Parallelism for Primary Schools

Overview

This exercise aims to teach children a quick introduction to parallelism/Amdahl’s law, a law that helps define the overall speedup of an algorithm/process by parallelising parts of the process. The formula can be given as 1/1-f, where f is the fraction of the program that has been sped up. In practice, Amdahl’s law provides an estimate of the overall speed at which the algorithm can be executed.

Suitable For

This is the version of the exercise that is suitable for primary school children, roughly age 8 and up.

Key Concepts

Amdahl’s law, parallelisation, speedup, multi-core architecture

Learning Intentions

* I can understand how parallelisation is an important factor in speeding up a program
* I can explain the need for multiple cores when computing.

How are you learning – recipe to complete the task

* Remember that more cores equal a faster execution
* Find parallelizable parts of code

Time Required

1 period - 1 hour

Preparation

Print out the items given in the pack, one of each.

Prior Learning Assumed

None – new topic

Outline of Activity

1. Outline that say for example you want to want to put in several fence posts into a construction site. One man might take 60 minutes to put in these posts, and that this is like giving one core all the work to do. It’s going to be really really slow and difficult to do.
2. Ask the class for any feedback on what they might do instead? Some options might be:
   1. Get more men involved to share out the task
   2. Put in less posts - we need these posts to exist!
3. Suggest that the concept of getting more men involved to share out the task is correct - this idea is called parallelism.
4. Cut up the ‘posts.docx’ piece of paper up on the board into its multiple people, and show that over time along the bottom the time taken gets shorter and shorter.
5. Explain why parallelism is important - suggest maybe it is unfair to let one man do all the work as it is slower and more difficult to manage.
6. Then bring out the second board, the computer board. Explain that this is exactly how computers work, with each person representing a different ‘core’ in a processor, which is like a little brain inside the computer.
7. Explain and finish by stating that it is important for computers to share out the work in order to complete it quicker.