

“....Or, as comedian Aaron Freeman put it, *‘Everything in your life ends up in your act.’*”

To bring this into the classroom, and my areas of history and leadership/decision making, there are ample opportunities whereby these can be studied in a cross-disciplinary fashion. History (being history) lends itself to applications across disciplines – art, music, natural science, and social science. *‘We must emphasize the transdisciplinary nature of education.’* Being able to track developments in each of these disciplines, and putting them in an historical perspective in relation to other historical developments, would not only lend richness to the study of multiple events, but also facilitate a deeper understanding of the interrelatedness of world developments, as changes in one arena (say, science) will frequently precipitate upheavals in another (religion or the political arena.) Another transdisciplinary example is in the IB system. Both psychology and history are offered at the top levels. To design an interactive class that incorporates the study of leadership and decision making from a psychological perspective, including the theoretical, experiential, and practical, and tying it to specific historical events and individuals would be a more realistic way to explore the psychology and application of leadership and the decision making process to history.

Nearly every seminal moment in history has required ‘decisions’ and leadership, whether the American Revolutionary era, the Civil War, the race struggles in the 50s and 60s, or Vietnam. Likewise, in a global context, the Napoleonic Wars, WWI, the 1930s, the Cold War. In each situation, decisions that were made by various leaders had far reaching consequences that affected millions and whose impact is still felt today. To put students in the position of decision makers in those situations would make the study of the respective subject a more ‘real’ experience and not just some event that occurred years ago.

My vision is to create a course that would utilize all forms of teaching media to cover a specific historical period, a crisis period, or series of events - books, video/movies, simulation games, even field excursions where possible. But the core of the course would be leadership and decision-making modules, or ‘events’ where the students are placed in simulations or role-playing positions. Events that could be modeled in this way (depending on the course topic/era) could be the US Constitution debates; the state’s rights debates, secession and the start of the Civil War and the Civil War; Lincoln’s cabinet during the war; the Berlin Airlift of 1948; the Vietnam War, the race struggles of the 50s and 60s, or the Cuban Missile Crisis – literally any major US or global historical event. Students will be placed in decision-making teams; they could be a task force, Congressional delegation, a National Security team, a Cabinet, or a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) team. Throughout the course term, there would be ‘decision points’ – significant ‘inflection times’ where important decisions or events are occurring and where decisions or advice need to be given. Each group would be provided with specific pieces of information at each ‘decision point,’ and different groups may get different pieces of information, according to who/what they represent. They would then be required to make

decisions or provide policy advice based on their understanding of what they have studied, the situation, competing priorities, and any other outside information sources. This will be done amidst changing situations with imperfect and/or inaccurate information, much as decision makers must react today to situations where there are gaps in information.

The students would then be required to present their decisions, to justify and argue them, and then explain as to how they were reached. Not so different from the real world.

Embarking on this course would tap each of the skills we have examined in this course and achieve what Root-Bernstein described as '*synosia is the natural and necessary result of imaging, analogizing, modeling, playing, and transforming.*' (p.307.) Students in this class would apply these skills in the following manner:

- 'Perceptions' of an issue;
- Developing frameworks for decision making ('patterning');
- Thinking about the crucial elements of the situation ('abstracting') and how to represent those. Drawing connections with past experiences or related experiences to reach decision frameworks ('analogizing');
- Feeling the pressure and making decisions 'in their gut' ('embodied thinking'); and putting oneself into the role of various individuals ('empathizing');
- 'Modeling' a situation by playing through the various scenarios (game theory);
- And of course 'playing' – but since its a role play, they won't have to suffer the consequences of their decisions.

The result would then be drawing it all together ('synthesizing') in order to come up with decisions. As Root-Berstein state, '*synesthesia is the key to not only experiencing but also to **understanding** things at a much deeper level than is possible using single modes of perception.*'

My course will place students in a front-line role as leaders and decision makers, experiencing history 1st hand, with its pressures, uncertainties, and the need to justify and explain decisions. By requiring them to broaden their sources of information and to take into account other factors (because no decision exists in a vacuum), they will gain an understanding of the competing choices that every leader is forced to make, as well as the context that their decision is being made in. With this will go the satisfaction of decisions well made, or the disappointment of ones that went awry (and the subsequent fall out – but without the real-world consequences!)”