As I walked into Fowler Middle School for the first time, memories of my youth came back to me. Though it looked nothing like the middle school I attended, there was something familiar to the setting. What first struck me about Fowler, was that it felt open and welcoming. Then the bell rang and students poured out into the hallways. I was surprised that after all of these years since my middle school days, I still felt intimidated and small. I was also surprised that there was such a size difference between the 6th graders and 8th graders. The 6th graders still looked like little kids, but the 8th graders were huge. Most of them were bigger than me. As the weeks went by at Fowler, it became a place with many friendly and familiar faces.

 Most of my time at Fowler was spent in room seven, 7th grade Language Arts. While the room itself was large compared to many of the classrooms at Fowler, the students were packed in tightly. This created what I consider to be the biggest obstacle to learning, classroom management. At Fowler there are 7 periods that are 48 minutes each, except for Wednesdays when the day starts an hour late and each period becomes only 40 minutes. The first 5 minutes of every period involves getting the 30 plus 7th graders settled. After spending at least 5 more minutes refreshing everyone’s mind on what happened yesterday and catching up those who missed, then the lesson plan can begin. This leaves 38 minutes. The last 5 minutes are usually pointless because everyone is packed up and staring at the clock. So now you’re down to 33 minutes. 33 minutes isn’t a lot of time when you have 30 students. Additionally, the students are mostly all antsy teenagers more interested in socializing than learning. A class discussion is nearly impossible because it can quickly turn to chaos with so many kids in one room. Side discussions are bound to happen and then the teacher has to pull everyone back in. Some teachers are better at this than others.

Fowler uses a type of PBiS, with behavior reflection forms and rewards. This works sometimes, but it’s not perfect. The process of threatening a behavior reflection form and then deciding to hand it out, still interrupted class. If a kid received a behavior reflection form, they did not just silently fill it out. They argued and threw a fit during or after class. It was still a form of punishment because they lost a sticker, which meant loss of freedom within the school. They also had to go talk to a behavioral specialist about why they received a form. It seemed a little extreme to me. The students are teenagers going through hormonal changes. Of course, when they get around peers they want to talk and flirt and have fun. It seems wrong to punish the students for being normal kids. Surely there is a better way, I’m just not sure exactly what it is. Ideally, the kids would all have their basic needs met, they would have involved and caring parents, the class sizes would be smaller, and the teachers would all be excellent at classroom management and teaching. However, this is obviously never going to be the case.

I found teaching to be much more challenging than I thought. Mostly, because it was so difficult to manage the classroom. I’m not necessarily one to dominate a room, and the kids saw me as nice and laid back. This usually led to them being talkative. I felt that if I had my own room and had an established relationship with the students from the beginning of the year, I would have eventually worked it out. I’m not the yelling type so I tended to use other methods to calm everyone. I used a hand clapping technique that was fairly successful. I found myself often wishing for a champagne cup to tap to get everyone’s attention. If I could start over I would have brought some sort of bell to get everyone’s attention. I also would have bribed them with random treats as rewards whenever having a class discussion. Anytime a treat was involved, even a pencil, the kids snapped into A+ students.

The lesson plans themselves were challenging to create and implement. I found myself learning with the kids. My cooperating teacher helped me create well-rounded lesson plans that would work for all the students. The PowerPoint and Prezi presentations worked better than I expected. The students seemed to learn more fully when given visual aids. My cooperating teacher was fantastic at helping me understand how I should explain things to the students. I kept falling into what my teacher called “college talk” which was over their heads. Overall, I felt that all of the plans were surprisingly well-received. I tried to keep them fun and interactive, yet informative. I mostly succeeded with that, but my confidence at the beginning of the day was always lower than the end of the day. I was thrilled to see such extreme learning gains. At times, I felt like trying to teach the students anything was pointless. They surprised me though.

I truly enjoyed my time at Fowler Middle School. I became attached to many of the kids and will miss them. Though teaching is challenging, it seems very rewarding as well. In a way, teaching is similar to being a parent. It can be draining, frustrating, and overwhelming at times, but well worth all the struggle to see the children grow, develop, and succeed.