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Shaping and being shaped by mathematics: examining a technology of rationality.

Skovsmose, Ole (ed.) et al., Opening the cage. Critique and politics of mathematics education. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers (ISBN 978-94-6091-806-3/pbk; 978-94-6091-807-0/hbk; 978-94-6091-808-7/ebook). New Directions in Mathematics and Science Education 23, 265-284 (2012).

Summary: The authors consider mathematics interpreted as a form of technology, and suggest that insights and theoretical tools from the field of science and technology studies may be usefully adapted in the quest to get a better understanding of, and control over, mathematics in action. Mathematics is ubiquitously used as “a technology of rationality”, a tool for making and justifying decisions. It is, indeed, a powerful tool, that meshes easily with a range of particular economic and political interests. What is essential is to retain control over that tool (i.e. preserve critical agency), otherwise technologies can become autonomous and beyond control. Finally, it can be observed that social theorizing, in general, does not pay any particular attention to mathematics. Thus, the discussion of the social formation of technology, including mathematics, needs to be combined with a discussion of how the social becomes formed to a substantial extent through mathematics as a tool for rationality.

Classification: D20 A40

Keywords: mathematics and society; technology of rationality