

Pedagogue Bonus: Dual Enrollment (w/Sarah Z. Johnson)

Pedagogue podcast

Transcript

Welcome to Pedagogue Bonus, a short episode that covers a single topic or question. I'm your host, Shane Wood.

In this bonus episode, I talk with Sarah Z. Johnson about the challenges, strategies, and sustainability of dual enrollment programs.

Sarah Z. Johnson is the Writing Center Director and a member of the English faculty at Madison College in Madison, WI. She currently serves as Chair of the Two-Year College English Association (TYCA) and has done policy and committee work for NCTE and CCCC for many years. Sarah's research interests include dual enrollment, teacher preparation, tutor education, and all things related to Writing Program Administration.

Sarah, thanks so much for joining us.

SW: I was hoping that we could spend time talking about dual enrollment. What are the challenges? And what strategies and principles would you recommend to faculty and administrators who are hoping to build more effective, sustainable dual enrollment programs? What steps might administrators and faculty take to ensure that their dual enrollment programs are supporting students?

SZJ: I definitely understand and acknowledge that, especially for writing teachers, dual enrollment can be a fraught issue. This is something that I've talked about in other contexts. Unlike dual enrollment college level math or something like that, where if the student can do the work, okay, great. It's a lot harder to argue that a 14 year-old has the maturity, the cognitive wherewithal to tackle the complex, ethical, rhetorical thinking that needs to be done in freshman composition, almost by definition. I absolutely agree that there are pitfalls of dual enrollment and programs have to be done well. I think the danger of dual enrollment is when the wrong people get too enthusiastic about it. That's the truth. Because here's the thing, governors talking about state law and how important it is...governors and legislators are under constant pressure to lessen the economic burden of college. So these programs have become a really easy or relatively easy Band-Aid. They can promise voters, "You can get your kids two years of college out of the way by the time they graduate from high school." And some states are way more aggressive than others.

For example, I think in Ohio, you can start taking dual enrollment classes, you could take freshman comp as a 12 year-old. Yeah, seventh grade. And of course, and you're like, no, that does not work. It's important to recognize that there are really terrible ways to do dual enrollment and you want to make sure that the people designing and assessing and maintaining these programs are the ones who know the theory, know the curriculum and have an idea of what is necessary to not just succeed in a particular class or set of curricula but succeed because part of what first year writing is about, of course, is helping students, helping prepare them to think and write when they get to college. So, that's something that's important as well.

One of the things that I did through my work with TYCA, I chaired the task force that wrote the joint position statement on dual enrollment in composition. That was a fantastic team. It was a really large team. I think there were 12 of us working on it for around two years. The thing I liked about it was that we got some high school folks, two-year college folks, four-year university people who had done the scholarly research into dual enrollment, but then some people who are actually doing it as well. What we came up with were a set of guidelines that tried to provide support and information for folks who were running programs, who were in programs.

Dual enrollment looks like a bunch of different things. Often it is trained, supported high school faculty delivering college curriculum in high school classrooms. Sometimes it's groups of high school students coming to a college classroom. We wanted to make sure that all of these different models could still benefit but we included recommendations for curriculum. Curriculum design, instructor support, students support and then we had a whole section on student readiness and that was aimed at that idea of...yeah, a high school junior or senior might be ready for college English, a seventh grader is not. So we kind of talked about those things.

One of the things that we specified was the idea that good dual enrollment programs also hook up these high school students with college support systems, with the writing center for example. That's something in my own college's dual enrollment program, we've done a lot of. We have our dual enrollment students, they come take field trips and we would have morning workshops on their papers, so I would hire a bunch of tutors and we'd all have a workshop together. It was great because the students got a chance to be on campus but also to get some of that feedback. A lot of times what we would say, because I'd always give a talk, kind of give my little spiel at the beginning of the workshop. And I would say, "All right, some of you are coming here. A lot of you are not. If you are going to college, it will have a writing center. You need to use that." It's helping to train these high school students how to make use of the college support services that they would encounter afterward.