Using Students’ Contextual Frameworks to Provide Equitable Education through the New Literacy Studies, Social Justice Education, and Intentional Practices

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Within the past decade and a half, education policies in the United States have become more standards-based and thus more restrictive. No Child Left Behind, under President Bush’s administration, began placing heavy weight on tests to measure student achievement (Klein, 2015); the Common Core State Standards Initiative, under President Obama’s administration, continued the curriculum standardization and increased connections to performance evaluations of teachers (Gewertz, 2015). The standardization that currently characterizes American schools poses several issues for students, especially those on the margins of society—socially, culturally, and economically. Classroom culture, especially under the standardization movement, is culturally biased and leaves few opportunities for traditionally marginalized students to feel at home and welcomed (Irvine, 2003, p. 6). Further, the different high-stakes tests mandated by current education policies take student individuality out of education and overlook marginalized students, as the information and testing practices reflect nothing of their own cultures (McCleskey, 2014). Similarly, despite policymakers’ communicated intentions to create equal learning experiences for all students, their plans are failing because they are relying on equality rather than equity (Irvine, 2003). Lastly, instructional methods, specifically as they are used with marginalized students, reveal color-blindness that, despite teachers’ intentions, are harming our students rather than empowering them (Garces, 2016).

The goal of this thesis is to provide a resource for teachers who desire equitable classrooms. In order to achieve this goal, I will first review the reasons behind the state of our current classroom practices and to propose solutions for classroom teachers. Although teachers have limited capacity to directly affect policies, we can work to improve learning experiences for those most affected by the policies. In order to ensure
equitable environments for all students, my literature review shows adopting New Literacy Studies (NLS) as a perspective as well as SJE as a framework will help to positively shape classroom culture and routines. Moreover, several practical instructional strategies are provided for teachers to use when adopting these concepts.