

A Win-Win Solution

Distance learning, you either love it or hate it; personally, I loved it. For the past year school was run virtually; students unwilling to learn and teachers perplexed with technology. One of the biggest hurdles that students must deal with this semester is readjusting themselves to in-person school. Studies show that students' grades have dropped significantly during the COVID pandemic and into the new fall semester. It's no wonder my buddy Caleb needed extra help with his math. I know he's a smart kid and he's got tons of potential. However, before I can guide my buddy through his hurdle, I must figure my way through one of my own hurdles. How can I make math fun for Caleb?

Throughout all the sessions I've come to know Caleb as a person, but yet his lack of an ability to properly recall common math concepts raises the question: what did Caleb's teacher teach him? Every session I see a clear lack of a deep understanding of the concepts. I know it's important to thoroughly study concepts in math. Much like literature it's important to keep the mind flexible for many interpretations of a concept. Hypothetically, if one studies a math review worksheet solely for the answers there is a high chance the person would struggle on their test, especially in higher math classes. Rather, studying math to understand all the whys and the hows helps a student thrive and be able to tackle a variety of problems in many forms. That is why it is essential for me to help Caleb achieve a solid foundation in math so he does not struggle later on in school, yet one of my own struggles was to engage Caleb. I could lecture all I wanted, but if Caleb wasn't actually listening, having these sessions would be meaningless. Though I don't believe that Caleb is unwilling to learn. In fact, he has shown quite initiative, bringing questions from his own classes at his school to review with me during our sessions. This causes my role as

a mentor to Caleb to be even more significant. Not only is Caleb a bright middle schooler, he also does many extracurricular activities which attributes to his fatigue during our lessons.

Caleb's activities include playing the violin in an orchestra, swimming, and much more. In addition, as Caleb lives on the east coast and I live on the west coast so it is difficult to find a proper time to have our sessions. Our current time we have our session goes well into hours where Caleb should be getting ready to go to bed and the bigger problem is Caleb is already fatigued from swimming practice. So to utilize my time with him, I strive to keep the first ten minute of our sessions math free. The usual rundown involves me asking how his day has been and other check-in questions. This lets the session flow and allows for a much smoother experience. One session, we did math Kahoots to turn the problem solving experience to something similar to a game show. It wasn't like our usual sessions of typing and drawing on a digital whiteboard, but it was equally as effective, if not better. When I asked Caleb about topics we covered in the Kahoot, he was more able to remember and solve the problems given to him. It's like my Spanish teacher said, "If something is memorable, it's easier to remember." The bottom line is, math doesn't have to be something you dread or fuss over. Math is everywhere and especially in our advancing society, it's important to know and comprehend the significance of math.

Overall, Caleb has his own issues and I have my own, but I'm starting to learn how to solve and circumvent these issues. Math should be fun, not boring and I yearn for Caleb to think that way too. I hope to continue to find more ways to make math fun. I know the internet has a lot of great teaching sources and I put great amounts of effort into making our sessions a truly efficient time where Caleb can be a math whiz like me and overcome his hassles with math; truly a win-win solution.