

Ethnomathematics

By

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Ethnomathematics, or, people's mathematics, is a way to rethink what we consider mathematics as a school subject. It represents a conception of mathematics that transcends the discipline of formal, symbolic mathematics, and the partial transmission of that which typically characterizes school mathematics education. There are fundamental activities found in all cultures and in everyday life everywhere, such as counting, measuring, locating, playing, that are inherently mathematical. By way of example, I will describe the boat-building, or vernacular engineering, I have studied on the Bay of Bengal, involving the construction of ocean-going fishing vessels by men working without plans or formulas, and with minimal tools. This is what I characterize as subaltern mathematics. I will examine the implications for mathematics education of valorizing the mathematics of such subalterns and relating school mathematics to the lived experience of children so that it becomes a tool for addressing issues of importance to them as future citizens.