice and proposed a 20 year plan for reforming our public education system to close the skills gap. To our pleasant surprise, the leadership of the Illinois Manufacturers Association—typically very Republican and anti-labor—saw enormous value in our work. They recognized that we had confronted a real problem for manufacturers and had offered a positive and practical solution. They asked if we wanted to work together in implementing this plan. We and the CFL replied, “Absolutely” and began a series of discussions between Manufacturing Renaissance, the Chicago Federation of Labor and the Illinois Federation of Labor and the Illinois Manufacturers Association that gave rise to the creation of the Chicago Manufacturing Renaissance Council (CMRC) in 2005. This unlikely partnership reflected the shift required by a new vision of development. What has made it possible to sustain this coalition, is the commitment to keeping its design simple. The CMRC has four objectives:

* The Chicago region should become the global leader in advanced manufacturing as the foundation for our economy.
* Our strategic partnership including labor, manufacturers, educators, community-based organizations and government is our competitive advantage and must be preserved.
* There must be deep changes in our education system to realign it with the needs and opportunities in manufacturing.
* We are committed to re-building communities by reducing poverty, particularly in those communities that were devastated by de-industrialization.

What has made this partnership successful was the design. We had no pretense that we had to confront all the problems between labor and management. That could be done at other tables. We have avoided third-rail issues that would have threatened this coalition such as international trade issues that typically split the manufacturing community. This approach allows us to potentially build a movement that includes the strong factions in both the Democratic Party (labor) and the Republican Party (manufacturers) that could actually allow us to have significant influence in a political climate that has been dramatically polarized at the state and national level and lead to practical success. We have developed a hybrid structure avoiding the restrictions and lack of flexibility that can come with formalization.

The first project of the CMRC was the founding of a small public school—Austin Polytechnical Academy.

We proposed the creation of Austin Polytechnical Academy in 2005. It reflected the objectives of the CMRC as well as a critical element of our larger strategic vision.[[12]](#footnote-12) Mondragon has always been a key source of inspiration and offers a model of economic democracy and the initiative of the civil society (Father Arizmendi) driving the industrial development in the Basque region in Spain in the development of the Mondragon Cooperative Corporation. This effort began with a polytechnical school in the 1940s in Mondragon that taught young people the skills and knowledge required to lead in the development of a modern manufacturing sector, as well as the values of the Church and Arizmendi’s social vision. The purpose of a company is to build the community rather than make one person or one family wealthy. Work is designed to strengthen humans and families, not degrade and exploit them. Workers and community should have authority in developing their regional economy and not be at the mercy of outside forces. It was the students from this polytechnical school that founded the first industrial cooperative in the 1950s. Now the region is one of the best examples in the world of merging innovation in production with innovation in social inclusion and participation with 100 companies employing 130,000 people and at the cutting edge of the Spanish manufacturing sector. A critical aspect of Mondragon is its profound connection to the struggle of the Basque people. The movement by Father Arizmendi was equally focused on the struggle of the Basque people for freedom and self-determination—a key factor in seeing the relevance of Mondragon to the African American people in the US as pointed out in an article by Professor Sigmund Shipp.[[13]](#footnote-13)

**Impact**

Austin Polytechnical Academy became the first site for the Manufacturing Connect program.[[14]](#footnote-14) We’ve long been seen by some as a complex organization that was difficult to understand and that had goals that seemed unachievable. Now our impact is easy to see and understand:

**Alex—Now a Supervisor: Alex** graduated from Austin Polytech and from our Manufacturing Connect program in 2012. He graduated with a diploma, a nationally-recognized industrial credential from the National Institute for Metalworking Skills (NIMS), and direct work experience in manufacturing. He went to work at Atlas Tool and Die. He’s had three promotions and now is a supervisor—2nd in charge—at a subsidiary plant of the company. He has keys to the factory. He recently bought a two-flat in the Austin neighborhood where he’s raising his two children with his girlfriend. He says, “I’m doing an excellent job and I love my career.” His girlfriend is now exploring a manufacturing career.

**Rene Work and Study: Rene** graduated in 2014. While as a junior at Austin Multiplex, he won the SkillsUSA Illinois State Championship for CNC lathe programming. Rene is now working full-time at Freedman Seating, one of our partner companies on the west side of Chicago, as a Laser Cutter Machine Operator. Rene is now going back to school, enrolled at Triton College to work towards an Associate’s degree in Mechatronics. Part of his tuition is being paid for by Freedman Seating. As a junior in the MC program, Rene was asked by Randi Weingarten, President of the American Federation of Teachers, what the MC program meant to him as she was touring the school in 2013. He replied: *“The CNC machine is like a playground for my mind, if I can think it, I can make it. Manufacturing Connect helped me discover that.”*

**Jervon attending Trinity College and studying engineering:** Jervon, with the assistance of MC’s Post-Secondary Education Coach, won a POSSE scholarship which will covers his 4-years tuition to study engineering at the prestigious Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut.

**Rahkeem – Mentoring the next generation:** Rahkeem , Austin Polytech’s Class of 2012, started working as a machine operator at Paasche Airbrush two days after his high school graduation. Several promotions and raises later, he’s now been working at Paasche for over 4 years as one of their lead CNC machinists. This summer Rahkeem has applied to be a mentor for our MC Mentoring program in which he will matched for at least one year with one of our current high school participants. Rahkeem is one of several alumni who are part of the Young Manufacturers Association, program graduates who are now building their careers in manufacturing are also stepping up to become role models to others.

**Neopatra Hawkins—Class of 2014 summarizes the impact of Manufacturing Connect:** “Manufacturing Connect showed me what is possible for my career; I can be an engineer and I can own my own manufacturing company some day and be a leader in my community.”

Here’s a summary of our performance since 2010:

* **Our students have had 298 paid internships and summer jobs in manufacturing for youth earning collectively over $291,000.**
* **347 nationally-recognized industry credentials from the National Institute for Metalworking Skills (NIMS) have been earned by 261 MC program participants.**
* **55 full-time manufacturing jobs for our graduates, with an average retention of 1 year, earning between $20 - $75k per year plus benefits.**
* MC has worked with **91 manufacturing companies** to provide learning and work experiences for participants.
* MC is responsible for establishing the first **manufacturing technology dual-credit course** in the Chicago Public School system in 2015, the first class of 16 juniors all passed earning 3 college credits each while earning industry credentials.
* **Building Training Infrastructure**: MC raised over $400,000 in private investment to install the WaterSaver Faucet Manufacturing Technology Center, the only accredited, state-of-the-art machining training facility on the west side of Chicago, and to support the MC program.
* **Expanding Workforce Development**: MC provided adult training using the machining facility at Austin High School. Over 80 percent of adult training graduates secured jobs or earned raises or promotions in current jobs averaging a $15.83/hour wage.
* **Entrepreneurship Development**: MC has been working towards starting a student-run manufacturing cooperative called Mech Creations. We want young people not only to aspire working in manufacturing but working towards ownership of manufacturing companies.

**The impact on the system?**  From the opening of the school in 2007 to 2014, we faced resistance from the school system. Austin Polytech was almost closed by CPS. We had a revolving door of principals. We had a number of educators in the school who had mixed views of the program. And we had other critics and competitors in the city. Despite the difficulties, we persisted. As described in greater detail later in the paper, we won a major federal grant of $2.7 million in recognition that we were “promising practice” that had the potential to become a program that could be replicated around the country. We were able to fully staff our program. Our results continued to improved. We now have a broad advisory committee of elected officials, other educators, the CTU and the CFL, and community-based organizations. Our principal in the school became a full partner as did local community organizations such as Austin Coming Together. We had advocates within CPS for our program. In 2015, we were asked by CPS to work with 8th graders in a West Side middle school. In 2016, we have been invited to work in Bowen High School on the South Side and Prosser Career Academy on the Northwest Side. Other schools in the county are exploring a potential partnership with us. Late in 2016, we took advantage of an offering by the MacArthur Foundation to apply for a $100 million grant. We used this opportunity to think through the actual cost of taking our programs to scale in Cook County. We have very low expectations regarding the MacArthur Foundation, but we are changing the discussion regarding our work in the region in light of having both the practice of the Manufacturing Connect program as well as a specific proposal for the creation of an ecosystem that could lead to a transformation of manufacturing and communities in the region. Our ecosystem includes:

* **The Manufacturing Connect** program in high schools, middle schools, and adult training programs;
* **The Young Manufacturers Association:**  The YMA is an organization of young adults including those who have gone through our program. They provide peer support for young people in manufacturing as well as engaging in outreach to other young adults to introduce them to the opportunities in manufacturing. The YMA is now supported by a $200,000 violence prevention grant reflecting a phrase by a County Commissioner, “The best way to stop a bullet is a job.”.
* **The Instructor’s Apprenticeship for Advanced Manufacturing**—a joint project of the CTU, NIMS, the Technology and Manufacturers Association, and Daley College to train instructors for manufacturing programs; and
* **The Ownership Conversion** project that brings together the Chicago Federation of Labor, the Safer Foundation that works with people with convictions, and the Local Initiative Support Corporation to arrange acquisition of manufacturing companies by employees as well as Black, Latino, and women entrepreneurs.
* **Communications:** Engagement with the leading Black radio station in the city—WVON—who has offered us a weekly hour show on our work and approach—a potentially powerful development.

We seem to be within range of making a qualitative breakthrough, yet humbled by past experience. But there’s no question that our patient and persistent approach has created this possibility. Debbie Mills, Director of the National Career Pathway Network recently wrote:

*Glad to hear the news about the possible expansion of the Manufacturing Connect program in Chicago to other schools.!  Wouldn’t it be wonderful to expand across the Midwest (and then the nation?)  Please use my NCPN connections to help keep you in the national spotlight and highlight the good work you are doing.*

**Our Design**

Our design has constantly evolved. There are several distinct components.

**Location--Austin:**  We were advised by Betty Green, the former principal at Chicago Vocational School at the beginning on how difficult it would be to develop our program in the Austin community. She encouraged us to reconsider. There was poverty, crime, deep unemployment and underemployment. There was deep cynicism in the community about initiatives by Chicago Public Schools and Mayor Daley to start new small schools as a means of educational reform. There was a challenged educational infrastructure at all levels. Plus we would be perceived as outsiders competing with local organizations for funding and for influence. Central to our vision is the necessity of linking the growth and development of the manufacturing sector to the growth and development of communities like Austin. Unlike companies and other vocational training programs such as Washburne Trade School[[15]](#footnote-15) that left the city as communities changed from white to Hispanic and African American, we went to Austin because it is Austin. Our commitment to communities like Austin is fundamental to our vision. We’ve been humbled from time to time as we’ve struggled to learn how to operate in a complex community but honored and privileged to work with a community with so many assets, committed leaders, and strong organizations.

**A Public School not a Charter:** When we first proposed the school and our program, the City insisted that the school be organized as a charter school rather than a traditional public school. We refused for two reasons. First, at that time, “charter” meant no union representation for teachers. Second, the problem faced by manufacturers in finding enough talent was huge requiring the transformation of the educational system not just the founding of a handful of independent small schools.

**A leadership school not a vocational school:** In every presentation about our program, we make it clear that we aren’t talking about simply rebuilding the vocational education system—as useful as it was for production positions in manufacturing in the 20th century. A “vocational education system” is all about educating prospective production employees. Our Manufacturing Connect program is about educating the next generation of leaders in every aspect of manufacturing. Our design for a full manufacturing program in a school will represent the full cycle of the manufacturing process including the following components including engineering, product development, production, and business development where students are introduced to the possibility of ownership of manufacturing companies or the start-up of companies.

We believe that this offering completes our objective of “educating the next generation of leaders in all aspects of manufacturing including production, management, and ownership” and distinguishes the Manufacturing Connect program from the traditional vocational education model.

**Our Partners**

Key to organizing around a new vision of development is defining who are your new partners and how do we bring them to our side and join us in our projects.

The skills gap crisis creates the entry point for a successful movement for fundamental change in how our economy is led, who participates in it, and what values guide it. The crisis also creates the potential for exponentially broader partnerships than typically associated with a traditional organizing campaign. The ability to win requires the recognition and recruitment of all the partners that can be engaged; and working with each partner to ensure their ability to forge a partnership with the rest. With each partner, we’ve had to engage them in order to shift their perspective from the traditional “redistributionist” paradigm to the new “wealth creation” paradigm requiring complicated and time consuming work. Our work with our various partners is completely integrated.

**Labor:**  MR emerged from the labor movement in the early 1980s. Our leaders in labor were part of the “dissident” factions in labor. We were activists and organizers—critical of the bureaucracy, corruption, racism, and passivity we often found within organized labor. We obviously recognized the strength and necessity of organized labor but candidly recognized its weaknesses as well. We’ve always valued and acknowledged our roots, and have always used the various campaigns and projects as an opportunity to encourage the labor movement to adjust to the opportunities that we saw in the crisis. We’ve always recognized the key and essential role that labor must play in any major project in society, and we’ve always included labor in our efforts. In earlier days, our name included “labor.” Our first name was the Midwest Center for Labor Research and then later became the Center for Labor and Community Research. We adopted our new name—Manufacturing Renaissance—in 2013. Prior to 2013, we were often asked to take “labor” out of our name. We always replied that we were proud of our association with labor, committed to working with labor to develop an effective strategy for partnerships and growth, and confident that in the long run, our commitment to working with labor as a strategic partner would be our competitive advantage rather than disadvantage. That has proven to be the case.

When we recognized the emergence of the skills gap as a major challenge to the manufacturing sector, we sought a partnership with the Chicago Federation of Labor to join us in analyzing the problem and finding an effective path to address it. As our key partner, we needed to address some of the weaknesses and habits of the traditional labor movement. We needed a partner who would be transparent and accountable and not defensive as we assessed the quality of our education system—a system that was organized by the Chicago Teachers Union Local 1. We had to have a partner that could be candid about the history of labor in dealing with discriminatory traditions within its own ranks in order to build meaningful partnerships particularly with community-based organizations. We recognized that this effort could involve manufacturing companies—many of which would not be unionized or comfortable in working with the labor movement. We needed to secure a commitment by the CFL not to use our work with companies as a means to gain access to their workforce with the purpose of organizing unions. The CFL, then led by Don Turner, agreed to our approach despite strong internal opposition. His commitment that is now sustained by the current leadership of the CFL has been at the foundation of our work and our ability to create unlikely and powerful partnerships particularly with manufacturing companies and their associations and with community-based organizations.

The CFL, now under the leadership of Jorge Ramirez, has played a leading role in the Chicago Manufacturing Renaissance Council and been the most influential voice—as a political force—in gaining the support of the Mayor and his political leadership on all issues related to the development of the Manufacturing Connect program. When our work was on the verge of being buried by institutional resistance, the strength and sophistication of Chicago’s labor community, cleared away the debris.

As we now begin to focus on the issues of arranging the acquisition of companies that are available for sale due to the retirement of owners at a large number of privately-owned manufacturing companies to groups of employees as well as Black, Latino, and women entrepreneurs, the CFL is a critical source of information as they represent tens of thousands of employees in these companies.

A key component in our work has been the Chicago Teachers Union Local 1 that represent the teachers in Chicago Public Schools. As a matter of principle, we refused to build Austin Polytech as a non-union charter school. The CTU was part of the design team in developing the proposal for Austin Polytechnical Academy and most of the meetings of the design team were held in CTU offices. There was a change of leadership in the CTU. Some of the leaders of the union including the steward in Austin Polytech were skeptical or critical of our model. Particularly progressive union leaders were critical of our partnership with companies including those that didn’t have a union. They were skeptical about the value of manufacturing and the skills gap issue. And they were concerned about our relationship with Chicago Public Schools and Mayor Emanuel. But as we began to show that students in the Manufacturing Connect program were actually getting great jobs, were going to college to study engineering, and were given real options in life, the CTU’s perspective shifted dramatically. Today, the CTU is one of our major partners, a major source of our funding, and leading a joint project to train teachers to become instructors in manufacturing courses who are technically, culturally, and pedagogically competent. They are joined in this project by the National Institute for Metalworking Skills, the Technology and Manufacturing Association, Daley College, and the Jane Addams Resource Corporation.[[16]](#footnote-16)

**Companies:** Clearly partnering with companies and their associations were fundamental to our objectives. Typically companies are viewed simplistically by community and labor leaders. You “love ‘em” or you “hate ‘em.” From the work in our early days, we certainly gained a lot of experience in dealing with the destructive role that management and ownership played in the manufacturing sector—cannibalizing viable companies with short-term strategies for profit maximization, breaking unions or securing unnecessary concessions, jacking up communities and local governments for benefits of various kinds with the threat to close or move production, etc. On the other hand, we worked with company owners and managers that were truly committed to innovation, to solving problems within the company and with employees, to find a way to engage the community. These companies are critical allies in shaping a new development vision. They have the knowledge on how to build and innovate in the manufacturing sector. We criticized the “anti-corporate” rhetoric that is so common in the labor, community, and activist network. It simply isn’t useful. If you are seeking fundamental changes you want as many allies as you can get. Clearly there are differences in policy and practice between large publicly traded companies that are under enormous pressure from short-term strategists in Wall Street and those smaller, privately-held companies that are locally owned, anchored in communities, and represent somewhere like 90% of all manufacturing companies. The larger companies have the capacity to go anywhere they want to find the labor talent they need and the ability to secure the terms they want. On the other hand, privately-held companies aren’t mobile and don’t have that flexibility. They depend on a competent local public sector for their survival. That’s a reality that opens the possibility for the real kind of partnerships we have within the CMRC and with the Manufacturing Connect program and local companies. Over 90 companies—mostly small—have partnered with the Manufacturing Connect program since 2007 and provided enormous value to our programs. And without them, there would be no way we could be successful. They provide the standards for our work and the opportunities for our young people to visit factories, to have job-shadowing experiences, internships, summer jobs, and full-time jobs following graduation.

We developed different way to describe the tensions that existed in our partnerships using intentionally vague concepts like “High Road” and “Low Road.” Simply defined, Low Road means that you will do deliberate damage to your stakeholders if it is in the interest of your shareholders or core membership, and High Road means the opposite. These terms aren’t just for the business community but apply to labor, community-based organizations, educators, and government. Acknowledging this reality provides the basis for unlikely partnerships. We are constantly offering opportunities for our partners companies to increase their High Road efforts in ways that clearly meet their immediate business interests as well as coinciding with broader community interests.

**Community-based Organizations (CBOs):** Gaining the support of and working in partnership with CBOs is also central to our objectives since our founding. CBOs were the main participants in our various efforts to prevent small and large companies from closing in the 1980s and 1990s. Our effort to prevent the closing of Brach Candy Company on Chicago’s West Side involved a coalition of some 60-70 community organizations, churches, and elected officials.[[17]](#footnote-17) Brach Candy Company employed 3,700 people.

When we as an organization shifted our strategic focus to embracing wealth creation as an essential part of an organizing strategy as well as wealth redistribution, we had to shift in our understanding of the requirements of building partnerships with CBOs. Even as early as our campaign to save the Brach Candy Company on Chicago’s West Side in 1994, we had to shift from the traditional oppositional campaign to a more nuanced and complicated stance. As we came to understand the company and to work with company executives who shared our belief that the company was viable and could be retained in Chicago for decades to come, our strategy for saving the company was to arrange a management/employee buyout. This was a viable strategy, but one that required a willing seller—in this case a Low Road Swiss billionaire—Klaus Jacobs. Our community partners—Alinsky aligned organizers from the Austin community--wanted to expose the owner of the company with posters showing his picture as part of a “Wanted” poster. We patiently explained that it was actually possible to save the company and the jobs, but it would require a respectful relationship with the owner to have any chance of success. We had to engage them on what were traditional organizing tactics that no longer were appropriate if we were to achieve our objectives. We were successful in helping the CBOs make the shift. In the long run, we weren’t successful in buying the company—although we came close. But we delayed the closing for several years, and gained allies and lots of experience in the process.

When we proposed the creation of Austin Polytechnical Academy, we also faced community opposition from a number of angles. Some leaders felt manufacturing was dead—so why create a school aligned with a dying industry. Others had misperceptions about the changes taking place in a sector that was no longer dirty, dangerous, and numbingly repetitive as had been the case when their grandparents worked in manufacturing. Others felt our program would result in African American students being tracked into low-end and low paying jobs rather than having the opportunity to become white collar professionals. Others were suspicious of our ties to the Mayor and Chicago Public Schools. Others were suspicious of our partnerships with companies. Others viewed us as competitors for funding and political influence. Others were suspicious of whites—and at that time our staff was mostly white.

The reality was that we were seeking support and investment for a strategic direction that came from outside the community and the experience of many of its members and leaders including the inspirational story about Mondragon. This was multiplied by the fact that we were starting a program for students that were 14 years old, knowing that the results of our work wouldn’t be really visible or compelling for 4-5 years. We listened carefully and addressed every issue in a candid straightforward way in meetings, in lunches, over dinner, and taking advantage of every possibility for dialogue. We did have a history of direct involvement in the community going back to plant closing fights starting in the mid 1980s and some influential community leaders knew our history. There were others in the community that knew the value of modern manufacturing and the careers it offered. In some of our community meetings, we had white owners of companies speak to the character of advanced manufacturing, their employment needs, the opportunities in manufacturing including ownership in a candid and straightforward way. We secured enough support to launch our program beginning with a 9th grade class in 2007. As each year went by, our progress was visible. Students were intrigued by what they were learning and getting paid internships. We started an adult program in the evening that would lead to securing NIMS credentials as were the students and employment. We partnered with the Safer Foundation the major agency that serves people with convictions in the region, as well as NIMS and the local community college and developed a program for 15 men returning to the community from prison. We had 100% placement. The program has now been sustained by Safer with similar results.

Once we had graduates, the sentiment in the community shifted qualitatively. We had persisted In the difficult circumstances of the community and the difficulties working with the public school system, and now were demonstrating what we said could happen when we first started the school and the program. We developed a close partnership with Austin Coming Together, the lead community organization in Austin. Public officials at all levels extended their support to us, and other shifts in our favor continue to take place. Now our influence is growing in other communities in the city.

**Chicago Public Schools (CPS):** In Chicago, many educators turned to the charter school model in light of the complexity and difficulty of working with Chicago Public Schools. When we proposed the school, the City asked us to create it as a charter school. We refused for two reasons. First, charter meant non-union in the context of Chicago and we don’t throw our partners under the bus. But as important was the issue of scale in solving the problem of the skills gap. There are 15 to 20,000 jobs going unfilled. To meet this demand requires the transformation of the public school system not 2-3 small charters. Our design was for the school in Austin being a public school, and our Manufacturing Connect program evolved in that context. We aren’t responsible for hiring principals and teachers. We don’t control the curriculum—we complement it.

Describing our experiences in building a partnership with CPS could take a book. CPS has had its own challenges since we started this project with 6 different CEOs of CPS over the last 10 years. And in the school we had 6 different principals, including the first one who was hostile to our program. Subsequent principals who were sympathetic or even liked our program but were worried about giving us too much support in light of the politics of CPS. Most professionals in CPS and in the school had many concerns about manufacturing and our program that were held in the community. And then we had what we now call “institutional resistance”—an aversion to us simply anchored in narrow competition and the fact that we weren’t educators and we were messing in around educational issues and policy.

We were also competing with CPS for funding. In 2014, federal funding became available for programs like ours. When we heard about the opportunity, we contacted CPS and suggested we put together a joint proposal to start this program in several schools—consistent with the design we had discussed with Arne Duncan when Austin Polytech was just a concept. They refused choosing instead to submit their own proposal for 5 schools. We submitted our own proposal for our Manufacturing Connect program at the Austin campus, certain we didn’t have a chance. We were in direct competition with CPS and 400 other school districts. To our surprise, we were one of 24 school organizations that secured the funding and won a $2.7 million grant for 4.5 years in recognition that we had the potential to develop a prototype that could be replicated around the country. This gave us the capacity to dramatically increase our staff and the scope of our program. CPS is now a sub-contractor to us.

With the DOL grant, we were able to fully staff our program. Our results in every way improved making the case for quality of our approach. CPS leadership became increasingly aware of the strength of our approach, as well as recognizing that our support in the community had substantially increased. Last year, CPS bought us into a middle school where we introduced 200 8th graders to engineering and manufacturing. CPS is now bringing us into two additional high schools, and the current CEO Forrest Claypool recently wrote:

“I want to congratulate Manufacturing Renaissance for its Manufacturing Connect program that, in partnership with CPS, has created a new model of reconnecting public education with Chicagoland’s manufacturing sector…I want to extend my full support for further MC expansion at Prosser Career Academy, (with future expansion at other high school and middle schools). CPS will be working diligently to remove every obstacle and pursue opportunities to scale this vital initiative.”

Working with an institution as complex and opaque as CPS was difficult and required enormous patience, flexibility, the willingness to build on the positive, the ability to exercise our political strength, and a long view.

**College Enrollment or Community Building:** Even progressive educators emphasize college enrollment as the key criteria for success in secondary education. If that’s the criteria for educational success in inner city communities, it means that we’ve created a portal for young people to leave the community with no attention on what role they play in society after they leave high school, with no knowledge if they succeed in college, or if they can pay off their inevitable college debt.

We see the purpose of the MC program as building the community. Again, manufacturing is the only sector that can re-build a broad-based middle class in inner city communities. Not only are there good wages and benefits for the individual, there’s the multiplier effect. On average, each manufacturing job generates 5 other jobs in the economy whereas each service sector job maybe creates 1 other job in the economy, and each retail job creates ¼ of a job. In the case of Walmart, there’s a destruction of jobs in the community.

If residents in a community are going to participate in 21st century manufacturing, there must be an appropriate educational infrastructure that at minimum includes elementary, secondary, and post-secondary institutions that meet the standards and requirements to work in manufacturing. This infrastructure can provide a link between the community and the regional manufacturing sector leading to a flow of money back into the community. Two of our MC graduates have purchased houses in Austin only 3-4 years out of high school.

With this infrastructure in place, there becomes the possibilities of start-up companies, of arranging the acquisition of companies facing a succession crisis by local entrepreneurs including employees. There becomes the possibility to attract companies. Without the building of this educational infrastructure, Black and Latino communities will not participate in the growth and development of the regional manufacturing sector. In fact, the failure of a city to build this infrastructure linked to 21st century manufacturing in inner city communities is a policy of 21st century segregation. This is why we have focused on the Manufacturing Connect program in Austin despite the challenges.

**What We are Learning**

I wrote in 1998:

“I believe that we are at the beginning of a relatively long transition period of 30 or 40 years that will result in the kind of economy and society envisioned in this paper. The transition will be complicated and difficult and requires careful, patient, and honest analysis as leaders seek to understand and transform events. As philosophers teach us, all development springs from the struggle among contradictory aspects of a thing. Negative and positive qualities are in constant transformation. We need to understand dialectics recognizing that in many cases, our work will be characterized by weakness--say 80% weak and 20% strong. We need to be skilled in recognizing that 20% and building on it to address the weaknesses in a protracted process that will lead to work that is 80% strong and 20% weak, or better.[[18]](#footnote-18)”

Our experience has borne this out. Our approach to community development had been gleaned from 15 years of active investigations and engagement in communities facing de-industrialization. Public perception had concluded that manufacturing was dying. From our perspective, manufacturing was viable, but required new partners and new perspectives to restore its strength and power as a means to build a sustainable society.

We defined our new partners to include sections of the business community. With our traditional partners, we began the process of suggesting new approaches that corresponded to what we saw as new conditions and new possibilities. We represented a minority point of view and recognized how easy it would be to fail, to be marginalized in our efforts, and to become alienated from our potential partners. To many, our approaches seemed flawed and were controversial. So we became comfortable in making incremental advances—cautious about pushing too fast. We knew that success in our programs like Manufacturing Connect would be the best “persuader”. We maintained our confidence in our approach and continually refined our analysis and program, although there were times we could feel the breath of defeat. Some of our staff and board weren’t comfortable with this approach and left the organization.

When you are advancing a new paradigm at the edge of the mainstream this “war of position” is essential. Circumstances can change that can allow an acceleration of the program and qualitative breakthroughs. This happened in part with our success in winning the federal grant for the Manufacturing Connect program. Or there can be a change in the political climate for the better on a local, state or federal level. But success at these moments depend on the patient building of a base of work that has high quality, that is supported by a range of partners, and that has the potential to scale. We believe our patience and persistence has paid off.

**Conclusion**

Through our Manufacturing Connect program we can go into any school district within proximity of manufacturing companies; establish a strong connection between the school, the community, and manufacturers; and create multiple pathways for success for students. This approach can set the stage for rebuilding a modern manufacturing sector in the community as a foundation for broader community development. This is a model that is a reflection of a new approach to development. Although manufacturing remains in private hands, it is championed by the public sector as the essential means to solve key social problems. Our vision is explicit in seeing manufacturing profoundly tied to the development of communities—particularly in the inner city. As such, the candid discussion of race, of poverty, of the health of communities is front and center. We believe that this approach can lead to a development vision that is economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable and restorative and, as such, contribute to a hopeful and practical movement for fundamental social change.

1. Paper on manufacturing for the Next System project. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://mfgren.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/The-Bridge-NAE-Article092815.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Truly Disadvantaged, William Julius Wilson [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <http://mfgren.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/building_a_bridge.pdf>, ppg. 10-11 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Dan Swinney was the founder of Manufacturing Renaissance. His first organizing experiences began as a part-time volunteer for the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee in the summer of 1965 in a project to desegregate public schools in Dekalb County, Georgia. He returned the following summer as a full-time organizer for the Georgia Council of Human Relations to work in the same county on the same issues. Following graduation at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, Dan spent 13 years in manufacturing at three companies in South Austin on Chicago’s West Side. At Gulf+Western Taylor Forge, he organized and led USW Local 8787 until the closing of Taylor Forge in 1983. He founded MR in 1982 in response to the dramatic increase in plant closings. The first major client of MR was the Harold Washington administration in Chicago. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Lost: The Crisis of Jobless and Out of School Teens and Young Adults In Chicago*, January 2016 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *West Side Forward,* Bethel New Life, p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. http://www.mbda.gov/sites/default/files/ManufacturingFactSheet2014.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Alinsky vs.Arrizmendi [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. http://mfgren.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/final-MWDP-report030802.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/as-skill-requirements-increase-more-manufacturing-jobs-go-unfilled-1472733676> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Balancing Innovation in Technology with Social Inclusion—the Second Industrial Revolution, The Bridge, The journal of the National Academy of Engineering, Fall 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. “The road not taken: alternative strategies for Black economic development in the United States,”  
    Journal of Economic Issues - March 1, 1996  
    Sigmund C. Shipp [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. http://mfgren.org/manufacturing-connect/ [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. http://forgottenchicago.com/articles/the-last-days-of-washburne/ [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. <http://www.ctuf.org/iaam/> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. http://mfgren.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Misadventure-in-Candyland-Part-2.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Building the Bridge to the High Road, p. 42 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)