

This is the first narrative for the NCATA's section dubbed DON'T BLINK.



Reflections from a 10 year veteran

It was a typical (define that word) field trip for the Southern Nash Ag Department. We went to the Southern Farm Show and the Museum of Natural Sciences with our highest fruit sellers from the fall. I was unaware (now, that is typical) that our group was going to be required to split into smaller units of six students with a chaperone. I am grateful for my teaching partners that did know and had it all worked out. I took my group and raced up the stairs with the students in tow looking like a mother duck and her ducklings crossing the street.

When out of nowhere I heard- NO RUNNING! I stopped dead in my tracks. You see, that day was the first day in my life wearing the label “chaperone” in a manner that was apparent for the world to see. I am not sure how I feel about it. I didn't feel like the one in charge. I don't feel like I should be making all the decisions. I don't feel like I have the correct answers. At some point, I guess all adults reach the realization that they ARE THE ADULT and, maybe, that means you have to make the realization that running is not always appropriate. I should have realized it before that moment but, hey, we all make mistakes.

This year marks my tenth year in the classroom. WOW. Sometimes I sit back and let that sink in, truly sink in. I am quite positive that not one of my Ag Ed professors would have ever thought I would have made it this long. Maybe hoped, but definitely not taking the wager to Las Vegas. I, like you, have learned, grown, developed, and whatever other interesting way to put it during my tenure. I am the one that is use to asking others for answers and, slowly, the pendulum has shifted into others asking me. My commute to work allowed for a special quiet time of reflection that I'll admit I did not take advantage of until recently. I treasure that time now. I was able to allow my mind to drift from topic to topic without having to engage anyone else. In this decade, I have accomplished a meager list compared to some in the profession. I have received a second undergraduate degree with a minor, a graduate degree, National Board Certification, a husband, and three beautiful (biased here) daughters. I have taught in five classrooms, guided by three principals, and lived through multiple teaching partner changes. During all this, I have strived to be “perfect” for the world to see. Did I accomplish ‘perfect’ too? (Let me shout from a mountain) NO! Did you add ‘perfect’ to your accomplishment list?

A few years ago, the CTE department at Southern Nash was called upon to create a presentation about Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships. I will save you from the full story of the day but I was tasked to make a sign with one side as the students see the world and one side with my take on the same topic. I chose to focus on not getting things right. Haven't you failed before? It is the worst! Failure is something that grips tightly and refuses to let go. Before I drift off into song let me get back to the point. I chose failure so as I am writing with the largest permanent marker Sharpie makes, I mention that I always spell perfect wrong so I need a pencil first. From there it was decided that I needed, no, the moment DEMANDED, me to spell the

word incorrectly for everyone to see. The front of my cardboard read "I am NOT prefect" in black and the 're' was marked through and rewritten 'er' in red. The back held the words that I think as teachers we are quick to forget "We ALL make mistakes!" The sign was given the place of honor in front of my room for the semester and years to come. Every once in awhile a student or myself would change which side it was on. More times than I can count someone would point out that perfect was misspelled; I would use those times to share the story of why it was made with the mistake. Slowly, my students felt comfortable with their mistakes. I would like to think that the large, glaring mistake in the front of the room gave them permission. I started to hear the students refer to the sign often and it made my heart happy. So many times we are called on to be perfect and failure is paralyzing. Once the hold of the failure is removed then we are free. Free to make mistakes and to learn. I admitted each and everyday, through that sign and my words, that I make mistakes. I was not ashamed of it so my students became unashamed. In fact, one of the girls in my group at the museum after I was corrected for running said, "Nobody is prefect." Yes, dear, that is the truth.

But is it?

Perfect by definition is having all the required or desirable elements, qualities, or characteristics; as good as it is possible to be from a Google search. Let us see it from our agricultural roots though. A perfect flower or a complete flower. I like that definition better. Perfect is complete. That is all that I believe agriculture teachers are looking to become. Complete. Whole. Mature. In this short ten years I have been working towards my complete, whole, mature life. We determine what that looks like for ourselves. I am constantly working towards my definition, are you?