



Welcome fellow Recovering Traditionalists to Episode 134. Today I'm Wondering: Pencil or Pen in Math Class?

My daughter started Jr. High volleyball this year and I got to help out keeping the scorebook. For anyone who hasn't ever kept the score for a volleyball game, it's done in pen and you do it with two different colors of pen. At a recent game, the score keeper for the opposing team had the [FriXion erasable pens](#) (I have them and love them) and she said she shares them with all the other scorekeepers because we all make mistakes and it's so nice to be able to erase them and keep the book looking clean.

She went on to say that when she was teaching math, she never let the kids use pens. She said that she told her students, *"we all make mistakes, so you need to use a pencil so you can erase them."*

Now, she had no idea who I was, she was just telling me the story and how much she loves the pens. But it brought up something I realized I've never shared on the podcast...I actually LOVE pens in math class. There are some teachers who think pens should be banned from math class, but I actually think pencils should be banned from math class. Every kid should HAVE to use a pen when doing math, and not the erasable kind.

In all honesty, I really don't care if a kid uses a pencil or a pen, but I like what the pen forces kids to do...it forces them to leave the messy.

When we have a pencil it allows us to erase our errors. But errors are a part of the learning process. If a student tried three different ways to solve a problem, but erased them all and the only thing I see when it gets turned in is the final solution and answer I don't get a full picture of their learning.

We can't sit beside every kid to watch how they think about a problem, so asking students to show their thinking and work in pen allows us the chance to go back and see it. Even if they cross it out, we can still see the thinking they were doing along the way.

I will say this was a hard change for me to make. It's hard to allow kids to make a mess on their paper. But this small change is a really big factor in creating the culture in your classroom that mistakes really are okay. Learning is messy and you don't get it right the first time, every time.

So I'm wondering will you give pens a try in your classroom?

Until next week, keep Building Math Minds.

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