



Science and an African Logic

Helen Verran

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Does $2 + 2 = 4$? Ask almost anyone and they will unequivocally answer yes. A basic equation such as this seems the very definition of certainty, but is it?

In this captivating book, Helen Verran addresses precisely that question by looking at how science, mathematics, and logic come to life in Yoruba primary schools. Drawing on her experience as a teacher in Nigeria, Verran describes how she went from the radical conclusion that logic and math are culturally relative, to determining what Westerners find so disconcerting about Yoruba logic, to a new understanding of all generalizing logic. She reveals that in contrast to the one-to-many model found in Western number systems, Yoruba thinking operates by figuring things as wholes and their parts. Quantity is not absolute but always relational. Certainty is derived not from abstract logic, but from cultural practices and associations.

A powerful story of how one woman's investigation in this everyday situation led to extraordinary conclusions about the nature of numbers, generalization, and certainty, this book will be a signal contribution to philosophy, anthropology of science, and education.

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