UNPACKING FRACTIONS

Classroom-Tested Strategies to Build Students' Mathematical Understanding

Foreword by Gail Burrill	xi
Introduction: The Challenge of Fractions	1
Appreciate the Fraction Challenge	3
From Natural Numbers to Real Numbers	3
A Word on the Word Fraction	6
Cognitive Shifts to Consider	7
The Rush to Algorithms	10
What Can You Expect from This Book?	12
Chapter 1: Convey the Many Meanings of $\frac{a}{b}$	15
Roberto's Story	16
Recognizing Misconceptions	21
Limited Ideas About the Meaning of a Fraction	21
Difficulty Conceptualizing a Fraction as a Single Number	22
Unpacking the Mathematical Thinking	23
The Part-Whole Meaning of $\frac{a}{b}$	23
The Measure Meaning of $\frac{a}{b}$	27
The Quotient Meaning of $\frac{a}{b}$	31
The Ratio Meaning of $\frac{a}{b}$	37
The Multiplicative Operator Meaning of $\frac{a}{b}$	39
The Rational Number Meaning of $\frac{a}{b}$	
Embodied by the Number Line	43
Targeting Misconceptions with Challenging Problems	44

Chapter 2: Use Visual and Tactile Models	49
Maya's Story	50
Beyond Misconceptions of Fractions	51
Limited Repertoire of Fraction Models	52
Lack of Connectedness Among Models	53
Unpacking the Mathematical Thinking	56
Continuous Models	56
Discrete Models	60
Discussing and Connecting Models	61
Targeting Misconceptions with Challenging Problems	64
Maya's Story, Part 2	69
Recognizing Misconceptions	70
The Parts Need Not Be Equal	70
The Parts Must Be Clearly Delineated	70
The Parts Must Have the Same Shape	70
The Shaded Regions Must Be Grouped into One Part	71
Unpacking the Mathematical Thinking	71
The Importance of Equal Parts	71
Area, Not Shape, Is the Focus	72
Targeting Misconceptions with Challenging Problems	73
Maya's Story: Epilogue	77
Chapter 3: Focus on the Unit	79
Ed's Story	80
Recognizing Misconceptions	83
The Whole Is Made of One Piece	83
A Fraction Is Smaller Than the Whole, the Unit, or the "1"	83
Difficulty Conceiving of or Writing Fractions Greater Than 1	84
Limited Experience with Non-continuous Units	84
Unpacking the Mathematical Thinking	85
The Unit Is Defining	88
Working with a Variety of Units	88
Revisiting the Partition and Iteration Process	90
Targeting Misconceptions with Challenging Problems	92
Two Vignettes	99
Linda's Story	99
Jason's Story	100
Recognizing Misconceptions	101

Difficulty Going from Part to Whole	101
Difficulty Discriminating Between What Is Relevant	
and What Is Not	101
Unpacking the Mathematical Thinking	102
A Fraction Is a Relation Between Two Quantities	102
Proceeding from Part to Whole	102
Infusing Problems with Distractors: Trapping	
or Stimulating Students?	103
Targeting Misconceptions with Challenging Problems	104
A Final Note	111
Chapter 4: Teach the Concept of Equivalence (Not Just the Rule)	112
Lisa's Story	114
Recognizing Misconceptions	116
Different Fraction Names for the Same Quantity or Number	117
Overreliance on Physical Models (3rd Grade and Up)	117
Difficulty with Discrete Quantities (3rd Grade and Up)	118
Limited Concept of the Equals Sign (4th Grade and Up)	119
Rote Application of $\frac{a}{b} = \frac{(n \times a)}{(n \times b)}$ (4th Grade and Up)	120
The Misuse of Language (All Grades)	120
A Partial View of the EFA (5th Grade and Up)	122
Additive Thinking	123
Unpacking the Mathematical Thinking	123
Build on Students' Informal Experiences with Equivalence	124
Cultivate the Equivalence Meaning of Equality	127
Explain Equivalence by Connecting Fractions	
to Multiplication and Division	130
Begin with Equal-Sharing Problem Situations	131
Model Equivalence Using Different Interpretations of Fractions	133
Be Mindful That Models Lead to Concept Building	141
Targeting Misconceptions with Challenging Problems	142
Targeting Misconceptions with chanenging i roblems	142
Chapter 5: Compare and Order Fractions Meaningfully	148
Nicole's Story	149
Recognizing Misconceptions	154
Overreliance on Ready-Made Models	154
Difficulty Comparing Fractions Without	
the Common Algorithm	155

Lack of Attention to the Unit	156
Inappropriate Whole-Number Reasoning	157
Predominance of Additive Thinking	158
Unpacking the Mathematical Thinking	161
Using Models	162
Reasoning with Unit Fractions	163
Using the Concept of Equivalence (Common Denominators	
or Numerators)	164
Comparing to Benchmarks	165
Using Multiplicative Thinking	166
Noticing Patterns	167
Looking Ahead: Visualizing the "Cross-Product" Method	170
Targeting Misconceptions with Challenging Problems	171
Chapter 6: Let Algorithms Emerge Naturally	177
Vignette 1: Division of a Whole Number by a Fraction	179
Vignette 2: Multiplication of a Whole Number by a Fraction	183
Recognizing Misconceptions	185
Difficulty Seeing Fractions as Numbers	185
Rote or Incorrect Application of Algorithms	186
Knowing Fractions Means Knowing the Algorithms	186
Lack of Fraction Operation Sense	187
False Beliefs About the Effects of Operations on Numbers	
or Quantities	187
Lack of Attention to the Unit	188
Unpacking the Mathematical Thinking	188
Begin with Problem Situations That Students Can Tackle	188
Allow Students to Devise Their Own Algorithms	190
Revisit Meanings of Addition and Subtraction	198
Revisit Meanings of Multiplication and Division	201
Emphasize That Relationships and Properties Still Hold	208
Highlight Important Changes in Ways of Thinking	210
Targeting Misconceptions with Challenging Problems	214
Chapter 7: Connect Fractions and Decimals	221
Denis's Story	223
Recognizing Misconceptions	227
Scarce Contact with Decimals in Daily Life	227
Lack of Connectedness Between Fractions and Decimals	228

Difficulty with Symbol Meaning	229
Overreliance on the Money Model	230
Poor Understanding of Decimal Magnitude	231
Rote or Incorrect Application of Decimal Algorithms	233
Unpacking the Mathematical Thinking	234
Extending Place Value to Tenths and Hundredths	234
The Models We Use Are Important	235
Comparing Decimals Meaningfully	238
Importance of the Unit	242
Sensing Approximate Values	242
Making Sense of Operations	244
Targeting Misconceptions with Challenging Problems	248
Conclusion: Moving from Rote to Reason	255
Foster These Seven Habits of Mind	255
Teach Meanings First, Algorithms Last	260
Look Ahead to Ratios, Proportions, Proportional Relations,	0.00
and Linear Functions	262
From Fractions to Ratios	262
From Ratios to Proportions	265
From Proportions to Proportional Relationships	266
From Proportional Relationships to Linear Functions	267
Concluding Thoughts	269
References	270
Index	273
About the Author	283