Theoretical Considerations for Art Education Research With and About “Underserved Populations”

AMELIA M. KRAEHE
University of North Texas

JONI B. ACUFF
The Ohio State University

Though it is widely used, the concept of “underserved” is sorely undertheorized in art education. Before the field of art education can effectively address the persistent educational disparities across different sociocultural and economic groups, we need deeper understandings of entangled sociocultural and political processes that create and conceal underservedness. The term “underservedness” moves us away from conceiving of populations, and instead draws attention to cultural articulations and material conditions that prevent certain groups from fully accessing and benefiting from the resources and opportunities for effective education, including high-quality art experiences. In this article, the authors discuss four theoretical perspectives—critical race theory, intersectionality, critical multiculturalism, and social justice education—that can foster nuanced analyses and cogent explanations of art education in the context of underservedness. The discussion focuses on key tenets of these theoretical perspectives, important points of tension and synergy, and their relevance for art education research.

Correspondence regarding this article may be sent to the authors at Amelia.Kraehe@unt.edu and joniettaboyd@gmail.com
More than a decade after the introduction of No Child Left Behind, there continue to be concerns that not all students are well served by the current educational system. Though rhetoric about closing the quality-of-service gap (Hilliard, 2003) typically has pertained to “core” academic content areas, The President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities released a report in 2011 that built a case for directing educational policies toward redressing longstanding inequities in arts education. The report argued that “students in schools that are most challenged and serving the highest need student populations often have the fewest arts opportunities” (President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, 2011, p. 32). This statement reflected the Obama administration’s increasing awareness and recognition of the negative effects that curriculum and budget compression have had on arts education for many public school students, especially “underserved populations” (Duncan, 2009).

While critical questions of access and quality of arts education for low-income and minority students has gained more national attention (e.g., Catterall, 2012), there have been numerous art educators, researchers, and art education scholars who have urged the field to consider the relevance of sociocultural, economic, and political influences on art learning, curriculum, teaching, and policy (e.g., Ballengee Morris, 2013; Bey, 2011; Cahan & Kocur, 1996; Chalmers, 2002; Check, 2004; Collins & Sandell, 1992; Daniel & Stuhr, 2006; Delacruz, 1996; Eisenhauer, 2007; Freedman, 1987; Garber, 2004; Grigsby, 1977; Knight, 2006a, 2006b; Lee, 2012; McFee & Degge, 1980; Slivka, 2011; Young, 2011). Of these and other pioneering scholars, some have focused on one or more social category (e.g., race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, ability, age, nationality, immigration status, language, culture, and religion) while others have tended to speak more broadly of the social construction and institutionalization of difference(s) and inequality within art education. Additionally, recent studies have demonstrated the presence of racial, economic, and gender gaps in art achievement (Keiper, Sandene, Persky & Kuang, 2009) and access to learning opportunities in art (Rabkin & Hedberg, 2011). These findings suggest that art education is deeply implicated in the production and maintenance of social inequalities.

Today, school art teachers, supervisors, and policymakers as well as art educators in out-of-school settings are faced with questions of how to conceptualize and respond to these disparities. We, the authors, believe that art education research influences how our field understands and articulates the way particular children and communities have been served inequitably. Unfortunately, it has not been uncommon for these inequities to receive cursory treatment in analyses and interpretations. The way art education research has been conducted with and about “underserved populations” has implications for the preparation of future art teachers and scholars, construction of K-12 art curriculum and standards, funding of community-based and art museum programs, and our ability as a field to advocate for continued relevance in public education.

We are mindful of the potential consequences for our use of the term “underserved” as it may contribute to the production of another essentializing category that reduces...
and conflates the heterogeneous situations and incommensurate experiences of individuals belonging to differently minoritized groups. In this moment, however, we believe that the term can still be usefully, though cautiously, deployed in highlighting an area of much-needed research in the field of art education. “Underserved” often subsumes multiple groups under one label. It is used synonymously with terms such as urban, inner city, diverse, at risk, and low SES (socio-economic status) (Bell, 2007). An example of this can be found in The College Board’s National Task Force on the Arts in Education’s (2009) publication of policy recommendations. In this report, issued in support of increasing access to high-quality arts education, the authors used “underserved” to mean a range of identities and situations. These included minority students, students attending schools with high percentages of low-income and minority groups, students attending schools with low college attendance rates, first-generation college students, and students who are homeless or in foster care. A number of art education studies have employed these terms (Bennett, 2011). Some may prefer to use “underserved” as a politically correct identity marker in the place of outdated terms (e.g., “deprived”) or heavily critiqued categories (e.g., “at risk”). It is possible that “underserved” is used in lieu of more specific concepts—such as race, social class, and sexuality—when there is a lack of knowledge of their meanings.

Our goal in this article is to consider how the field of art education might develop more complex understandings and theorizations of underservedness in research and practice. While we recognize its potentially problematic uses, we invoke the discourse of “underserved” as a way to call attention to an undertheorized area of research in art education. Our discussion in this article is, therefore, oriented toward understanding “underserved” as a historical and political category that signifies a set of material conditions and cultural articulations within social, political, and economic institutions, policies, and practices that prevent particular groups of people from fully accessing and benefiting from the resources and opportunities for effective, high-quality education.

This discussion sets the stage for reconceptualizing how we imagine, construct questions, conduct our analyses, and develop interpretations about art education for and with “underserved” groups. We consider the significance of four theoretical directions for conducting art education research with and about “underserved” groups. They include critical race theory, intersectional methodology, critical multiculturalism, and social justice education. While the terminologies may be appropriated into art education discourse, the analytic force of these frameworks is rarely actualized in reports of art education research, policies, and practice-based inquiries. We focus on the potential of these four theoretical lenses to support art educators, art education policymakers, and researchers in conducting situational, relational analyses of underservedness that illuminate how race, gender, class, and sexuality play out as socially constructed categories of difference as well as material relations of power (Apple, 1979/2004). The situational and relational analyses imagined through these frameworks aim to show the linkages between (1) micro-level experiences in art classrooms and art teacher preparation programs, (2) meso-level or institutional state arts education standards and national arts education policies, and (3) diffuse macro-level societal and discursive structures that maintain inequality. These multi-level analyses, we believe, are crucial in increasing our knowledge about how best to serve all learners effectively and equitably in art education.

The remaining sections of this article describe the key tenets and assumptions of each of the four theoretical positions. Then, we interpret the relevance of these theoretical positions for art education research conducted with and about “underserved populations,” describing fruitful ways each theoretical position may inform art education.
education inquiries. The conclusion considers important points of tension and synergy between these theoretical bodies.

**Critical Race Theory**

Art education, as in other fields in education, often has attempted to address the causes of educational inequality without adequately theorizing race and racism as a fundamental part of educational and social processes in the United States (Desai, 1996, 2010b; Knight, 2006b). Proponents of critical race theory (CRT) have insisted that race is a key part of understanding and transforming the educational system today (Gillborn, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In the 1970s and 1980s, CRT emerged from the work of mostly minoritized scholars within legal studies (Bell, 1987; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Harris, 1993) and made its way into education in the 1990s (Yosso, Parker, Solórzano, & Lynn, 2004). This scholarly movement grew out of concerns that racial injustice persisted even though the Civil Rights Movement brought about incremental changes by providing equality under the law for Blacks. Whites continued to disproportionately occupy positions of power and benefit from unearned advantages produced out of the social and economic legacy of slavery and subsequent history of legalized racial oppression. Discontent with the slow advance of racial equality, critical race scholars and practitioners have the shared goal of social transformation.

No singular statement summarizes the work of critical race scholars. Yet, important discernable strands across various writings have significance for enhancing art education research and practice. One important position within CRT has been that racism plays a central role in United States society. Contemporary forms of racism have been subtler than in the pre-Civil Rights era and, usually, have operated under the guise of neutrality. Knight (2006a) explained, “Whiteness is perhaps the foremost unmarked and thus unexamined category in art education… White is assumed to be the human norm. Moreover, when Whiteness goes unexamined, racial privilege associated with Whiteness goes unacknowledged” (p. 323). White Euro American experiences often have been the standard by which all other racial groups’ experiences are measured, thus, the experiences and interests of Whites are normalized.

Whiteness and other forms of normalized privilege frequently has been invoked in art education research that does not recognize the influence of power relations and participants’ socio-historical location (demographic or otherwise) in the analysis and interpretation of data. By not attending to these contextualizations in research and reporting, art education research has obscured the racial and cultural specificity of our collective art education knowledge and has risked inappropriate generalization of research findings across all groups. CRT has explicitly sought to develop its conceptual constructs out of the experiences and stories of people of color in order to destabilize the presumed neutrality and universality of Whiteness.

Racism may operate indirectly through institutional rules and routines. As Lynn and Parker (2006) stated, “the ideology and assumptions of racism are ingrained in the political and legal structures as to be almost unrecognizable” (p. 260) to members of the dominant group. This often has happened when the policies and norms of educational institutions have appeared “fair in form but have a disproportionately negative impact on racial minority groups” (p. 260). Racism also has been enacted through face-to-face microaggressions, where everyday insults, exclusions, and slights are transacted between individuals and groups (Lewis, 2003). Thus, racism may manifest within the everyday actions and interactions of art education (Sanders, Hutzel, & Miller, 2009).

Another key tenet of CRT has held that racism is inextricably linked to all other forms of social inequality, including sexism, elitism, heterosexism, ableism, xenophobia, and others. CRT has
expanded into related theoretical strands such as Latin@crit (Latcrit), Asiancrit, Tribalcrit, critical whiteness studies, critical race feminism, and Queer-crit (Bernal, 2002; Carbado, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 1998; Haney López, 1996; Wing, 1997; Yosso, 2005). These multiple directions in CRT have pointed to intersecting identities and shifting axes of oppression, privilege, and injustice, “where not one category (e.g., race, social class, sexual orientation) dominates, but where there are multiple ways in which they operate... and can become potential avenues of solidarity” and sociopolitical activism (Lynn & Parker, 2006, p. 262). CRT has introduced a set of imperatives for scholarship that requires us to think more relationally and systemically about our practices and policies in art education. It has redirected research about curriculum, for example, away from analyzing an individual lesson, curricular unit, teacher, or classroom as an entity unto itself. Instead, a CRT analysis would embed that individual lesson, curricular unit, teacher and student narratives, and classroom interactions in a broader context of institutional and discursive practices and societal arrangements that may help to maintain racial privilege and subordination.

While several recent publications have provided a CRT perspective on education in general, our reading of the literature has indicated little research published using CRT in art education. In seeking to understand and redress underservvedness, CRT could enable us to attend to racialized inequality in education on multiple levels. For example, future critical race studies in art education might foreground the construction of race, racism, and other forms of oppression in art education at an interpersonal level. This kind of research might be framed around questions such as:

- How do minoritized students experience and make sense of race and other markers of identity in the art classroom?
- How do art students and teachers of different racial backgrounds perceive, understand, and respond to racism and other forms of subordination inside the art classroom?
- How are racial discourses deployed within art curriculum?
- What explains the low participation of students of color and low-income students in college-bound tracks of advanced art courses?
- How do racism and other interlocking systems of oppression play out in art teacher education programs and art colleges?

Critical race studies in art education might also reveal institutional and historical racial injustice. CRT could help our field answer questions such as:

- How do conditions for art teaching and learning differ between schools with divergent student demographics?
- How is learning in art impacted by the inequitable distribution of certified art teachers?
- What barriers exist for recruiting and admitting students of color and low-income students into the art teaching profession?
- How do preservice art teacher preparation programs (mis)educate future teachers for how to successfully teach students of color?
- How does race or ethnicity inform the epistemologies that undergird art education research and evaluation?

Intersectionality

Rooted in multiracial feminist theories and queer theory (Anzaldúa, 1999; Collins, 1990; Combahee River Collective, 1983; Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 1990; McCall, 2005), intersectionality is another important perspective to incorporate into art education research. Intersectionality is not entirely new to art education. Almost 20 years ago, Hicks (1994) critiqued static and homogenizing definitions of community that were prevalent in many well-meaning efforts to teach about diversity in art education. Other art education scholars, artists, and art critics—
drawing from feminist and womanist perspectives—have also been attuned to intragroup differences, in particular, experiential differences in gender oppression as it intersects with racial inequality (Daniel, 1996; Piper, 2003), heteronormativity (Desai, 2003; Honeychurch, 1995; Mercer, 1991), and ableism (Blandy, 1996).

Intersectionality can be understood as a methodological orientation to research. Choo and Ferree (2010) identified three different foci in current approaches to intersectionality in research: group-centered, process-centered, and system-centered. Intersectional methodology that is group-centered has recognized and valued difference within any shared identity. Group-centered interpretations have focused on including the perspectives of “multiply-marginalized” (p. 131) groups and individuals who experience various forms of subordination and discrimination based on their overlapping social locations (e.g., Black females, gay working-class White males, and first-generation Asian lesbian women). A process-centered practice has highlighted what Choo and Ferree termed “analytic interaction: a nonadditive process, a transformative interactivity of effects” (p. 131). This means that different identity markers (e.g., race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, age, ability, etc.) can and do inform each person or group’s perceptions, experiences, privileges, and oppressions not as discrete factors operating in isolation but, rather, at the same time. Social categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, and others are mutually constitutive; that is, they are not simply added together as discrete sets of experiences (race + class + gender + sexuality) but, instead, they overlap and comingle. This can produce the absence of clear edges (Daniel, 1996, p. 80) in how individuals make sense of identities and the effects of institutional inequalities. Process-centered intersectionality must, according to Choo and Ferree (2010), "problematize relationships of power for unmarked categories, such as whiteness and masculinity" (p. 131), as well as heteronormativity (Desai, 2003; Honeychurch, 1995). The third consideration for intersectionality research has been the extent to which researchers give “institutional primacy” (Choo & Ferree, 2010, p. 131) to any single axis of oppression and marginalization.

Intersectional approaches to inquiry can help art education research and pedagogy to generate more complex understandings of how social formations (e.g., race, gender, class, sexuality) shape individual and shared experiences of members of historically marginalized (underserved) and dominant (abundantly served) groups. As a methodological lens, intersectionality also may support the development of explanations of the role art education practices and policies play in reproducing and challenging social inequalities. There have been some recent studies in art education that illustrate sensitivity to intersectionality as a methodological approach to research and classroom inquiry. One example is a self-study conducted by Cosier (2011) with a group of art education students. Cosier described how she and her students analyzed and interpreted hidden visual cultural narratives within popular film representations of Black girls. She and her students explored how the construction of Black girlhood was more than simply the addition of two discrete identities (race + gender). Critical reflections helped students further examine the heteronormative assumptions and class-based norms running throughout many hegemonic femininities. Race, gender, sexuality, and class were dynamically and inextricably threaded together.

Kraehe (2012) also took an intersectional approach in her ethnographic research on the co-emergence of beginning art teachers’ social and professional identities. Her comparative study of six art teachers’ identities eschewed essentializing, linear notions of art teacher learning and development. By focusing on the structural and cultural interplay of race, sexuality, class, and nationality in the process of negotiating what it means to become and be an art teacher, Kraehe illuminated how prospective art
teachers’ multiple social locations comingle to influence their ideological stances and teaching commitments. Both Cosier (2011) and Kraehe (2012) challenged the field of art education to think relationally about underservedness and illustrated the complexities and contradictions that are obscured by apolitical and decontextualized discussions of “underserved populations.”

**Critical Multicultural Education**

Multicultural education is an educational reform that was conceived during the Civil Rights movement. Its goal was to provide all students—regardless of gender, race, and class—an equal opportunity to learn in school (Banks & Banks, 1989). This movement was an answer to the call for education that acknowledged and reflected the experiences, histories, cultures, and perspectives of people of color. Over time, other historically victimized groups such as women, people with disabilities, senior citizens, and those who identify as gay or lesbian also sought equitable resources and fair treatment.

Multicultural education theory has often been critiqued for its uninspiring translation into art education policy and practice (Chin, 2011; Desai, 2000; Kader, 2005; Kraehe, 2010; Wexler, 2007). This view has stemmed from misinterpretations of multiculturalism’s most basic principles (Gay, 1995). Scholars have argued that the transformative pulse undergirding multicultural education theory has been neglected (Nieto, Bode, Kang, & Raible, 2008; Sleeter & Bernal, 2004); this is problematic, as its historical roots are grounded in a critical analysis of power and structural change (Banks, 2004; Gay, 2004). Simply put, some approaches to multiculturalism have failed to identify power and privilege as chief concepts for interrogation. Education criticalists have named this “liberal multiculturalism” (May & Sleeter, 2010; McLaren, 1995). Fortunately, some art education scholars, artists, and art critics have rejected this diluted version of multiculturalism (Durham, 1986; Lippard, 2000; LaMarr, 1984; Luna, 1990; Mesa-Bains, 1996; Stuhr, Ballengee Morris, & Daniel, 2008). Critical multicultural discourse has drawn from the activist origins of multiculturalism by centering the critical analysis of power (Banks, 2004; Rios & Stanton, 2011). May and Sleeter (2010) asserted that critical multiculturalism “provides the best means by which to integrate and advance various theoretical threads” (p. 10) that address power relations and are potentially transformative even outside of the traditional classroom. These “theoretical threads” include, but are not limited to, CRT, social justice theory, critical theory, feminist theory, and queer theory (e.g., Ballengee Morris, 2013).

Three developing tenets of critical multicultural education have guided this rerouting. Of primacy has been the act of unmasking and deconstructing the assumed neutrality of the concept of “civism.” The perceived definition of civism has been a “universal, neutral set of cultural values and practices that underpin the public sphere of the nation-state” (May, 1999, p. 30; see also May & Sleeter, 2010). However, civism has been far from neutral because the dominant group has established its values and practices. The expense of civism, for minorities, has been a loss of ethnic, cultural, and linguistic habitus.

Another key tenant of critical multicultural education has been the positioning of cultural differences within the wider nexus of power relations. Critical multicultural education has claimed that the knowledge of the dominant culture is normalized and universalized. Its goal has been to uncover how alternative cultural knowledge comes to be subjugated and to support educators in recognizing and utilizing the differing cultural frames of reference that learners bring to the classroom (Desai, 2003; Stuhr, Ballengee Morris & Daniel, 2008; Young, 2011). Simultaneously, critical multicultural education has contested the cultural capital allocated to dominant social position as a result of wider hegemonic power relations.
Lastly, critical multicultural education has desired to "maintain a reflexive critique of specific cultural practices that avoids the vacuity of cultural relativism, and allows for criticism (both internal and external to the groups), transformation, and change" (May, 1999, p. 33). This principle has supported a more fluid, complex, interconnected conception of culture wherein people are encouraged to engage dynamically with all ethnic and cultural backgrounds, especially their own.

Art education scholars can ground their practice and/or research in critical multicultural education theory in order to identify and question institutional power, the creation of culture, the ownership of knowledge, and educational and community resources (May, 1999). Critical multicultural education can help art education researchers indict hegemonic epistemologies and pedagogies (Freire, 1970). Helfand (2009) suggests:

- Asking questions about how we have learned to think and construct knowledge within a Western paradigm leads us to explore how we are shaped by our culture. Questions about thought and knowledge guide us deeper to where we can theorize about the forces sharing our history or identity. (p. 92)

Here, Helfand challenged us to question "objectivity" and normalized knowledge. This suggestion has been particularly helpful for art education, as "objectivity" is common in many areas of our field. For example, Acuff, Hirak, and Nangah (2012) asserted that there has been a Master Narrative leading most histories of art education, leaving out various cultural perspectives and defining historical significance around very few voices. These accounts of the history of art education have been standardized. Fortunately, various art education scholars have, commendably, offered literature that attempts to counter these insular, controlled histories. Their writing has articulated invisible histories and silenced narratives in art education (Bolin, Blandy, & Congdon, 2000; Slivka, 2011) and also has suggested strategies that may combat the stagnant, seemingly objective art education history (Acuff, Hirak, & Nangah, 2012). These scholarly efforts have been noteworthy; however, much of this work has yet to identify, dissect, and act against the structural inequalities in place that create and sustain the Master Narrative in the first place (Fine, 1994). These more foundational investigations are necessary, as they are directly related to the formation and maintenance of underservedness.

To consider the query, "how should the concept of underserved be interpreted and addressed in art education theory and practice," art education scholars need to first recognize and acknowledge how "underserved" groups have become the underserved groups. Certain knowledge and ways of knowing have been accepted and universalized (Helfand, 2009). Therefore, undoubtedly, those whose cultural knowledge has been least revered will continue to maintain the position of underserved, as they will consistently have to work within the confines of the established, dominant knowledge paradigm that is different from their own. By continuously disseminating myopic historical renderings of art education, we have played an active role in writing minority groups out of the development of our field. In order to address the concept of underserved in art education theory and practice, we should recognize and challenge the oppressive positioning of certain groups of people and their knowledge. Critical multicultural education guides art education research in moving toward such a goal.

Critique of power has been at the core of critical multicultural education. From a research perspective, it has guided the development of relevant questions and strategies for denormalizing dominant ways of knowing (Freire, 1970). Critical multicultural education theory has incited explicit questions such as, "Is it true?… Who says so? Who benefits most when people believe it is true? How are we taught to accept
that it is true? What alternative ways of looking at the problem can we see?” (Sleeter & Grant, 2007, p. 260). Applying these inquiries to art education research may translate into questions such as:

- Whose knowledge, culture, and educational experiences have been subjugated in art education (research, curriculum, history)?
- How does such subjugated knowledge become normalized and whom does it benefit?
- How does subjugated knowledge inform art education practices?
- Are we cognizant of the consequences of using rationality as the foundation of knowledge?
- What (or who) is our transformative work aiming to transform—the people or the system?

If art educators fail to consider these structural questions and others like them, we must realize that our practices and programs that focus on and provide experiences for the “underserved” may indeed be hegemonic, thus, sustaining the underservedness of groups.

Social Justice Education

Bell (2007) wrote, “social justice education is both a process and a goal” (p. 1). Social justice has been multidimensional in that it is a goal found within multicultural education theory as well as CRT, feminism, (dis)ability studies, critical theory, postcolonial theory, and queer theory (North, 2008). There have been myriad theoretical frameworks often associated with social justice education. However diverse its theoretical trajectories, key concepts have existed around which the discourse of social justice education is organized: the equitable distribution and fair allocation of rewards, resources, and punishments (Bell, 2007; Tyler & Smith, 1995) and the recognition of difference and diverse epistemologies (Cochran-Smith, 2010; North, 2008). Because social justice promotes respect for difference, access, fair treatment, and equal opportunities for everyone, its goal has been the liberation for all people (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994).

Historically, social justice has been especially important for those outside the dominant population because such groups of people disproportionately bear the effects of discrimination and unequal resources (Tyler & Smith, 1995). Social justice education has helped to focus on structural change; it has rejected and countered the deficit model (Valencia, 1997) that identifies minorities and “underserved” groups as incapable of educational and economic success due to race, culture, or personal agency or desire (Bell, 2007). Thinking of groups of people in these reductionist terms has supported racial and socioeconomic hierarchies. Social justice education has supported the assertion that, regardless of race, culture, or community, with equal access, individuals will be self-determined, develop their full capacities, and have a sense of agency (Bell, 2007).

A social justice education framework has helped researchers attend to the ways in which art unites with the emancipatory goals of social justice (Dewhurst, 2011; Garber, 2004). Engagements with art and visual material culture have illuminated sources of alienation and strategies for working against forces that structure and legitimate inequality (e.g., Carpenter, 2010; Desai, 2010a; Dewhurst, 2010; Kraehe & Brown, 2011). Often, this has focused on raising awareness of social issues and “giving voice” to the experiences of those on the margins of society. A social justice orientation to art education research should, at the same time, interrogate the extent to which art education policies and practices do or do not provide students and teachers with opportunities to participate in a democratic process, acquire historical and cultural knowledge with which to (re)contextualize present disparities, and question imposed ideas and commonsense assumptions (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994; King, 2006).
Like critical multicultural education, social justice education has recognized and critiqued power as an issue to be addressed. Bell (2007) suggested that we must establish “a ‘power with’ versus ‘power over’ paradigm for enacting social justice goals” (p. 2). Art educators, researchers, and policy makers should consider this claim when working within the context of underserv edness. It is imperative that we identify how this “power over” model exists in our research and classrooms in various permutations. For example, consider Discipline-Based Art Education (DBAE). The debate over its practice is longstanding, well-researched, and extensively documented (see Chalmers, 1987; Davenport, 1990; Delacruz & Dunn, 1995; Eisner, 1988; Jagodzinski, 1997; Stinespring, 2001; Wilson, 2003). As research has matured, the perception has been that support for the skill-driven approach has decreased. However, in spring semester 2012, approximately two out of three preservice teachers enrolled in Joni Acuff’s Secondary Art Education Methods course reported that their cooperating teachers employed strictly DBAE curriculum versus issue- or concept-based (Acuff, personal communication, May 2, 2012). Brooks and Thomas (2005) critiqued such a stringent focus. They argued that when the focus is more on discipline-based curriculum to the exclusion of the social curriculum, it is to the detriment of our students. This lack more significantly has impacted the students of low socioeconomic status because they often depend on teachers to bridge the gap between their own cultural capital and the mainstream cultural and social perspectives. For these vulnerable and often disenfranchised students, the larger the incongruence between the predominant cultural capital of their schools and themselves, the less effectively the teaching of the explicit curriculum can stimulate their learning. (p. 49)

Consequently, all students have not been provided equitable educational opportunities. DBAE may be reaffirming the “power over” model of learning (Cahan & Kocur, 1996). Social justice education theory has allowed us to ask questions about how underserved students make sense of their immediate world and construct explicit, sustainable knowledge that is practical and relevant (Brooks & Thomas, 2005; Duncan-Andrade, 2005) to their lives. Social justice art education has required us to ask what is needed to achieve social justice and provide an equitable education to all learners. To do so has meant understanding that underserv edness is directly relational to lack of resources, access, and opportunities. Social justice education theory may help art educators to identify how to disrupt or reinforce inequalities.

Conclusion

These four distinct theoretical bodies open up fruitful directions for art education scholars, researchers, and educators whose work is situated within the context of difference and inequality. In many instances, it may be advantageous and appropriate to draw from more than one of these theories, given their shared critique of unequal power relations and desire for a more just society. That said, art educators should heed Butler’s (1992) admonition that any effort to synthesize or group theoretical positions is also a potentially dismissive “gesture of conceptual mastery” that works “to colonize and domesticate these theories under the sign of the same” (p. 5). With this in mind, our final discussion spotlights salient points of tension and overlap between CRT, intersectionality, critical multiculturalism, and social justice education.

Critical race scholarship has exposed education as a site where race is constructed and becomes a central discriminating and organizing force. While race and (anti)racism have been at the fore in CRT, an intersectionality lens has contributed to race-oriented and gender-oriented explanations of oppression and inequality
through its analysis of intragroup diversity. By assuming multiplicity, fluidity, and interdependency of group identification and subjugation, intersectionality has guarded against determinisms that assume a priori the form oppression may take in people’s lives. These two aforementioned theories have provided correctives for a multiculturalism that would reduce issues of power and inequity to the level of cultural awareness and tolerance (Desai, 2003). The critiques notwithstanding, multiculturalism has retained a great deal of theoretical and practical currency because of its long history of theory and activism in the arts, media, and education. Critical multiculturalism has been successful in disrupting the presumed ameliorative effects of these sacred cultural institutions, showing that the knowledge produced and disseminated in these spaces is capable of disabling learners and communities as much as enabling them.

Broadly speaking, justice has been the underlying aim of CRT, intersectionality, and critical multiculturalism. Alternately, social justice scholars have drawn from concepts and methodologies developed within these three theoretical areas. Social justice education has distinguished itself by emphasizing the systemic or societal nature of unjust situations or events, building capacities, and developing strategies for resistance and transformation. This overt emphasis on participation in justice-driven, socially engaged activity has been a defining feature of social justice education. In contrast to CRT, intersectionality, and critical multiculturalism, the rhetoric of social justice education has been appealing in its expansiveness, giving few clues for the kinds of injustices that fit under its rubric. In some instances, the discourse of social justice education has been used to describe art projects about a social issue (e.g., environment, homelessness, war). In these instances, inquiries and artmaking about the social issue often avoid essential questions about which groups benefit, who is left out, and how it got to be this way—questions that get at the core of inequality and underservedness. Understanding the systems of advantage and disadvantage that hold asymmetrical relations of power in place are necessary for imagining alternatives, building solidarity across groups, and engaging in strategic art interventions that help to dismantle the social, political, economic, and discursive structures of underservedness. Anything less in the name of social justice education may make us feel good for a little while. Like a bandage at the surface of a festering wound, it will do little to foster individual transformations or societal solutions that many who choose to work with “underserved populations” seek.

As a field and as individual researchers, art education and art educators must recognize the possibility of complicity in underservedness in ways that have not been considered. In our own research endeavors, these four framings have helped to heighten our perceptivity and reflexivity toward unequal power relations and privilege, as well as forms of creative agency and resistance. Bringing these perspectives into our scholarship as art education researchers and teacher educators has also enabled us to move closer to living out the rhetoric of social change that has inspired so much of our work and of many others.
REFERENCES


ENDNOTES

1 Throughout this article, usage of “we” refers to the authors.

2 We find the notion of “underservedness” to be more generative than “underserved populations.” The latter term conjures a logic for “populational reasoning,” which, according to Bloch and Popkewitz (2000), conceives and constructs subjects by transposing the effects of historical and structural injustices into presumed identities and qualities of an individual or group. Thus, the discourse of “underserved populations” inscribes particular kinds of personhood. As a move against the characterization and treatment of children, families, and communities as populations to be measured, categorized, ordered, and pathologized, the discourse of underservedness opens up possibilities for investigating the social and cultural processes by which privilege, status, power, and respect are unequally distributed within art and art education.

3 Sociologists of education and others in the social science fields offer empirical data that connects various systemic influences, such as healthcare access, curriculum tracking, and redistricting, to status maintenance and persistent inequality (see Elhoweris, Mutua, Alsheikh, & Holloway, 2005; Feinstein, 1993; Harry & Klingner, 2005; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Naguera, 2003; Pitts, 2008; Sacks, 2007; Vanfossen, Jones, & Spade, 1987). These factors pervade all activities in daily living, including art education.