

# Re: Abolish Fractions?

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On 2008-01-31, Bill Dubuque <[wgd@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx](mailto:wgd@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx)> wrote:

But such ratios and proportions can just as easily be expressed in terms of decimal fractions for the purposes of the layperson.

How many decimal places do you want for  $1/3$ ?

I do see part of the point. There's a reason why virtually no programming languages make any provision for dealing with rationals. For practical purposes, integers suffice for almost all computations that must be exact, and there are decimals (well, bicimals) for the rest.

In fact I suspect most readers will have a hard time thinking of any real-word problem that requires integral fractions as opposed to decimal fractions.

Yeah, most of the examples I could come up with could be eliminated by a very simple rewording of the problem. Almost all of the remainder were cases where using fractions would be misleadingly exact anyway.

Perhaps DeTurck is proposing that one should delay the teaching of integral fractions until the student has sufficient background to appreciate some of these finer points, esp. if there is no other need to introduce them earlier.

The only practical (rather than pedagogical) advantage I see is that fractions sometimes allow exact computation whereas decimals are almost always inexact.

I haven't read DeTurck's proposal at all, but I think introducing fractions along with other symbolic math concepts (e.g. basic algebra)

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would be quite reasonable. Then again I think at least some parts of symbolic math could and should be introduced a lot earlier than they are.

– Tim

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