Why Do They Keep Asking Me to Fill Out Surveys?: Sharing Research with Agriculture Teachers through Data Parties

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Introduction: Data Parties

Collecting data related to school-based agricultural education often involves asking agriculture teachers their thoughts and opinions on the various issues and concepts researchers deem important enough to study. At this time, the current issue of the *Journal of Agricultural Education*, Volume 66, No. 2, includes twenty-one articles. Of those, five (24%) include quantitative data collected from teachers, and nine (43%) include qualitative data collected from teachers. Often, grants ask for plans to share research results with the target audience to disseminate findings for use among practitioners. However, how many researchers find the time and opportunity to share their results with the teachers participating in the research?

Best practices for sharing research results often come from the field of evaluation, where the sharing of data is prominent. Evaluation scholarship offers various examples of innovative ways to share data findings and get participant input (i.e., Evergreen, 2017; Hutchinson, 2017). Participatory data analysis is often used to help research participants take ownership of the research (Kogen, 2024).

One method of participatory data analysis is termed the data walk (Murray et al., 2015) or data party (Franz, 2013; Lewis et al., 2019). Both concepts involve sharing data with participants in a way that allows them to interact with the data instead of just passively listening or reading a research report. Franz (2013) used the participatory data analysis process with ten farmers and Extension educators to make sense of data used to help guide Extension programming. Lewis et al. (2019) used data place mats and a gallery walk of data posters to share 4-H youth development data with camp staff and 4-H volunteers to engage in discussions to make changes to 4-H programming. In agricultural education research, much of the work includes recommendations for changes to address issues such as teacher retention. The data walk can be used to help share research findings with teachers in an effort to spread the recommendations for change to the audience that could actually implement many of the recommendations, but may not read academic journals to find the suggestions.

How it Works

Two researchers from Illinois offered to present a summary of their past research during a professional development session at the state agricultural education teachers' annual conference. The researchers chose research projects that had (1) asked teachers specifically for their input in the last 5 years (2020 or after) and (2) had been presented at a conference or published in a peer-reviewed journal. The researchers identified nine studies that met the criteria. The researchers also included the results of an informal online survey that teachers filled out to give the researchers information for a presentation to school administrators. This survey did not fall under IRB and will not be published, but the researchers believed it was data that the teachers would be interested in seeing.

For each project, the researchers completed one slide that answered (a) the overall research question, (b) what was asked of the teachers (such as completing an online questionnaire in the spring of 2021), and (c) a summary of the findings in either words, charts, or tables. The slide also included a QR code that took the reader to a copy of the published paper, poster, or conference proceeding with more information about the study. Each slide was printed on 11 x 14 paper and taped to the top of a piece of newsprint. Underneath were two questions: (1) What does this make you think of? And (2) What other questions do you have?

When participating teachers came to the workshop, they were given sticky notes and colored markers. For the first twenty minutes, the teachers were encouraged to walk around the room and write their responses to the two prompts for each research study. After the time period, they were asked to stand by the poster that they were most interested in learning more about to determine where to start further discussion of the topics. In addition, a separate newsprint was hung in the room as a parking lot for additional ideas for research or questions that came up during the presentation. The workshop lasted 70 minutes.

Results to Date

Approximately 30 teachers attended the workshop. Compared to other workshop pre-registration numbers, it was one of the most highly chosen workshops during the conference time period. As the teachers participated in the data walk, about half of the teachers filled out sticky note responses for the prompts. Very few were observed scanning the QR codes for more information. As the researchers engaged with teachers, they encouraged teachers to put their thoughts in the "parking lot" of additional information to study.

After the twenty-minute time period, the teachers stood by the poster that they were most interested in learning more about. They were distributed very equally among the posters, so the researchers pulled each research slide up on a projector and gave a brief overview, and then addressed the questions posed on the sticky notes for each research project. The time frame only allowed discussion of about six of the ten projects.

Advice to Others

Informally, the researchers asked teachers about the level of data presented in the slides and if it was enough information to understand the studies. The teachers felt it was the right amount of information - enough for them to understand what the study was about, but not too much that they felt overwhelmed with "research stuff". Therefore, we would recommend similar presentations for others attempting their own data walk.

While not many teachers seemed to scan the QR codes for more information during their data walk, some did stop to scan codes on their way out of the room at the end of the session. While not used by many, we feel that having the opportunity to learn more is important for those teachers who may be more interested in research and the research process. A copy of the presentation and all the linked resources were made available in a Google folder with all resources from the conference.

Our data walk was used to share published research. However, the same process could be used to get participant analysis of new research data that has not been published. For quantitative data, charts or tables of the data could be shared, and the teachers are allowed to offer their analysis of what they think the data is suggesting. The data walk could also be used with participants in focus groups as a way of member checking the analysis.

Resources Needed

The researchers in Illinois were fortunate to be able to use the workshop time during the existing state agriculture teacher conference to lead their workshop with an already established audience. Besides location and audience, the only resources needed are printed slides for the data walk (printed on 11 x 14-inch paper in color for $15 total), sticky notes (approximately $18 for a pack of 24), and a large sticky easel pad ($24), totalling $57. The workshop included approximately six hours of preparation.

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