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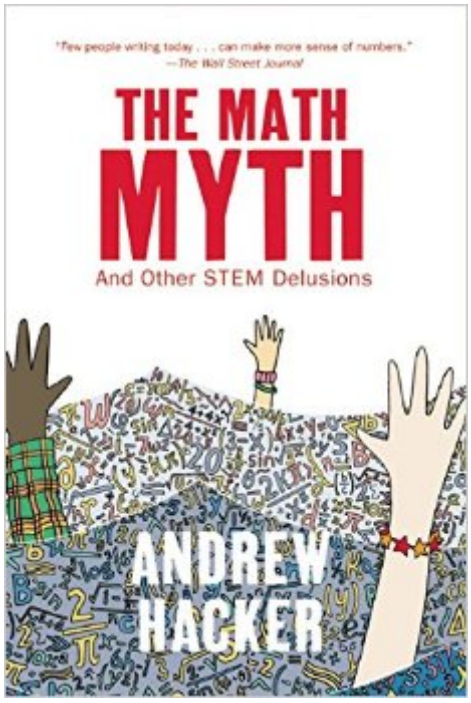
The Math Myth: And Other STEM Delusions



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Synopsis

Andrew Hackerâ ™s 2012 New York Times op-ed questioning the requirement of advanced mathematics in our schools instantly became one of the paperâ ™s most widely circulated articles. Why, he wondered, do we inflict a full menu of mathematicsâ ”algebra, geometry, trigonometry, even calculusâ ”on all young Americans, regardless of their interests or aptitudes?The Math Myth expands Hackerâ ™s scrutiny of many widely held assumptions, like the notions that mathematics broadens our minds, that mastery of azimuths and asymptotes will be needed for most jobs, that the entire Common Core syllabus should be required of every student. He worries that a frenzied emphasis on STEM is diverting attention from other pursuits and subverting the spirit of the country.In fact, Hacker honors mathematics as a calling (he has been a professor of mathematics) and extols its glories and its goals. Yet he shows how mandating it for everyone prevents other talents from being developed and acts as an irrational barrier to graduation and careers. He proposes alternatives, including teaching facility with figures, quantitative reasoning, and understanding statistics.The Math Myth is sure to spark a heated and needed national conversation not just about mathematics but about the kind of people and society we want to be.

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Customer Reviews

Unfortunate that Hacker tried to use mathematics in his criticism of the current mathematics curriculum, because his math errors will distract mathematicians and other "STEM" practitioners from some basic truths.For example:In March of 2008, the National Mathematics Advisory Panel

presented its Final Report to the President of the United States and the Secretary of Education:"This Panel, diverse in experience, expertise, and philosophy, agrees broadly that the delivery system in mathematics education -- the system that translates mathematical knowledge into value and ability for the next generation -- is broken and must be fixed."Since that time the "Common Core" math standards have replaced the various state standards that were for the most part derived from standards developed by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM).However, an original goal of the NCTM, that all students should have the opportunity to learn mathematics, became "students will be required to learn mathematics." This requirement works for some students and punishes others. Many of the students who succesfully pass through the school maths gateway will quickly forget the topics they studied. In some cases, it’s just as well, since the "mathematics" they are taught will be a collection of manipulative tricks that avoid real math understanding -- like the FOIL pseudo-algorithm for avoiding the binomial theorem.Hacker points out the "myths" and "delusions" that keep our present broken system in place. THE MATH MYTH and Other STEM Delusions presents a detailed argument for alternatives to Algebra as a required school subject for all students.

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