

Foredragsholder: Statsråd Kristin Halvorsen
Arrangement: Holmboeprisen 2011
Dato: 23. mai 2011, kl 0900
Sted: Oslo Katedralskole

Dear prize winners, students and teachers.

It's an honor for me to be here today together with so many great thinkers of all sizes and ages.

First, I want to congratulate Jon Milnor with the 2011 Abel Prize. I hope that the prize will contribute to make your scientific achievements, as well as mathematics in general, more visible and appreciated by all.

I know that many kids in school often ask themselves: "Where on earth will I ever get to use algebra?" or "why do I need to know how to solve a second degree equation?"

I wouldn't blame anyone for questioning that, but I would deeply hope that every single person with lack of interest and low motivation for mathematics will have daily access to a wise teacher that knows how to answer this intriguing question.

Truth is that mathematics is probably the best tool we have in order to deal with life's many challenges.

It is of course useful for simple things like calculating prizes, making sense out of foreign currencies, or setting your watch right when traveling to other time-zones.

Still, mathematics is far more than figures and calculations.

Mathematics has to do with learning how to see patterns, how to organize your thoughts, how to create order out of chaos and even how to become good at reasoning. Mathematics is about learning how to learn!

In this perspective, going to math-class is like going to the gym, except in this kind of gym we're training our brain and not the body.

You could say that instead of becoming a better football-player, the goal is to become a better thinker.

Just like in sports and arts, we need to have idols, role models and great teachers in mathematics as well: People that are always

prepared to inspire new generations in exploring the world of scientific subjects and mathematics.

The young talents that are present here today must find it really exciting to meet an innovative and world leading scientist like John Milnor.

So thank you for being here with us.

This is the second time I'm given the honor to present the Holmboe prize winner of the year.

This year's teacher has been an everyday source of inspiration and empowerment for many young people.

He is known for using diverse methods in the classroom, and he makes tremendous effort to understand how each pupil learns at his or her best. He supplements the textbook with a relevant plan and creates tasks that suit the individual.

Teachers like him make a great difference! By being deeply committed to the act of teaching, and by having the needed skills

and enthusiasm, he leads young people to experience the joy of learning.

Our ultimate goal must be to help every child to reach its fullest potential, and we must be aware and take the consequence of their different ways of learning.

The world is full of mathematics waiting to be discovered. I'm sure there are plenty of young kids who don't pay much attention to the formulas written on the blackboard. I'm sure that the very same kids can become clever human calculators when it comes to figuring out the cubic content in their motor bike.

Norwegian pupils do quite well in school if we look at the international tests and scores. Nevertheless, the situation is somewhat alarming when it comes to mathematics compared to language or social science.

We know that 30 percent of the pupils attending their last year of lower secondary school have a score of two or less on a scale of six, in mathematics.

This is a fact that worries me, and that is why the government and I have committed ourselves to supporting and encouraging all teachers in finding more varied and interesting ways to work in the class.

Within a period of five years every single teacher in lower secondary schools throughout the country will be given guidance and necessary in – service training to improve their ways of teaching mathematics. To really make improvement, we are also dependent on school leadership in giving our teachers the best possible backing and support.

The Norwegian centre for mathematic education will have an important role in our efforts to strengthen students' basic skills in mathematics. It's worth mentioning that Sigbjørn Hals has been a great contributor to this centre, with ideas and material that will be of great interest and inspiration for teachers from all over the country.

It is well known that many young people carry with them a fear of learning mathematics- they suspect that it will be of no use for them in life. One of the most important things we can do to

motivate and conquer this fear, is to do like Sigbjørn Hals has done, and prove them wrong through more motivating and practically oriented ways to discover mathematics.

Dear prize winners and dear students,
I'll get back to where I started; if ever algebra seems pointless, think of it as an hour at the gym, and try instead to ask yourself "When in life will I not need the ability to think?"

I want to congratulate Sigbjørn Hals with the 2011 Holmboe-prize. He is a skilled and excellent teacher who provides good teaching that is tailored to each individual student. We also know that his instructions are based on practical, everyday situations and that he engage and motivate his students.

Thank you very much and congratulations!