



Indoctrination and Common Sense Interpretation of Texts

The Tucson Unified School District Book Banning

Emily J. M. Knox (knox@illinois.edu), Assistant Professor, School of Information Sciences, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

The national headlines about Arizona's newly enacted education policies in early 2012 were stark. The *Tucson Weekly* (Herrerias 2012) asked, "TUSD Banning Books? Well Yes, and No, and Yes" while the online magazine *Salon* (Biggers 2012b) inquired, "Who's afraid of 'The Tempest'?" in reference to the most notable title on the presumed list of banned books. According to these and other news reports, on January 10, 2012, Tucson Unified School District (TUSD) officials walked into the Mexican American Studies (MAS) courses and proceeded to confiscate seven book titles. This removal was one of the final acts in a years-long battle to remove the MAS program from the TUSD curriculum. Originally developed to comply with a 1978 desegregation order, the MAS program, which began in 1998 to help recruit and retain Latino students, came under attack by conservative Arizona state legislators in the late 2000s. In April of 2010, the legislature passed HB 2281, which specifically targeted the MAS program by linking its continued existence to state funding. The school district initially fought against the law but, after considering the impending loss of income, decided to end the program. One of the unique aspects of the TUSD MAS case is that legislators and other opponents targeted not only the program but also the textbooks that were used in the courses. In fact, the news stories published on January 11, 2012, tended to focus on the fate of the books rather than the dismantling of the program itself.



Although there are book challenges (that is, requests to remove, restrict, or relocate materials) in many different settings including public and school libraries, such an act has heightened intensity when books in school curricula are targeted. Since these are often books that are required reading there is an added element of fear of indoctrination among challengers that is not present for non-required materials, and that raises the stakes for those who bring challenges against textbooks. As will be shown below, censorship is fundamentally concerned with the relationship between power and knowledge (Jansen 1988), and this connection is heightens the fear of indoctrination in an educational setting. This article, which focuses on the reasons for removing the books from the MAS program classrooms, is grounded in a social constructionist metatheoretical framework as well as the study of reading practices and is based on research I have previously conducted on book challengers. In particular, I hope to demonstrate that those who argued for the dismantling of the program and the removal of the books employed what I call a “common sense” or “monosemic” interpretive strategy with regard to texts and were particularly focused on the idea of indoctrination in public schools.

Like many ethnic studies programs, MAS stood in opposition to the triumphal, grand national narrative of the United States as place of opportunity (Zimmerman 2002, 109). MAS’s curriculum was based in a critical analysis of US society and, as will be demonstrated below, it was this critical aspect that led to fears of indoctrination by opponents of the program. Even though TUSD had three ethnic studies programs in its high schools (Mexican American, African American, and Native American), the critical analysis of society employed in the MAS program was seen as a particular threat to state politicians and other stakeholders in the community.

To understand what happened in Tucson and to provide context for arguments used in the analysis, the following section presents an overview of the development and dismantling of TUSD MAS program. It is based on news accounts from several sources, including the *Arizona Daily Star*, *Associated Press*, *Tucson Weekly*, and supplementary material from the school district (a complete bibliography is on the [author’s website](#)). As there are several legal cases involved in the development and dismantling of the program that provide sources for discourse used in the analysis, these are indicated throughout the timeline for clarity.

Developing and Terminating the TUSD Mexican American Studies Program

As Jeff Biggers (2012a) notes in *State Out of the Union*, Arizona has long been a place of cultural conflict. The last of the forty-eight contiguous states to be admitted to the Union, Arizona became a state in 1912 during the Mexican Revolution. The TUSD MAS controversy erupted during what Biggers calls the “summer of the brown scare,” but its history dates back more than thirty years. In 1974, several Latino parents with children in the TUSD system brought a lawsuit against the district arguing that the schools were segregated. This case, together with a previous one brought on behalf of African American students (the two cases were combined into *Fisher, Mendoza v. TUSD*), reached a settlement in 1978 and the district was placed under a desegregation order. The district attempted to meet the terms of the order in the 1980s and 1990s by implementing a three-phase program that first targeted some schools through merger and closure. The second phase focused on busing students to existing magnet schools, and the third phase focused on starting new magnet schools. Between 1983 and 2000 TUSD opened several new magnet programs, which were intended to attract nonminority students to majority minority schools. The district also started a Black Studies Program (later changed to African American Studies) during this phase. (Note that the Native American Studies program began in 1976 in response to the 1972 Indian Education Act.) In 1996 several students and community members requested that a Mexican American Studies program be added to the African American and Native American programs to decrease the Latino dropout rate. The program formally launched in January of 1999 and classes started that fall.

Developing the Program

Before the program started in the fall of 1999, the TUSD board initially vetoed a request to develop an MAS program in December 1996. The district relented, partially in response to a lawsuit filed by a constituent in 1997 that argued that the lack of money for Mexican American Studies was the result of ethnic discrimination. In July, even though the judge urged the parties to settle out of court, the program was still not funded by the board in the coming academic year’s budget. The Tucson city council responded to the impasse by voting to ask the TUSD to create an MAS program. Finally, in July of 1998, the board instituted a Mexican (at the time Hispanic) American Studies program for TUSD with a budget of



\$210,800. The department formally launched in January of 1999 and classes started in the fall. Until 2007, the program was only mentioned in passing or in a general news item in the media.ⁱ

Targeting the Mexican American Studies Program

In October 2007, the *Daily Star* noted that Tom Horne, the state superintendent of public instruction (and as of 2010 the Arizona Attorney General), sent a Freedom of Information Act request to the TUSD to find out more about the MAS program. He also wrote an “Open Letter to the People of Tucson,” which was posted to the Arizona Attorney General’s website, stating that the program should be terminated noting that they teach a “destructive ethnic chauvinism” (Horne 2007, 2). The inspection ended in December, but this was the first indication that MAS had become a political target.

In 2008 and 2009 state senate committees passed bills ostensibly to block the teaching of ethnic studies classes across the state but which were specifically aimed at the TUSD MAS program. The bill in the state senate stated,

A public school in this state shall not include within the program of instruction any courses, classes or school sponsored activities that promote, assert as truth or feature as an exclusive focus any political, religious, ideological or cultural beliefs or values that denigrate, disparage or overtly encourage dissent from the values of American democracy and Western civilization, capitalism, pluralism and religious toleration. (Proposed House of Representatives Amendments to S.B. 1108, 2008)

Here one can see that the state senate committee is arguing that the MAS program has an agenda that is in conflict with so-called American values. Neither bill made it to the floor of the state legislature. In November 2009, Horne released a study conducted by Deputy Associate Superintendent Robert Franciosi, which found that MAS students did not do better on state standardized tests. Then in December of that year a federal judge lifted the desegregation order in its entirety, declaring the district unified.

i. It should be noted that the TUSD filed a motion for unitary status in 2005. This means that the school no longer had a “dual” system for white and minority students. The district was declared unitary in 2009 and removed from court supervision. This status was revoked in 2011 and the district is again under court supervision to desegregate. Information about the plans is available on the district’s website: <http://tusd1.org/contents/distinfo/deseg/index.asp>.

Banning the Mexican American Studies Program

2010 was a watershed year for conflict in Arizona. First, in January, a group of Latino plaintiffs (*Fisher, Mendoza v. TUSD*) appealed the end of the desegregation order and court oversight of the school district. In February, HB 2281 based on SB 1108 above, which would make it illegal for a school district to have any courses or classes concerning ethnic studies, passed the house education committee. In response, TUSD insisted that the MAS program complied with the legislation. At the same time, the full Arizona state legislature passed SB 1070, the Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act, also known in some quarters as the “Papers Please” law. SB 1070 allowed law enforcement officers to ask anyone for documentation proving their status as citizens or lawful aliens on the basis of “reasonable suspicion.” Governor Jan Brewer signed the bill on April 23.

On April 28, the ethnic studies bill, HB 2281, was approved by the senate. The bill precluded school districts or charter schools from including in their program of instruction any course or class that does the following:

1. Promotes the overthrow of the Federal or state government or the Constitution
2. Promotes resentment toward any race or class (e.g., racism and classism)
3. Advocates ethnic solidarity instead of being individuals
4. Are designed for a certain ethnicity

However, the following were still allowed by the bill:

1. Native American classes, in order to comply with federal law
2. Groupings of classes that are based on academic performance of students
3. Classes about the history of an ethnic group that are open to all students
4. Classes that discuss controversial history

The term “controversial” was not defined. As with the previous bills on ethnic studies, this bill specifically targeted the TUSD’s MAS program and on May 10, Governor Brewer signed the bill into law. The TUSD continued to maintain that the bill did not apply to the MAS program. In response there were protests against both SB 1070 and HB 2281, and in October MAS teachers filed a lawsuit (*Acosta et al. v. Horne et al.*) against Horne and the State Board of Education.



In January of 2011, in a *Daily Star* interview, Horne, now the state attorney general, noted that “the only way the district can come into compliance will be complete elimination of the Mexican American Studies program” (Huicochea 2011). The new state superintendent of public instruction, John Huppenthal, gave a statement noting that he planned to review the program and that he was “concerned” about TUSD. During its monthly meeting the TUSD board decided not to challenge the ethnic studies law but offered an explanation as to why it is not violating the law.

On April 29, 2011, there was a major protest at the TUSD board meeting and the meeting was cancelled as a result. Police were present at the board meeting in May at which there were protests but no vote on the program. On June 15, Huppenthal announced the long-delayed outcome of his audit, which found that the program was *not* in violation of the state law. However, despite the findings, Huppenthal announced that the MAS program *was* in violation of the law and that the TUSD had sixty days to come into compliance or lose \$15 million in revenue from the state. Huppenthal argued that MAS program violated three of the four criteria (it did not promote the overthrow of the government). On December 21, there was a federal court hearing regarding the program and the injunction against HB 2281 (*Acosta v. Horne*, now *v. Huppenthal et al.*). In a different case (*Administrative Hearing of an Appeal by: Tucson Unified School District, No. 11F-002-ADE*) the following week, the administrative judge issued a finding that held that the program was in violation of the law.

Ending the Program and the Aftermath

According to news accounts, the TUSD had until the end of July to end the MAS program. If the program did not end, the first reduction in state funds of \$4.9 million would come in February. On January 10, 2012, the board voted to end the program. However, even though the classes were eliminated, the MAS department still existed—a tactic employed to remain in compliance with the desegregation order. On January 11, administrators walked into the MAS classes, boxed the books used in the curriculum, and then transported them to a warehouse. The courses and curriculum were now American history and English literature. In March 2012 a judge refused to reinstate the program and there was a new hearing for challenging the state law on constitutional grounds. In April the TUSD terminated the director of the MAS department and a member of the board made national news

after he defended his vote to end the program on the *Daily Show*, a satirical news show on Comedy Central.

The federal Department of Education began an investigation into the TUSD in May of 2012, and the district announced a new multicultural class and a new plan to end the desegregation case, which was filed with the court in November. Note that these were post-unitary plans, since the desegregation order (in *Fisher, Mendoza v. TUSD*) was lifted in 2009, but the case remained in the court after the district was found out of compliance in 2011. New cultural studies classes in African American and Mexican American literature and social studies were approved by the board; unfortunately, these new classes only brought more confusion to the case.

In 2013, the board decided that it would offer core credit (instead of elective credit) for culturally relevant courses, which had been ordered by the judge in charge of the desegregation case. In March, the state law that banned the MAS program was upheld by federal court and the case was appealed. The status of the culturally relevant courses filled the local news until the classes were approved in July for the coming school year. In 2014, there were additional protests against ending the program. Huppenthal, who was voted out of office after confessing to being the author of disparaging blog posts, issued a final order on his last day stating that TUSD’s new multicultural classes violated Arizona law. In March 2015, the new state superintendent, Diane Douglas, found the TUSD to be in compliance with the law but also stated that the district would still be monitored by the state Board of Education. In July of 2015, an appeals court (in the case of *Acosta v. Huppenthal*, now *Arce v. Douglas*) found that the ban on ethnic studies in public schools was constitutional but also sent the discrimination claim against the District to the lower court. The judge found that the state’s law was racially motivated and ruled in favor of the plaintiffs.

The Banned Books

Although the focus of this article is on interpretation and indoctrination, not the content of the books, it is important to discuss the titles that were actually removed as well as the controversy over *The Tempest* to provide context for the analysis below. When the news media first covered the case, there was some confusion regarding which titles could no longer be used in school curriculum. *The Tempest*, which was taught as part of a course on English/Latino Literature according to the audit of the MAS program conducted by a consulting company (Cambium Learning, Inc. 2011, 118), was not banned by the district. However, an instructor who used the text in one of his



MAS classes, Curtis Acosta, discussed why state officials might have trouble with his interpretation of the text in an interview with Jeff Biggers for the *Huffington Post*:

What is very clear is that *The Tempest* is problematic for our administrators due to the content of the play and the pedagogical choices I have made. In other words, Shakespeare wrote a play that is clearly about colonization of “the new world” and there are strong themes of race, colonization, oppression, class and power that permeate the play, along with themes of love and redemption. We study this work by Shakespeare using the work of renowned historian Ronald Takaki and the chapter “*The Tempest* in the Wilderness” from his book *A Different Mirror* where he uses the play to explore the early English settlements on this continent and English imperialism. From there, we immerse ourselves in the play and discuss the beauty of the language, Shakespeare’s multiple perspectives on colonization, and the brilliant and courageous attention he gives to such important issues (Biggers, 2012c).

Contrary to news reports, *The Tempest* is still on the approved books list. A press release from the TUSD noted that the news reports were erroneous (Tucson Unified School District 2012). However, one might surmise that only certain interpretations are sanctioned by the district.

According to the same press release, seven books were removed by the TUSD after the vote on January 10, 2012:

- *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* by Rodolfo Acuna
- *Rethinking Columbus: The Next 500 Years* by Bill Bigelow
- *Critical Race Theory* by Richard Delgado
- *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire
- *Message to AZTLAN* by Rodolfo Corky Gonzales
- *500 Years of Chicano History in Pictures* edited by Elizabeth Martinez
- *Chicano! The History of the Mexican Civil Rights Movement* by Arturo Rosales

The press release noted that these books were found to be “out of compliance” with the state law that targeted the MAS program. It should be noted that the books were approved as supplementary curriculum materials in October 2013. As will be shown in the analysis below, these books were considered to be instrumental in what the opponents called the “indoctrination” of the MAS students.

In this article, I hope to show that a particular interpretation of these books is crucial to understanding the opposition to the MAS program. As I have previously argued (Knox 2014), calls for the restriction, removal, and

relocation of books are often a matter of interpretation of texts. Critics who argued for both the dismantling of the MAS program and the removal of the textbooks often employ what I call “common sense” interpretive strategy with regard to texts wherein texts “mean what they say and say what they mean”; this is an interpretive strategy that is strongly associated with the concept of indoctrination. As noted above, censorship is an act that combines power and knowledge. In this case, the question interpretation of the knowledge found in texts indicates what is appropriate for public school curricula.

On the TUSD MAS Program and School Book Challenges

Since it includes numerous social issues including race, politics, and education, the dismantling of the TUSD MAS program is overdetermined (Althusser 1962) and difficult to analyze. In light of this overdetermination, there are many different framing lenses that one might use to analyze the events in Tucson. For example, one might see the abolishment of the MAS program as a struggle over social, cultural, and political power in an area of the Southwest that is rapidly becoming majority minority. According to the 2010 US Census, people of Hispanic or Latino Origin are 41.59 percent of the population of Tucson, 16% increase since 2000. Hispanics and Latinos are an ever-increasing share of the population, and it is not surprising that this might lead to cultural conflict.

Previous scholarly research on the TUSD MAS program case has primarily been conducted through the lens of critical race theory (CRT). CRT, which originated in the legal field, seeks to expose the relationship between power, race, and racism. As Delgado and Stefancic (2012) note in their introduction to CRT, the theory “questions the very foundations of the liberal order including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law” (3). For example, Richard A. Orozco (2012) focuses on how Horne was able to influence Arizona state legislators through his discourse. Orozco traces a direct line from Horne’s letter to the legislative floor and statehouse members using Horne’s phrasing to describe MAPS as both “un-American and iniquitous” (53). Orozco also focuses on “rationality” and its relationship to common sense interpretations of texts by examining Horne’s “literal and (assumed) rational translation of ‘raza,’ [he] not only misses its emotive interpretation as ‘the people,’ he repositions literal translations as sensible and reasonable” (Orozco 2011, 827). As will be discussed below, this “common sense” interpretation of



text is ubiquitous among those who challenge books in libraries and schools. Orozco's work demonstrates how these interpretive strategies can also be linked to issues of race and power.

Although there are many practical resources on academic freedom and school textbooks, there has been relatively little scholarly research. Perhaps the most well-known is Diane Ravitch's *The Language Police* (2003), which focused on bias review committees employed by textbook publishers. Ravitch argues that such review committees are engaging in censorship when they change certain words in texts. Note however that Ravitch's work focuses on a priori challenges to classroom material while the focus of this article is on the removal of certain books from schools after adoption.

Another example of research regarding textbook challenges is Robert H. Burger's (1978) study of the Kanawha County textbook controversy of 1974. Burger found that the opposing sides used communication styles to describe their viewpoints. Joan DeFattore's 1992 book *What Johnny Shouldn't Read* explores the history of two textbook-censorship cases in the United States. She finds, for example, that the challengers were suspicious of children's imagination and saw their actions as an act of protection. A few studies focus on the relationship between school book censorship and the law. For example, Eugene Bjorklund (1990) discusses 1998 the *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier* Supreme Court decision, which gave school boards high discretion in removing books from the curriculum. He notes that the decision led to an increase in school book challenges in the following years. There are also manuals and edited volumes (Brown and National Council of Teachers of English 1994; Reichman 2001) that discuss school challenges in general, and these often include some information on challenges in the classroom as well as the school library. The current article is intended to expand our understanding of school-curriculum challenges and explore a framework for analysis based in the study of reading practices.

Two concepts will be employed in the discourse analysis below: indoctrination and the common sense interpretation of texts. Indoctrination has long been part of pedagogical discourse. There is not room to explore the entire history of the debate, but it should be noted that in the late nineteenth century, education and indoctrination were synonyms. As Gordon (1984, 531) notes, the difference between education and indoctrination seems to be rooted in the concepts of transmission (in which students are passive receivers of values) and presentation (in which students are active agents in pedagogy). In her article on

indoctrination, Mary Anne Raywid (1980) states that the pejorative sense of the term could not be found in a dictionary until the 1930s. James A. Lang (2007) notes that educational philosophy no longer asks "is indoctrination wrong?" but "what is it about indoctrination that is wrong?" Following the work of I. A. Snook (1970) and others, there are four main components of indoctrination: intent, content, method, and outcome. In order of importance for this study, intent refers to the need of the educator to reduce criticism and limit student challenges in the classroom. Method refers to the educator suppressing other sides of the argument. Outcome refers to the idea that the student will hold their beliefs uncritically.ⁱⁱ Finally, content seems to be more a matter of perception but, according to Lang (2007), it often refers to information that does not support a broadly liberal, secular position. As will be demonstrated below, all of these criteria are cited as reasons for dismantling the MAS program in Tucson. However, it is not surprising that, when referring to the textbooks that were used, content was of primary importance to the program's opponents.

The concept of common sense interpretation is rooted in print-culture studies and the study of reading practices. This interpretive strategy's (Fish 1982) foundations can be traced to eighteenth-century Scottish Common Sense Realism philosophical theory and a particular relationship to texts. Although this type of interpretation is linked to literalism, it is more accurately termed "common sense" because the challengers who employ such interpretive strategies not only argue for the literal interpretation of texts but also that such an interpretation should be self-evident to others. For eighteenth-century common sense philosophers such as John Witherspoon, the ability to observe and understand the world along with the self-sufficiency of the individual were of primary importance (Segrest 2010). Interpretation of texts, for those who followed this tradition, should be based on scientific rationality instead of on the symbolic or analogic. Marsden (1991) notes that these philosophers and their followers subscribed to the theory that "things are thought best described exactly the way they appear, accurately with no hidden meanings" (157). That is, texts do not contain many different meanings and there

ii. Raywid argues that the final component of indoctrination is osmosis but, since the publication of her article in 1984, this has been supplanted by outcome. In my estimation, this is unfortunate because Raywid's argument for osmosis takes a social constructionist understanding of indoctrination and includes the concepts of language and socialization, both of which are major components of education. This process-oriented idea is not present in conceptualizing indoctrination as intent, content, method, and outcome.



is only one interpretation possible when one encounters the text. In some respects, those who hold to this style of interpretation reject reader-response theory as a viable method for interacting with texts.

Schrader (1997) links this dismissal to what he calls “word fear,” noting that it is a type of interpretation of people who

reject any distinction between narrative and indoctrination, between portrayal and instruction and promotion, between description and “how-to,” between disclosure and endorsement and advocacy, between statement and encouragement and glorification, between exposure and seduction, between telling and teaching, between storytelling and condoning, between discussion and recruitment, between knowledge and action. (10)

As I have previously (Knox 2014, 2015) demonstrated, this common sense interpretation of texts unites book challengers of different ideologies and worldviews. This type of interpretation can also be called “monosemic,” wherein it is believed that texts possess a stable referent and can only have one meaning. It is challengers’ belief in monosemy and the impossibility of polysemy that drives them to ask for books to be removed, restricted, or relocated in public institutions. Challengers actively reject reader-response theory (Tompkins 1980), transactional theory (Rosenblatt 1995), and the idea that texts contain multiple meanings. That is, for the challengers it only takes “common sense” to determine the meaning of texts.

Here one can see the link between monosemic interpretation and indoctrination. As noted above, the concept of indoctrination relies on constructing students as passive agents in the classroom. This would indicate that they bring nothing to the texts that they read and therefore would not be capable of applying various interpretive strategies to texts. Instead, a particular text’s meaning is always clear to anyone, including a student, who encounters it. Therefore, if the text states a controversial idea, there is only one outcome that can come from reading it—indoctrination into a particular point of view.

Methodology: Language and the Discourse of Censorship

In previous work (Knox 2015), I have explored book censorship as a type of reading practice. This analysis is grounded in the social constructionist theory of Berger and Luckmann (1966) and Schutz and Luckmann (1973). Berger, Schutz, and Luckman focus on how knowledge is

constructed, transmitted, and maintained in society. They especially focus on stocks of knowledge that humans use as frames to understand our interactions in the everyday world. These stocks of knowledge are made of typical actions and types. Typical actions provide maps for “getting thing done” in the world. Types are abstract, incomplete, relative, and relevant constructions of objects. In my work I focus on the typical action of interpreting text and “the book” as a type of object. This article explores common themes of interpretation that were employed in the discourse of MAS-program opponents regarding the textbooks used in the program.

Throughout my work I focus on what I call the discourse of censorship to better understand both why and how people construct arguments against reading particular materials. These are arguments that go against the overall ethos of “freedom” that permeates our society. By focusing on opponents’ arguments, we can see how access to information is impeded through the use of language and symbolic power. If we wish to keep ethnic studies programs like Tucson’s MAS, it is imperative that we understand the arguments made by those who wish to dismantle them.

I used several sources for the MAS opponents’ arguments discussed below. The main source of discourse consists of various court filings, reports, audits, as well as the open letter from a government official discussed in the timeline above. I also sent an open-records request to the TUSD in July 2012 and received a few documents, including emails, that discuss the case directly from the district in response. Transcripts from school district meetings regarding the program were also included in the corpus. Finally, a blog post from an opponent of the MAS program provided a vibrant source for discourse against the program. Following approval by my university’s institutional review board, I also sent interview requests to both Huppenthal and Horne, but was denied.

I employ the methods of discourse analysis that focus on how challengers’ arguments communicate “the constitution and construction of the world in the concrete use of signs and the underlying structural patterns or rules for the production of meaning” (Keller 2013, 2). All the arguments against the MAS program in the complete set of documents from the sources above were analyzed for common themes using Atlas.ti software for qualitative research. The analysis is an example of culturalist discourse analysis (Keller 2013) that focuses on how people combine symbolic power and language to effect change. In particular, I look for how people name themselves (e.g., as taxpayers, parents) and thereby invoke their own symbolic power and also how



they discuss the negative effects of reading to justify their position against the MAS program. Coding was an iterative process, and both previous research and the discourse itself provided codes for analysis. Codes were applied at the paragraph level to ensure sufficient context, and paragraphs sometimes received more than one code.

Common sense Interpretation and Indoctrination

As noted above, according to philosophers of education, there are four conceptualizations of indoctrination: intent, content, method, and outcome. MAS program opponents discuss all four of these concepts throughout their discourse regarding the textbooks. Not surprisingly, content takes precedence for the opponents in their arguments. This section of the article explores the discourse of the opponents and seeks to demonstrate a connection between common sense interpretation and indoctrination, as this link is important for understanding school curricula challenges. As noted above, other analytical lenses, including critical race theory, could be used to understand why opponents attacked the both the program and textbooks. For example, the dismantling of the program could be seen only as a response to the growing power of the Lantinx community in Arizona. However, it is hoped that the following section demonstrates why MAS opponents targeted not just the program but also the books through the use of a particular interpretive strategy—one that allows for only one meaning in texts. Due to space constraints, only representative samples of discourse are discussed here.

Common Sense Interpretation

Those who employ common sense interpretation hold that texts “mean what they say and say what they mean” and that this meaning is self-evident (that is, common sense) to all readers. When individuals—particularly children and youth—are confronted with a text, they can only understand the words on a page in one particular way. This interpretive strategy can be found throughout the MAS opponents’ discourse. For example, a court document from the *Acosta v. Huppenthal* case discusses the textbooks as follows (underlining in original and quoted at length for clarity):

The materials for this class include “A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in School.” These materials include: “We often hear people referred to as being privileged, which usually is a comment pertaining to the individual’s financial or economic status. . . . In *Courageous Conversation*, however,

privilege takes on a different meaning: it refers to the amount of melanin in a person’s skin, hair, and eyes. (This is followed by a table which promulgates racial stereotypes by detailing the differences between “white individualism” “colored group collectivism.”) “White people tend to dominate the conversation by setting the tone for how everyone must talk and which words should be used. All of these “White ways” must be recognized, internalized, and then silently acted on by people of color”. (This is an example, referring to the statute, of subsection 2, “promote resentment toward a race or class of people”)...The aforementioned White cultural characteristics, such as individualism, blur into the consciousness of Whiteness, which becomes not only a way of behaving but also a way of thinking. . . . At page 200 of these materials, there is a table setting forth in detail the difference between “White Talk” and “Color Commentary”. These materials go on to state: “Anger, guilt, and shame are just a few of the emotions experienced by participants as they move toward greater understanding of Whiteness”. [If one were to substitute any other race for “Whiteness”, it would be obvious how this promotes resentment toward a race or a people.] (Response to Plaintiffs’ Motion for Summary Judgment 2012, 3–4)

Note that the references to “promulgating racist stereotypes” and “promoting resentment toward a race or class of people” are direct responses to the Arizona law to end MAS. What is of interest here is that the authors of the document assert that their interpretation of the book is the only possible one that a reader could make. The quotations from the book are presented without context so that the reader of the document does not have any sense of what the author of the book is trying to convey or even if these are the author’s own judgments. I have found that this tactic is indicative of a common sense interpretive stance wherein the author views the meaning of the quotations from the textbook as self-evident to any reader.

Similarly, in his “Open Letter to the Citizens of Tucson” (2007) mentioned in the timeline above, Tom Horne, then state superintendent of public instruction, also discusses the textbooks that were used in the curriculum using a common sense interpretation. He describes the texts as engaging in a “kind of destructive ethnic chauvinism.” The following discusses both the author’s interpretation of a speech and Horne’s own interpretation of the same:

One of Gutiérrez’s speeches is described as follows:

We are fed up. We are going to move to do away with the injustices to the Chicano and if the ‘gringo’



doesn't get out of our way, we will stampede over him." Gutiérrez attacked the gringo establishment angrily at a press conference and called upon Chicanos to 'kill the gringo,' which meant to end white control over Mexicans.

The textbook's translation of what Gutiérrez meant contradicts his clear language. In describing the atmosphere in Texas where Gutiérrez spoke, the textbook states: "Texans had never come to grips with the fact that Mexicans had won at the Alamo." (P. 323.) It is certainly strange to find a textbook in an American public school taking the Mexican side of the battle at the Alamo.

Horne's statement offers a clear example of common sense interpretation. For him, Gutierrez's speech can only be understood in one way, and "Kill the gringo" means that one should kill white Americans. The idea that the authors of the text would interpret this using a different lens or that the speech has a particular historical context simply does not seem to be viable interpretation of the text and, in light of his own common sense strategy, the perceived point of view of the text is adequate justification for banning the book.

A common sense interpretive framework was also employed in the testimony of opponents to MAS during various open meetings and hearings that were held regarding the status of the program. The following quote is from a community member:

I would like to address this board on the La Raza Studies that makes it quite clear that Chicanos want to have wars, civil war. You don't really want that. Because true war, men who have been in war can tell you that right offhand, men, women, and children. War is about life and death, and there's not going to be no time outs and no little white flags. And the La Raza Studies calls for civil war, they want to fight the white man, they want to kill every gringo over the age of 16. I've read it in the book. (Anonymous 2011)

The testimony here offers a strong statement of monosemic interpretation. Since the MAS opponent has "read the book," he therefore understands the purpose of the program, which was (he presumes) to teach children to kill white people. As will be demonstrated below, this is precisely how the MAS opponents understand the practice of indoctrination. They argue that students do not have agency in their own education and when are presented with certain ideas and they accept these ideas without question.

Indoctrination

The opponents of the MAS program did not always use the term "indoctrinate," but it is strongly implied in many of their arguments. In particular, some of their discourse focuses on the four main concepts of indoctrination: intent, content, methods, and outcome. For example, throughout the Response to the Plaintiffs' Motion for Summary Judgment (Document 151) from *Acosta v. Huppenthal*, the idea that the MAS program has a particular intent and leads toward certain outcomes is prevalent (underlining and "Emphasis added" in the original):

Like the Findings of the Hearing officer, [Exhibit A] presents overwhelming evidence that TUSD adopted a course of study that promotes racism:

The Findings Pulled directly from the materials used in the ethnic studies class:

The students are taught "Critical Race Theory". A part of the "Critical Race Theory" is defined by the materials taught to the students as follows: "Unlike traditional civil rights, which embraces incrementalism and step-by-step progress, critical race theory questions the very foundation of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law." (Emphasis added). (Response to Plaintiffs' Motion for Summary Judgment 2012, 3)

Note that this quotation from "the materials used in the . . . class" is presented without comment in the Response. It is clear that, for the defendant, teaching CRT means—by definition—that the teachers in the program intended for students to question the "liberal order" and "Enlightenment rationalism." Since there is no commentary on why this type of questioning might be problematic, this seems to be an idea that the defendant believes would be abhorrent to any reader. Likewise, in an affidavit from one of the former teachers in the program (who eventually opposed it), the testifier implies the students were "indoctrinated" rather than "educated:"

3. The teachers and administrators in the MAS Program did not encourage or cultivate robust discussion by presenting a variety of balanced views on controversial issues covered in classes. Instead, they advocated views and ideas that were consistent with their ideology, while demeaning opposing viewpoints.



4. MAS staff promoted racial and ethnic solidarity among students and fostered an “us versus them” mentality. Accepting the MAS staff’s views was a litmus test for students to demonstrate that they were “Raza”—in other words a proud member of their ethnic group. (Ward 2012, 2)

According to this affidavit, the MAS curriculum fulfills all four conceptualizations of indoctrination. The other teachers’ intent was to persuade students that there was a cultural war against Latinos. The method was what the testifier calls “ethnic solidarity.” Content is not discussed explicitly but it is implied that it was anti-capitalist. Finally, the outcomes that the MAS staff demanded was that the students show that they were “proud member[s] of their ethnic group.”

Community members also provided arguments against the program. For example, a Tucson attorney, John Munger, was an outspoken opponent of the MAS program and discussed it on both his blog, *Imagine Arizona*, and during his testimony at board meetings. In 2010 he asked the school district for the textbooks used in the MAS program, which he read and analyzed. Much of his analysis, excerpted below, is concerned with the issue of indoctrination. In the following he notes that that the books are focused on Marxism:

The books are not about history. The books are not about ethnicity. The books teach two major themes. The two themes they teach is first the books are classical showpieces of Marxist re-indoctrination. They are about political oppression, incessant deprecation of anything not Chicano, including the US Constitution, capitalism, and anything European or of European culture. That’s what the books said. (Munger 2011b)

Of interest here is the use of the term “re-indoctrination.” It is possible that Munger means that, as “immigrants” (although many of the students were born in the United States), these students left countries that were Marxist and the books are reintroducing them to political ideas that they left behind. According to Munger’s testimony, the books were not fulfilling an educational need to introduce TUSD students to non-Chicano culture.

Munger also writes the following on his blog regarding the critical perspective of the books, stating that they eschew a grand national narrative of American history:

Having read the books the students must read, as well as the Principles and philosophies of MecHa [Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana/o de Aztlan], I found many interesting quotes

and facts. First, there is NO book presenting American History generally, nor even the standard view of Southwestern American History—ALL the books speak solely from the point of view of the oppressed “Chicano,” with no effort to teach alternative thought or facts. Second, the concepts and language in the materials is, frankly, classic Marxist indoctrination based on oppression and inculcation of hatred of anyone European or who might identify themselves as an American. (Munger 2011b)

Here Munger reiterates the point made in his testimony above that the books take a “nonstandard” view of American history. Books that discuss oppression or that are critical of dominant culture are automatically described as indoctrination.

These are just some of the facts pertaining to TUSD’s Ethnic Studies Program and MecHa. There is much, much more. These facts are based on reading the materials given our students to read. The results of this indoctrination are astounding. I have a photograph of one student of this program carrying a sign and protesting recently. The sign held by this student shouts in bold letters: “Dumb F*** Gringos. You Are Standing in Mexico Right Now!” (Ibid.)

Munger discusses the effects of indoctrination as the polar opposite of education. Education is about learning and growth while indoctrination focuses on ideology and being exposed to one (wrong) idea. It is clear from Munger’s example that the anti-MAS community members are using the term “indoctrination” to imply that there is something inherently wrong with the MAS program.

The question of the outcomes and effects of the program is also found in court documents, for example, in the Response to Plaintiffs’ Motion for Summary Judgment (2012) when it refers to the affidavits of former teachers in the program:

The Motion for Summary Judgment argues about “chilling affects” on the exercise of 1st amendment rights. But the testimony from teachers and former teachers show that it is this program itself which is chilling 1st amendment rights:

In the past several weeks, messages have filtered out from teachers and other TUSD employees . . . about what an officially recognized resentment-based program does to a high school.

In a word, it creates fear.

Teachers and counselors are being called before their school principals and even the district school



board and accused of being racists. And with a cadre of self-acknowledge [*sic*] “progressive” political activists in the ethnic-studies department on the hunt, the race transgressors are multiplying.(5).

According to opponents, the MAS program was not teaching students and expanding students’ minds but attempting to inculcate them with certain values and a particular way of thinking about society. In this case, indoctrination means that the students will inevitably become people who feel that there is something wrong with the United States. The program itself is instilling fear into other teachers. This is, of course, premised on the idea that students cannot think for themselves nor engage in rational discernment regarding the ideas they are taught in class. Here we see how indoctrination is strongly related to the acceptance of common sense interpretation. There is only one possible interpretation of the texts (and lectures) taught in the MAS program.

Indoctrination, Education, and Banning Books

Indoctrination describes a practice that is somewhat difficult to pin down. Originally linked to religion, indoctrination is connected to a process of forming minds that does not allow for deviation or interrogation of the facts presented. When teachers are accused of indoctrination, they are perceived to have a distinct intent, to teach particular content, to use only certain methods, and to expect a particular outcome. Although the philosophy of education has described what indoctrination is, it has paid less attention to how this process might play out. This paper is intended to be a first step in linking indoctrination to one understanding of interpretation of texts, and it has demonstrated this connection through the discourse of those who fear indoctrination within a particular educational program.

All the concepts of indoctrination were used against the MAS program and its instructors. Opponents argued that the intent of the program was for students to hate the United States and white people. The content of the textbooks in particular and the entire program in general did not adhere to a grand national narrative of progress. There was less focus on methods in the opponents’ discourse, but they did state that the teachers did not allow for dissent

from a critical orientation toward history and society. Finally, the opponents argued that the outcome of the program was anger and resentment at the wider society. It is clear from both the opponents’ discourse and the fact that they were banned that the textbooks used by the MAS instructors played a major role in understanding how the process of indoctrination takes place. I am arguing here that it is a commitment to common sense or monosemic interpretation that helps explain both this process and the fear inherent in the discourse of the opponents to the MAS program.

This fear and a reliance on common sense interpretation are based in the understanding that students lack agency to interpret lectures and texts using their own interpretive framework. There can be no doubt that the MAS program teachers had a critical point of view regarding US history and society. However, presentation of critical ideas in the classroom does not mean that they will be accepted by all because students are not passive receptors in education. The fact that the MAS program opponents were able to read all the same books and come to very different conclusions demonstrates how readers engage in active responses to texts. The program opponents argue that the inevitable outcome of the program was indoctrination because there was only one way to understand the messages that are given by the program’s teachers. The opponents’ discourse focuses on common sense interpretation wherein the books that were boxed up “say what they mean and mean what they say.” This understanding of interpretation leads directly to challenges of books in school curricula and also in school and public libraries.

It must be stated that there is a very fine line between education and indoctrination because all education has a specific intent of introducing students to new ideas and socializing them into a distinct culture. However, challenges to school curriculum materials in particular can only be understood through a combination of lack of agency on the part of the students, common sense interpretation, and a fear of indoctrination on the part of the challengers. It is imperative educators be aware of these arguments to be adequately prepared for a school curriculum challenge.

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