

# **Graph-Based Modelling of Students' Interaction Data from Exploratory Learning Environments**

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# The Problem

- Much research focuses on interactive educational applications that encourage students' open-ended experimentation within a knowledge domain
- For students to benefit from interaction with such *Exploratory Learning Environments* (ELEs) there is a need for explicit pedagogical support to be provided
- Has led to research in intelligent techniques for providing *personalised, adaptive support* to students, to foster their productive interaction with ELEs
- Data gathered from students' interactions in ELEs has the potential to help pedagogical experts understand how students are interacting with the system, and technical experts to develop enhanced intelligent support features

# The Problem

- However, log files from ELEs can contain large quantities of data, making their interpretation difficult and costly
- Also, it is not possible to always know in advance what data are relevant for analytical purposes, therefore an exploratory analysis of the data gathered may be needed
- In this paper we consider how modelling student-system interaction data as a graph makes possible graph-based queries and analyses that can provide insights into the ways that students are using the affordances of the ELE, and the effects of system interventions on students' behaviour
- Our ultimate aim is to feed back this understanding into improving the design of the ELE and its intelligent support
- Two case studies: eXpresser and FractionsLab

# eXpresser microworld

File Activities Edit

Page 1

My World

World Colouring Rule

$$5 \times \text{reds } 4 + 3$$

Properties

reds

4 × E

2 →

0 ↓

How many tiles?

5 × reds 4

# student feedback: a nudge...

The screenshot shows a software interface for a math model. At the top, there is a header "My Model" with a color palette (red, green, blue, yellow) and a numerical input field containing "35". A green play button and zoom controls are also present. The main workspace is a grid with a pattern of six green vertical bars. A "Properties" dialog box is open, showing a "Make" tab and a "Place" tab. The "Make" tab has a "How many tiles?" input field with the value "6" circled in blue. An orange arrow points from a yellow feedback box to this "6". The feedback box contains the text: "Would the pattern be coloured if you changed the number of building blocks?" and an "OK" button. Another "Properties" dialog box is visible in the background, showing a value of "5". At the bottom, there is a "Model Rule" section with a folder icon and a question mark, a progress bar, and a "Help" button.

an unsolicited prompt...

The screenshot shows a software interface for learning multiplication. At the top, a toolbar includes the text "My Model", a row of four colored squares (red, green, blue, yellow), a box containing the number "20", a green play button, and zoom-in/out icons. The main workspace is a grid with four green vertical bars. A yellow callout box with the text "This is correct. But use a general rule to show the link between these numbers." and an "OK" button is positioned over the bars. Below the bars, a "Properties" window displays the equation  $5 \times \square = 20$ . A smaller window titled "How many tiles?" shows a multiplication problem  $4 \times \square = 20$  with a blue circle around the number "20" and an arrow pointing to the callout. At the bottom, there is a "Model Rule" section with a folder icon and a question mark, a "See previous" button with a hand icon, a progress bar, and a "Help" button.

# feedback after a student's explicit request for help...

The screenshot shows a software interface for a learning environment. At the top, there is a toolbar with a play button and a help icon. Below the toolbar, a yellow dialog box contains the text: "Check the number of tiles in your **building block**. How many building blocks do you have? What's the rule needed here?" with "OK" and "More help..." buttons. Two red arrows point from the "More help..." button to two "Properties" windows. The first "Properties" window has a "Make" tab and shows a "3" tile multiplied by a stack of three dots, with the question "How many tiles?" and a "9" tile next to a stack of three red tiles. The second "Properties" window has a "Place" tab and shows a "2" tile multiplied by a red tile. At the bottom, there is a "Model Rule" section with a question mark icon, a dropdown menu showing "I am trying to", another dropdown menu showing "colour", a third dropdown menu showing "the patterns in My Model.", and a "Help" button. A "See previous" button with a lightbulb icon is also visible in the bottom left corner.



# FractionsLab microworld

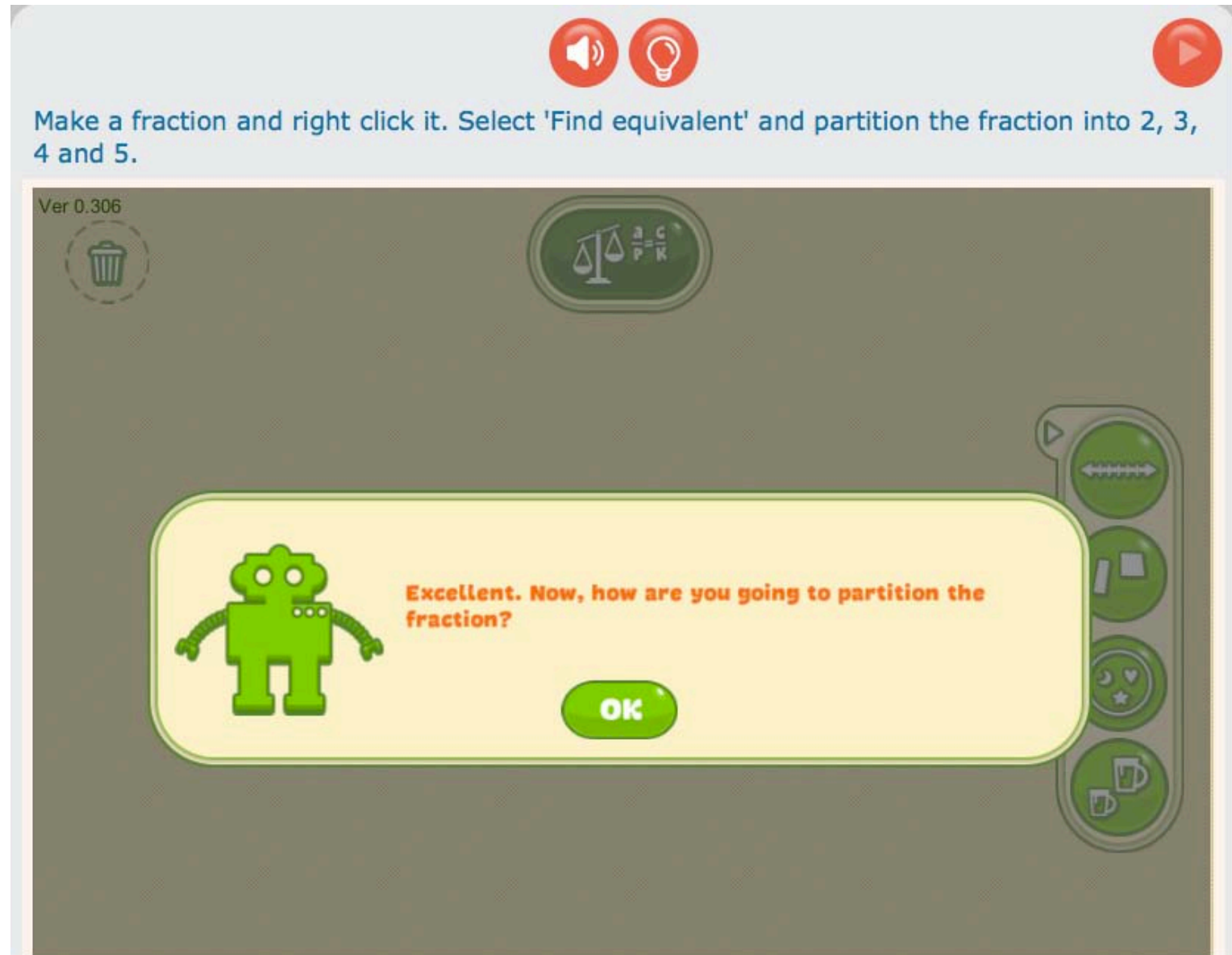
Make a fraction and right click it. Select 'Find equivalent' and partition the fraction into 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Ver 0.306

$\frac{1}{3}$



# Low-interruption feedback



Make a fraction and right click it. Select 'Find equivalent' and partition the fraction into 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Ver 0.306

Excellent. Now, how are you going to partition the fraction?

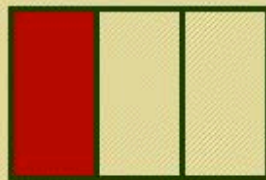
OK

The interface includes a top bar with a speaker icon, a lightbulb icon, and a play button. A central area contains a trash can icon, a scale icon with the equation  $\frac{a}{p} = \frac{c}{k}$ , and a vertical toolbar with icons for zooming, erasing, and other functions.

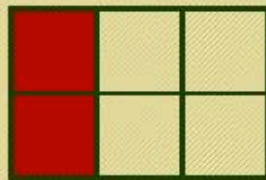


Make a fraction and right click it. Select 'Find equivalent' and partition the fraction into 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Ver 0.306



$$\frac{1}{3}$$

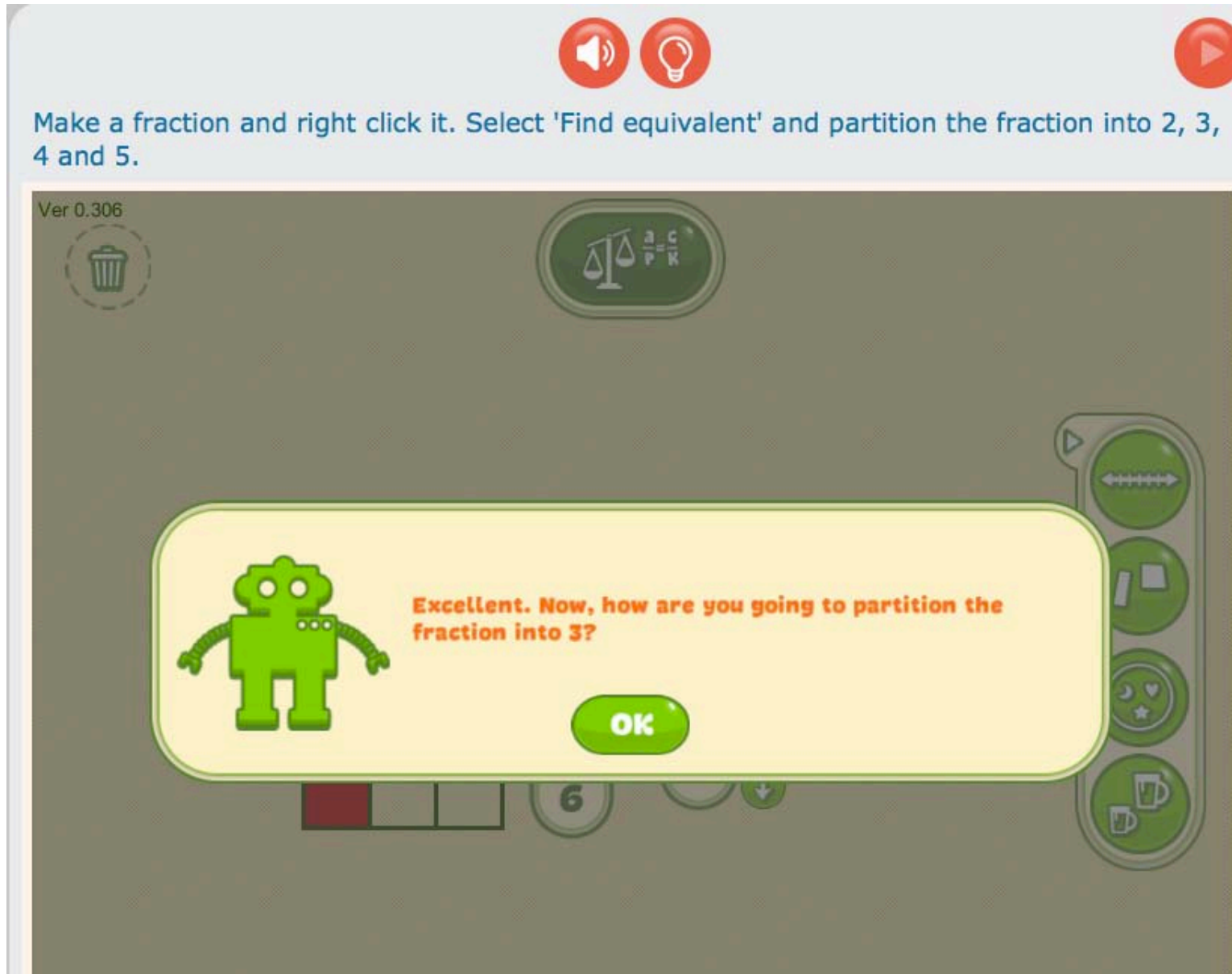


$$\frac{2}{6}$$

$$\frac{2}{2}$$



# High-interruption feedback



Make a fraction and right click it. Select 'Find equivalent' and partition the fraction into 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Ver 0.306

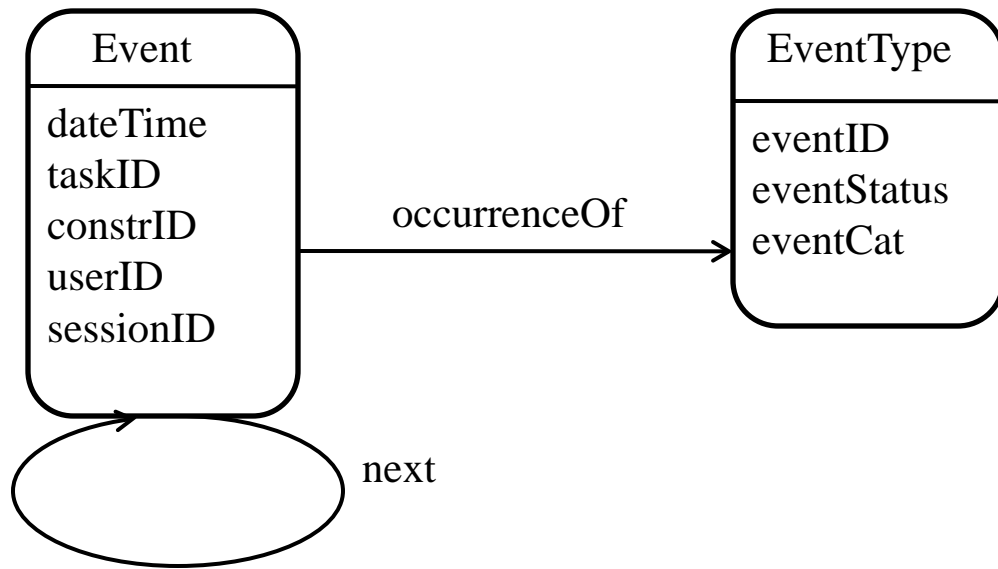
Excellent. Now, how are you going to partition the fraction into 3?

OK

The screenshot shows a software interface for a math application. At the top, there are three red circular icons: a speaker, a lightbulb, and a play button. Below them is a blue instruction text. The main area is a dark grey workspace with a trash can icon, a scale icon with the formula  $\frac{a}{b} = \frac{c}{x}$ , and a vertical toolbar on the right with various icons. A yellow dialog box with a green robot icon and an 'OK' button is overlaid on the workspace.

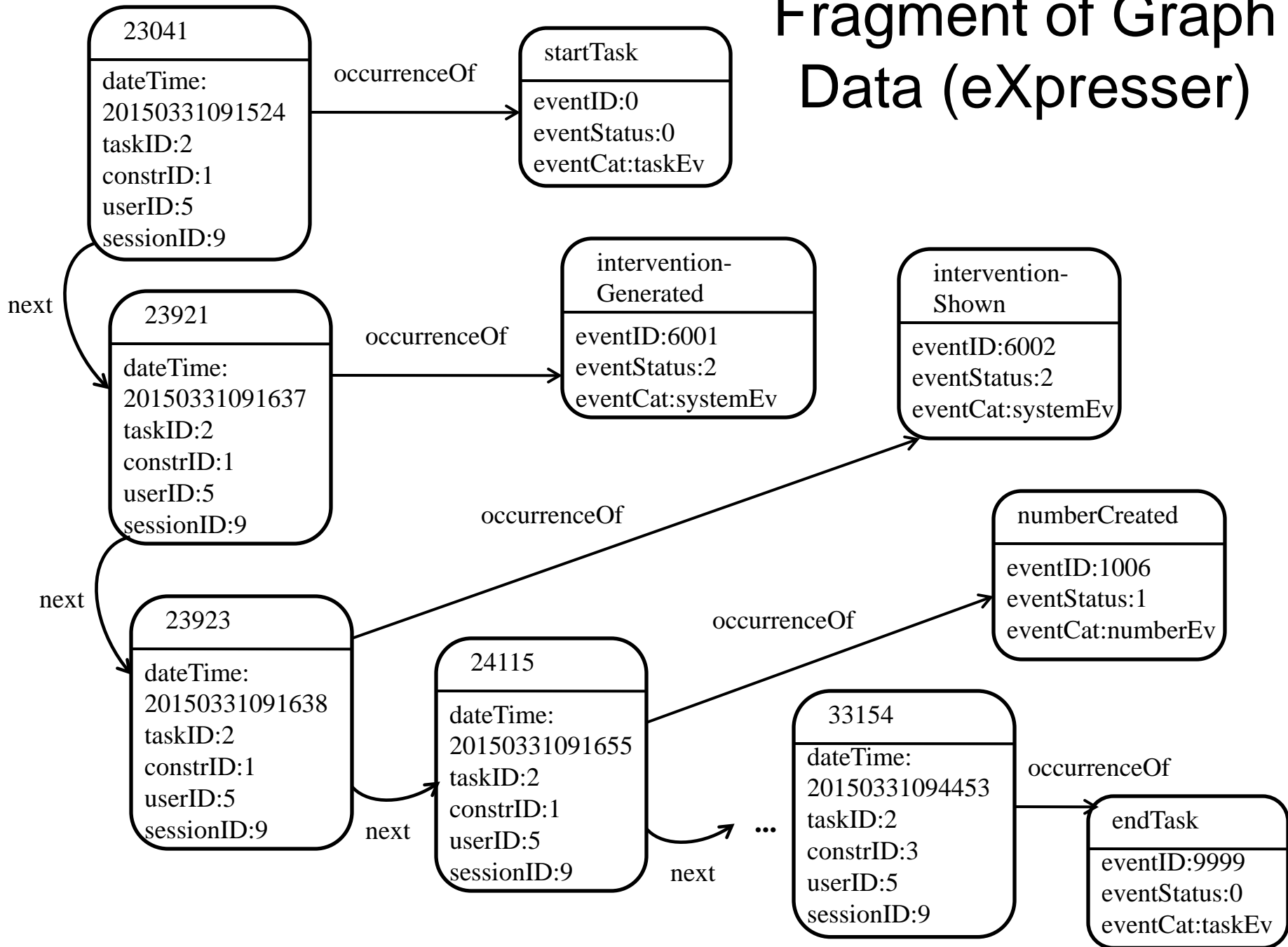
## The data gathered

- Event-based data:
  - Students' interactions with the ELE
  - Occurrence of key *indicators* as students interact with the ELE
  - Provision of feedback by the ELE to students
- Students' constructions:
  - including history of development of these
- Task information: learning goals, solution approaches
- Students' learner models

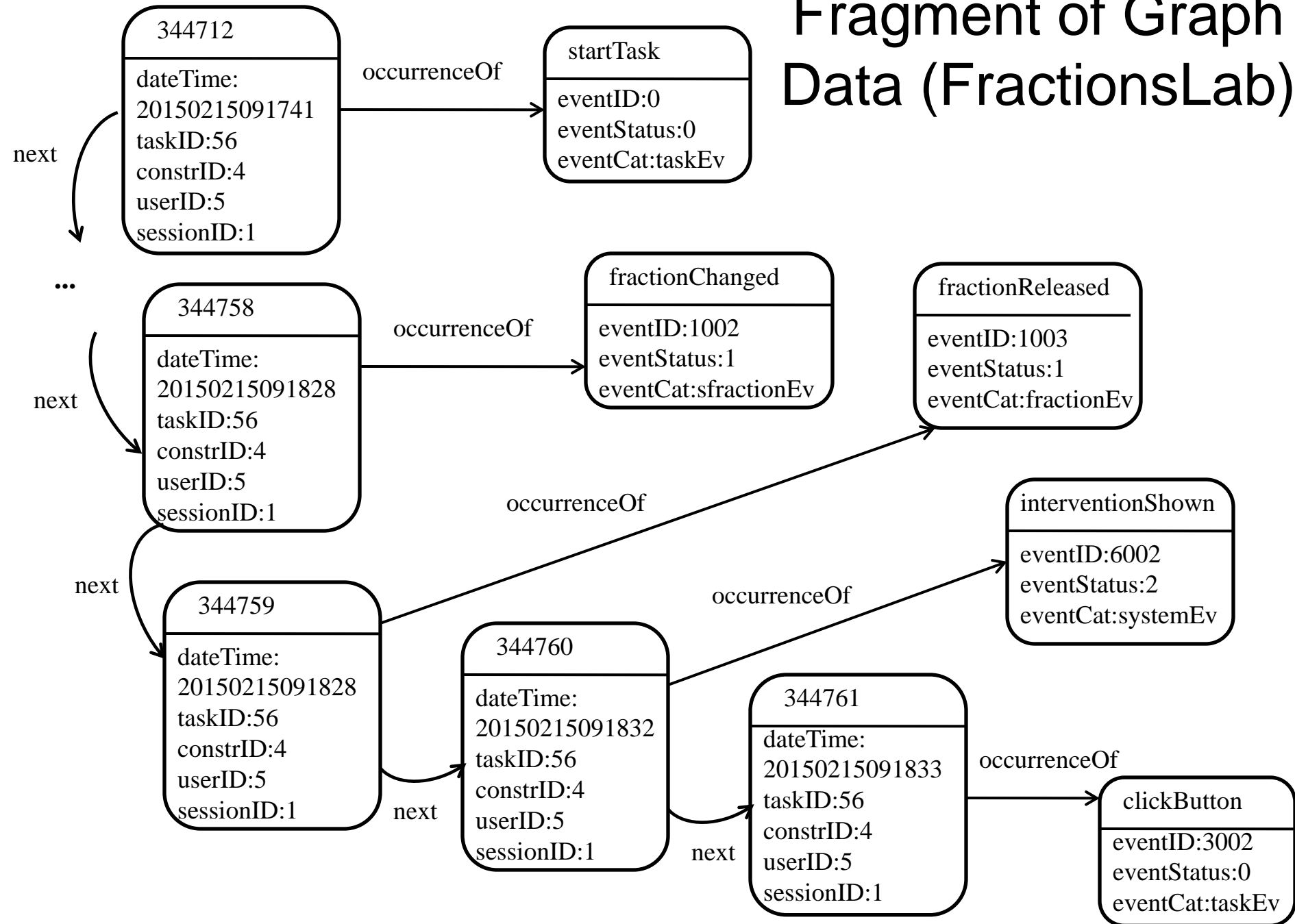


## Core Graph Data Model

# Fragment of Graph Data (eXpresser)



# Fragment of Graph Data (FractionsLab)





## Some Exploratory Queries

(?X,?Y,?Z) <- (?X, occurrenceOf, interventionShown),  
                  (?X, next, ?Y),  
                  (?Y, occurrenceOf, ?Z)

allows researchers to see types of events directly follow the display of an intervention message; allows confirmation/contradiction of their expectations regarding the immediate effect of intervention messages on students' behaviours

(?X,?Y,?Z) <- (?X, occurrenceOf, interventionShown),  
                  (?X, next+, ?Y),  
                  (?Y, occurrenceOf, ?Z)

allows researchers to see types of events directly *or indirectly* follow the display of an intervention message; allows confirmation/contradiction of expectations regarding longer-term effects of intervention messages on students' behaviours

## Some Exploratory Queries

modify the query to retain only pairs X, Y that relate to the same construction:

```
(?X,?Y,?Z) <- (?X, occurrenceOf, interventionShown),  
              (?X, constrID, ?C), (?X, next+, ?Y),  
              (?Y, constrID, ?C), (?Y, occurrenceOf, ?Z)
```

use a *path variable* to return the matched paths through the data as well:

```
(?X,?P, ?Y,?Z) <- (?X, occurrenceOf, interventionShown),  
                 (?X, constrID, ?C), (?X, next+ : ?P, ?Y),  
                 (?Y, constrID, ?C), (?Y, occurrenceOf, ?Z)
```

use *approximate matching* to return increasingly longer paths to the user:

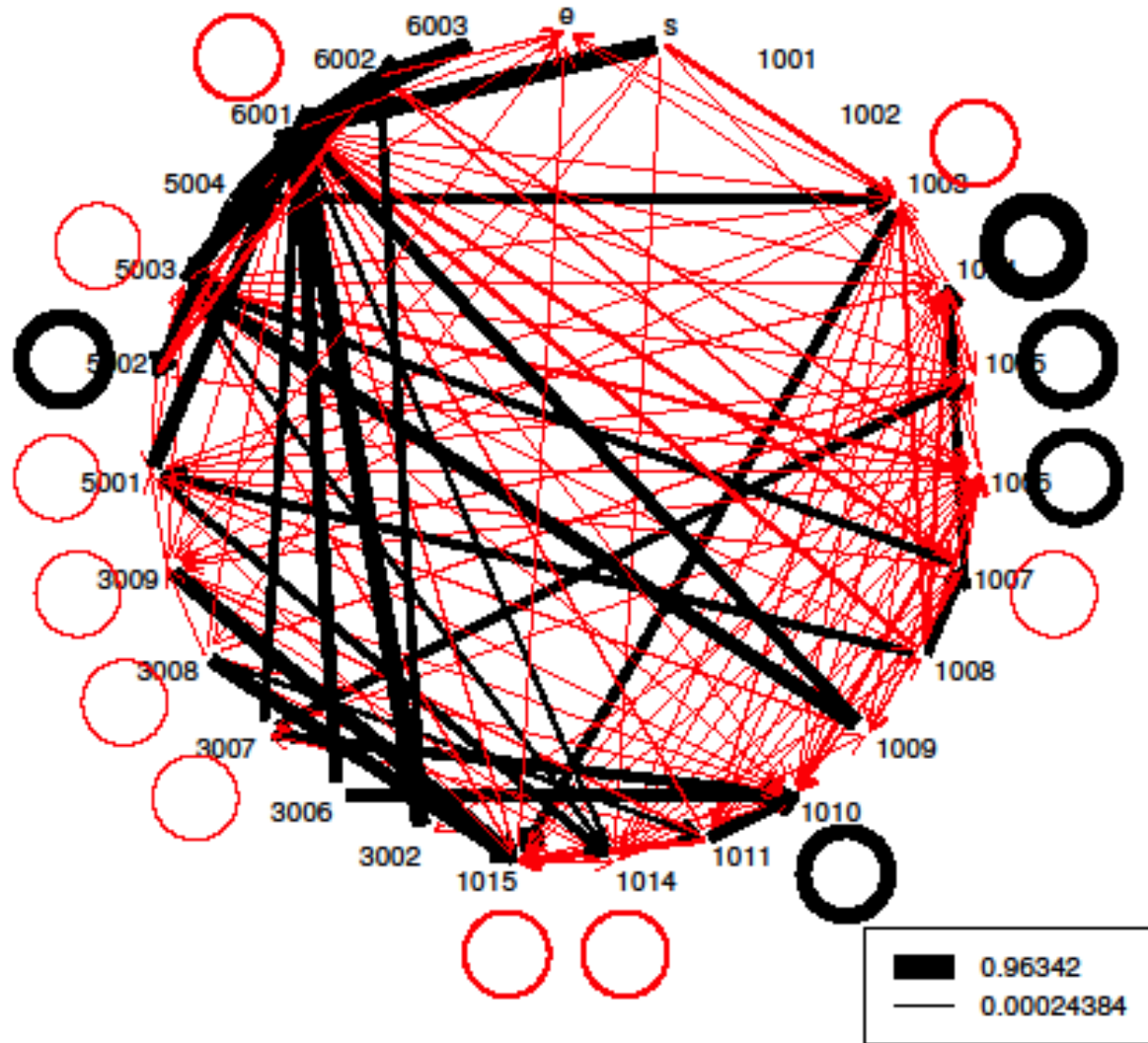
```
(?X,?P, ?Y,?Z) <- (?X, occurrenceOf, interventionShown),  
                 (?X, constrID, ?C), APPROX (?X, next : ?P, ?Y),  
                 (?Y, constrID, ?C), (?Y, occurrenceOf, ?Z)
```

# Possible Graph Structure Analyses

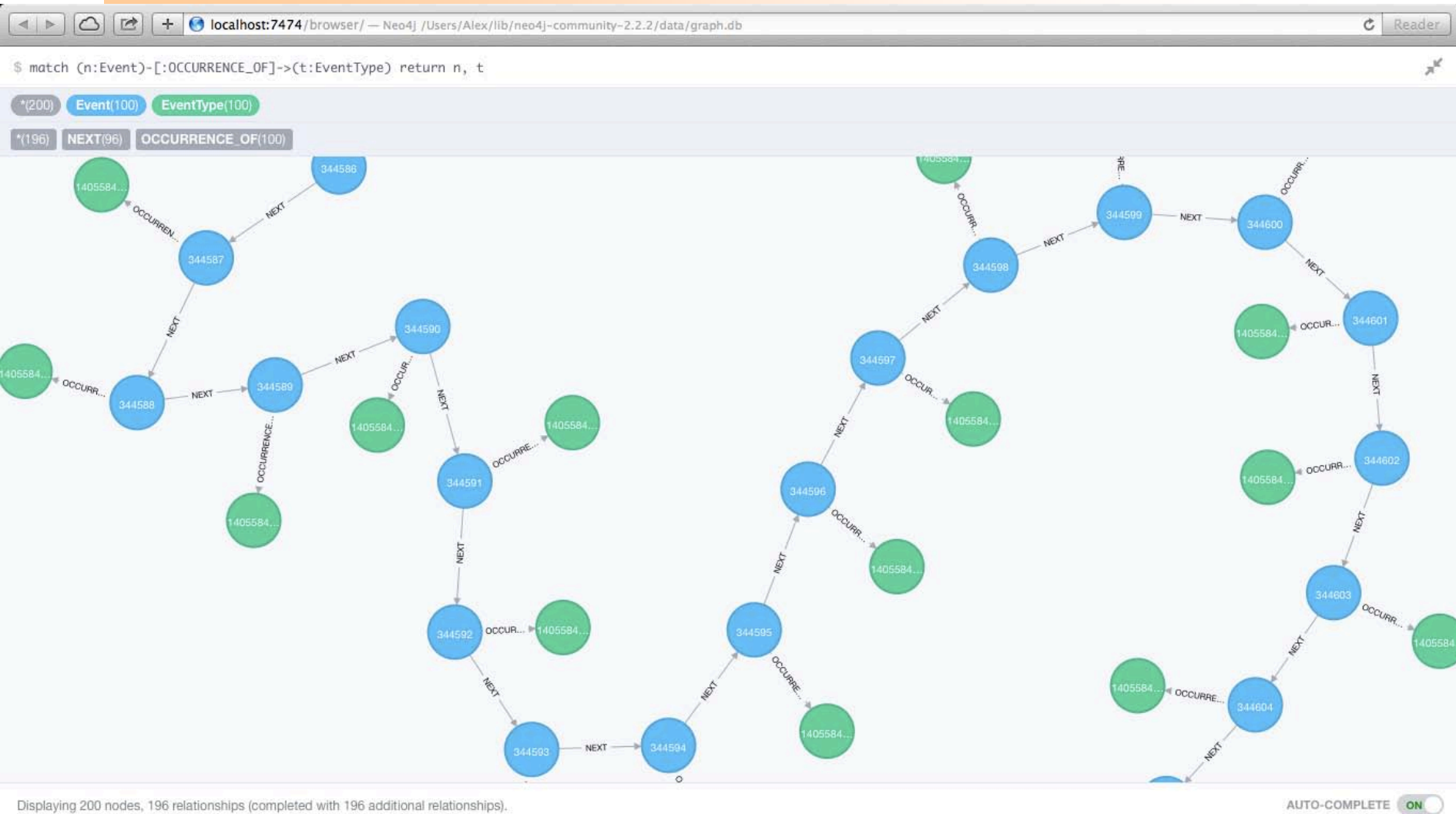
In addition to evaluating queries over the interaction data, by representing the data in the form of a graph it is possible to apply graph structure analyses such as the following:

- *Path finding and clustering*: for determining patterns of interest across a whole dataset, or focussing on particular students, tasks or sessions
- *Average path length*: determining the amount of student activity
- *Graph diameter*: determining the most long-running or most intensive task(s)
- *Degree centrality*: identifying key event types occurring during students' interactions
- *Betweenness centrality*: identifying event types that play key mediating roles between other event types

# Ad hoc analyses: Transitions between indicator types



# Implementation in a Graph DB (Neo4J)



# Conclusions

- We have presented a general graph model for representing event-based student-system interaction data arising from ELEs
- We have explored the possibilities that evaluating regular path queries over this graph-based representation provides for exploring the behaviours of students as they are working in the ELE and the effectiveness of the ELE's intelligent support
- We have also identified additional graph algorithms that may yield further insights about learners, tasks and significant interaction indicators
- In recent work, we have transformed and uploaded an interaction data set gathered during a trial of FractionsLab into the Neo4J graph database

# Future Work

- Design, implementation and evaluation of meaningful queries, analyses and visualisations over the graph data, in collaboration with pedagogical experts and teachers
- Aiming to lead to improved understanding of student-system interaction, and to feed back into enhanced design of the ELEs
- Investigation of how existing flexible querying processing techniques for graph data might be applied/adapted/extended to fine-granularity student-system interaction data, and to the pedagogical setting of providing effective intelligent support to learners undertaking exploratory tasks in ELEs



# Acknowledgements

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