

Owl Pellets – Regurgitating Practical Tips for Agriculture Teachers

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Introduction/Need for Innovation or Idea

There exists a large divide between research and practice. Constas and Sternberg (2006) argued that “researchers write for other researchers rather than for practitioners; and when they do write with practice in mind, it is rare that what is written can support robust practical implementation” (p. 19). Agricultural education has faced this same challenge. Though a number of efforts have been made to extend research to the classroom, mediums like the *Agricultural Education Magazine* and regional research conference that include secondary educators have seen limited success. Very rarely are secondary educators seeking the *Journal of Agricultural Education* to find support and guidance in the daily grind of classroom instruction.

Denton, Foorman, and Mathes (2003) suggested a five-phase model to scale and sustain interventions resulting from research that included: (a) development of the intervention, (b) empirical evaluation of the intervention, (c) tests of robustness and generalizability, (d) Scaling up and sustaining, and (e) networking. Research and development is occurring within agricultural education departments nation wide. Empirical evidence is being collected and generalizations are being made. But what are the strategies to deliver this knowledge to secondary based agricultural educators currently exists? How are researchers purposefully building bridges between academic departments and secondary classrooms? Are networks created and sustained?

Constas and Sternberg (2006) attribute the scaling challenge in educational research to our research paradigm. We, as educators, view research as the development of insight rather than the development of robust practical applications for teachers. Owl Pellets is an attempt to do just that. Through a blogging and podcast platform, this innovation seeks to consume educational research in agricultural education, and “regurgitate” that information in a way that is palatable and accessible to secondary agricultural educators. Scalable applications of research are identified and networks are formed to create dialogue around teaching practices.

How it Works/Methodology/Program Phases/Steps

As a result of the scaling challenges described, three faculty members from different institutions met and created *Owl Pellets: Regurgitating Practical Tips for Agriculture Teachers*. The objective of the project was to identify key research practical to secondary agriculture educators and disseminate it in a concise and attractive platform conducive to those in the classroom. It was decided that these “pellets” would be in either a blogging format similar to that of the popular *eduTopia*, or in the form a short podcast including interviews with various researchers and practitioners.

Using the blogging website www.WordPress.com, research is converted to short “pellets”, published, and then shared through the Owl Pellet Facebook page, Twitter feed, and WordPress blog. In addition, relevant seasonal topics are identified and experts in the respective topic are recruited for interviews and development of a podcast. The faculty members utilize online meeting software, as well as a free audio editing software Audacity, to record, edit, and comment

on the discussion of interest. Once the podcast is edited and ready to publish, it is disseminated through the Twitter, Facebook, and Wordpress feeds. The goal is to provide weekly tips, suggestions, and scaled research suggestions through the blogs, and at least one podcast each week.

Results to Date/Implications

To date, there have been five WordPress posts that have received over 537 views from 355 visitors. The Facebook data reported a total reach of 526 viewers, with 342 included post reach. There have been 244 total page likes and over 40 post clicks. Twitter has also received over 300 views of the posts.

The first podcast, which focused on tips and thoughts for managing the National FFA Convention, included an agricultural educator from Florida discussing best practices. This podcast is the first completed and will be published during the month of October. Three other podcasts are in progress and will be released by the end of November.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

A schedule has been created to provide daily blog posts and weekly blogs. This schedule has been an important element of the process to ensure that there is an adequate supply of information to sustain the readership collected during the initial publishing of the resource. We hope to create a team of academics willing to contribute a short “pellet” following the publication of key articles into various publishing outlets.

Technology has been an important element of the innovation. The team has learned the importance of finding editing software, conferencing software, microphones, and recording devices to improve the processes. This continues to be a challenge as podcasts are developed and edited.

Costs/Resources Needed

At this point, the cost of the program has been minimal. The team has utilized current resources, free conferencing software, existing microphones and equipment, and social media sites that do not include a fee for usage. It is anticipated that additional costs will be incurred to improve the audio recording capabilities and the purchasing of an educational license for small audio clips will be purchased to include a modern intro and closure to each podcast.

References

- Constas, M. A. & Sternberg, R. J. (2006). *Translating theory and research into educational practice: Developments in content domains, large-scale reform, and intellectual capacity*. Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Denton, C. A., Foorman, B. R., & Mathes, P. M. (2003). Schools that “beat the odds”: Implications for reading instruction. *Remedial and Special Education, 24*, 258-261.