

Case: Hoy & Tarter 5.7 (Latin American Literature Elective)

Satisficing Model

<p>The Problem</p> <p><i>Short Term:</i> A veteran teacher would like to take advantage of an informal benefit by offering an elective in her department; her department chair is worried that the curriculum will be too watered down if another elective is added.</p> <p><i>Long Term:</i> The school needs a formal policy regarding the development of department electives, including prerequisites for student enrollment.</p>	
<p>Analyzing the Difficulties</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The department chair and a veteran English teacher are at odds; the conflict has become personal and developed racial overtones • The department chair has suggested that electives are watering down the curriculum, resulting in an inferior education for students; this concern needs attention • The veteran teacher has suggested that teacher morale would suffer if the option to create electives was taken away; this concern needs attention • It is possible that the standard English curriculum is not offering culturally diverse materials, such that students are only receiving exposure to that literature in electives 	
<p>Criteria for a Satisfactory Solution</p> <p>The school should provide quality curriculum that honors diverse cultural backgrounds, while making sure all students develop basic proficiencies and fundamental skills. Schools should trust and support teachers' professionalism and desire for ongoing development.</p>	
Alternatives	Likely Consequences
1. Do nothing.	Tensions in the English department will continue to rise and the elective will not be offered, possibly denying students a valuable learning opportunity and angering Ms. Dotson.
2. Have a conference with Mr. Peterson and Ms. Dotson to mediate the personal and professional conflict.	Short term easing of tensions, but not a long-term solution until decision is made regarding the elective.
3. Audit English department's grades/test scores to investigate students' basic proficiencies and address Mr. Peterson's concerns.	Hard data to support decision – if audit shows low scores, there is backing for limiting elective offerings; if audit shows high scores, there is backing for offering more electives.
4. Allow the elective, but institute a qualifying exam or minimum GPA requirement.	Could leave out some students who might thrive in with literature that they identify with personally or are motivated to read. Will anger Mr. Peterson.
5. Allow the elective, but institute a rotating schedule of electives to limit the watering down of the curriculum.	Could anger other teachers who are happy with their electives. Might not appease Mr. Peterson.
6. Postpone the elective until a formal policy can be developed regarding electives.	Will likely anger Ms. Dotson. Possibly deny students a valuable learning opportunity.
7. Allow the elective based on Ms. Dotson's interest.	Will anger Mr. Peterson and could water down the curriculum, ignoring a potential problem with students' basic proficiencies.
8. Deny the elective based on Mr. Peterson's concerns.	Will anger Ms. Dotson and deny students a valuable learning opportunity. Tensions in English department will continue to rise.

Initiate the Plan

Programming

My top priorities are addressing the conflict between my two teachers and auditing grades and test scores from the English department to determine the impact elective offerings are having on student learning. I will have a conference with Mr. Peterson and Ms. Dotson to clear the air and find common ground; I will also remind them of the need for professionalism moving forward. If the audit of grades reveals a problem with students' basic proficiencies, I will institute a basic proficiency test as a prerequisite for enrolling in English electives. I will also instruct Mr. Peterson to begin incorporating literature selections from the electives into the regular English curriculum so that students are not missing out on the learning opportunities afforded by culturally diverse literature. If the audit of grades reveals no problem with the students' basic proficiencies, I will allow the elective process to continue unimpeded. In either case, I will require the English department to formalize their policy regarding electives and present this to me before the end of this school year so that we can avoid future misunderstandings.

Communicating

Mr. Peterson and Ms. Dotson need to be reminded that they are expected to behave as professionals at all times. This means they need to have a calm, direct conversation – even if it needs to be mediated by me – rather than bickering and attempting to “rally support” from other teachers. I will also add an item to our next faculty meeting agenda about culturally responsive pedagogy: “As our school demographics change, we must augment our curriculum to reflect the interests of our students. This shouldn't happen only in electives, but should be incorporated into all classes, when appropriate.” I will also take this opportunity to remind all faculty of my faith and trust in their professionalism and my commitment to maintaining high morale.

Monitoring

I will closely monitor the dynamics between Mr. Peterson and Ms. Dotson to ensure that they are ready to collaborate in a professional manner moving forward. If needed, we will hold additional face-to-face meetings until the problem is resolved. I will also request that each department bi-annually submit a brief summary of their students' basic proficiencies; this will allow me to be proactive in reforming the curriculum if a problem arises.

Evaluating

A successful outcome in this situation means that my English teachers are working together harmoniously and that students are getting the instruction they need. Teachers should feel valued and trusted as professionals. Students should have the opportunity to develop not just basic skills, but also develop their interests in culturally diverse materials. If our students need more support in basic proficiencies at the moment, we should find ways to incorporate those diverse materials into the regular curriculum. If our students are excelling in the basic proficiencies, special-interest electives are a great option to keep them engaged in the learning process.