

Preparation of Mathematics Teachers for the Future

May 5–7, 2003, Malmö, Sweden

Opening address

CHRISTER KISELMAN

Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences as well as the Organizing Committee, it is my privilege and pleasure to welcome you all to the Kingdom of Sweden and the City of Malmö.

We are indeed happy and excited to see here many of the world's leading experts in math education, ready to discuss and present your views on the preparation of mathematics teachers, including in-service competence development. We have high expectations that this will lead to some definite steps forward in our understanding of the most important ideas and concepts in the preparation of teachers.

I am myself a research mathematician, and I have not been directly involved in the preparation of teachers. However, over the years I have devoted time and energy to university education, and I have come to appreciate more and more the utmost importance of math education at all levels.

In Sweden, mathematics in the compulsory school is the second biggest subject: only Swedish, as a study of language and literature, occupies more time than mathematics in the lives of students and teachers. And I believe the situation is similar in many parts of the world: some national language and its culture are considered the most important, followed by, most often, mathematics.

This simple fact points also to the great responsibility of our teachers: time is a limited resource; do we use it in the best possible way? If we do not, this will mean a waste of time on a very large scale—indeed a scaring prospect. Conversely, if our young ones can learn more quickly, more easily, more profoundly, there will be an enormous growth in human potential. It is with these thoughts in my mind that I am ready to listen to you. Mathematics has an importance for many kinds of human activity; it is an indispensable part of technological development; but it is also a contributor to human dignity.

Here in Sweden, the education of teachers is now undergoing great changes. This is something that will certainly be touched upon in the interventions of the next few days.

Another national development is that the Government of Sweden has appointed a committee of eleven persons, called the Mathematics Delegation, to survey the whole field of mathematics education, from kindergarten to the univer-

sity level. The chairman of the delegation is Professor Said Irandoust, President of the University College of Borås, and a professor of chemistry by profession. The tasks of this committee are very wide, the first and widest being to propose an action plan to change the attitude towards mathematics in all of Swedish society; the second goal of the plan is to increase the interest for mathematics; the third to develop mathematics education. The committee shall report back to the government no later than May 28 of next year, 2004.

This symposium will last for three days, and this first day is open to all interested: we are indeed happy that so many mathematics teachers have come here for the presentations and the panel discussion today. The other two days will be a long and intense working session, resulting, hopefully, in an exciting document delineating the future of the preparation of mathematics teachers.

It has been said that school is the most important organization in the world, and that the teacher has the most important profession in the world. I think this is worth repeating. I believe we are here as a tribute to this idea.

Finally, let me welcome you all again in the hope that you will have an exciting and fruitful meeting, creating lots of new contacts and reviving the old ones.

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