ALGEBRA FOR TEACHING

Some Recommendations for Teacher Preparation

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OUTLINE

IN A TYPICAL DAY...

- Algebra in algebra class
- Algebra in non-algebra classes
- Algebra outside of class

2 Some Recommendations

- For Abstract Algebra
- For Linear Algebra
- For Number Theory
- For Other Things





Some Recommendations

Conclusion

• Is
$$\frac{x^2-3x}{x^2-9}$$
 the same as $\frac{x}{x+3}$?



Some Recommendations

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- If a polynomial doesn't factor over Z, can it factor over Q? (McCallum)

In a	Typical	Day.	
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 Why can't you trisect a 60° angle with a straightedge and compass?

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5.01388 cm²

50.1387 cm²

PROFESSIONAL USES OF ALGEBRA

The class is using calculators and estimation to get decimal approximations to $\sqrt{5}$. One student looks at how you do out long multiplication and realizes that none of these decimals would ever work, because if you square a finite (non-integer) decimal, there'll be a digit to the right of the decimal point. So you can't ever get an integer. She deduces that that $\sqrt{5}$ can't be rational.

- adapted from "A Dialogue About Teaching" in *What's Happening in Math Class?* Teacher's College Press.



PROFESSIONAL USES OF ALGEBRA

Nine year old David, experimenting with numbers, conjectures that, if the period for the decimal expansion of $\frac{1}{n}$ is n - 1, then n is prime.

- Adapted from a Reader Reflection by Walt Levisee in the *Mathematics Teacher* (March, 1997).

Speaking of decimals, how would you characterize the "unit fractions" $\frac{1}{n}$ that have terminating decimal expansions? What can you say about the periods of the repeating ones?



PROFESSIONAL USES OF ALGEBRA

How can you help your students understand the "multiplication rule" for complex numbers?

$$|zw| = |z| |w|$$
 and $\operatorname{Arg}(zw) = \operatorname{Arg}(z) + \operatorname{Arg}(w)$





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What if they don't know any trig?



PROFESSIONAL USES OF ALGEBRA

How can you generate "nice" problems, for example:



How big is $\angle Q$?



Some Recommendations

Conclusion

PROFESSIONAL USES OF ALGEBRA

Or. . .



Find the zeros, extrema, and inflection points





Conclusion

SUGGESTIONS FOR ABSTRACT ALGEBRA

Instill a sense that algebraic objects are open to experiment

• Start with rings, fields, and polynomials-not groups



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 - the theory of SE and compass constructibility



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Some Recommendations

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SUGGESTIONS FOR LINEAR ALGEBRA

Help students develop a knack for reasoning by linearity


In a Typical Day...

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$$(*) \begin{cases} 3x + 5y - 7z + w &= 2\\ 4x - 5y + 10z - w &= 8\\ 6x - 5y + 3z + 2w &= 6 \end{cases}$$



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- Exploit matrix algebra as a formal "bookkeeping" tool...
 - in adjacency and scheduling problems
 - as tools for solving recurrence equations
- Make connections among eigenvalues, geometry, and algebra

In a Typical Day...

SUGGESTIONS FOR NUMBER THEORY



Let general results evolve from numerical experiments

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- Talk to Glenn Stevens



In a Typical Day...

Conclusion

SUGGESTIONS FOR OTHER THINGS



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Encourage reasoning about calculations and operations

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- Chebyshev polynomials bring coherence to trig addition formulas

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In a Typical Day...

Some Recommendations

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Some Recommendations

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Algebra and algebraic reasoning around topics in the undergraduate mathematics curriculum can help prospective teachers enter the profession with a coherent view of secondary mathematics.

But this doesn't come for free. Explicit connections to the daily work of high school teaching should be a part of every undergraduate course.



Some Recommendations

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This doesn't mean developing courses in high school mathematics from an "advanced" perspective. It means developing courses that develop the content and methods of undergraduate mathematics while taking seriously the profession-specific needs of high school teachers.



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Conjecture: Such courses would benefit *all* mathematics majors, not just prospective teachers.





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