The National Center for Education Statistics reports that as of 2014, so-called minority students in K–12 schools in the United States outnumbered White students for the first time (Table 203.50). A significant factor in the changing ratio of minority/majority is a rapidly increasing Latin@ population, a population that hasn’t consistently achieved academic success (M. Lopez). This article explores the rhetorical effects of pedagogical choices made by teachers in one public school program that had proven particularly effective for Latin@ students: the Mexican American Studies (MAS) program in Tucson, Arizona. While MAS is used as a model for school districts across the nation to better reach Latin@ students, the program is currently illegal in Arizona. As such, it is at the center of a battle over whose histories, literatures, and identities matter enough to be taught in schools. The MAS program is, for all intents and purposes, dead. This analysis, then, is a rhetorical autopsy. It works to piece together what happened in the complex body of the program and how internal and external forces combined to cause its demise.

This article investigates the rhetorical effects of pedagogical choices within and beyond classrooms. It examines how the Tucson Mexican American Studies program incorporated and embraced cultural and linguistic borderspaces—which simultaneously led to successful outcomes and the program’s demise. The article draws on my interviews with former MAS students and teachers and is divided into three movements, as in a musical piece. Each movement is relatively self-contained, but the combination in sequence provides the audience a fuller
experience. The term movement also brings to mind activist movements, such as the ongoing efforts to revive ethnic studies in Tucson, and physical movement, such as the clapping in one of the opening rituals this piece examines.

The first movement provides an overview of MAS and how it was connected to the place and history of Tucson as well as some of the effects of its implementation and subsequent removal. The second movement explores the rhetorical evolution of the In Lak’ech chant, an opening ritual in many MAS classes. I trace the chant’s path through various languages, authors, and nations, dissecting the various forms it took before arriving in Tucson classrooms. The third movement focuses specifically on particular choices teachers in the MAS program made. Here, I trace the rhetorical effects of various opening rituals many MAS classes used, such as reciting In Lak’ech and doing the Chicano Clap. Taken together, these examples help to illustrate the differences between what MAS teachers and students experienced and what others feared in those rituals and about MAS as a whole. Examining rituals as the everyday practices of a particular set of classes allows for an understanding of what Greg Dickinson calls “the profound consequentiality of rhetoric or rhetorical spaces” (6) and enables a critical approach to understanding that consequentiality. Beyond providing a thick description of elements of MAS curricula, I argue that the consequences of politicians policing K–12 MAS classes in Tucson reverberate throughout our educational system, including college English classrooms.

First Movement: Tucson and the Rise and Fall of Mexican American Studies

By elucidating where Tucson is situated historically and geographically and then explaining how and why teachers developed the MAS program, the context of both place and program provides much-needed background for this larger argument. What follows describes the program’s accomplishments prior to its illegal status, situates it within conversations in English studies, and introduces readers to some of the elements of MAS that distinguish it from standard curricular course offerings as well as from other multicultural classes.

The city in southern Arizona now called Tucson is one of the oldest continuously occupied areas in the United States—anthropologists believe Paleo-Indians first settled there 12,000 years ago. The area has long been home to the Hohokam people, from whom it is thought the Tohono O’odham people descended. Even the word Tucson comes from the O’odham word Ts-iuk-shan, meaning “black base” and believed to refer to the black base of Sentinel Hill, one of Tucson’s many surrounding mountains (“Origin”). Thus, Tucson, as the origin of its name indicates, actually has a much longer Indigenous, Spanish,
and/or Mexican history than it does a Euro American history. The Hohokam people lived in the area for over a millennium before the Spanish conquistadors claimed the land. What is now Tucson was part of Spanish colonial lands until 1821, when Mexico won independence. As part of the Gadsden Purchase of 1853, it became part of the United States (June). However, as Tucson is only an hour’s drive from the present-day Mexican border, and until recently that border remained fairly porous, Tucson maintains strong material ties to its Indigenous, Spanish, and Mexican history.

Honoring this longer narrative, the Mexican American Studies program in Tucson reflected the Indigenous, Mexican American, and Euro American perspectives that appear in local history and in the identities of the majority of students in classes. The program originated in 1997 when Tucson’s largest school district, Tucson Unified School District (TUSD), began offering a series of high school courses that collectively came to be called MAS. These courses emphasized the history and identity of the students in TUSD classrooms. Cristina Ramírez, describing the writing of Mexican rhetor Hermila Galindo, argues that “[b]y bringing together ideas from two cultures and two ideologies, [Galindo] created a symbolic space of her nation’s new social realities” (620). MAS worked similarly to combine Tucson’s cultures and ideologies and create both a symbolic site and a physical classroom space to reflect and protect new social realities. Because it blended three cultural perspectives, MAS was a tricultural curriculum. Tricultural more specifically reflects the content of MAS than broader descriptors like multicultural. The tricultural content of MAS courses was curated specifically to reflect Tucson’s history and thus to match the three main ethnic identities and lived experiences of its students.

MAS was designed to help Latin@ students see themselves in school subjects in order to increase their level of engagement and graduation. The approach of the courses aligned with what Gloria Ladson-Billings describes as culturally relevant teaching, which “requires that students maintain some cultural integrity” along with achieving “academic excellence” (160). Although begun as ad hoc course offerings, the MAS program expanded, eventually becoming a department within the district, offering classes at the elementary and middle school levels as well as the high school classes that are the focus of the interviews and analysis of this article. As part of this curriculum, literature classes examined texts by Mexican American and Indigenous authors, and US history and government courses provided Indigenous and Mexican American perspectives that are otherwise absent from many high school curricula. Though the classes were open to all students, MAS students were primarily Latin@, reflecting both student choice and school population—for example, 90 percent of Pueblo High students and 61 percent of Tucson High students are Latin@ (“School”).
MAS classes were offered across TUSD until January 2011, when interpretation of a new Arizona law—one written specifically to target the MAS classes in Tucson—brought them to an abrupt halt. In December 2010, administrative law judge Lewis J. Kowal ruled that the Mexican American Studies classes were out of compliance with that new law, Arizona Revised Statute 15-112, originally HB 2281. ARS 15-112 states:

A. A school district or charter school in this state shall not include in its program of instruction any courses or classes that include any of the following:

1. Promote the overthrow of the United States government.
2. Promote resentment toward a race or class of people.
3. Are designed primarily for pupils of a particular ethnic group.
4. Advocate ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals.

(State of Arizona House of Representatives, Forty-Ninth Legislature)

The judge determined that “one or more [MAS] classes or courses were in violation” of A.R.S. §§ 15-112(A)(2), (A)(3), and (A)(4) (Kowal 36). The judge made this ruling despite data supporting the successes of the classes and despite a 2011 independent audit known as the Cambium Report, which found MAS did not violate any aspect of that law or any laws (Curriculum).

Commissioned by John Huppenthal, then Arizona State Schools Superintendent and a vocal opponent of MAS, the Cambium Report was supposed to provide evidence that MAS classes were violating ARS 15-112, by, for instance, encouraging the overthrow of the American government. Instead, the audit, performed by a Texas-based firm, found “no observable evidence” of such violations (50). The Cambium Report, which was based on focus group interviews, unannounced classroom observations across several schools and courses, and analysis of classroom materials and district data, found that “[t]eachers and MASD curriculum specialists created lessons where learning experiences were aligned with the state standards and incorporated targeted performance objectives within multidisciplinary units for real life applications” (19). The auditors’ overall finding, in other words, was that good teaching—teaching in line with standards and life beyond school—occurred in MAS classes. Further, “[t]he curriculum auditors observed teachers using researched-based instructional strategies that were developmentally appropriate and provided students with assignments which required the use of higher-order and critical thinking skills” (19). The report also mentions that every observed classroom—literally “every classroom”—“demonstrated [that] all students [were] actively engaged” and that students “worked collaboratively with each other across various sociocultural backgrounds and academic abilities” (19). The overwhelmingly positive report goes on like this, spending many of its 120 pages lauding the program’s effects.
and specifically emphasizing how the program supported student learning and graduation rates.

The MAS program dramatically improved graduation rates. The Pew Research Center reports that nationwide, the high school graduation rate for Hispanics hovered around 61 percent throughout most of the 1990s (Fry). In 2003, though, an uptick began, and by 2013, the nationwide graduation rate for Hispanics was 79 percent (Fry). These numbers are reflected in reported graduation rates by TUSD. In 1999, three Tucson high schools that were just beginning to implement MAS were graduating Hispanics at rates ranging from 56 percent to 69 percent—roughly on either end of the national average of 61 percent (“Graduation Rate”). Yet, reflecting the findings of the audit and the success of the MAS program, those schools quickly outpaced the national average; by 2007, these schools reported graduating Hispanic students at 85 percent to 92 percent (“Graduation Rate”), outpacing the national average of 68 percent (Fry). Moreover, graduation rates of MAS students reported in the Cambium Report were found to be 5 to 11 percent higher for students taking MAS classes as seniors, thus further emphasizing the positive impact of the MAS curriculum.6

Those high local numbers stayed fairly stable from 2007 on, while the national average continued going up about 1 percent a year. But in 2013, after MAS was deemed illegal, those Tucson schools experienced dramatically lower graduation rates for Hispanic students: In fact, each of these schools’ rates fell below the national average that year. This shift is visible in Figure 1, which plots three TUSD high schools using TUSD-provided data (“Graduation Rate”; Scott) and data regarding the national average graduation rate of Hispanic students (Fry).

Although suggestive, these numbers alone cannot prove that MAS was increasing graduation rates and that MAS’s demise made them decrease. The graphs and data here show a positive correlation but cannot demonstrate causation. However, that positive correlation, when combined with other information like the graduation rates of MAS students specifically, the findings of the Cambium Report, and testimony of the teachers and students in that program, suggests a strong link between MAS and higher graduation rates for Latin@ students. Moreover, successes like an increase in graduation rates were explicit goals of MAS. As former MAS teacher José González put it: “. . . the goal of MAS was always to give the students a sense of history, of literature, and provide them the opportunity to learn about themselves as part of the United States of America, and instill an academic type of identity, and get them to matriculate into institutions of higher learning” (2014). That success, though, did not read as success to everyone, nor, perhaps, did it matter to everyone: the MAS disbandment was upheld despite national attention.
Readers may already be familiar with the decision to outlaw the curriculum, as stories of TUSD’s “book banning” and lamentations about the literal boxing up of books while students were in classes went viral, popping up on social media sites and prompting anti-censorship responses from NCTE, the AAUP, ALA, and dozens of other national organizations (“NCTE Raises”). In her 2012 Council Chronicle article, for example, Deb Aronson describes how MAS, although lauded, became outlawed. But the story has to do with far more than book banning and speaks to the increasing politicization of education and of English studies particularly.

The troubles in Tucson are reminiscent of Linda Brodkey’s “Troubles at Texas.” When Brodkey was at the University of Texas at Austin (UT), a syllabus for a planned first-year composition course with a multicultural focus lit a political flame of anti-multiculturalism within UT and the surrounding community. Brodkey’s experience fit into the broader context of writing teachers disagreeing about what college writing classes should include and the political nature of writing. This debate is typified by Maxine Hairston’s article, “Diversity, Ideology, and Teaching Writing,” in which she derides writing classrooms that embrace political debate, and in the subsequent response by John Trimbur and

Figure 1: National Hispanic graduation rates and those for three Tucson schools with MAS, 1999–2013
other scholars, who invoke political content as part of a “resolutely rhetorical” focus. In their reply, they paint a picture of the writing classroom as responsible for providing students with the rhetorical tools to examine “how people argue public issues of central importance to our society,” rather than advocating any particular political stance (248).

Similarly, MAS courses were—and remain—at the center of a battle that seems to respond to the current political climate rather than the actual curriculum. While the MAS curriculum sought to prepare students for the critical thinking expected at the college level, those seeking to ban it may have been more interested in shutting down ethnic studies at any level than in ensuring students were prepared for college. A recent case in point: in January 2017, Arizona state representatives introduced HB 2021, which sought not only to extend the existing K–12 ethnic studies ban to the state’s universities, but to expand the ban by making it illegal to “promote division, resentment, or social justice toward a race, gender, religion, political affiliation, social class or other class of people” (State of Arizona House of Representatives, Fifty-Third Legislature, emphasis added) in any course or event on campus. While that bill did not survive, its intent was clear and chilling.

What happened to Mexican American Studies in Tucson must be viewed as one piece of a much larger racially motivated puzzle. MAS was already an emotionally charged topic in Tucson. While the media flurry was calling the episode censorship and a book ban, the district responded, arguing that there was no ban: then-Superintendent John Pedicone wrote to TUSD faculty and staff to say that the books had merely been boxed but were not banned (Bynum). As the books did remain nominally accessible in school libraries, naming the MAS dissolution a “book ban” reveals misdirection over the core principle at work. What was truly outlawed was a pointed, socially just curriculum that spoke to students’ identities and was helping Latin@ students achieve scholastically.

Among the boxed books was Paulo Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed, which of course advocates a critical pedagogy. Augustine Romero, a former MAS teacher and currently an administrator in TUSD, described Pedagogy of the Oppressed as his “educational Bible.” Following Freire’s principles, MAS teachers implemented critical pedagogy in part by asking students to see themselves as agents of change rather than merely as recipients of knowledge. To this end, one of the core tenets of the MAS program was that students researched and enacted their own social justice projects. But Freire’s book was more than a pedagogical tool for MAS teachers: it was a text the students in MAS classes read and directly engaged with as well. This engagement is clearly promoted through books like Pedagogy of the Oppressed, a point made by former MAS teacher Lorenzo Lopez when describing his experience teaching Freire’s text:
It was very difficult for the students, and we would take an extremely long time working through one chapter. It was empowering for students to realize this is grad school material, but if you sit down and break it down, word by word, sentence by sentence, then you can understand this. (2014)

Lopez makes clear that reading Freire empowered students in multiple ways—not least as students capable of challenging work. Lopez went on to say that students would discover,

My brain is capable of understanding these concepts... and if I'm doing it here in high school, why can't I do it in college? Why can't I be successful? This isn't even undergrad stuff; this is grad school stuff. That, in a significant way, it pushed them... it fed their identities as intellectuals—it created that identity.

In unifying students' identities inside and outside the classroom, Freire's text played a pivotal role for Lopez and for other MAS teachers and students. MAS was successful beyond eliminating the achievement gap between Latin@ and White students on paper. It was successful at getting students to identify as intellectuals, to have an in-depth academic experience. When discussing the MAS program, teachers repeatedly described wanting students to become “academic people” (Escamillo) or “critically compassionate intellectuals” (Romero). Sally Rusk wanted to inspire students’ “intellectual curiosity” and José González worked to “instill academic identity.” Students I interviewed felt the teachers succeeded with those goals. One such student, Kim Dominguez, took MAS classes, and when they ended, instead of collecting a grade and moving on, she asked, “How can I continue to learn this stuff?” Ultimately, Dominguez headed to the University of Arizona to pursue first an undergraduate degree and then a master’s degree in ethnic studies. Dominguez was not alone in continuing her studies and activism well beyond the MAS classes that inspired them.

MAS students’ engagement with their classes and enjoyment of academic learning within the MAS curriculum is evidenced by memories former students share. Adilene Cota, a previous MAS student, described her MAS class as “more like a family” than a class, not like other classes where “we memorized our notes and that’s it.” It was “more active, and there was more discussion.” In MAS, she was taught to “listen to both sides” and to “respect each other.” A first-year student at the University of Arizona at the time of our interview, Cota described MAS teachers as “push[ing her] to go for [her] goals, to be a better person.” MAS offered many students who, as Augustine Romero explains, would be on a path to “die in the streets” or have a “metaphorical death” in the prison system, a chance at a different path of cultural and intellectual awareness, community, and agency. Evidencing this, seniors taking MAS graduated at higher rates (91–96 percent between 2005 and 2010) than a comparison group of all seniors
In Lak’ech, The Chicano Clap, and Fear

(83–85 percent between 2005 and 2010) and at higher rates (91 and 94 percent in 2009 and 2010, respectively) than the overall average for Hispanic students (76.4 and 79.5 percent for all Hispanic students in 2009 and 2010, respectively) (Curriculum 108–9) and many MAS graduates went on to college. Beyond such quantifiable outcomes, however, MAS students simply loved the courses. High school students in poor socioeconomic areas and often with underachieving backgrounds—in other words, students who were disenfranchised and whom teachers often struggle to reach—loved and felt empowered by MAS classes and teachers.

The deep impact of MAS on the students and their investment in MAS is further revealed by their efforts to save the program when it was disbanded. When judgment came down and MAS classes were ended abruptly, students wrote and protested and attempted to save their beloved curriculum. They spoke at press conferences and demonstrated for their right and desire to learn through Mexican American studies, actions visible to the world on YouTube (ThreeSonorans). These students found an investment in literature, history, government—the things we focus on in higher education: ideas and the written word. Their investment and excitement, however, were met with derision from local news outlets, various community members, and state politicians, fought with legal challenge, and concluded with a wide range of books removed from MAS classrooms—a baffling result to many educators.

Examining the clear successes of the MAS curriculum, it is only natural to wonder why this successful program, which met the localized needs of its students, became such a target. To describe it succinctly, MAS’s strength was also its downfall: it was a tricultural program in a state whose predominant governmental ethos is that the only appropriate culture in “‘merica,” is a single, homogenized (read: “White”) culture. Arizona is a prime example of what Damián Baca describes as the “enduring Eurocentric teleology and its consequent dominant narrative of assimilation” (163). Arizona, writ large, does not want three cultures and three histories intertwined, taught, or put on remotely equal footing. Regardless of the histories or identities of the people in many parts of the state, the state would prefer to preserve the advantages of already-advantaged groups. In Catherine Prendergast’s terms, race can be understood as an “absent presence” in this formulation (36). What led Arizona politicians to outlaw MAS is an example of an “unconscious racism on the part of the culture as a whole” (Prendergast 39, emphasis hers). Legislators arguing (and/or believing) that they are working to protect students from radical teachers are, rather, working to protect the status quo and current ethnic and racial hierarchies. Furthering this understanding of the legislative action in Arizona is the state’s long history of discrimination against minorities. TUSD in particular has a legally recognized
history of discrimination against its minority students. In fact, since the 1970s TUSD has been under a federal desegregation order after a lawsuit by parents accused the school district of discrimination (“Supporting”). The federal order specifically requires that TUSD offer a multicultural curriculum that reflects the histories and perspectives of both African American and Latin@ student populations (“Tucson” 37). The MAS program had become the primary path to following that order for Latin@ students. Thus, the MAS program that the state courts of Arizona made illegal was actually required by the Federal courts in order for the district to be operating legally.

Exploring TUSD’s efforts to create a new “multicultural” curriculum to comply with federal law in the wake of all that has happened is beyond the scope of this article, but in this space I do want to make clear that MAS, as a tricultural program, provided deep learning about each culture’s perspectives. In this regard, it was better than a more general “multicultural” curriculum, which would necessarily have to sacrifice depth for breadth. As Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes point out, multicultural education can end up being “bland” or uncritical; it can “emphasiz[e] commonalities that prevent us from perceiving and analyzing critical differences” (431). Unlike the broad multicultural courses Alexander and Rhodes critique, MAS classes were carefully focused and localized. MAS classes weren’t saying, “Let’s read several things from multiple cultures so we can find out how we’re all really the same”—what Alexander and Rhodes describe as the “flattening effect” (431). Instead, MAS classes helped students recognize different cultures’ “common humanity”; they also offered “a strong critical sense of [ . . . ] radical alterity, of the critical differences that exist among different” people and different groups (431). Difference, of course, is at the heart of the fears about the MAS curriculum, and it is also the reason the curriculum is necessary. The MAS program required explicitly teaching about difference, about borders—present-day and historical, local and national, linguistic and cultural, physical and ideological. MAS delved into Mexican American and Indigenous perspectives of and contributions to US history, government, and literature; rather than focusing on ways that all cultures are similar, it delved into the ways Indigenous and Mexican American perspectives of history, government, and literature differed from the dominant Euro American perspective.

MAS shared stories of Indigenous and Latin@ people with students, thereby including those peoples and their stories as valid contributions to history. Victor Villanueva suggests that “[t]he narratives of people of color jog our memories as a collective in a scattered world and within an ideology that praises individualism” (16). He points to these narratives as a necessary corrective to an otherwise incomplete view of history. Further, that individualist-focused ideology is not merely posited: it is literally written into law in Arizona, where ARS 15-112
prohibits classes that “advocate ethnic solidarity instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals.” With its focus on “individuals” over “ethnic solidarity,” ARS 15-112 fits into what Edward Bonilla-Silva describes as an “ideology of colorblindness,” or “’racism lite’” (3), which relies on the misguided belief that inequalities do not exist or that educating people about racial inequities enshrines victim mentalities. “Individualism” functions as a “justification for opposing policies to ameliorate racial inequality because they are ‘group based’ rather than ‘case by case’ . . . [but] if minority groups face group-based discrimination and [W]hites have group-based advantages, demanding individual treatment for all can only benefit the advantaged group” (83–4). In other words, individualism is not created equal. Nevertheless, the current law requires not advocating ethnic solidarity over individualism. One might argue that a class could advocate ethnic solidarity and treat pupils as individuals—next I argue that MAS did precisely that. I will also clarify that none of the teachers I interviewed believed that MAS classes violated any aspect of the law—a belief upheld by the impartial, independent Cambium Report auditors.

SECOND MOVEMENT: TRACING THE LINGUISTIC AND RHETORICAL HISTORY OF IN LAK’ECH

The documentary Precious Knowledge shows Mexican American Studies (MAS) students and teachers in Tucson clapping and reciting together—the words are from In Lak’ech. María Federico-Brummer, like many MAS educators and those who have written about MAS and In Lak’ech in the press, describes In Lak’ech as an excerpt from a Luís Valdez poem called “Pensamiento Serpentino” (1990). In our interview, Federico-Brummer mentioned that fellow MAS teacher Curtis Acosta “found [Valdez’s] poem.” When I spoke with Acosta, he clarified that the version of In Lak’ech that MAS classes chant comes from Jorge Huerta’s introduction to Luís Valdez’s play, Zoot Suit, rather than directly from “Pensamiento Serpentino.” In Lak’ech turns out to have a complicated textual history. It appears in various forms across time and sources, as this movement details.

In the introduction to Zoot Suit, Jorge Huerta presents the In Lak’ech chant as a straight excerpt from Valdez’s poem “Pensamiento Serpentino.” Huerta says Valdez “describes and revives the philosophy of ‘In Lak Ech,’ which translates as Tú eres mi otro yo/ You are my other me” (10). There, Huerta provides—in block quote form—the bilingual version of In Lak’ech that MAS students recited:

\[
\begin{align*}
Tú eres mi otro yo / You are my other me. \\
Si te hago daño a ti / If I do harm to you, \\
Me hago daño a mi / I do harm to myself. \\
Si te amo y respeto / If I love and respect you, \\
Me amo y respeto yo / I love and respect myself. (10)
\end{align*}
\]
A careful reading of “Pensamiento Serpentino”—the poem Huerta quotes as his source for *In Lak’ech*—reveals that this version of *In Lak’ech* does not appear verbatim in the poem at all.

“Pensamiento Serpentino” is a thirty-page Chicano manifesto written in a blend of English and Spanish. It does not include *In Lak’ech* as a neatly dissectible chant or mini poem, nor does it include English translations of the Spanish lines the way the chanted version used in MAS classes does. In fact, rather than appearing together, the lines that make up the *In Lak’ech* chant are spread throughout Valdez’s poem in three different places. The concept of *In Lak’ech* as the title of a Mayan moral philosophy is introduced on the fourth page of Valdez’s text, from a line that reads, “just look at their moral concept/ IN LAK’ECH: Tú Eres Mi Otro Yo” (173, emphasis in original). The second through fifth lines of the poem-as-chant appear—notably, in reverse order—a page later, when Valdez writes, “Si te amo y te respeto/ a ti, me amo y me respeto yo/ si te bago daño a ti, me bago daño a mí.” (174). The phrase “IN LAK’ECH: Tú eres mi otro yo,” the title and first line of the poem-as-chant, appears on the twenty-second page.

Although the version of *In Lak’ech* Huerta provides in his “Introduction” appears as a whole poem, the lines of that poem come from disparate parts of its origin text, “Pensamiento Serpentino.” While the Spanish language elements of the chant largely come from the poem “Pensamiento Serpentino,” the arrangement and translated/bilingual presentation, curiously, do not. It appears that Huerta himself modified the *In Lak’ech* language without acknowledging those adjustments in his introduction to *Zoot Suit*. But Valdez’s version isn’t the original written source of *In Lak’ech*, either. He’s drawing on something older.

Although the MAS version of *In Lak’ech* is excerpted from Valdez’s original text, Valdez’s poem is reviving an ancient Mayan philosophy. In a piece on the *Voices in Urban Education* website, Valdez explains:

I inherited *In Lak’ech* directly from the late Professor Domingo Martinez [sic] Paredes[sic] of the National University of Mexico in the 1970s. He was the renowned author of several books on Mayan thought and culture, and I had the privilege of being personally tutored by him” (Valdez and Martinez-Paredes[sic]).

In his book, *Parapsicología Maya* (Mayan Parapsychology), Domingo Martínez Parédez writes about *In Lak’ech* as what he calls a *filosofía maya* (Mayan philosophy). Martínez Parédez’s translation of the Mayan philosophy is strikingly similar to Valdez’s poem, and thus to Huerta’s version and to the MAS chant. For example, one line reads:

[Q]ue tú eres yo, y yo soy tú. Que si te respeto me respeto yo, y si te bago daño me bago daño yo . . . (19)

[Such that you are me, and I am you. Such that if I respect you I respect me and if I do harm to you, I harm me . . . ] (my translation)
The second time Martínez Parédez invokes *In Lak’ech*, he writes:

*Tú eres yo y yo soy tú, si te respeto me respeto, si te hago mal, me hago mal. Todo lo que yo te hago repercute en mí . . .* (84)

[You are me and I am you, if I respect you I respect me, if I do something bad to you, I do something bad to myself. All that I could do to you has repercussions on me . . .] (my translation)

Martínez Parédez’s versions of *In Lak’ech*, which are Valdez’s original sources, are worded somewhat differently than the version Huerta cites as Valdez’s. They’re also different from the version Acosta found and that many MAS classes took up. As the *In Lak’ech* philosophy crossed the modern border from Mexico to the United States, the physical border from teacher to student and the linguistic and temporal border from Spanish (with a few ancient Mayan words) to a shared bilingual borderspace of contemporary Spanish and English, things changed.

Tracing these changes and examining the rhetorical differences that are marked by the evolution reveals how these subtle changes help the poem to capture the present spirit of MAS students and classes. Rhetorically, the addition of the “*mi otro* / my other” to the original (“original”) line “*Tú eres yo / You are me*” is significant—the added words distance the speaker from the addressee, separating them even as the speaker and addressee remain linked through the content. “*Tú eres ‘mi otro’ yo / You are ‘my other’ me*” functions to maintain the individuality of the speaker more so than the original “*Tu eres yo / You are me*,” which more fully blends speaker with addressee. Further, the order has changed—in the original versions of *In Lak’ech*, respect comes directly after “*tú eres yo / you are me*,” and warnings about harm come last. The new order, with warnings about harm sandwiched between the “*tú eres mi otro you / you are my other me*” statement and the line about respect, also functions differently because of these changes. The words “and love” have been added to the respect line, folded in. While the newer rhetorical arrangement communicates essentially the same message—that harm can be avoided and respect gained—now the emphasis is on love and respect. Their position as the final piece of the tricolon asks the reader to note the importance of these sentiments. By contrast, the parallel structure section of the original ends on a note of warning, emphasizing the negative consequences of not recognizing this co-identification of self with other rather than the positive benefits of recognizing that co-identification. Teachers might notice that the newer arrangement mirrors what has been called “the compliment sandwich” of constructive feedback—say something positive (“You are my other me”), mention something maybe not so great (“If I do harm to you, I do harm to myself”), and end with something positive (“If I love and respect you, I love and respect myself”). This arrangement subtly makes the poem structurally
familiar to US students and teachers, thus potentially making it more effective as a pedagogical tool in a classroom setting in the United States.

**THIRD MOVEMENT: IN LAK’ECH AND THE CHICANO CLAP DEMONSTRATE RHETORICAL EFFECTS OF OPENING RITUALS**

The poem-as-chant creates a sense of unity and identity, of connection across borders between English and Spanish, Euro Americans and Mexican Americans, and students and teachers. It bridges different cultures and identities. However, the rhetorical–pedagogical choice to incorporate the daily chanting of a bilingual Spanish-English poem—as well as clapping and other chants used in different courses—also provided outsiders inclined to see MAS as dangerous with evidence of what read to them as cultish, ritualistic, “un-American” behaviors. Arizona is a conservative state whose actions suggest it does not view Spanish favorably: it outlawed bilingual education for non-native English speakers in 2000, and since 2006 its official language has been English (Arizona). MAS teachers’ pedagogical choices, then, went explicitly against the political grain in Arizona. Chanting *In Lak’ech* simultaneously contributed to borders being crossed, complicated, and (re)constructed, both rhetorically and materially.

A quick clarification: although many stories about MAS in the media suggest that all the teachers opened and taught classes in the same way, they didn’t. My interviews reveal significant differences among teachers’ choices. I focus here on a few examples of teachers’ choices that are representative of what all MAS teachers implemented as opening rituals. While we can certainly imagine classrooms of mostly Latin@ high school students chanting and clapping together, these rituals are best understood and experienced both visually and aurally. Readers can enhance their understanding by watching an excerpt from the documentary *Precious Knowledge* called “In-Lak’ech Banned Poetry.”

In order to understand the power of the clap as ritual, it is first necessary to understand the clap’s history. The clap has a specific cultural history and goes by various names. Former MAS teacher José González describes two common terms and mentions the one he believes common to MAS teachers: “It’s called the solidarity, the farmworker’s clap. We call it the Chicano clap.” Also known as “the unity clap” (Acosta, Personal Interview), it became known widely in the 1960s during the United Farm Workers’ movement and the grape strikes (Kim). In 1965, Chicano farmworkers, led by César Chávez, joined in a strike with Filipino grape workers (“1965–1970”). The clap allowed the Spanish-speaking Chicanos and Tagalog-speaking Filipinos to communicate and feel connected to one another.
Acosta’s choice to use the Chicano clap and *In Lak’ech* together was a pedagogical and ideological choice, reflective of the course’s historical content, the program’s goals, and the larger goals of education; however, this choice simultaneously worked as evidence that MAS was dangerous. Acosta’s class was frequently visited by Arizona politicians such as Tom Horne, then-State Superintendent of Public Instruction,* TUSD School Board President Mark Stegeman, and by various auditors and was specifically cited in testimony leading to MAS being made illegal (Acosta, Personal Interview). The rhetorical effects of those words and sounds extended far beyond the classrooms in which they were uttered, and those effects—hearings, fights, and the demise of MAS—were in many ways the opposite of the ideals they promoted.

In the clip from *Precious Knowledge*, Acosta and his students blend the recitation of *In Lak’ech* with the Chicano clap: the clap leads right into the chant. Also visible in that brief clip is José González’s class clapping but not chanting. Several MAS teachers began class with recitations or clapping like this, though their choices were not uniform. Sally Rusk had students doing a different daily recitation, and Lorenzo Lopez says that having students recite *In Lak’ech*, “wasn’t really my style,” and that while his classes sometimes did the unity clap, they did so only occasionally. Maria Federico-Brummer used *In Lak’ech* but not the clap. José González says, “I’ve never done *In Lak’ech*. I don’t know the poem, and, um, there were other colleagues that did. You know, people trip out, because they think we all do it, and that’s not the case.” But many teachers did make use of one or both of these rituals, and significantly, teachers in the film *Precious Knowledge* and teachers whose classes were observed by politicians and other outsiders implemented one or both of these rituals.

In José González’s classes, students begin clapping, and students and teacher finish together. González believes that the clap “empowers. And this is my rationale, [. . .] and this goes to [. . .] the pedagogy. The kids begin it, and we close.” As viewers see in the clip from *Precious Knowledge*, Acosta’s use of the clap differs slightly—he begins the clap, or at least did on this day, and he and the students recite *In Lak’ech* together while they all clap. Former MAS teacher Alejandro Escamilla describes the Chicano clap as “an energetic way to start class.” He explains that it says to students, education deserves an energetic clap, “kinda like a sports team.” He believes that it builds unity and gets kids to wake up. He says, smiling, “You do stuff like that to get people together.”

The Chicano clap works to create one sound from many—it’s a human sound example of *granular synthesis*, a term from music production describing the manipulation of grains of sound. Individual, distinct sounds graduate to a synthe-

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*This line should read “politicians such as John Huppenthal, former Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction, ...” Tom Horne did not visit any MAS classes. kho*
sized, blended single sound. I read this clap as a way of blending the individual with the group and bringing people together through their bodies and through sound. This clap builds something—something one can hear and feel—and that something is significant to perceptions of the MAS program. To MAS students and teachers, the clap means fun, energy, connection, and the very beginning of education. To some outsiders, it symbolizes indoctrination and is perceived as cult-like behavior, terrifying, or even the beginning of a violent revolution. The clap is powerful; it requires a response. TUSD School Board President Mark Stegeman responded to the clap with fear, testifying that he found MAS classes to have properties akin to mass movements like those described by Eric Hoffer in his 1951 book, *The True Believer* (Buckmaster). American Ethnic Studies professor Devon Peña explains that the Chicano clap was the reason—the sole reason—Stegeman gave for considering MAS classes to be a cult. In his scathing denunciation of Stegeman’s logic, Peña mentions that he has seen the Chicano clap used in “dozens of classes, seminars, and conferences, [and that he has seen it] at meetings of the American Studies Association (ASA) and a recent workshop on environmental justice at The White House.” Peña’s response to Stegeman’s fear of the Chicano clap points to the importance of knowing and affirming a wider cultural history.

In the opening claps and chants of some MAS classes, there is a call for unification. Physically, this call for unity appears in the clapping itself as a group claps together, beginning at individual rates and intensities before drawing together into a unified finale. This manner of clapping requires respect of both self and others to achieve an individual and yet group experience. In the classes that recited *In Lak’ech*, this dual experience is emphasized in the words of the poem: “Tú eres mi otro yo / You are my other me.” There is undoubtedly an individual in that line, but an individual who is aware of others, aware of humanity’s interconnections, and more specifically of connections among those in the room. There is, then, in classes largely composed of students of the same ethnicity, reason to believe that this clap “advocates ethnic solidarity,” an advocacy made illegal by ARS 15-112. However, because the clap focuses on both the individual and the group, it isn’t at all clear that it does so “instead of the treatment of pupils as individuals” (my emphasis). Rather, the clap celebrates and combines both the individual and the group.

Chanting *In Lak’ech* along with clapping the Chicano clap is in one sense a purely pedagogical choice. It brings an ancient Mayan philosophy into both English and Spanish, connects it with a clap from a moment of 60s-era Chicano history, and blends it with modern-day Chicano students and issues. Reciting *In Lak’ech* together also served a classroom management function. Former MAS teacher Maria Federico-Brummer describes it this way:
The *In Lak'ech*, it’s just an excerpt from the poem, and it’s a Mayan philosophy . . . it’s kind of like our bell work—have the kids get ready to go. They do the recite the poem piece [. . .] and then they get to work. [. . .] For me, I want our students, for their own growth, it’s for them. So it, this space: This is *In Lak'ech*. [. . .] This is the expectation. So I don’t have anywhere, “These are the Rules, and this is how you’re going to behave in here.”

Escamillo echoes this sentiment: “For me it’s my rules in the class.”

It is surely in the enactment of the recitation, not merely in the actual words or even in the languages of the poem, where outsiders’ (mis)perceptions of the purpose of MAS lay. However, it is also in the enactment of the recitation, of daily repetition, that the power of the poem lies. *In Lak’ech* undeniably exerts rhetorical power through repetition and memorization, but the perceived value and interpretation of that power differs across populations in Arizona. For MAS student Adilene Cota, the recitation was “nice.” It also explicitly stated what mattered to her about the class:

The class had to, like, respect each other—it’s like *In Lak’ech*, have you heard of it? “You are my other me, if I do something to you, I’m hurting myself . . .” It was, like, really nice and the words . . . it was more like a family . . . it’s not like a regular class where the teacher is, like, giving you notes.

Cota’s memory of chanting the poem, even a few years after her MAS class ended, lit her up: She smiled as she told me, unprompted, about *In Lak’ech* and how critical it was to the entirety of her experience as an MAS student. That experience is captured in the recitation of *In Lak’ech* and through the clap; this ritual creates expectations for both teachers and students.

Every day they said the same words. Every day they repeated the poem together, aloud. Every day they clapped together as they recited. Every day those words gained meaning as their sounds reverberated through the classroom. Every day students in MAS classes performed these rhetorics, these embodied rituals. In doing so, as Debra Hawhee argues in *Bodily Arts*, their bodies became “an intensive gathering of forces (of desire, of vigorous practice, of musical sounds, of corporeal codes)” (160). It is possible to imagine how this gathering of forces within bodies and within a classroom could seem frightening to outsiders. However, we have copious examples of people reciting and gesturing in ways that don’t seem to frighten anyone the way the MAS curriculum frightens Arizona lawmakers. Kids shout out rules together at the start of karate classes. K–12 children recite the Pledge of Allegiance, hands over hearts. What is the rhetorical effect of this collective recitation? What happens to people experiencing this combination of chanted words with the added bimodal resonance of clapping? What are the rhetorical and material effects, both on participants and witnesses, of these oral/aural/bodily experiences?
One way to read the *In Lak’ech* chant is as a form of implicit rhetorical pedagogy. As E. Johanna Hartelius argues, invoking Kenneth Burke, the rhetorical qualities of texts impact how students respond. She writes, “formal properties of text . . . stir up something in the student that in the end enables him [sic] to reach for higher ground” (61). The form of the *In Lak’ech* poem is familiar, and students’ recognition of that form can “create an experience of pleasure which facilitates the learning process” (70). The poem serves as a form of unlocking: one discourse (*In Lak’ech*) opens up access to another, more distant discourse (ancient Mayan precepts), which in turn affects the students’ understanding of and appreciation of what Hartelius refers to as an “actuality,” or truth—in this case, human interconnectedness across races and ethnicities. Although MAS teachers were not explicitly teaching rhetoric or exploring the rhetorical qualities of the poem’s form, the daily recitation nonetheless served a pedagogical purpose, one that aligned with the explicit pedagogical goals.

Acosta says, “I don’t know if [reciting *In Lak’ech* is] a pedagogical thing for [the other teachers], but it is for me—it’s a life thing for me.” He explains that he got the idea to have students recite something each day from Jeff Duncan-Andrade, a professor at San Francisco State University:

[Duncan-Andrade] came up with a recitation that they say every day, [. . . like a] rite of passage . . . not hazing, but it’s like something you would do, you know. It reminded me of learning lore in a fraternity because it’s like you need to know this, you need to recite it by heart, and everyone recites it together, and once you do . . .

Acosta left that line hanging, making the answer to the “once you do” an enthymeme, readily fillable with my own ideas—or yours or those of Arizona state legislators. To Acosta, that enthymeme is completed with the power of connection, with building community, but to others, that blank is filled in in very different ways.

María Federico-Brummer realizes, for example, that the chant can seem scary to outsiders. She explains:

Everybody’s saying something at the same time, and it seems, I mean, it’s a voice, and it’s a human voice all at once, united, and I think that might frighten people, because <sarcastically> “you don’t want people united.”

You [state legislators] want people to be *individuals*. And to have their conflicts, and to—especially in this state—[if] students who look the same, maybe, and come from the same socioeconomic background, if they’re united they might do something, so . . .

Federico-Brummer recognizes that what reads to her and to many MAS teachers and students, as an invitation to respect one another and learn from one
In another, reads to Arizona politicians like Mark Stegeman and Tom Horne—as well as many community members—as terrifying and cult-like. The repetition and inclusion of words in languages other than English seem to them threatening rather than uplifting.

What Federico-Brummer possesses and Stegeman and Horne don’t might be captured with the Indigenous term *neplanta*, a term Chicana cultural theorist Gloria Anzaldúa employs. In *This Bridge We Call Home*, Anzaldúa defines *neplanta* as “the overlapping space between different perceptions and belief systems,” where one is “aware of . . . changeability” and categories that “rende[r] the conventional labelings obsolete” (541). *Neplanta*, this overlapping consciousness, or conscience, is available to those who have bicultural or tricultural experiences, whether in life or through school, those who inhabit different, sometimes somewhat contradictory spaces, at once. *Neplanta* is an element of mestiza rhetoric, which Cristina Ramírez defines as “emerg[ing] from a place of suspension between cultural worlds, a mestiza consciousness” that allows one to “conceptualize a different reality . . . making for an ontological shift” (607). *Neplanta* is a space within, rather than across, a border or a complex of borders—it’s a space where languages, ethnicities, and nations converge. Anzaldúa claims, “Your identity is a filtering screen limiting your awareness to a fraction of your reality. What you or your cultures believe to be true is provisional and depends on a specific perspective” (542). Readers will no doubt notice resonance between Anzaldúa’s assertions there and Kenneth Burke’s notion of terministic screens, with his claim that particular terms act to select, reflect, and deflect reality.

For those within the tricultural space of MAS, the Chicano clap and *In Lak’ech* can symbolically and materially unify a group, celebrate participants as individuals, or do both at once. *Neplanta* permits that duality or multiplicity where ritual language and clapping can easily exist both as tools of celebratory pedagogy and of classroom management. But for those who exist only on one side of that border, whose identities limit their awareness, making them unwilling or unable to understand or inhabit a complex space like *neplanta*, those claps and chants read only as dangerous, as indoctrination. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the people who seem to most need to learn more about Mexican American Studies, about inhabiting *neplanta* and learning different ways of knowing and seeing, are the very people who shut it down. MAS students recognized this reality, as well. Federico-Brummer shared with me her favorite example of a Rincon High student’s protest poster. Its message is simple, yet profound, and in keeping with *In Lak’ech*: “Tom Horne needs a hug.”

In an interview with Andrea Lunsford, Gloria Anzaldúa describes North American culture as “clockwise” and Mexican and Indigenous cultures as “counterclockwise” (21)—*culturases* that clash, then, simply by existing, by doing
what is at once the same and the opposite thing. MAS tried to layer one clock over another, such that multiple sets of spinning hands could simultaneously be visible to students. MAS showed students that Indigenous, Latin@, and Euro American histories and literatures could be seen and understood as hands on the same clock—each visible, each contributing to perceptions of time and of one another. Critically, the goal was not to see one clock hand instead of another but to enable students to see the multiple stories and perspectives that could coexist with and be layered over or under one another. Unfortunately, politicians and those afraid of MAS saw just one clock hand replacing another, going in what seemed to them the wrong direction.

MAS was undeniably valuable from a rhetorical and pedagogical standpoint. It graduated students at record levels, prepared them for college-level study, and set them up for lives of active intellectual engagement and community involvement. Rhetorically and pedagogically, the tools MAS employed were sound—from critical pedagogy to social justice projects to opening rituals drawing on ancient Mayan philosophy and the 60s-era Chicano movement. In Arizona’s political climate, those same tools rang a discordant note. In the current US political and educational climate, such pedagogical tools at all levels remain in danger of being labeled illegal—a truth underscored by the introduction of HB 2021 in Arizona. The swift demise of that bill notwithstanding, political pressures and threats remain for all educators. The work that lies ahead, then, is political. The work that lies ahead is to determine how to overcome fear—fear that shuts such programs down, fear of Latin@ students growing into politically active adults who might challenge the status quo, fear of the loss of White privilege. The work that lies ahead is to determine how to better educate not only students, but also politicians and communities so that programs like MAS can remain viable and continue to enhance the lives of students—as individuals, as members of particular ethnic groups, and as citizens of an imperfect state in a changing country where neplanta is becoming the norm.12

Notes

1. “Latin@” uses the @ symbol to combine the words Latino (masculine) and Latina (feminine), but as Sandra Soto explains for the word Chicano, the non-alphabetic @ symbol does more work: it disrupts expectations by catching the reader’s eye and “announces a politicized collectivity” (2). While some scholars now prefer the term Latinx as a way to avoid gender binaries, I find the @ symbol fluid enough to include a full spectrum of gender identities, its swirl encapsulating far more than a binary. I also find Latinx challenging to pronounce, while Latin@ rolls smoothly for me as reader and speaker in both English and Spanish. Soto’s preferred pronunciation, with the diphthong ending ao, adds to the symbol’s functional disruption of the gendered endings built into Spanish while retaining linguistic fluidity. For more discussion of Latinx vs. Latin@, see Guerra and Orbea and Scharrón-del Río and Aja.
2. After this article was accepted but before it went to print, those who support MAS got excellent news: U.S. District Judge A. Wallace Tashima ruled that ARS-112, the state law making MAS illegal, was unconstitutional. Details of a resurrection of MAS have not yet been worked out. See Smith.

3. This research project was approved by the University of Rhode Island IRB, approval number HU1314-078.

4. HB 2281 bore a direct relationship to previous bills introduced in Arizona with ties to nationalism and White supremacy, such as SB 1108. See Lundholm.

5. I use this problematic term for this section because Hispanic is the term the federal government and schools use for their data collection.

6. Auditors did not measure the effects on graduation rates for students who took the courses prior to but not during senior year.

7. While this spelling of the professor’s name is used on the website, Martínez Parédez is the spelling on Martínez Parédez’s own book.

8. Jorge Huerta writes about In Lak’ech as three capitalized words. Domingo Martínez Parédez writes it in lowercase, italicized letters as two words, in lak’ech, seeming to treat Lak’ech as one word. Valdez’s use varies somewhat, but most recently he has used capital letters for In and Lak, and also combined Lak and ecb with an apostrophe. I’m following his layout and italicizing because the language is Mayan.

9. Among those who supported ending bilingual education were some prominent Latin@ educators who felt native Spanish-speaking students were disadvantaged by bilingual education and were not gaining enough English proficiency to succeed in or beyond school.

10. Precious Knowledge (www.preciousknowledgefilm.com) is valuable because it captures some of the final experiences of those in the MAS program, but it is also contentious because a young woman profiled in the original version (who has since been edited out) alleges that the film’s producer raped her. See Herreras and “Girl Code.”

11. Acosta’s class was visited regularly as his teaching became symbolic of the program; not all MAS teachers had regular or necessarily any outside visitors.

12. The author is grateful for support for this project provided by a Career Enhancement Grant, Sabbatical Grant, and sabbatical from the University of Rhode Island, an invitation to present the 2016 alumni keynote for the Gesa E. Kirsch and Center for Writing Studies Graduate Symposium at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and generous feedback on drafts from Amy T. Hamilton, Derek Van Ittersum, Luke Owens, Amy Wan, and the College English reviewers. Thank you.

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