These are notes interview from Steve Elsensohn, a teacher with 10 years of experience, 5 of which are with the Boise School district where he’s currently teaching math. Steve is answering questions about what parents can be doing to help their kids transition to learning from home.

**Q. I’m feeling overwhelmed with my child at home. I want them to learn and feel like I’m a bad parent and my son will probably be behind. What should I do?**

It’s normal for good parents to be concerned. The school does a good job at providing resources for kids to work with, and the teachers are still available to answer questions, so you’re not in it by yourself.

**Q. What are some common ways kids can fall behind and what are some resources you’ve already connected them to?**

If you have access to technology, lots of information is available online so kids and parents can reach out to teachers. Many teachers are making videos that are similar to what they would be presenting if they were still in the classroom. Teachers are still able to answer questions from students so parents don’t have to answer them themselves.

**Q. My child loves math but it’s a struggle to get them to do ELA and reading and I’m starting to give in. How do I keep her from falling behind?**

If she already likes math, try to find engineering related reading material so she can learn about things that interest her like architecture, math or finances. Try to find something math related.

**Q. Are there any things you would recommend for kids to read right now?**

Right now, there are lots of options in the New York Times with math or statistics information for people in Junior High and High School.

**Q. How do you feel about Netflix as a teaching tool?**

It depends what they are watching. Another teacher mentioned that for kids who don’t like to write, they watch what they want to watch but then have to write a page about what they watched. So, if they are watching, say, Doctor Seuss, they have to write a page or a paragraph (depending on where the child is). So before they watch another episode they have to turn in the page or paragraph to their parent about what they just watched.

**Q. Is there anything you’re struggling to teach in this new world?**

When technology doesn’t work. Sometimes when people are talking you don’t get the full concept of what they’re saying. When someone is using the chatbox but they don’t have a camera so you can’t see what their reaction is. That’s been one of the tough things for me is not seeing their face and how they’re really feeling. In the classroom I can get a feel of if a kid is understanding or not. It’s really hard by just voice. That’s the thing, looking at their eyes and seeing how they react.

**Q. Is there any ways you’ve been able to compensate for that? Phone, virtual meetings, with other teachers or students?**

I’m happy we live in the time we do because we have all this technology. I can’t imagine being a teacher without the technology we have. So that’s the biggest thing, email. I’ve had at least 200 emails from students in the past 2 weeks. The written word is still an important thing. I’m really grateful that we have email if the video doesn’t work. Also, I can email them videos of me teaching and that seems to be helping.

**Q. Is there an email that comes to mind about something that warms your heart or is a really interesting question that someone asked you?**

An email that really pulled the heartstrings was an email from a student who said they didn’t really have a math question, but they just wanted to say hello. So they talked for a while. Human interaction is something we’ve all been missing. The math is all online, but it’s the human interaction that people aren’t getting any more, which I’m happy to be around when there’s Zoom and we can talk that way.

**Q. A lot of our Bigs are interested in helping their Littles. What are your suggestions in how they can do that?**

Especially for the elementary kids, cooking in the kitchen is a good idea. Using measuring cups, compare 1/3 to 1/5. Cut a carrot into 1/10ths. Cooking is a great activity you can do separately. You can video yourselves and share back and forth. Just be careful with sharp knives.

**Q. Do you have a foolproof recipe you recommend, maybe with minimal knives?**

Cereal is a good one. Measuring the milk in the cereal and the radius and diameter of the bowl. That’s the great thing, math is all around us, you just have to ask the right questions.

**Q. What are some other ideas of math always being around?**

Sports. If a Big is into sports, you can talk about the dimensions of a field. You can time yourself on a run and see if you improve. Exercise is a big one. Watching the news in the morning, people are doing yoga through Zoom. Any exercise class. I just picked up yoga about a year and a half ago, and it’s definitely a great skill to learn.

**Q. Would yoga be something you’d suggest Bigs to do with their Littles, or Littles to do with their families?**

I would for sure. And dancing. Zumba went away a little bit, but I think it’s making a comeback during this time that we’re in.

**Q. Do you have any suggestions for parents to keep their kids busy while they’re stuck at home.**

The biggest thing, I’m sure most parents have chores around the house for kids to do, but educational, the internet is just a big resource. Also, school districts have things laid out for kids to be doing. The reason I know the Zumba thing is that it’s what a P.E. teacher was doing last week. Go check the school district website, the things are free there. There’s so much to do online productively. Or, call someone you haven’t talked to in a long time. I know for me personally, that’s something I’ve been doing. I don’t talk to my grandma that often, but I called her a week ago. Reach out to loved ones and friends. Reconnect to people.

**Q. Do you have suggestions on where people go for yoga classes on line.**

Mine is YouTube. Adrian’s videos are very nice. She has hundreds of videos. Yoga with Adrian.

**Q. What are some of the lessons that a young person can learn from interacting on the phone?**

Listening skills are a big one. I know I like to talk a lot, so actually listening to someone is a big skill to learn. Most people are comfortable talking, but it’s hard to be quiet listen. It’s a good skill to work on as a human. We can all work on listening.

**Q. What is the best place to get information for what info the kids need to have for next year’s school.**

That’s where the teacher comes in big. We’ve had meetings for what comes in when a kid’s in pre-algebra and is going into algebra. We’ve had lots of things about what the most important thing is. That’s what we’re working on for these 6 weeks. These are the things they have to know to be successful next year. So, for parents who are feeling overwhelmed, we’re still here, we’re still figuring out what’s best for students in the future.

**Q. Can you safely say that parents can freely reach out to any of their child’s teachers and have a candid conversation?**

Yeah, I would say that. Again, I’m so happy we’re in this technological world when there’s so many ways to do that. I understand that kids are worried about their kids falling behind, but they’ll be fine next year.

**Q. If you could tell worried parents anything to fill them up with security about how they’re doing, what would you say?**

If you really are worried if you’re kid is falling behind, talk to their teacher. Some parents don’t want to butt in, but that’s a big concern. So just reach out to their teacher. Now’s a good time. We like that.

**Q. Have any of these questions brought up other stories that would bring home the point that you and your fellow teachers are there and ready to communicate.**

I always try to say, what are the positives that are coming out of that. The biggest positives are that a lot of us have time to learn a new skill. If that’s Zoomba or yoga or cooking, or reaching out to loved one. Or learning an instrument. Take this time and find something new to learn about. Or have a conversation and talk to family. Try to find something new.

**Q. Do you think that there will be different expectations for students next year than there have been in the past?**

Yes. We’ve had conversations about that before. We know we’ll have to assess them next year to see where we’re at and do extra review or see what’s fallen through the cracks. So, we’re aware they’re not in class like they normally are. Maybe they will have learned more than we expected because they will have less options and will have to do math.

**Q. Do you know what that assessment will look like?**

It’s an assessment we might give in the first quarter, but now we’ll give it in the first. We know what they need to be successful. They’re not taking an end of quarter assessment, so maybe they’ll do that at the beginning of the year. This would have been the final, so let’s see where you’re at with it. I see teachers using what they would take at the end of the year to see where you’re at.

**Q. When school starts again in the fall, what do you think will be the biggest thing you’ll wish kids would have done when they were out?**

The biggest thing I would say is, I’m hoping they would reaffirm some of the work they would have missed. Quarter 1, 2, 3. If they were falling behind, this is their chance to fill in the gaps. I’m hoping they’re just worrying about the important fundamental concepts. They might actually be more successful next year. Many students have.

**Q. What would be one of the more helpful things a Big can do for a Little outside school work?**

I would say, just piquing their interest in different subjects. Because we are worried as teachers about a Big tutoring, especially if they’re not knowledgeable. They might do more harm. Instead, show them how math is used. Cooking. Measurement. Sports. So, that’s what I would do. Just pique they’re curiosity about math, not teaching it. Just show them it’s around. If you go fishing and the pond has 100 fish and we caught 10. What would be the percentage. Show them that math isn’t just a worksheet, it’s all around us. That’s what I’d say to a Big.

**Q. Are there resources to start those conversations?**

STEM is one. They have a lot of activities they can do. YouTube is a great one. You can just type in “Math.” As a big, I’d go make rockets out of 2 liter bottles. You don’t have to be in person. Zoom would be a great thing. Rockets are a pretty great thing to make with a bottle. It’s just air pressure and water. I’d go to YouTube if my math wasn’t up to par. They’ll walk you through the math of what shooting a rocket off is. That’s the resource I’d use. Do YouTube and do those activities. You don’t need to be in person, you can each have the materials and do it together if you have Zoom or some other technology where you can see each other’s faces. Or you can even just talk over the phone and see if you can do it.

**Q. Have you built a rocket recently and how far did it go?**

I did about 3 years ago and it went about 30 feet. So about 3 basketball hoops.

**Q. If my child had trouble turning in an assignment next week, can they still do it next week.**

That’s a tough question for me because I’m not sure which school district they go to. But at this time most teachers I know are allowing them to turn in whatever they’re capable of doing during these uncertain times. I would say that most teachers would just like the material that the student’s doing, so I would say yes in this time. I know I am.

**Q. Is there anything else you’d like to say to assure Bigs or Littles that things are going to be okay?**

The thing about Big Brothers Big Sisters is it gives them human interaction. I think that’s a big thing. If parents are worried about learning, please reach out to the teacher. They’re more than willing to talk to you. Find something that’s positive. I think that’s something that Big Brothers Big Sisters does. And hopefully we have more 2 liter rockets being shot up.