

My Journey

In my 25+ year teaching career, I could have never predicted a year when school closed before the end of May. I've seen a lot of things, but this has literally been one of the most difficult.

My first thought when the closure was announced was "How will my students eat and learn?" Many eat two meals a day at school. My second thought was this can't last long. I wanted to tell my principal how much I worried about all of this and more, but knew she had much more to worry about herself. So, I kept many thoughts to myself.

When reality set in, that we were closing at least until the next school year my thoughts turned to sheer panic about online teaching. I normally consider myself able a "go with the flow kind of girl" but for some reason I was terrified. How could I teach first graders online? I listened to many teacher friends about their plans. All of them sounded so confident. This made me feel even worse.

I finally got a grip and knew I had to jump in head first, so to speak. I decided to start with one of my favorite things, a read aloud. How bad could it be? And I truly missed all of my kiddos, even those who gave me a run for my money. I chose one of my favorite books. It

was a childhood favorite of mine, Harry the Dirty Dog. About 2 minutes in, I wondered why I had been so afraid.

Each day after, I tried something new. Seeing my students took all the fear away. Each day I tried to end with something fun so they would return the next day. It worked. My silly little antics drew big crowds. I started feeling overwhelmed again because they all had things to say, and the teaching seemed to take second place to "crazy." I knew it couldn't continue.

I decided my day should include small groups of students. I began by asking parents what time would be best. Ironically, 1:00pm-5:00pm were the preferred hours. Scheduling became a nightmare, and I opened myself up for it. Finally, I figured out what could work so that everyone that would show up for at least one Zoom Class a day.

The small groups were a hit! I could accomplish a lesson and still allow students to be kids. When students didn't show up I called home, sent messages and mailed notes to students. It worked! I was definitely in my zone again.

Still, I had those students who were not interested in lessons. I decided to reach out to the last few holdouts. Bedtime stories, became my new bag of tricks. I began

inviting students to join me in pajamas and with a stuffed friend. The evenings were a hit. I got a glimpse of family life. The more story times I had, the more students I reached. Soon, siblings were joining in the fun. The favorite by far - Fort Night. Students built forts from blankets, pillows and such. They played with flashlights, while I read.

So this awful virus came. It robbed us of nine weeks of school. But it left something too, a new way of teaching and a reminder that schools are much more than buildings and books. We are students, parents, teachers, administrators, cooks, delivery drivers and custodians. We are FAMILY! Fowler is Family.