La Revuelta
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Berta Berriz's Political Autobiography encompasses the affirmation of her identity and the integration of that process into her life and work now as a bilingual third grade teacher. [Editor]

"Home was the place where I was forced to conform to someone else's image of who and what I should be. School was the place where I could forget that self and, through ideas, reinvent myself"

Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom.

Revuelta

My political autobiography begins with a personal story of my Cuban family life. At home there were heroines and the oppressed, family stories that were national stories, military government, police corruption, revolution and exile. At home, the expectations were for me, the only girl, to grow up to be a beauty queen. While my home was like bell hooks' home, a place where I was forced to conform to someone else's image of who I should be; my home also, through the family stories, provided a cultural identity that sustains me. My school life was also a dialectical experience. It was through the exercise of resistance that I reinvent myself in school--resistance to alienating experiences in schools that attempted to crush my home stories. That is why, as a teacher today, I emphasize the importance of family stories as cultural grounding for the optimum learning experience for my students.

I present my political story in two parts: Home and School. Home tells of the contradictions that shaped the warrior in me. Home is the part of my political life that takes place in Cuba, the place of my birth and of my ancestors. School, then, is a story of exile and of coming of age. School is the story of my evolving political life: my praxis as an urban educator in the state of Massachusetts.

Home

I was born in La Habana, Cuba the same year that television came to the island. I have two brothers, one was nine years older and my other brother was six years younger. My father was, and still is, a business man. My mother was in charge of the children.
We lived the life of the middle class, then called the *nouveau riche*. My mother was busy with the house, gardening, the club. My mother was *una mujer de sociedad* (lady of society). Her picture was in the social pages. As a young woman she was a beauty queen. She played canasta at the country club, raised money for the church, took lessons about classical music and art at the cultural center. On the dark side of her life, she had repeated abortions, psychiatric treatment and was a woman alone in her marriage. Through her eyes I lived feminist oppression in a machista culture. I am my mother’s only daughter. She transmitted her rage to me. I know now that my mother's story is different from my own story, yet, I do know the oppression of women. I have brought up a son, who is marvelous in his own personality and not a machista.

When I was a young girl, in La Habana, my grandmother, *Abuelita*, was my primary care taker. We would spend the days together walking to the park, coloring with prismacolor pencils, laughing and spinning stories. Abuelita told me about her parents, José Camejo Paynts and Caridad Rodriguez Algeciras. They were *Mambises* who fought in the last war for Cuban independence. José Camejo Paynts, born in the Dominican Republic came to Cuba with his brother in the company of General Máximo Gomez. The resistance to Spanish colonialism was fought over a ten year period. The Mambises fought the war on horse back with machetes. The families fought this war together. The women would accompany the men, set up camp and nourish and heal the soldiers. Some women became warriors as well. The family story places my great grandfather in the Caballería, the troops of General Antonio Maceo. Abuelita said that Maceo -- a free black man -- was a racist, and that he did not like to have white soldiers in his ranks. He made an exception, the story goes, for José and his brother. General Antonio Maceo, she said, was a military genius. José Martí, on the other hand was not a soldier, but a poet who expressed the Cuban spirit that won the revolution.

"José Martí should never have gotten on that horse." Abuelita would say; "The Cuban people, the men were foolish push Martí into battle." José Martí was killed the first time he got on horse back to fight in the war. He was not a soldier; his sword was his word. Abuelita recited the poetry of José Martí:

*Le llega a los pies la espuma;*  
*Gritan alegres las dos;*  
*Y se va, diciendo adiós,*  
*La del sombrero de pluma.*

*The foaming wave touches their feet, They both shriek happily, And she leaves saying good bye, The one with the feathered hat.* I remember these words from "Los Zapaticos de Rosa," that teaches little children that poor children and rich children are both dear
yet live quite different lives. He also wrote about racism: “Esa de racista se está siendo una palabra confusa, y hay que ponerla en claro. El hombre no tiene ningún derecho especial porque pertenezca a una raza u otra; digase hombre, y ya se dicen todos los derechos.” (Mi Raza, 1893, p. 52) [The word racist is a confusing word. It needs clarification. Man has no special right because he belongs to one race or another. Say, man and all of the rights are implied.]

I still remember my great grand mother Caridad. She fought for Cuba’s independence as the wife of a Mambis. I was two years old when she died. I remember her sitting in her rocking chair in the kitchen of her house. She was barefoot. I could see that the nails on her toes were fuzzy as if they were wasting away. She made a chocolate cigarette for me by grinding the Spanish chocolate. She was making hot chocolate for the children. I feel a powerful sense of pride and responsibility that I was born in a family of warriors. In my spirit, I was born into a family of guerreros, warriors. A sense of racial and economic justice was instilled in me through these family stories.

There was one more historical hero in my family stories. It was said that, el Indio Hatuey was an Arawak Indian born on Cubanacán--as the island was known to its native peoples. He was one of the most brave of the caciques, native leaders, who fought against the Spanish. The story says that Hatuey was captured by the Spaniards and was tied to a stake to be burned to death. A Spanish priest came to Hatuey and offered him conversion. The priest said, "Let me baptize you and you will enter the kingdom of heaven." Hatuey responded with a question, "Tell me, do the Spaniards go to heaven?" The monk said that the Spaniards would go to heaven, of course. El indio Hatuey said, "Kill me now. Why would I want to go to heaven with those beasts."

It wasn’t until many years later that I would discover that el indio Hatuey was not a family member. He is, however, among my warrior guides. In La Habana I went to a private catholic school, Las Esclavas del Sagrado Corazón de Jesus. (The Hand Maids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus). In that school there was a small museum. We would have social studies class in the museum. The exhibit was about the Taíno and their conquest. The dioramas of Taíno life drew me in. As if in a dream, imagined myself among them. The sisters told us that all of the Indians had been killed by the Spaniards. My father says that because Cubans have no Indian blood, we are smarter than other Caribbean people. I never quite believed this story. In my spirit I feel a kinship with the Indians.

Many years later, when I was forty, I encountered José Barréiro, a Cuban Taino, at Cornell University. He opened up a world of understanding about the Taino presence in Cuba today (Barreiro, 1993). I tell Taino stories. Environmental justice and cultural justice issues are part of my Taino heritage. My family in Cuba today is very involved in
environmental protection, sustainable agriculture and alternative sources of energy. (Cuba Solar: http://www.cubasolar.islagrande.com)

As a child, nature was my sanctuary from the madness of adult life that surrounded me. A large part of my day was spent watching the lizards. I learned their language. I call this my first bilingual experience. This served me well in Philadelphia where I could understand almost anyone who I could see.

Abuelita, the teller of these tales, the daughter of José y Caridad was also active politically. In her day, she was involved in leftist politics. My mother tells me the story of the day Abuelita took her, at age 9, to a demonstration. There was a vigil for the death of Julio Antonio Mella (1905-29), a promising democratic politician. My mother said that there was a tiroteo, a shoot out, and she ran into a house and hid under a bed. On my last trip to Cuba, I saw picture of the massacre that took place during the Mella burial. It was part of the historical development of the revolution on display in the Muséo de la Revolución.

Abuelita had been a first grade teacher in one of the poor neighborhoods of La Habana. She went to la escuela normal, normal school, and later became an inspector. She would tell me stories about her challenging students. "Yo le daba la llave al más majadero. Así yo estaba segura que nada me faltaría en mi cartera." [I would give the key to my most challenging student. That way I was sure nothing would be missing from my purse.] So often we would be walking to the park and some chubby bald guy would greet her so warmly. I could see that she was loved by her former students. They remember her cariñosamente from their first grade experience. We would stop at the bodegas and street corners and talk to folks. This happened in Miami too. My grandmother taught me how to write with beautiful handwriting, use color pencils and to laugh with the people.

One of our usual walks in our neighborhood was to ride my horse that was kept behind the cemetery. Someone once paid off a debt to my father by giving him a horse. Papi gave it to me. I love horses. I was riding my pale plump palomino in the field. That day only the chubby boy with the white horse that looked like Hopalong Cassidy was there. There was something about that boy that I did not like. He invited me to ride with him on the road behind the cemetery. The adventure led us to a place like I had never seen before. It was a llega y pon neighborhood. It was called llega y pon [get there and set up] because the huts were all make shift without water or electricity. The poor children saw us and came running out with rocks in hand. They were angry. I saw into the eyes of one of the children. This was the first time that understood about poor and privilege. I will never forget that awakening. The children were angry at me because I represented the oppressor.
I remember this anger at times when I see some of my students act out their rage. For example, one of my students, Johnny was always getting into fights. When I spoke with his family they invited me to their home in the Cathedral projects. Johnny's father wanted me to see what Johnny sees everyday. On the grounds of the projects I could see people openly using drugs. The elevator was out of order and it was being used for a bathroom. Some people were living in the halls. When I got to Johnny's home, the apartment inside was a sharp contrast. On every surface were hand made tapestries. The apartment was painted a bright blue and green. It was spotless and welcoming inside. I understood Johnny's anger and respect his sense of injustice. Children know the difference between right and wrong. Yet, they may not always know that everything that is happening around them is not their fault. Politically I position my self in their midst. That is, I too feel a strong sense of justice and I am working by their side.

Soon after the cemetery horse ride, the revolution came to La Habana. Our family was in Cuba for one last Christmas, but we were already settled in Philadelphia. The Fidelistas had arrived to La Habana. I was eight years old then. I did not leave Cuba with empty sacks. My grandmother filled them with family stories of fighting for independence, justice, and resistance to oppression. In the United States, they call the Cuban War for Independence the Spanish-American War. There is never a mention of Martí, Maceo, or Hatuey. Nevertheless, new experiences in this country shaped my politics through my new marginalized status: female, immigrant of color who speaks a language other than English.

Moving to the United States of America at age eight has influenced my feminist outlook. My mother clandestinely participated with other Cuban women in feminist study groups. She divorced my father and worked for a living. Because, I am the only girl, my brothers had their education paid for by my father, but I paid for my own. It is a point of honor with me to continue. This doctorate at Harvard has a feminist significance for my family and the women who are encouraged that I am here. My feminist position is always developing. I have just married for the last time. My husband is supportive of my power and we have a home which we treasure. I appreciate my femaleness. I am not in competition with men. I have learned about male emotional oppression. As a teacher, my favorite students are the girls. I appreciate them as mature, bright, collaborative, creative and I rely on them for the cooperative group work. I begin my story of school life with third grade in the U.S.
School

A story from my two-way bilingual third grade classroom.

It's Tuesday morning in our two-way bilingual third grade classes. *Eramos de una visión...la música de su corazón* is playing softly as the children write in their morning journals. Ramona Mejia, my teaching partner, and I are talking about the day in the doorway between the Spanish and English classrooms. It is time for morning circle. The *chékere*--a beaded gourd instrument calls us to order. Echoes of names bounce back around the circle as we play the whispering name game: Yismilka/Yismilka, Rodney/Rodney, Maria/Maria. "Frederick" says Frederico with a nervous smile. The game stops. Frederico has changed his name over the long weekend.

"Federico, let me tell you a story of how I lost my name in third grade" I tell Frederico and the class this story:

My name is Berta... Berrrrrrr-ta. I was born in La Habana, Cuba. When I was in third grade my family moved to this country. I spoke no English. The folks at the school spoke no Spanish. Sadly, not one my twelve blond, blue-eyed, third grade guardian angels could say Berta. "Bbbbbbb-eeeee-rrrrrrrrrrr ... como tren, ferrocarril, tigre: rrrrrrrrrr ..." Not one. I decided that I had to teach my new classmates how to pronounce my name. I gave lessons during recess and after school. I recited the rhyme: "Erre, con erre cigarro, erre con erre barril, rapido corren los carros sobre las lineas del ferrocarril."

The teacher told me that I must change my name to something Americans could pronounce easily: Bertha - but there is no thuh sound in our Spanish. We are Cubans, we are not a colony of Spain, we do not use the royal lisp. I had to practice th-th-th-th, and discovered, instead, zzzzzz - another sound not found in Cuban Spanish.

At lunch, the second week of school, I eyed the tray of grilled American cheese sandwiches and the white milk without sugar - food I could not eat. I was gagging at the prospect of swallowing that bland white stuff all at once - the food stuck in my throat, like the name they wanted me to adopt: Ber-thz-thz-thz... Ber-zzzz-a. Not my name, not my name! I lost my name, my spirit.

Frustrated and disappointed, I compromised by calling myself "Bert" while reluctantly answering to "Bertha." Without the support and encouragement of teachers and other adults it took me ten years to reclaim my name, and with it, my Cuban identity. But at 18 years old I declared, proudly, for all to hear: ¡No! Me llamo Berta. ¿Te gusta? Berta.

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So Federico, I tell you this story so that you never give up your name. Keep on, Federico! 'Federico' we whisper back. The ritual call and response of names settles. Others around the circle share stories about their names, nicknames and namesakes. Miguel was named after his father’s favorite uncle. Marilyn was carrying the name of her great grandmother who was an important matriarch. Kevonia was called Kiki by her sister and now everyone called her Kiki. Joshua was carrying his father’s name and his sister their grandmother’s name who is still in Puerto Rico. Each name holds a thread on the weave of the family heritage regardless of the immigration route.

Chairs from the circle get shuffled back to the desks clustered in small groups. Students are in charge of much of the organization of the day. Rodney walks over to get the materials cubby for his group. Maria is the checker this week. She pulls out the group’s clip board an begins to check for homework from each member of her group. Josymir, the group librarian is collecting books signed out from our popular Multicultural classroom library. I am going over last nights word problems with Jamar and Robert. The teacher’s desk serves as a resource materials area. The agenda for the day, homework, schedules and announcements are posted. The resource teacher joins us. The language arts class begins. Teaching within dual language programs we have found an inclusive structure for quality urban education.

I have lived in the US for over 40 years. But in my heart, I remain that dark-haired, Cuban third grader forced to give up her country, her language and her name. I am my students -- I have felt their confusion, embarrassment and anger firsthand. I understand how the imposition of a new language and culture can profoundly affect the process of identity-formation, self-esteem and the capacity for learning for a young child. I have dedicated my life and career to fighting for them and for all of us.

My Politics are One with My Work

"It always astounds me when progressive people act as though it is somehow a naive moral position to believe that our lives must be a living example of our politics." Bell Hooks

For the last twenty-three years I have been a bilingual educator in the Boston Public Schools. I have taught in elementary two-way bilingual programs, special education classrooms, and middle school. For four years I coordinated native language literacy services for the bilingual department and am currently a literacy coach at the Charles Sumner School. Lesley University is my professional and artistic oasis.

I discovered my gift for teaching as a dancer, creating opportunities for young children and families to explore movement together. Although undergraduate studies in sociology provided insights into the dynamics of social grouping, the degree promised
few opportunities for meaningful employment. I decided to return to school, the Lesley Arts in Learning program, and for the next few years I juggled education courses, a job, and single-motherhood.

I remember my first elementary classroom. Armed with methods courses and theories on arts and learning, I met my students -- a small group of Latinos, six boys and a girl, each labeled "behaviorally disordered." Across the hall, the African-American teacher of behaviorally disordered black students welcomed me. I soon discovered that the four classrooms along this corridor were set aside for students deemed unable to handle mainstream placement due to language, physical or emotional problems. This form of blatant ghettoization shocked me -- how could a learning community that routinely segregates children claim to provide equal access to a quality education? (Radical Teacher, 1984.)

As a new teacher, I was learning more from my students, than from any of my courses. Their experiences resonated with remembrances of my own childhood. I resolved to create a nurturing and supportive learning environment that would allow my students to explore "real life" situations. This encouraged them to define their own values, responsibilities, and identities with respect to the larger society -- as well as to refine their cognitive and social skills. "Engaged pedagogy does not seek simply to empower students. Any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process." (hooks 94, p.21)

I recall the day the children hung their first mural in the hall. It was a representation of the fairy tales and connections to scenes from their lives. Passers-by were moved by the beauty and the insight of their work. The children became more interested in reading, thinking and writing when they heard praise and recognition. The power and influence of this simple act demonstrate the strong connection between learning and cultural production.

"For the notion of literacy to become meaningful, it has to be situated within a theory of cultural production and viewed as an integral part of the way in which people produce, transform and reproduce meaning. Literacy must be seen as a medium that constitutes and affirms the historical and existential moments of lived experience that produce a subordinated or a live culture. Hence, it is an eminently political phenomenon, and it must be analyzed within the context of a theory of power relations and an understanding of social and cultural reproduction and production." (Freire and Macedo, 87, p. 142)

Over the years, critical reflection on my classroom practice and independent study, framed by my lived-experience, has evolved into a general philosophy of education responsive to the needs of children from minority and foreign-born cultures.
I believe that learning takes place in a web of relationships; an environment that fosters community and connects knowledge to everyday life. Our children come from diverse family cultures and each child brings to the classroom abundant resources that reflect family values, language and knowledge based on lived-experience. When the classroom and school fabric reflect family cultures, each student’s identity is affirmed and learning takes on a personal and social meaning (Berriz, 2000). As a teacher my intention is to orchestrate this web of relationships so that I value the knowledge that students bring while expanding and presenting new challenges. When the classroom teacher is comfortable with her cultural identity, she can more easily inspire a sense of belonging for her diverse students. It is easier for me to know what questions to ask my students about their culture because I have gone through the process of affirming my own cultural identity. For this reason I believe that a cornerstone for student success in a multicultural classroom setting is the relationship of the teacher to her own cultural identity.

Attention to relationships and contextualizing learning form part of my political pedagogy. I teach within the political reality of public urban education in a democratic society. "Separating education from politics is not only artificial but dangerous. To think of education independent from the power that constitutes it, divorced from the concrete world where it is forged, leads us either to reducing it to a world of abstract values and ideals (which the pedagogue constructs inside his consciousness without even understanding the conditioning that makes him think this way), or converting it to a repertoire of behavioral techniques, or to perceiving it as a spring board for changing reality." (Freire 85, p. 167)

My beliefs and politics motivate the quality and intensity of my work with children, teachers and parents. Teachers, as well as children, thrive in collaboration. Articulating the effectiveness of our work leads to creativity and educational reform. Agreement among educators on a common philosophy and goals for the children is essential for a successful educational program.

**The Teacher-Researcher**

I recall the first time that I stuck my head out of the water of my classroom practice to reflect on what was taking place both inside and outside the classroom walls. Then, I worked collaboratively with Beth Handman to combine Special Needs sixth graders with Advanced Work students in an accelerated curriculum at the Mackey Mosaic Middle School. We called our work TeamStream (Wheelock 1990). TeamStream demonstrated a new approach to building integrated learning-communities. The Lucretia Crocker Fellowship year (1989), was the first time research and critical reflection became an integral part of my teaching method.
New questions arose from my two-way bilingual third grade. Third grade is a critical year for minority youth regarding developing a strong sense of identity, pride in their family heritage and making connections between schooling and their community (Kunjufu 95). There was a group of us who wanted to guide our own professional development regarding matters of race, culture and learning. I convened and facilitated a teacher research project exploring the dynamics of biculturalism in our classrooms. We designed a two-year study project built around the writings of Antonia Darder and Lisa Delpit. These discussions generated specific questions about our practice that evolved into classroom-based participatory research projects. I quote from our research journal:

"The ideas for the project came out of the constant frustration I was experiencing as a teacher of young children. Many of my students seem to lack social skills. The children needed guidance and support in the area of conflict resolution, friendship, sharing and respect issues. I wanted to provide a safe nurturing environment where children respect each other. I struggled with the issues of developing a peaceful classroom community. Was I contributing to the problems or helping to reduce it. What was my role as the teacher? Where did I go from here? I began the project by reflecting on my school experience." Teacher researcher, Cheryl Meyers 1997.

My own research question addressed an understanding of biculturalism both in my own history and as a necessary consciousness for teachers of children of color. "Hence the notion of biculturalism must not be reduced to an absolute determined moment or a linear developmental stage. One the contrary, its critical dimension must be emphasized though its representation of bicultural existence as a complex process encompassing all the conscious and unconscious contradictory, oppressive and emancipatory responses that can be found along a continuum that moves conceptually between the primary culture and the dominate culture. Educators who possess this dialectical understanding of biculturalism will be better equipped to assist their students of color critically examine their lived experiences in an effort to reveal genuinely the impact that cultural domination has on their lives" (Darder 91, p. 14). Darder's ideas at once pierced the shadows of my own cultural identity formation and planted the seeds for further inquiry with my students.

Issues of race, identity, language, and community are central to my work as both educator and artist. In the bilingual/bicultural paradigm, students' native language and culture is afforded equal status in the learning process. This enables students to begin to overcome the silencing effect of language domination and racism (Darder 91, Freire & Macedo, 87). I am most interested in third graders because of the critical importance of cultural identity formation in students ages 8 to 10 and its relation to success in schooling (Delpit 93, Nieto 92).
Racial and ethnic disparities in student academic achievement persist in the Boston Public Schools (BPS Office of Assessment and Evaluation, 2001). This disparity in achievement intensifies after third grade (Applied Research Center, 2000; Berriz, 2002b; Garcia, 2001). Studies have documented a relationship between the cultural identity and academic performance of youth of immigrant origin. Cultural identity is demonstrated to be particularly significant in relation to academic performance for second-generation immigrant youth (Garcia, 2001; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Valenzuela, 2000).

While there is significant evidence of the link between cultural identity and academic outcomes among adolescents, the relationship of identity to academic performance for students of latency age, is yet to be well documented in the research (Troya & Carrington, 1990). I am interested in studying and understanding the relationship between latency-age students' cultural identities and their teachers' assessments of academic performance. The focus of my dissertation research is understanding how second-generation third-grade children from families of Puerto Rican and Dominican heritage describe their cultural identities, and how these descriptions relate to teachers' assessments of these children's academic performances.

Our study group wanted to find a voice for teachers -- and in particular bilingual teachers -- in the reform process. By creating a space for collective study, mutual support and encouragement, and debate, we were supporting the solitary role of classroom teaching in the midst of dramatic, system-wide change. Out of a sense of mutual respect, our study group was a source of authentic accountability for our best work.

At the same time that our study group was motivating change in our classrooms, Boston responded to the Massachusetts Educational Reform Act (1993). Teachers in our school experienced little opportunity to contribute our knowledge to improving the learning conditions for their students. In actual practice, the traditional decision making hierarchy constituted a structural and ideological barrier to democratic participation. Structures encouraging the open and critical exchange of ideas (such as our study group) are conspicuously under-utilized, or totally absent (Berriz, 97).

I believe that improving the quality of urban educational systems will require taking a broader view of the relationship between the university and the community. Further, that this improvement is an essential ingredient for the success of the current education reform movement. How can teachers play a greater role in contextualizing theory-based learning of the schools of education? How can the university continue to support new teachers? How can teacher education programs better utilize the expertise of veteran teachers?
Revuelta

My personal, political and intellectual present. In order to maintain balance and currency I must continue with my cultural development. I must tell stories, dance, travel to Cuba, work with children. My dispersed family is central to me. Ty dePass and I were married in May 1998. In our new family we share political hopes and dreams for our community. We both have worked for our ideals and now are in school to develop, read, write and move our agenda forward.

I am a teacher in a democratic society where I interpret my role and responsibility to prepare students to become active participants in our democratic society on behalf of our communities.

I understand the process of becoming bicultural and bilingual as an additive one, that holds promise and possibility for our increasingly global reality. As a member of the District 7 education committee, my mission is to educate about bilingual education and to engage families in the defense of bilingual education.

It is a question of democracy: The vote against bilingual education this past November on the Unz initiative is a violation of democratic principles. In Massachusetts, only 5% of families chose bilingual education for their children. It is most difficult for me to explain to my students how, in a democratic society, a multimillionaire has the power to overrule the Supreme Court by carpet-bagging the English only agenda of those who oppose public education. The vote by the majority of voters essentially denied access to comprehensible public education to immigrant students.

On November 2002 Massachusetts voters who have no need for bilingual education, like the citizens of Arlington, Hull or Mendon, overruled the educational rights of immigrants established by the Supreme Court in Lau v. Nichols (1974). In Lau, parents of non-English speaking children of Chinese descent sued the San Francisco school district alleging that their children did not have equal opportunities to learn because they could not access general education instruction and were not receiving any special instruction. The United States Supreme Court held that the San Francisco school district violated Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and discriminated on the basis of race and national origin because the Chinese-speaking students were receiving fewer benefits than their English-speaking peers and were denied a meaningful opportunity to participate in the educational program. Current reality for immigrant students who enter our Boston Public School doors by October is that they are accountable for the MCAS test by the spring of the same year. While the school system is not accountable for educating immigrant students to pass the test that will
deny them a high school diploma, our state also requires a second language as a
graduation requirement.

Words of children cut to the point of urgency:

¿Maestra? Does this mean that I can't speak Spanish with my family" Fourth grade
student on November 6. As a caring teacher, I know that youngsters interpret events in
their lives very personally. "Why do they want to take away my teacher?"
"Why do they hate us because we speak Spanish?"

"We came all the way here for this?" In the 23 years that I have been teaching in public
school, I have seen no greater inhibitor of learning than the feelings of rejection and
alienation. Analysis of this event must enter the curriculum of our classrooms and
living rooms. The social mirror just came crashing down on them (Suarez-Orozco, ).
Student cultural identity is an important link to academic achievement of our
students.

My first impulse is to assure children that the vote taken on November 5 was a result
of ignorance and misinformation about bilingual education. There is a history of
struggle for equality through equal access to education opportunity. This history
includes repression of culture and language of Native Americans, denial of literacy to
African Americans, and the history of bilingual education that springs from the work of
Chinese families (Spring, 1997). Considering our current reality in the context of
history helps us to consider ways that we, together with our students and their
families, can influence future history.
References


