Crush Fractions with Technology: Show me and I Get it

Gallery Workshop, NCTM Annual Meeting 2013
Denver, Colorado

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A. "Old Math" & Technology

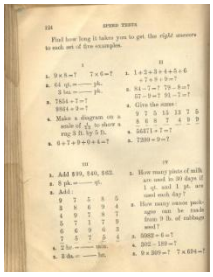
When compulsory, free education for all was first introduced, the mathematical needs of students and future citizens were, compared to today, quite basic.

Workers in factories, shops and offices had few calculating machines available, so most math had to be done by the individual, using mental and written methods.

Discussion Questions:

- What were the ***skills*** and the ***knowledge*** needed by school leavers?
- How have the ***expectations*** which society holds of school leavers' math skills ***changed***?
- What place does ***mathematical understanding*** have in such a learning environment?

B. Technology Changes Classroom Math



How does the introduction of a calculator into a pre-1970 elementary classroom change what happens?

Math curriculum documents have had to change since the 1970s, when handheld calculators first became readily available.

Discussion Questions:

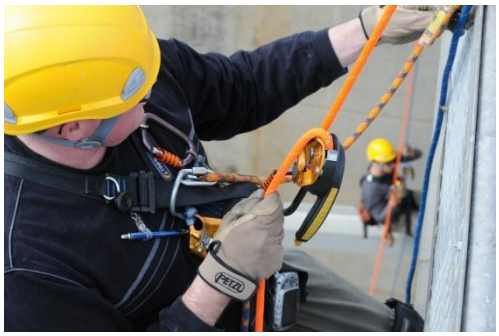
- How can we justify the learning of number facts and written algorithms when a cheap, simple calculator will produce answers faster and more accurately?
- Is it fair to ask students to work out answers in math classes manually, when adults routinely use calculators?
- If we take a "middle position" on when to switch from mental and manual math to electronic methods, what are the criteria we use to evaluate that choice?

C. What Do Students Need Math For Anyway?

Think of the problems facing humankind today.

Think of the possibilities which present themselves.

What might a student in your class achieve in his or her lifetime?



Discussion Questions:

- Which problems will require some level of mathematics to reach a solution?
- How many problems can be solved in routine ways, via “template procedures” learned from a textbook?

D. CCSSM: Grades 3-5 Fractions

Number and Operations—Fractions[1] 3 NF

Develop understanding of fractions as numbers.

1. Understand a fraction $1/b$ as the quantity formed by 1 part when a whole is partitioned into b equal parts; understand a fraction a/b as the quantity formed by a parts of size $1/b$.
2. Understand a fraction as a number on the number line; represent fractions on a number line diagram.
   a. Represent a fraction $1/b$ on a number line diagram by defining the interval from 0 to 1 as the whole and partitioning it into b equal parts. Recognize that each part has size $1/b$ and that the endpoint of the part based at 0 locates the number $1/b$ on the number line.
   b. Represent a fraction a/b on a number line diagram by marking off a lengths $1/b$ from 0. Recognize that the resulting interval has size a/b and that its endpoint locates the number a/b on the number line.
3. Explain equivalence of fractions in special cases, and compare fractions by reasoning about their size.
   a. Understand two fractions as equivalent (equal) if they are the same size, or the same point on a number line.
   b. Recognize and generate simple equivalent fractions, e.g., $1/2 = 2/4$, $4/6 = 2/3$). Explain why the fractions are equivalent, e.g., by using a visual fraction model.
   c. Express whole numbers as fractions, and recognize fractions that are equivalent to whole numbers. *Examples: Express 3 in the form 3 = 3/1; recognize that 6/1 = 6; locate 4/4 and 1 at the same point of a number line diagram.*
   d. Compare two fractions with the same numerator or the same denominator by reasoning about their size. Recognize that comparisons are valid only when the two fractions refer to the same whole. Record the results of comparisons with the symbols >, =, or <, and justify the conclusions, e.g., by using a visual fraction model.

Number and Operations—Fractions[2] 4.NF

Extend understanding of fraction equivalence and ordering.

1. Explain why a fraction a/b is equivalent to a fraction $(n \times a)/(n \times b)$ by using visual fraction models, with attention to how the number and size of the parts differ even though the two fractions themselves are the same size. Use this principle to recognize and generate equivalent fractions.
2. Compare two fractions with different numerators and different denominators, e.g., by creating common denominators or numerators, or by comparing to a benchmark fraction such as 1/2. Recognize that comparisons are valid only when the two fractions refer to the same whole. Record the results of comparisons with symbols >, =, or <, and justify the conclusions, e.g., by using a visual fraction model.

Build fractions from unit fractions by applying and extending previous understandings of operations on whole numbers.

3. Understand a fraction a/b with $a > 1$ as a sum of fractions $1/b$.
   a. Understand addition and subtraction of fractions as joining and separating parts referring to the same whole.
   b. Decompose a fraction into a sum of fractions with the same denominator in more than one way, recording each decomposition by an equation. Justify decompositions, e.g., by using a visual fraction model. *Examples: 3/8 = 1/8 + 1/8 + 1/8 ; 3/8 = 1/8 + 2/8 ; 2 1/8 = 1 + 1 + 1/8 = 8/8 + 8/8 + 1/8.*
   c. Add and subtract mixed numbers with like denominators, e.g., by replacing each mixed number with an equivalent fraction, and/or by using properties of operations and the relationship between addition and subtraction.
   d. Solve word problems involving addition and subtraction of fractions referring to the same whole and having like denominators, e.g., by using visual fraction models and equations to represent the problem.
4. Apply and extend previous understandings of multiplication to multiply a fraction by a whole number.
   a. Understand a fraction a/b as a multiple of $1/b$. *For example, use a visual fraction model to represent 5/4 as the product $5 \times (1/4)$, recording the conclusion by the equation $5/4 = 5 \times (1/4)$.*
   b. Understand a multiple of a/b as a multiple of $1/b$, and use this understanding to multiply a fraction by a whole number. *For example, use a visual fraction model to express $3 \times (2/5)$ as $6 \times (1/5)$, recognizing this product as 6/5. (In general, $n \times (a/b) = (n \times a)/b$.)*
   c. Solve word problems involving multiplication of a fraction by a whole number, e.g., by using visual fraction models and equations to represent the problem. *For example, if each person at a party will eat 3/8 of a pound of roast beef, and there will be 5 people at the party, how many pounds of roast beef will be needed? Between what two whole numbers does your answer lie?*

Understand decimal notation for fractions, and compare decimal fractions.

5. Express a fraction with denominator 10 as an equivalent fraction with denominator 100, and use this technique to add two fractions with respective denominators 10 and 100 [3]. *For example, express 3/10 as 30/100, and add 3/10 + 4/100 = 34/100.*
6. Use decimal notation for fractions with denominators 10 or 100. *For example, rewrite 0.62 as 62/100; describe a length as 0.62 meters; locate 0.62 on a number line diagram.*
7. Compare two decimals to hundredths by reasoning about their size. Recognize that comparisons are valid only when the two decimals refer to the same whole. Record the results of comparisons with the symbols >, =, or <, and justify the conclusions, e.g., by using a visual model.

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[1] Grade 3 expectations in this domain are limited to fractions with denominators 2, 3, 4, 6, and 8.

[2] Grade 4 expectations in this domain are limited to fractions with denominators 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, and 100.

[3] Students who can generate equivalent fractions can develop strategies for adding fractions with unlike denominators in general. But addition and subtraction with unlike denominators in general is not a requirement at this grade.

Number and Operations in Base Ten 5.NBT

Understand the place value system.

1. Recognize that in a multi-digit number, a digit in one place represents 10 times as much as it represents in the place to its right and 1/10 of what it represents in the place to its left.
2. Explain patterns in the number of zeros of the product when multiplying a number by powers of 10, and explain patterns in the placement of the decimal point when a decimal is multiplied or divided by a power of 10. Use whole-number exponents to denote powers of 10.
3. Read, write, and compare decimals to thousandths.
   a. Read and write decimals to thousandths using base-ten numerals, number names, and expanded form, e.g., 347.392 = 3 × 100 + 4 × 10 + 7 × 1 + 3 × (1/10) + 9 × (1/100) + 2 × (1/1000).
   b. Compare two decimals to thousandths based on meanings of the digits in each place, using >, =, and < symbols to record the results of comparisons.
4. Use place value understanding to round decimals to any place.

Perform operations with multi-digit whole numbers and with decimals to hundredths.

5. Fluently multiply multi-digit whole numbers using the standard algorithm.
6. Find whole-number quotients of whole numbers with up to four-digit dividends and two-digit divisors, using strategies based on place value, the properties of operations, and/or the relationship between multiplication and division. Illustrate and explain the calculation by using equations, rectangular arrays, and/or area models.
7. Add, subtract, multiply, and divide decimals to hundredths, using concrete models or drawings and strategies based on place value, properties of operations, and/or the relationship between addition and subtraction; relate the strategy to a written method and explain the reasoning used.

Number and Operations—Fractions 5.NF

Use equivalent fractions as a strategy to add and subtract fractions.

1. Add and subtract fractions with unlike denominators (including mixed numbers) by replacing given fractions with equivalent fractions in such a way as to produce an equivalent sum or difference of fractions with like denominators. *For example, 2/3 + 5/4 = 8/12 + 15/12 = 23/12. (In general, a/b + c/d = (ad + bc)/bd.)*
2. Solve word problems involving addition and subtraction of fractions referring to the same whole, including cases of unlike denominators, e.g., by using visual fraction models or equations to represent the problem. Use benchmark fractions and number sense of fractions to estimate mentally and assess the reasonableness of answers. *For example, recognize an incorrect result 2/5 + 1/2 = 3/7, by observing that 3/7 < 1/2.*

Apply and extend previous understandings of multiplication and division to multiply and divide fractions.

3. Interpret a fraction as division of the numerator by the denominator ($a/b = a \div b$). Solve word problems involving division of whole numbers leading to answers in the form of fractions or mixed numbers, e.g., by using visual fraction models or equations to represent the problem. *For example, interpret 3/4 as the result of dividing 3 by 4, noting that 3/4 multiplied by 4 equals 3, and that when 3 wholes are shared equally among 4 people each person has a share of size 3/4. If 9 people want to share a 50-pound sack of rice equally by weight, how many pounds of rice should each person get? Between what two whole numbers does your answer lie?*
4. Apply and extend previous understandings of multiplication to multiply a fraction or whole number by a fraction.
   a. Interpret the product (a/b) × q as a parts of a partition of q into b equal parts; equivalently, as the result of a sequence of operations $a \times q \div b$. *For example, use a visual fraction model to show (2/3) × 4 = 8/3, and create a story context for this equation. Do the same with (2/3) × (4/5) = 8/15. (In general, (a/b) × (c/d) = ac/bd.)*
   b. Find the area of a rectangle with fractional side lengths by tiling it with unit squares of the appropriate unit fraction side lengths, and show that the area is the same as would be found by multiplying the side lengths. Multiply fractional side lengths to find areas of rectangles, and represent fraction products as rectangular areas.
5. Interpret multiplication as scaling (resizing), by:
   a. Comparing the size of a product to the size of one factor on the basis of the size of the other factor, without performing the indicated multiplication.
   b. Explaining why multiplying a given number by a fraction greater than 1 results in a product greater than the given number (recognizing multiplication by whole numbers greater than 1 as a familiar case); explaining why multiplying a given number by a fraction less than 1 results in a product smaller than the given number; and relating the principle of fraction equivalence $a/b = (n \times a)/(n \times b)$ to the effect of multiplying a/b by 1.
6. Solve real world problems involving multiplication of fractions and mixed numbers, e.g., by using visual fraction models or equations to represent the problem.
7. Apply and extend previous understandings of division to divide unit fractions by whole numbers and whole numbers by unit fractions[4].
   a. Interpret division of a unit fraction by a non-zero whole number, and compute such quotients. *For example, create a story context for (1/3) ÷ 4, and use a visual fraction model to show the quotient. Use the relationship between multiplication and division to explain that (1/3) ÷ 4 = 1/12 because (1/12) × 4 = 1/3.*
   b. Interpret division of a whole number by a unit fraction, and compute such quotients. *For example, create a story context for 4 ÷ (1/5), and use a visual fraction model to show the quotient. Use the relationship between multiplication and division to explain that 4 ÷ (1/5) = 20 because 20 × (1/5) = 4.*

[4] Students able to multiply fractions in general can develop strategies to divide fractions in general, by reasoning about the relationship between multiplication and division. But division of a fraction by a fraction is not a requirement at this grade.

c. Solve real world problems involving division of unit fractions by non-zero whole numbers and division of whole numbers by unit fractions, e.g., by using visual fraction models and equations to represent the problem. *For example, how much chocolate will each person get if 3 people share 1/2 lb of chocolate equally? How many 1/3-cup servings are in 2 cups of raisins?*

Discussion Questions:

- How different is CCSSM to your previous state or school curriculum, or textbook?
- CCSSM is notable in the rigor of its mathematical descriptions of learning. Select a statement about students' learning of fractions. How can you use visual models to support students' learning?
- How much teacher autonomy, authority and professional ownership of the teaching/learning contract is required or permitted under CCSSM?
- How well are textbook authors and publishers capturing the letter and the spirit of the CCSSM?

E. Common Fractions, Decimal Fractions, Percentages and Ratios

Fractions are all around us. Fractions provide ways to measure and manipulate non-discrete quantities, or parts of whole amounts.
Fractions exist in four basic types:

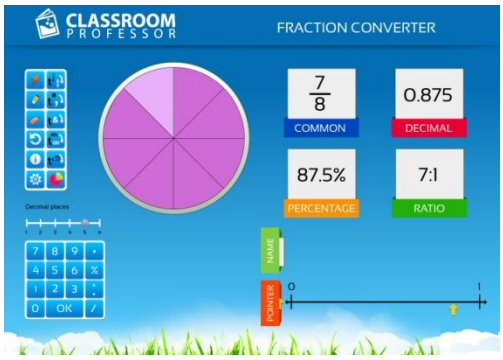
- Common
- Decimal
- Percent
- Ratio

Each type of fraction is used according to very versatile, simply-defined rules of notation.
It is important to help students to recognize that these four types are variations on a single idea.

Discussion Questions:

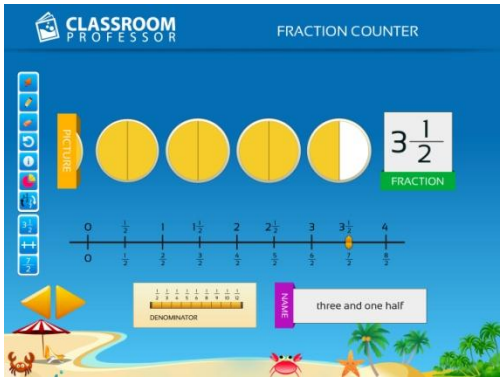
- Do students generally see the four types of fractions as "variations on a theme"?
- How can we best help them make the necessary connections between them?
- CCSSM repeatedly refer to "visual models"; how do these help students to understand fractions at the conceptual level?

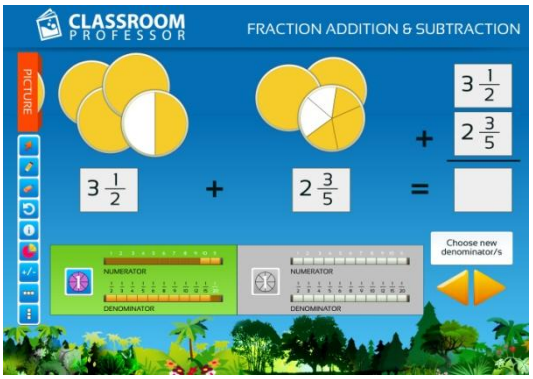
F. Technology for Teaching Fractions



Since the aim of good mathematics education is to develop ***conceptual understanding*** rather than *symbol manipulation* or "answer finding", it is important to use pedagogical methods and resources that support this development.

Good textbooks and well-designed software can fill this role, but must be supported by excellent teaching to focus students' attention on the thinking that is needed, and to avoid leaving them to find ways to "game the system".





Discussion Questions:

- What advantages are there in using computer-based technology, rather than physical resources such as worksheets and cut out shapes, to teach fractions?
- To what extent does excellent teaching rely on having the right resources in the classroom?
- What risks are there in assuming that the adopted textbook or electronic resource is based on sound pedagogy and will result in learning if used according to the manufacturer's or publisher's instructions?

Picture References

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