

# Action, Criticism & Theory for Music Education

*The refereed journal of the*



Volume 8, No. 1  
March 2009

Wayne Bowman  
Editor

David Lines  
Assistant Editor

Frank Abrahams & Carlos Rodriguez  
Associate Editors

## **Electronic Article**

### **Human Needs Theory: Applications for Music Education**

Vincent C. Bates

© Vincent C. Bates 2009 All rights reserved.

ISSN 1545-4517

The content of this article is the sole responsibility of the author. The ACT Journal and the Mayday Group are not liable for any legal actions that may arise involving the article's content, including, but not limited to, copyright infringement.

For further information, please point your Web Browser to <http://act.maydaygroup.org>

## Human Needs Theory: Applications for Music Education



Vincent C. Bates  
Northwest Missouri State University



*It wasn't the first time Josh had to stay after class; his behavior in the eighth-grade band was an ongoing problem and the topic of regular after-class discussions. I sit, facing Josh across the corner of my desk while he stares defiantly at the floor. I open with, "Okay, Josh. Do you know why I had you stay after class?"*

*He answers with a sullen, "No," trying to avoid any admission of guilt.*

*I continue, "Let's pretend that class today was video-taped and you are watching yourself on the TV. As we play back the tape, can you tell me what happened just before I tapped you on the shoulder and asked you to stay after class?"*

*Josh rolls his eyes and answers, "I was just talking to Richard."*

*I persist because we both know there was more to it than that. "I don't normally have students stay after for talking," I say. "Can you recall what else was going on?" Josh knows he's not getting off that easy—we've been through this before.*

*"Richard took my mouthpiece. I was just trying to get it back. It wasn't my fault."*

*"Josh, it doesn't matter whose fault it was. It's just that this isn't the first time you were messing around in class."*

*"But, he started it!" This is a typical response—I remember using that same logic as a child when I was 'in trouble.'*

*"Josh, what is it you really want from band class?"*

*At this point, Josh moves from defense to offense, and I mean from being defensive to being offensive. "I want to have a good time. This class sucks."*

*Ouch! That hurts and Josh knows it. I'm tempted to give him a good 'lecture'—making it clear that "that kind of language isn't tolerated in my class and if you keep it up 'buster' I will make your life even more miserable than it is now"—in so many words. But, I don't let Josh's attack sidetrack me. "Then why did you come to class?" I ask.*

*"I had to," he says stubbornly.*

*I try to lighten things up a bit, "Come on, Josh. Did someone actually pick you up and force you through the door, into your seat, and place a trumpet in your hand?"*

*"No."*

*"Then you chose to come to class. Why? If my class is so awful, then why did you sign up for it?" This is a risky question on my part because I really need Josh in band and I'm banking on him not really hating it enough to opt for a different class.*

*He eventually replies, "All my friends are in band and I thought it would be fun."*

*I restate Josh's concern; "So, what you're saying, Josh, is that you want band to be enjoyable."*

*"Yeah."*

*I notice that my next class is coming into the room. I need to hurry and wrap things up so I reason relative to Josh's expressed need for fun. "Is it fun to get in trouble—to stay after class and visit with me when you could be out in the hall with your friends?"*

*“I guess not.” Of course, Josh wants to get this over with as much as I do so he’s willing to concede the point in order to get out of the situation.*

*I finish with a brief lecture about the importance of behaving appropriately and of learning difficult music and how ‘fun’ can actually be a serious type of fun that comes from being able to do something well. Then I send Josh on his way.*

The latest ‘wave’ of school reform that teachers in my school district were ‘enduring’ when I began teaching music was William Glasser’s *Quality School* (1990, 1998) movement. The theory behind Glasser’s approach to classroom management is that people have basic physical and psychological needs for survival, freedom, love and belonging, power, and fun that must be met for them to enjoy optimal well-being and a high quality of life. Much of human behavior, from this perspective, is aimed, consciously or not, at fulfilling these basic needs. Inappropriate behaviors are viewed as misguided attempts at needs satisfaction.

Consequently, the purpose of after-class counseling sessions is to help students understand how their misbehaviors are not helping them get what they want or need and to encourage them to adjust their behaviors accordingly. The above example is a blending of my many and somewhat muddled attempts at applying Glasser’s counseling method with my students.

Over the years, however, I began to feel that this process had somehow ‘back-fired’ on me. From asking my students over and over how their needs were or weren’t being met in my classes, it became apparent that what I was offering really wasn’t what they wanted. They expressed that they weren’t having fun, that they didn’t get to choose what to play or sing, that they had little opportunity for social interaction. I was building what the music education profession might consider an excellent rural music program, but from the point of view of some of my students my classes ‘sucked.’ This, to say the least, was a humbling realization and caused me considerable introspection and reflection.

It also led me to change my practice, including ‘scrapping’ the concert band in favor of jazz/rock bands, offering guitar instruction, helping to start a musical theater tradition, giving student preferences a prominent place in repertoire choices, and grading solely on participation—if at all. Community members, parents, and especially students generally seemed to welcome these types of innovations. The music education profession, on the other hand, did not. The jazz band was chastised at the state festival for not playing at least one swing chart; my vocal students were given lowered ratings at solo/ensemble festivals because they chose to sing Broadway tunes; and the fact that we no longer had a concert band was viewed as no less than tragic by other band directors in the state.

Conflict theorist, John Burton (1988a) writes, “It is the everyday experience of social workers that their duty to their clients and their duty to authorities and to society are frequently at variance” (47). Understanding teaching as social work, Burton’s statement resonates with me: it is true to my experience. Many of the institutional values, standards, and practices learned during pre-service training and promoted through in-service training, professional conferences, and ‘festivals’ seemed at variance with the expressed needs and desires of my students. This also relates to a point made by Thomas Regelski (1997) at the first Sociology of Music Education Symposium:

Institutions are inherently conservative: they persist, with little or only cosmetic change, until they become problematic. And even then, they change only as little as is absolutely needed to insure continuation of the truth and necessity of the realities they protect . . . Carried far enough, of course, this head-in-the-sand conservatism brings about various kinds of crises as the institution’s paradigms get further out of touch with original needs (102).

Similarly, development theorist Johan Galtung (1980) points out that social disintegration—evidenced by a range of indicators from apathy and a general lack of participation to outright mutiny and revolt—results when basic human needs are no longer being satisfied. Berger and Luckmann (1966) write that: “Deviance from the institutionally ‘programmed’ courses of action becomes likely once the institutions have become realities divorced from their original relevance in the concrete social processes from which they arose” (62). Along the same lines, Richard Ryan (1995) speculates that “the more a culture’s values evolve toward incongruence with basic . . . needs, the more difficulty individuals within that culture will have internalizing and integrating the transmitted way of life, and thus the fabric of the culture itself will deteriorate—it will fail to ‘integrate’ its members” (415).

This tension between institutions and individuals—between structures and agency—places the teacher in a difficult position, enforcing and advocating the institution’s standards and norms in the face of resistance on the part of students. In my experience, the aforementioned indicators of institutional deterioration—lack of interest, refusal to conform, resistance—were manifest by my students and I attempted to work within this dialectic. Hildegard Froehlich (2007) describes a “paradox of professional routinization” in music education: “One expects professionals to exhibit routinized behavior; otherwise our trust in them would not be warranted.” However, “To be called professional also means one must be willing to question and let go of routinized behavior when the situation calls for it” (10).

Without transformative conversations with my students, prompted by needs theory, I might not have “let go”—persisting with enforcement and advocacy despite student resistance or misbehavior. Needs theory provided a vehicle for considering the various points of view of my students and for joining them in questioning professional standards. Now, as a teacher of music educators, I recommend needs theory to my students and to the profession in general for exploring the current relevance and future directions of music education. What follows is an overview of the field of needs theory and discussion about applications of needs theory in music education.

### **Needs Theory: History, Definitions, and Critique**

The history of needs theory has been extensively summarized by various scholars, among them Robertson (1998), Deci & Ryan (2000), and Reader (2006). Jackson, Jager, and Stagl (2004) provide this concise overview:

A needs-theoretical approach to human well-being was inherent in the writings of Plato, Aristotle and the hellenistic philosophers; it was a key component of the Enlightenment inquiry into the psychological bases for human behavior; it provided a crucial input to the early socialist critiques of capitalism in the mid- to late-nineteenth century; and it formed the foundation for an extended critique of contemporary development that emerged through the humanistic psychology of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers in the mid-twentieth century and has informed modern environmental critiques today (16-17).

Maslow (1943) is a pivotal figure in needs theory and his hierarchical typology of human needs has been influential in research domains ranging from psychology to sociology and philosophy. Psychological applications have ranged from empirical studies of specific needs (particularly achievement, power, and affiliation) to more complete typologies of needs, one of the more recent being Deci & Ryan’s (2000) self-determination theory. Scholars in the sociological fields of development, economics, and conflict have elaborated and applied needs theory extensively, most notably John Burton, Manfred Max-Neef, Johan Galtung, and Len Doyal and Ian Gough. Also, Amartya Sen’s and Martha Nussbaum’s respective ‘capabilities approaches’ have been considered extensions of needs theory. Many argue that capabilities approaches have in fact supplanted the needs theoretical approach while others defend and continue to use needs theory (Gough 2003, Jackson 2004, Reader 2006). Needs theory, as it relates to quality of life and well-being, remains a central paradigm for the internationally

recognized Economic and Social Research Council's Research Group on Wellbeing in Developing Countries (Gough & McGregor 2007).

Definitions for 'needs'—specific kinds of wants, desires, or goals—used in needs theory stem from research indicating a central human impulse towards wellbeing and self-organization (Ryan 2000). In this light, Deci & Ryan (2000) define needs as the “innate . . . nutriments that are essential for ongoing . . . growth, integrity, and well-being” (229). According to Braybrooke (1987), “Being essential to living . . . may be taken as a criterion of being a basic need. Questions about whether needs are genuine, or well-founded, come to the end of the line when the needs have been connected with life or health.” (31) Galtung (1980) writes: “In a sense, needs theories are all about well-being. What are the basic nutriments for a good life?” (56).

The aim of needs theorists to identify a set of innate, basic, and universal human needs has drawn substantial criticism from those who argue that the approach is overly prescriptive and potentially oppressive in that recipients of aid may disagree with their 'benefactors' about what 'is good for them'. This issue is illustrated in the following account related by Tom Lavers (2007):

A remote community in the Peruvian Andes received financial compensation from the regional government for the negative effects of mining activities that had begun nearby. At a meeting to decide how the community should use the money, the mayor, who had traveled to other areas of the country and recognised the benefits of 'modernisation', suggested that the money would be best spent providing clean drinking water or building a school or paving the road from the nearest town. In contrast, the community members clearly expressed their preference for the purchase of musical instruments for a band to play at community *fiestas*. The mayor, incredulous, told the people that they were ignorant *campesinos* [peasants], unaware of the possibilities that improved infrastructure could bring and that they should follow his recommendations, as he knew more about the world than they. The mayor has since been thrown out of the area, and the community now has a band to play at their fiestas. (3)

The idea of the mayor prescribing which preferences might constitute basic human needs—that they are essential to human well-being—runs parallel to the primary critique of needs theories: that such theories and their typologies are too specific to be applicable to all people and, thereby, are inappropriately prescriptive. However, needs theorist, Johan Galtung (1980) qualifies the concept in this way:

This does not mean that a list of needs can be established, complete with minima and maxima, for everybody at all given social times and social spaces as the universal list of basic human needs. The claim is much more modest—namely, that it does make

sense to talk about certain classes of needs, such as ‘security needs,’ ‘welfare needs,’ ‘identity needs,’ and ‘freedom needs’ . . . and to postulate that in one way or the other human beings everywhere and at all times have tried and will try to come to grips with something of that kind, in very different ways (59).

Most needs theories are based, then, on generalized needs categories such as autonomy or freedom, survival, physical health, love and belonging, and security. It is these categories that are considered universal; specific satisfiers, on the other hand, are envisioned as culturally relative. Returning to the previous example, when a few innate human needs categories are combined with a plurality of satisfiers multiple possibilities come into view. Needs for recreation or cultural identity, expressed or not, may have been the primary concerns of the villagers. It is even plausible, according to needs theories, that the need for autonomy prompted them to defy the wishes of their mayor. The needs theoretical outcome, in this case, could well be represented by the local consensus to purchase musical instruments. Jackson, Jager, and Stagl (2004) point out:

[M]odern needs theories do not attempt to prescribe or proscribe specific responses to . . . drives. From Maslow onwards, needs theories have attempted to offer a categorization of underlying motivations—and not a prescriptive list of what is or is not a legitimate way of satisfying the underlying needs. Moreover, in practice, the Max-Neef framework, for example, is often not used prescriptively or proscriptively at all. Rather it is employed as a tool for reaching inter-subjective agreement on which kinds of satisfiers might best be employed to meet the range of underlying motivations (25).

Of course, it is possible to apply needs theory prescriptively. I originally understood Glasser’s needs theory in this sense—I tried to use it to control classroom behavior. Eventually, my counseling processes evolved from attempts to make students conform into opportunities to discover what students really wanted or needed. This led me to become more reflective and critical toward my own practice and toward music education in general. It has occurred to me that this approach might be helpful to others as well. Glasser’s needs theory is still being applied in schools across North America and, outside of education, needs theory remains a current and vibrant field of research. It has been effectively defended against some criticisms and has evolved significantly in light of others. It is, by no means, a ‘grand’ or ‘unifying’ theory, but as Katrin Lederer (1980) points out, it is just one useful approach among others. “There may be good reason for retaining the needs concept for the time being, at least as one concept among others. One of the reasons is the concept’s potential as a constant reminder of

a, if not *the*, most important goal of any individual and social activity—to focus on humane existence and development.” (2).

### Needs Typologies

The aim in this section is simply to give a brief summary of seven major needs theories (typologies and significant theoretical contributions) relative to their respective needs theorists including Maslow, McClelland, Galtung, Doyal & Gough, Nussbaum, Max-Neef, and Deci & Ryan. Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs is conceptualized as a pyramid, with physical needs for food, water, and so forth at the bottom just beneath security needs; next, love and belonging, followed by esteem needs for achievement and recognition; cognitive needs for knowledge and understanding and aesthetic needs for beauty and symmetry near the top; and finally self-actualization as the highest need. Self-actualization “refers to the desire for self-fulfillment . . . to become actualized in what [one] is potentially . . . the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming” (380). This hierarchical approach, some have argued, has a Western bias and is potentially oppressive in that a “normative thesis applied to a hierarchy of needs may serve as grounds for indefinitely postponing the fulfillment of nonmaterial needs fostering the type of policies that might guarantee security and economic welfare, but at the expense of considerable amounts of alienation and repression” (Galtung 1980, 68). Perhaps anticipating such criticism, Maslow (1968a) later revised his account, acknowledging that people strive to meet higher needs even as lower, physical needs are being satisfied.

McClelland (1961) postulated that individuals are motivated relative to three basic needs: achievement, power, and affiliation. McClelland’s theory is often associated with personality theories—individuals have varying need strengths that increase their propensity to be successful in specific roles relative to the dominant need. Consequently, this view of human needs has found application in business management. It is a ‘soft’ theory in this sense that it makes few if any claims relative to human rights or the need for institutional transformation. Also, the needs within McClelland’s theory (in contrast to the other theories reviewed here) are presumed to be socially derived rather than innate (Deci & Ryan 2000).

Galtung (1980) differentiates needs categories as material or nonmaterial, and as actor dependent or structure dependent. He acknowledges that both distinctions are overlapping and problematic. However, he does not attempt an absolute truth about human needs, but a “rule

of thumb, as some sort of guide, at least sensitizing us to some problems in connection with satisfiers and need satisfaction” (64). The resulting four needs (and their opposites) from combining these two sets of identifiers are security (violence), welfare (misery), freedom (repression), and identity (alienation). Galtung recognizes the cultural diversity of satisfiers, and notes that the term ‘satisfiers’ may be somewhat misleading, since in many cases they don’t satisfy long-term but require constant repetition. “Thus, the need for food is seen as a process, with no beginning and no end, of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, undulating through time with sometimes slow, sometimes quick rhythms, with no resting point, full of contradictions at any point” (80).

Doyal and Gough (1991) link needs satisfaction with avoidance of harm, understood as any impediments to attaining personal goals and potentials. They also acknowledge that needs satisfaction depends on social participation—that social policy ought to both sustain and improve needs fulfillment. They identify two basic human needs: survival and autonomy. These “must be satisfied to some degree before actors can effectively participate in their form of life to achieve any other valued goals” (54). Survival needs include overall physical health while autonomy needs include three categories: mental health, opportunities, and understanding. *Mental health* is understood as ‘practical rationality and responsibility,’ and *opportunities* encompass a ‘critical autonomy,’ the freedom and opportunity to question social practices pursuant to exploring and creating new ones. *Understanding*, as a category of human needs, underscores the necessity for social interaction as well as the availability of quality teachers. Doyal and Gough reason that learning, if it is related to practical and significant social roles such as parent, householder, worker, or citizen, will increase autonomy, whereas autonomy may be negatively influenced by formal schooling that is unrelated to practical social roles or that fails to help students actively explore their potentials.

Like other needs theorists, Doyal and Gough assert that while basic needs are universal, satisfiers are often culturally relative (Gough 2003). Their distinctive contribution to needs theory is a tentative list of eleven more specific or *intermediate needs*. The first six (nutritional food and clean water, protective housing, a non-hazardous work environment, a non-hazardous physical environment, safe birth control and child-bearing, appropriate health care) relate to physical health and the remaining five relate to autonomy (a secure childhood, significant primary relationships, physical security, and appropriate education). Doyal and Gough assert that efforts to optimize needs satisfaction should be ‘experientially grounded,’

bringing together the knowledge of experts and the everyday, practical knowledge of those whose needs are at issue.

Ian Gough (2003) points out that although they were developed independently of each other there are many similarities between the Doyal-Gough theory of human needs and Martha Nussbaum's account of human capabilities. "Though Nussbaum uses different terms from us—'*capabilities*' versus '*needs*'—we have much in common, notably the goal of developing a genuinely universal argument for human emancipation." (3) He outlines three premises that the two theories share: arguments for the existence of basic (and universal) conditions for optimal human functioning; a critique of cultural relativism; and the idea that theories of universal human needs/capabilities entail moral imperatives and social obligations. Nussbaum outlines ten capabilities: *life* (longevity and a life worth living); *bodily health* (nourishment, shelter, reproductive health); *bodily integrity* (free movement, security); *senses, imagination, and thought* (information, education, self-expression), *emotions* (love, attachment, free from overwhelming fear or trauma); *practical reason* (concept formation and critical reflection); *affiliation* (caring social interaction, a social basis for self-respect); *other species* (concern for nature); *play* (recreation); and *control over one's environment* (political and material).

Max-Neef's (1992) needs theory is aimed at promoting what he calls "Human Scale Development," in order to "develop processes of economic and political decentralization; strengthen genuine democratic institutions; and encourage increasing autonomy in the emerging social movements" (198). Human Scale Development places the state in the role of fostering and empowering local communities to develop their own solutions for social participation and basic needs fulfillment. He develops a needs typology based on the interaction between four existential needs categories (being, having, doing, and interacting) and nine axiological categories (subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, leisure, creation, identity, and freedom.) He emphasizes that satisfiers do not have a one-to-one correspondence to specific needs—that, in other words, a given satisfier may satisfy multiple needs. He gives the example of a mother breast-feeding her baby—an action that has the potential for satisfying not only the need for subsistence, but protection and affection as well.

Max-Neef maintains that cultures are defined by the satisfiers they choose, and that cultural change is thus "the consequence of dropping traditional satisfiers for the purpose of

adopting new or different ones” (200). He adds that fundamental human needs can be satisfied at various levels of intensity, a concept that provides a more human-scale or general view of poverty.

It is suggested here that we should speak not of poverty, but of *poverties*. In fact, any fundamental human need that is not adequately satisfied, reveals a human poverty. Some examples are: poverty of subsistence (due to insufficient income, food, shelter, etc.), of protection (due to bad health systems, violence, arms race, etc.), of affection (due to authoritarianism, oppression, exploitive relations with the natural environment, etc.), of understanding (due to poor quality of education), or participation (due to marginalization of and discrimination against women, children and minorities), of identity (due to imposition of alien values upon local and regional cultures, forced migration, political exile, etc.) (200).

He further classifies potential satisfiers into five categories: *violators or destroyers* that impede needs satisfaction; *pseudo-satisfiers* that might on the surface seem to satisfy, but upon closer inspection really do not; *inhibiting satisfiers* that might satisfy some needs while impeding the satisfaction of others, *singular satisfiers* that effectively satisfy a single need, and *synergic satisfiers* that satisfy multiple needs at once. The first four categories are “usually imposed, induced, ritualized or institutionalized,” while the final two categories tend to “derive from liberating processes which are the outcome of acts of volition generated by the community at the grass roots level” (205).

Deci and Ryan (2000) have continued the use of needs theory in empirical psychology with extensions into social theory. They propose, based on “inductive and deductive empirical processes,” that there are three fundamental and universal psychological needs: competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Self-determination is based on the idea that people are

naturally inclined to act on their inner and outer environments, engage in activities that interest them, and move toward personal and interpersonal coherence. Thus, they do not have to be pushed or prodded to act. Further, and importantly, their behavior does not have to be aimed at need satisfaction per se, it may simply be focused on an interesting activity or an important goal if they are in a context that allows need satisfaction (230).

In other words, when people engage in needs-fulfilling actions, they are not generally thinking about meeting basic needs. Deci and Ryan offer the following example:

A man who, in the evening, sits at a keyboard and begins to play a piece of music, may become lost in its beauty and experience great pleasure. He would not experience the pleasure if coerced to play, or if he felt unable to master the music. Thus, need satisfaction, which in this case means experiences of autonomy and competence, is necessary for the enjoyment of the activity, but his explicit purpose in playing the music is not likely to be need satisfaction. He would be doing what interests him, and

---

he would experience spontaneous pleasure as long as the activity was self-organizing and the task appropriately challenging. (230-31)

Conversely, when psychological needs are thwarted, direct attempts to satisfy such needs are reduced, and people may “become controlled (either complying or defying) or amotivated (either being out of control or helpless). And these responses can . . . become self-perpetuating” (231).

Regarding social processes, Deci and Ryan point out that an individual’s ability to integrate cultural standards and values depends on the degree to which relevant behaviors support the fulfillment of basic psychological needs. They also maintain

the more a culture, through its typical style of socialization and the contents of the regulations it transmits, promotes integrated internalizations, the more its members will be in harmony and the more stable will be the culture. In contrast, cultures that either use controlling forms of socialization or endorse goals and values that are unintegratable tend to foster alienation and anomie and, thus, are inherently less stable. In this way, needs constrain the dynamics of cultural evolution . . .” (247).

In summary, common to all of the needs theories reviewed here (with the possible exception of McClelland’s) is the idea that theories about human needs or capabilities theory can be instrumental in guiding resistance to potentially harmful effects of some institutions and the development of more needs satisfying social practices; basic human needs are, in this way, moral imperatives for those who work to improve the wellbeing of others. In addition, although many needs theories divide needs into the physical and psychological, there seems to be a concerted effort, since Maslow’s initial efforts, to avoid hierarchical concepts and, thereby, the structural violence that might be perpetuated by such formulations. Furthermore, the corresponding applications of most of the theories reviewed here emphasize collaboration between theorists, social workers, and the local individuals or groups for and with whom transformative action is initiated; needs theories provide a framework for discussing and evaluating seemingly conflicting goals and desires. Finally, there is significant overlap in what is included in each typology and some differences depending on how theorists conceptually divide and categorize human needs. Nonetheless, what is included seems to be secondary to the foregoing considerations about how needs theories are applied.

### **Needs Theory and ‘Needs’ in Music Education**

There are a number of connections between needs theory and music education; I will mention a few here. First, needs theory has had some influence in music education philosophy. In his

presentation at the Tanglewood Symposium (1968b), Maslow focused on the role of music in satisfying self-actualization needs, asserting that music is one of the best and most complete means for achieving peak experiences. As I have discussed elsewhere (Bates 2004), this claim that music satisfies the highest of all needs seems to resonate with and is mentioned within aesthetic philosophies for music education, particularly Bennett Reimer's (1989). Also, Maslow's theories of human motivation along with Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory—both of which are needs theories—contributed significantly to Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi's theory of *flow* (Inghilleri 1999) around which David Elliott's (1995) philosophy of music education is constructed.

Next, Maehr, Pintrich, and Linnenbrink offer a brief review of particular needs theories in their chapter on motivation and achievement in the *New Handbook on Research in Music Teaching and Learning* (2002). They discuss McClelland's research regarding the acquired need for achievement (one of three basic needs identified in McClelland's research), questioning whether 'need' is the most appropriate term yet acknowledging the utility of needs theories in studying motivation. They also discuss Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory, focusing on the role of autonomy relative to both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation.

Finally, music has been identified by a number of music education theorists and policy-makers, without making any direct connections to human needs theory, as a social practice that satisfies human needs. For instance, Regelski (2004) calls for the reinsertion of music as a social practice "into the system of social relations and needs that produced and sustains it" (14) and Paul Haack (2000) asserts that music "is a multifaceted human behavior which can fulfill many vital human needs" (139). In addition, a very strong claim relative to human needs, without any apparent clarifications or research connections, is made in MENC's Strategic Plan (2007):

Music is a universal expression of the human spirit; *a basic human need*. It allows us to communicate our deepest ideas and feelings; to explore and preserve our cultural heritages; and to celebrate the realms of emotion, imagination, and creativity that result in new knowledge, skills, and understanding. Therefore, every individual should be guaranteed the opportunity to learn music and to share in musical experiences.  
(italics added)

It seems reasonable to suggest that reference to "a basic human need" in a field that claims, at least, to be based on research, would benefit from the large body of research in *basic human needs*. Consistent with MENC's statement, needs have been significant in establishing ethics

and rights and, for this reason, the claim that music *is* a basic human need contains the potential for the prescriptive kind of universality discussed previously. It could also be beneficial, in light of extant research relative to human needs, to examine more closely what we really mean as music teachers, theorists, and researchers when we refer to ‘needs’, how music might satisfy needs, and whether music can or should be considered a basic need. Beyond the clear benefit of enhanced communication due to clearly defined terms, needs theory can inform what “many vital needs” might include or what types of needs might motivate the development and perpetuation of various institutions. Needs theory could also provide insight in identifying what exactly might be inhibited when social institutions are said to no longer be responsive to human needs—in identifying those practices that may, in fact, rise to the level of structural violence.

### **Exploring Further Applications to Music Education**

My intent in applying needs theory to music education is to promote dialogue between or among music teachers, students, parents, and policy makers, dialogue that may lead to practical transformations of social practices relative to students’ basic needs. It is not to promote a replicable technology for teaching or an ideal music education method or curriculum. It hinges on the fundamental question of what music education is or isn’t actually doing for or to students, and focuses on their basic human needs. Thus, it is one approach among others for promoting transformative dialogue that may resist institutional inertia and foster humanly and socially significant adaptations of current practices.

Three points need to be made before proceeding. First, and as mentioned previously, sustainability is key—that is, satisfaction of basic needs is an on-going process. In music education, sustainability implies that acquired skills and understandings will have practical levels of cultural and social significance and that students will *want* to continue musicing—they will be intrinsically motivated to do so. This requires that teachers understand there are *many* viable ways to make and teach music—that there are many potentially viable possibilities beyond generally accepted practices.

Second, music is a satisfier, not a basic need. *No comprehensive needs theory stipulates that music is itself a basic need.* Attempts to define music as a basic need (as in the aforementioned MENC mission statement) are transparently self-serving. Because within needs theory music is considered a satisfier, the ways music may satisfy basic needs are

culturally relative and infinitely variable. It is well outside the scope of needs theory, then, to recommend one mode of musical engagement, one kind of music, or one approach to musical instruction for all people, at all times, everywhere.

Third, a needs theory framework recommends practices that satisfy multiple needs at once—synergic satisfiers, as Max-Neef refers to them. For example, singing “You Are My Sunshine” with my two-year-old daughter meets (for me, at least) needs for relatedness, as we interact; for competence, especially when I accompany the song on the piano or guitar; and for autonomy, as I identify culturally with a favorite song that I learned as a child. Of course, as Deci and Ryan (2000) point out, people are not usually conscious of how they are satisfying needs, and in this instance I engage in musicing with my daughter simply because it is one of my most interesting and enjoyable forms of musicing and it seems to be equally enjoyable for her. Enjoyment flows from the satisfaction of multiple needs.

In an earlier essay (Bates 2004) I explored how Glasser’s typology of basic needs might be applied to music education. This time around, I have attempted a broader synthesis of needs theories, one that acknowledges the contributions of diverse theorists. In the interest of keeping the list short I suggest we subsume various needs under three general headings: autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Unlike Deci & Ryan, however, I suggest that these three categories include both psychological and physiological needs. In fact, I prefer to view these categories in a way that blurs the distinction between physiology and psychology or, following Mark Johnson (1987), between mind and body. From this perspective physical health and survival are integral to considerations of autonomy, relatedness, and competence.

*Autonomy* includes volition or concurrence; the freedom to question and transform social and cultural practices; opportunities to be creative; leisure and recreation; and a sense of personal freedom. It is impeded by the imposition of values, by coercion (punishments & rewards), and by exploitation, manipulation, and domination. *Relatedness* includes affection or care; meaningful communication with others; participation in shared and enjoyable activities; being understood and appreciated; and physical and emotional security. It is impeded by authoritarianism, alienation and exclusion, oppression, conflict, and self-consciousness. *Competence* includes knowledge and understanding; social significance and relevance; opportunities for the development of competence; appropriate skills and challenges; and personal health. It is impeded by marginalization and discrimination, debilitation, ignorance, boredom or anxiety, and social or cultural irrelevance. There is

considerable overlap in these indicators: they are offered simply as guideposts to clarify the basic need category, not as an exhaustive or definitive list of intermediate needs, needs categories, or potential satisfiers.

For the remainder of this paper, I will proceed with caution. Applications of needs theory to music education cannot be worked out once-and-for-all in an office or at a conference. Still, in order to illustrate some *potential* applications, I would like to explore some of the considerations that might present themselves when theories of basic human needs are brought to bear on two practices in music education with which I have had some experience: concert band and general guitar class. The guiding questions in this practical analysis are somewhat speculative: “In what ways can school music satisfy basic human needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy?” and, conversely, “In what ways might school music currently impede or merely fail to satisfy these basic needs?”

I think it is fair to say that in a typical concert band, the director makes many (sometimes, most) decisions for the band members. In fact, I know directors who would insist that an effective director makes *all* the decisions. How does this affect autonomy? Choice shouldn't be confused with volition—the sense one has of *concurring* or agreeing with the decisions that have been made; I am certain there are students who genuinely concur with all of the band director's decisions. However, conversations with my own students led me to believe that many of them appreciated being able to make their own choices—and not just superficial choices like “Which overture or march would you like to play today?” but substantive, important choices about musical styles, instrumentation, seating, performance venues, and so forth. While over half the student population in my school participated in band, only some seemed genuinely interested. It is likely that most of these students identified primarily with styles of music and/or modes of musicing other than the standard concert band repertoire. Suggesting the superiority of this one type of music or limiting what students are able to play to a traditional concert band repertoire—a genre that may be different from the music they ‘like’ or with which they may have grown up—seems to be an imposition of values and potentially harmful to their senses of cultural identity. In addition, coercion or manipulation through, for example, the use of rewards or punishments, as Deci and Ryan (2000) point out, may undermine autonomy. Finally, exploitation may occur in offering concert band as the only instrumental music option in a given school rather than, for example, offering to teach more popularly played musical instruments such as guitar or piano. It might

even be warranted to reconsider the relatively standard practice of requiring concert band participation for those wishing to participate in marching band or jazz band.

Competence needs are probably satisfied to a considerable extent in concert band programs that, as recommended by David Elliott (1995), involve the development of increasing levels of skills to meet similarly increasing challenges. Many students generally learn to read music and play with technical accuracy. A knowledgeable and careful band director will also help students avoid possible performance injuries and will guard against all forms of discrimination. However, I wonder if, in the effort to have the best sounding band possible, these considerations are often overlooked. In high-pressure situations, the needs of the band *program* can, in fact, compete with the needs of students. For example, a balanced ensemble might necessitate excluding some students altogether. And finally, the cultural significance or relevance of the concert band for the general population may be questioned, given the low levels of interest in the broader field of classical music, let alone the narrow sub-genre of wind ensemble literature. Though students may become competent, few will find uses or applications for their skills once they have left school or, in other words, concert band is not generally a sustainable development.

Needs satisfaction in concert band presents a similarly mixed picture in terms of relatedness needs. Students refer positively to the sense of belonging that comes from being a member of a performing ensemble, developing friendships and working towards common goals. Furthermore, a caring and affectionate band director whose office is always open for students to visit about things that are meaningful to them may help satisfy students' relatedness needs. The traditional 'benevolent dictator', however, maintains a 'professional distance'. In addition, conflict between the director's wants and needs and those of students can thwart feelings of relatedness. For instance, my students often wanted to visit with each other while I wanted them to be quiet so we could rehearse. How could I get them to do what I needed them to do? Why should I? According to needs theory, their visiting helps fulfill needs for relatedness—needs impeded by my insistence on silence. Perhaps if they felt making music was as valuable *as* socializing, or more enjoyable as a shared experience, this kind of conflict would not arise. Still further impediments to relatedness that are standard in concert band include competition—pitting students against each other; singling students out so that they feel self-conscious or embarrassed; or limiting participation based on relative ability, reliability, or perceived talent.

During the past sixteen years of applying needs theory on a practical level, I have come to the conclusion that guitar education has real potential as a ‘synergic satisfier’ of basic needs. Some possibilities are apparent in the Guitar Education Network Mission Statement (2005):

The guitar is an ideal vehicle for lifelong active music making. It is a highly motivational instrument that can help school music programs reach many of the students not now involved in music classes. The GAMA/NAMM/MENC Guitar Task Force is committed to establishing and expanding school guitar programs. The Task Force is dedicated to teaching guitar in the classroom using a broad, multi-style approach that includes diverse techniques and methods.

Exploitation becomes more likely, however, when business interests seek to expand or extend school guitar instruction; the aim is to sell products rather than to fulfill needs. Similar conflicts of interest may be at work in a claim on the MENC website claiming that guitar programs can effectively “recruit new students into performing music” and “enhance the image of the music department” (2007). One reason the guitar is perceived as “a highly motivational instrument” may be that students can see a direct relationship between school guitar instruction and outside-of-school musical engagements. Because of genuine concurrence with cultural practices, students do not have to be ‘sold’ on the idea of learning to play. The stylistic versatility of the instrument may also contribute to autonomy. For example, it was and is a common practice among my students to search the internet for readily available tablature to share with the class or to learn on their own. In addition to facilitating self-motivation, such a practice provides an opportunity to discuss transposition and arranging and enables students to learn music with which they identify. Autonomy may also be enhanced by improvisation and song-writing, two practices that seem to fit naturally into guitar class as I teach it.

As in band, competence can be developed in general guitar class by matching skills to increasing challenges. An advantage of the guitar class, however, is that it may give students more actual playing time than in a concert band rehearsal for one simple fact: a classroom full of acoustic guitars makes considerably less sound than a classroom full of wind, brass, and percussion instruments. I learned early in my career, the hard way, that it is virtually impossible to give instruction while band members are practicing their parts. On the other hand, it’s not difficult to work with individual guitar students while others practice. Finally, the multiple social contexts available for playing the guitar at home, in church, with family, or

with friends (guitar is probably the most popular amateur musical instrument in the U.S.A.) introduces considerable social capital to this competence dimension.

As far as relatedness is concerned, the guitar class, for me at least, has been very conducive to the type of teaching that seems to nurture and preserve relationships. Without the performance pressures institutionally inherent in school concert band traditions, I find that I am able to relate to students in a more relaxed manner, avoiding coercion and judgment. Classroom management (again, due in large part to the overall volume) has never seemed to be much of an issue. I lead group songs, demonstrate techniques, and then, while students practice individually, I walk about the room interacting with students and offering suggestions. Students visit with each other during class and share their skills with the class if they want. One might consider and attribute such differences in classroom environment to the inherent differences between the concert band tradition that grew out of military traditions and various guitar traditions related to collaborative social arrangements occurring in the garage or on the front porch. In other words, the atmosphere in the classroom relates to how the musical tradition is carried on socially outside of school—authoritarian or egalitarian.

## Summary

In this article I have reviewed needs theory as a field of research and scholarship, examined seven needs theories (including Nussbaum's capabilities approach), and synthesized elements of all of these into a list I used tentatively and speculatively to analyze two common instructional practices in music education. My intent has been to give an idea of how needs theory might be applied, not to prescribe specific practices. It speaks to the need for a more reflective practice in music education on all levels. As Froehlich (2007) writes:

We music educators must examine the ties of jurisdiction in our own field and ask ourselves (1) when, whether, and how we have engaged in truly diagnostic acts in our teaching; (2) to what extent we have engaged in routine acts of dispensing pat solutions to problems simply because we were unaware of, or did not think to look for, alternative options; (3) whether our body of professional knowledge offers those alternatives; and (4) if not, how such a knowledge base might be produced. The answers to these questions might actually be the tools . . . to become a gate-opener rather than a gatekeeper . . . (18).

By providing ways to understand student resistance and to imagine practices that are more acceptable, needs theory has helped me explore alternatives to various institutionalized practices. Used this way, in the spirit in which it was conceived, needs theory is a potentially

useful tool, a way of directing teachers and policy-makers away from habitual adherence to institutionalized standards and methods, and towards cooperative efforts with students, parents, and communities—efforts and practices that more effectively satisfy students' basic needs.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> An alternate version of this paper is also published in [Bates,etc. in] Roberts, B. A. (Ed.) (2008). *Sociological explorations: Proceedings of the 5th international symposium on the sociology of music education*. St. John's, NL: The Binder's Press (pp. 13-34).

## References

- Bates, Vincent C. (2004). "Where Should We Start? Indications of a Nurturant Ethic for Music Education." *Action, Theory, and Criticism in Music Education* 3:3 (December). [http://act.maydaygroup.org/articles/Bates3\\_3.pdf](http://act.maydaygroup.org/articles/Bates3_3.pdf)
- Berger, Peter L. and Thomas Luckman (1966). *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc.
- Braybrooke, David (1987). *Meeting Needs*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Burton, John (1997). *Violence Explained: The Sources of Conflict, Violence and Crime and Their Provention*. New York: Manchester University Press.
- (1990a). *Conflict: Resolution and Provention*. New York: St. Martins Press.
- (1990b). *Conflict: Basic Human Needs*. New York: St. Martins Press.
- (1988a). "Human Needs vs. Societal Needs." In Roger A. Coate and Jerel A. Rosati eds. *The Power of Human Needs in World Society*. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 34-58.
- (1988b). "Conflict Resolution as a Function of Human Needs." In Roger A. Coate and Jerel A. Rosati eds. *The Power of Human Needs in World Society*. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 187-204.
- Deci, Edward L. and Richard M. Ryan (2000). "The 'What' and 'Why' of Goal Pursuits: Human Needs and the Self-Determination of Behavior." *Psychological Inquiry*, 11:4, 227-68.

- 
- Deneulin, Severine & Nicholas Townsend (2006). Public Goods, Global Public Goods and the Common Good. ESRC Research Group on Wellbeing in Developing Countries, Working Paper 18. Accessed on December 30, 2007. <http://www.bath.ac.uk/econ-dev/wellbeing/research/workingpaperpdf/wed18.pdf>.
- Doyal, Len and Ian Gough (1991). *A Theory of Human Need*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Elliott, David J. (1995). *Music Matters: A New Philosophy of Music Education*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Froehlich, Hildegard (2007). "Institutional Belonging, Pedagogic Discourse and Music Teacher Education: The Paradox of Routinization" *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 6(3), November 2007: 7-21.  
[http://act.maydaygroup.org/articles/Froehlich6\\_3.pdf](http://act.maydaygroup.org/articles/Froehlich6_3.pdf)
- Galtung, Johan (1980). "The Basic Needs Approach." In Katrin Lederer, ed. *Human Needs: A Contribution to the Current Debate*, 55-125. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Oelgeschlager, Gunn & Hain.
- Gasper, Des (2004). "Human Well-being: Concepts and Conceptualizations." Discussion Paper No. 2004/06. Helsinki, Finland: UNU-WIDER (United Nations University—World Institute for Development Economics Research).
- Glasser, William (1998). *Choice Theory: A New Psychology of Personal Freedom*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
- (1990). *The Quality School*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Gough, Ian (2003). "Lists and Thresholds: Comparing the Doyal-Gough Theory of Human Need with Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach." Wellbeing in Developing Countries Working Paper 01. Economic & Social Research Council.
- Gough, Ian & J. Allister McGregor, eds (2007). *Wellbeing in Developing Countries: From Theory to Research*. Cambridge University Press.
- Guitar Education Network (2005). [http://www.guitareducationnetwork.org/home\\_html](http://www.guitareducationnetwork.org/home_html)
- Haack, Paul (2000). "Multi-functional Music Education: A 21st Century Paradigm for Theory and Practice." In Roger R. Rideout and Stephen J. Paul eds. *On the Sociology of Music Education Symposium II: Papers from the Music Education Symposium at the University of Oklahoma*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 139.
- Inghilleri, Paolo (1999). *From Subjective Experience to Cultural Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bates, V. (2009) "Human Needs Theory: Applications for Music Education." *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 8/1: 12-34. [http://act.maydaygroup.org/articles/Bates8\\_1.pdf](http://act.maydaygroup.org/articles/Bates8_1.pdf)

- Jackson, Tim (2004). "Consuming Paradise? Unsustainable Consumption in Cultural and Social-Psychological Context." In Hubacek, Klaus, Atsuchi Inaba, and Sigrid Stagl (eds). *Driving Forces of and Barriers to Sustainable Consumption*, Proceedings of an International Workshop, 9-26. <http://portal.surrey.ac.uk/pls/portal/docs/PAGE/ENG/RESEARCH/CES/CESRESEARCH/ECOLOGICALECONOMICS/PROJECTS/FBN/PARADISE.PDF>
- Jackson, Tim, Wander Jager, and Sigrid Stagl (2004). "Beyond Insatiability: Needs Theory, Consumption and Sustainability. Economic & Social Research Council Working Paper Series, 2004/2. University of Surrey Centre for Environmental Strategy. <http://portal.surrey.ac.uk/pls/portal/docs/PAGE/ENG/RESEARCH/CES/CESRESEARCH/ECOLOGICAL-ECONOMICS/PROJECTS/FBN/BEYONDINSATIABILITY.PDF>.
- Johnson, Mark (1987). *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Kamenetzky, Mario (1992). "The Economics of the Satisfaction of Needs." In Paul Ekins and Manfred Max-Neef eds. *Real-life Economics: Understanding Wealth Creation*. New York: Routledge, 181-96.
- Lavers, Tom (2007). "Asking People What They Want or Telling Them What They 'Need'?: Contrasting A Theory of Human Need with Local Expressions of Goals." Wellbeing in Developing Countries Working Paper 28. Economic & Social Research Council. <http://www.bath.ac.uk/econ-dev/wellbeing/research/workingpaperpdf/wed28.pdf>
- Lederer, Katrin, ed. (1980). *Human Needs: A Contribution to the Current Debate*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Oelgeschlager, Gunn, & Hain, Publishers.
- Litwack, Larry (2007). "Basic Needs: A Retrospective." *International Journal of Reality Therapy* 26:2, 28-30.
- Lutz, Mark A. and Kenneth Lux (1988). *Humanistic Economics: The New Challenge*. New York: The Bootstrap Press.
- Maehr, Martin L., Paul R. Pintrich, and Elizabeth A. Linnenbrinck (2002). "Motivation and Achievement." In Richard Colwell and Carol Richardson eds. *The New Handbook of Research on Music Teaching and Learning*. New York: Oxford University Press, 348-72.
- Maslow, Abraham H. (1968a). *Towards a Psychology of Being*. New York: van Nostrand Reinold.
- (1968b). "Music, Education, and Peak Experiences." In Robert A. Choate ed. *Music in American Society: Documentary Report of the Tanglewood Symposium*, 70-73. Washington: Music Educators National Conference.

- 
- (1943). "A Theory of Human Motivation." *Psychological Review*, 50, 370-96.
- Max-Neef, Manfred (1992). "Development and Human Needs." In Paul Ekins and Manfred Max-Neef eds. *Real-life Economics: Understanding Wealth Creation*, 197-213. New York: Routledge.
- McClelland, David C. (1961) *The Achieving Society*. Princeton: Van Nostrand.
- MENC: The National Association for Music Education (2007). "Strategic Plan." <http://www.menc.org/information/admin/07stratplanfinal.pdf>. Retrieved December 18, 2007.
- MENC: Music Educators National Conference (2007). "Guitar: A Course for All Reasons." [http://www.menc.org/music\\_classes/guitar/reason.html](http://www.menc.org/music_classes/guitar/reason.html). Retrieved June 25, 2007.
- Reader, Soran (2006). Does a Basic Needs Approach Need Capabilities? *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 14:3, 337-50.
- Reimer, Bennett (1998). "In Dialogue: Aims, Concepts, and the Philosopher's Quest: Reflections of Koopman's 'Conceptual Study'." *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 6:1, 60-70.
- (1989). *A Philosophy of Music Education*, 2d ed. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Reis, Harry T., Kennon M. Sheldon, Shelly L. Gable, Joseph Roscoe, and Richard M. Ryan (2000). "Daily Well-Being: The Role of Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 26:4, 419-35.
- Regelski, Thomas A. (2004). "Social Theory, and Music and Music Education as Praxis." *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 3(3), December 2004. [http://act.maydaygroup.org/articles/Regelski3\\_3.pdf](http://act.maydaygroup.org/articles/Regelski3_3.pdf)
- (1997). "Musicians, Teachers, and the Social Construction of Reality." In Roger Rideout, ed. *On the Sociology of Music Education*, 95-111. Norman: University of Oklahoma School of Music.
- Robertson, Ann (1998). "Critical Reflections on the Politics of Need: Implications for Public Health." *The Society for the Social History of Medicine*, 47:10, 1419-30.
- Rubenstein, Richard E. (2001) "Basic Human Needs: The Next Steps in Theory Development." *The International Journal of Peace Studies*, 6:1, [http://www.gmu.edu/academic/ijps/vol6\\_1/Rubenstein.htm](http://www.gmu.edu/academic/ijps/vol6_1/Rubenstein.htm)
- Ryan, Richard M. (1995). "Psychological Needs and the Facilitation of Integrative Processes." *Journal of Personality*, 63, 397-427.
- Bates, V. (2009) "Human Needs Theory: Applications for Music Education." *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 8/1: 12-34. [http://act.maydaygroup.org/articles/Bates8\\_1.pdf](http://act.maydaygroup.org/articles/Bates8_1.pdf)

Ryan, Richard M. and Edward L. Deci (2000). "The Darker and Brighter Sides of Human Existence: Basic Psychological Needs as a Unifying Concept." *Psychological Inquiry*, 11:4, 319-38.

### **About the Author**

Vince Bates taught K-12 music in Eureka, Utah for twelve years and currently teaches elementary and general music education methods and horn at Northwest Missouri State University. He enjoys discussing music teaching and learning with anyone, anywhere. Feel free to email ([bates@nwmissouri.edu](mailto:bates@nwmissouri.edu)) comments, suggestions, or questions.