



Inventing a Classroom

Kathryn F. Whitmore

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What are the patterns of teaching and learning that make a classroom holistic? How do children invent oral and written language? How do they create the culture and curriculum of a classroom? How does the spirit of community and collaboration develop among children and teachers? What are the relationships between literacy, schooling, and socialization as they form among the children?

These are a few of the broad questions that Kathy Whitmore and Caryl Crowell answer in this absorbing portrait of Caryl's third-grade classroom, "the Sunshine Room." Over the span of a school year, we watch the students in this bicultural classroom within a bilingual, working-class neighborhood work and develop together as a community of learners. It is the story of how the Sunshine Room, like many whole language classrooms, invents itself; and how in this process the children themselves are continually inventing oral and written language, culture, and curriculum.

In two separate collaborative voices, the authors carry readers through several critical events in the life of the classroom: the process through which the children and the teachers negotiate the curriculum, the creation of a theme study about the Middle Ages, and a vicarious experience of the Middle East war through children's literature and discussions. On an individual level, the deep friendship between Seaaira, an English-speaking child from the volunteer community, and Lolita, a bilingual Latina from the barrio, is symbolic of the bicultural experience fostered in the Sunshine Room.

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