



Welcome fellow Recovering Traditionalists to Episode 211:  
Building Number Sense Without Adding to Your Plate

Welcome to Build Math Minds the podcast, where fidelity to your students is greater than fidelity to your textbook. I'm your host, Christina Tondevold, the recovering traditionalist and BuildMathMinds.com Founder, where my mission is to change the way we teach elementary math to our kiddos. Are you ready to start building math minds and not just creating calculators? Let's get started.

Over the past few weeks, we've talked about the 8 foundational number sense concepts, how to integrate them through activities like Number Strings, and how what you say and ask during these activities is what actually builds understanding. If you haven't watched any of those, I'll link them in the description.

And I know what many of you have been thinking through this series of videos: "This all sounds great. I can see how important this is. But I'm already drowning. I have state standards to cover, curriculum pacing guides to follow, assessments to give, and a million other requirements. I can't add ONE MORE THING to my already overflowing plate."

I hear you. I really do and you're right. You can't add one more thing.

But here's what I want you to consider: What if building number sense isn't about ADDING something? What if it's about changing HOW you use the time you already have?

Because here's the truth: Spending time building number sense actually SAVES you time in the long run.

## **SPEND TIME TO SAVE TIME**

Let me explain what I mean by "Spending time building number sense actually SAVES you time in the long run."

When students have strong number sense - when they have the 8 foundational concepts in place - everything else in math becomes easier. And I mean EVERYTHING.

Students with strong number sense learn new concepts faster. They make connections more quickly. They can apply strategies flexibly instead of getting stuck when the numbers change.

And you know what that means for you as a teacher? You spend less time re-teaching. Less time explaining the same concept five different ways. Less time on intervention and remediation. Less time feeling like you're banging your head against a wall wondering why your students just aren't getting it.

I learned this the hard way in my own classroom. But, once I started focusing on building those foundations first, everything changed. Students didn't need me to reteach as much because they actually UNDERSTOOD what was happening with the numbers. They could figure out new problems because they had the conceptual understanding to think flexibly.

So yes, I was spending 10 minutes a day on number sense activities, but I was saving time in the long run.

The time you invest in building number sense compounds. It pays dividends all year long.

To help you with the overwhelm of thinking about adding one more thing to your plate I've got a couple of strategies on HOW to fit this in without adding time.

## THE 1% BETTER APPROACH

A few episodes ago - back in [episode 206](#) - I talked about the concept of making your math instruction just 1% better. The idea is that you don't have to overhaul everything. You don't have to change your entire math block. You just need to focus on ONE small chunk of time - about 4-5 minutes of your day is 1% - and make it about building mathematical thinking.

If you haven't listened to episode 206, I'll link it in the show notes because it's a great foundation for what I'm sharing today. The whole episode is about how changing just 4-5 minutes of your time can make a huge difference for your students.

Take a look at your entire day, not just Math Time and see if there are 5 minutes that you could squeeze in the time to work on the number sense concepts.

## THE "REPLACE, DON'T ADD" STRATEGY

Another way to approach number sense building is Replace, Don't Add. This is about identifying what you can STOP doing and what you can START doing instead.

### What to STOP doing:

Stop giving worksheet warm-ups where students are just practicing procedures in isolation. You know the ones - 20 problems of the same type of calculation, like 20 subtraction problems or 20 multiplication facts. Students solve them independently, you check them, and then you move on to the lesson.

What are students building during this time? The ability to follow a procedure. That's it. They're not developing number sense. They're not seeing relationships. They're not thinking flexibly.

Stop giving rote fact practice that's just drill and kill. Flashcards where students are trying to memorize isolated facts without understanding the relationships between the numbers.

Stop doing calendar time that's just reciting the date and counting the days. If your calendar routine is just "What's today's date? How many days have we been in school? Let's count by ones to 47" - that's not building number sense at that level.

These activities aren't bad. But they're not the best use of your limited time. There is a time and place for them, but I feel like there are so many math activities that we just mindlessly do because it's what's always been done. I want you to stop and reflect about if those are really the best thing for your students at that moment.

### **What to START doing:**

If not, then start doing some Number Strings, Number Talks, or Quick Images - activities that develop multiple number sense concepts simultaneously and require students to think and reason about numbers.

Instead of 20 worksheet problems that students solve independently, have them pick 5 from the worksheet that have some kind of connection. Then talk as a whole group about the relationships, making connections, and building understanding.

Start replacing your rote fact practice with strategic fact practice. Instead of drilling random facts, choose facts that help students see patterns and relationships. Use dot patterns or ten frames that help students subitize and see the number relationships.

Transform your calendar time into number sense building time. Count by different amounts. Start from different numbers. Ask students to visualize that quantity. Make it about developing relationships, not just writing and reciting numbers.

The key here is to not ADD in number sense activities, but take activities you are already doing and replace them with activities that intentionally build number sense.

Same amount of time. Better use of that time.

## **WHERE THESE ACTIVITIES FIT**

Now, the beautiful thing about number sense activities is that they're flexible. They can fit in lots of different places in your day, depending on how your school and classroom are structured.

Some teachers use them as math warm-ups at the beginning of their math block.

Some teachers use them during morning meeting or calendar time.

Some teachers use them as transition activities - you have 5 minutes before lunch, pull out some subitizing cards and do a Quick Images activity.

Some teachers build them into their math centers or station rotations.

The point is, you're not looking for extra time. You're looking at the time you already have and asking, "Could I squeeze a quick number sense activity in here?" or "Where can I replace something with something that builds number sense?"

And here's the thing - once you understand these 8 concepts and what they look like, you start seeing opportunities everywhere. You start realizing, "Oh, I could turn this counting activity into something that builds spatial relationships. I could adjust this center activity to focus on part-part-whole thinking."

You become more intentional about every minute of your math instruction.

Let me share something a teacher who went through the Flexibility Formula course sent to me. This is Linda, a first grade teacher, and here's what she said:

*"I have been doing lots of subitizing activities in the classroom, but I feel as though I haven't been providing my students with enough opportunities to compare and contrast various visual images of number. The visual slides provided in the Flexibility Formula offer a way for me to better integrate spatial reasoning into the experiences of number sense I provide for my students. I carefully choose the spatial reasoning activities so that these experiences help children to build the other three number relationships of one and two more and less, benchmarks of five and ten, and part-part-whole."*

Do you hear what Linda is saying? She was already doing subitizing activities. She was already spending the time. But the course helped her understand how to make those activities more intentional. How to choose activities strategically. How to integrate the concepts together.

She didn't add more time. She made better use of the time she already had.

And that's what's possible for you too.

Imagine it's three months from now. You've been doing 10 minutes of intentional number sense work every day - not as something extra, but as a replacement for activities you were doing before.

Your students are thinking more flexibly. They're seeing relationships between numbers. They're not getting stuck on problems just because the numbers changed. They're actually ENJOYING math because it makes sense to them.

And you? You're spending less time reteaching. Less time frustrated. Less time wondering why they're not getting it. Because they ARE getting it. Because you built the foundation they needed.

That's what's possible when you use your time strategically.

## GO DEEPER WITH PD FROM BUILD MATH MINDS

Now, here's where I want to help you make this shift.

Because understanding that you need to replace activities is one thing. Knowing WHICH activities to use and HOW to facilitate them effectively - that's another thing entirely.

And this is where having a clear system makes all the difference.

I have two options I've created to support you:

### **The 10-Day Number Sense Kickstart (\$19)**

If you're thinking, "I need to start somewhere. I need some actionable things I can try out to get started building number sense," the Kickstart is perfect.

You get 10 days of small tweaks you can do in your classroom to get started. Well it's 10 videos and resources that are meant for you to watch one-a-day but you can binge watch them all as soon as you enroll. In the videos, you get the basics you need to start replacing less effective activities with more intentional number sense work.

This is your quick start. Your way to dip your toes in and make some small changes without a huge investment of time or money.

### **The Flexibility Formula Course (\$97)**

If you're thinking you want to truly transform your math instruction. You want to understand these concepts deeply so you can make strategic decisions about what to do when, then Flexibility Formula course is for you.

In the course, you get:

- Deep understanding of all 8 concepts and what they look like at different developmental levels
- A comprehensive library of activities and resources - like the spatial reasoning slides Linda mentioned in her testimonial
- Assessment tools so you know exactly where each student is in their development
- Support for connecting this work to your required curriculum

The course doesn't tell you exactly when in your day to do these activities - because every school and classroom is different. What it DOES do is help you understand the concepts so well that YOU can make

those decisions. You become the expert in your own classroom. You can look at your schedule and your students' needs and make strategic choices about where and how to integrate this work.

It gives you the knowledge and resources to transform how you teach math, not just hand you a script to follow.

So here's how to choose:

**Choose the 10-Day Kickstart if:**

- You are new to this way of thinking about math
- You want small things to try out in your classroom
- You're looking for the basics to get you moving in the right direction

**Choose the Flexibility Formula course if:**

- You want to deeply understand these concepts so you can make strategic instructional decisions
- You want a comprehensive library of resources and activities to pull from all year long
- You're ready to transform your approach to math instruction so there is a focus on building number sense
- You want assessment tools so you can track student progress and know what to focus on next

Both will help you use your time better. Both will help you replace less effective activities with more intentional number sense work. The question is just how deep you want to go.

**Here's what I want you to do right now:**

First, think about your typical math day. Where are you spending time on activities that aren't building number sense? What could you replace?

Is it your warm-up routine? Your fact practice time? Calendar time? Center activities?

Identify just ONE thing you could replace. One activity that's taking up time but not building these foundational concepts.

Then, decide which option is right for you:

Go to [buildmathminds.com/10Day-kickstart](https://buildmathminds.com/10Day-kickstart) for the 10-Day Number Sense Kickstart if you want to dip your toes in.

Or go to [BuildMathMinds.com/enroll](https://BuildMathMinds.com/enroll) for the Flexibility Formula course if you are ready to dive into building number sense with your students and want the complete system. Remember, there's one for PreK-2nd grade and one for 3rd-5th grade, so choose the right one for your students.

Don't wait until next month or until summer break or until next school year to make this shift. Your students need these foundations now.

Remember, you don't have to find extra time. You just have to make tweaks in the activities you are already doing and in the questions you are asking.

And I can help you do that.

It starts with making one small change. Replacing one activity. Using 5-10 minutes differently.

And if you want support in making that change - if you want the activities, the examples, the resources - I've got you. The Kickstart and the Flexibility Formula are both there, ready for you.

The links are in the show notes at [BuildMathMinds.com/211](https://BuildMathMinds.com/211).

Thank you for joining me for this series on building math fluency. We've covered the 8 foundational concepts, how to integrate them, how to facilitate activities effectively, and how to fit it all in without adding to your plate.

Now it's time to take action. Pick your path - Number Sense Kickstart or Flexibility Formula - and let's get your students thinking flexibly about numbers.

Until next week, my fellow Recovering Traditionalists, keep letting your students explore math, keep questioning, and most importantly, keep Building Math Minds.

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