

ZMATH 06675803

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Mathematics education as praying wheel: how adults avoid mathematics by pushing it onto children.

Straehler-Pohl, Hauke (ed.) et al., The disorder of mathematics education. Challenging the socio-political dimensions of research. Cham: Springer (ISBN 978-3-319-34005-0/hbk; 978-3-319-34006-7/ebook). 19-34 (2017).

Summary: Why is mathematics education endorsed even by people who know little mathematics and almost never use it? We explore this question with reference to a theoretical framework inspired by anthropology and psychoanalysis. Our answer is that participation in mathematics education generates ambivalence towards mathematics, where it is at the same time loved and feared. The response to this ambivalence is to endorse mathematics per proxy, by sending children to school where they put up a “show” of mathematics-love. By means of a psychological mechanism involving what we will call the naïve observer this arrangement allows people to both seem to love mathematics and at the same time keep it at arm’s length.

Classification: C20 C40

doi:10.1007/978-3-319-34006-7_2