



**Guest Editorial:**  
**Special Edition on the Lifeworld Approach for Empirical Research in  
Education – the Gothenburg Tradition**

by **Jan Bengtsson**

The aim of this Special Edition is to explore the use of the phenomenological notion of the lifeworld in educational empirical research. This notion was originally developed within philosophy to answer philosophical questions. If it is going to be used in empirical research, it is necessary to discuss how it can be used in this new and different context. Consequently, this Special Edition aims to address this challenge in two ways: Firstly, by theoretical discussion; and secondly, by showing how the lifeworld can be used in research practice. This Special Edition includes contributions from the Gothenburg tradition.

The lifeworld approach is an established research tradition in the Nordic countries. In my introductory essay I follow the history of this tradition back to its initiation in the 1980s at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden and from there out to different geographical destinations. The tradition has spread to new disciplines, other universities and other countries and thus continues in the form of regional lifeworlds.

In my second contribution I introduce the basic principles of a research approach based on lifeworld phenomenology. I discuss the importance of being explicit about the philosophical assumptions of empirical research in order to use them in a controlled way instead of being governed by them. However, a transition from the abstract theories of philosophy to empirical research is needed, and this is achieved by way of a regionalisation of the philosophical theories. In this way, the theories become resources in doing research. In the lifeworld approach, theories from lifeworld phenomenology are regionalised and used in research. I also discuss methodological consequences

of lifeworld ontology and compare them with consequences from other ontologies.

Annika Lilja's article is an empirical study of trustful relationships between teacher and student in the classroom. Her study shows how lived body, lived space and lived time mediate between teacher and student. They have effects on the relationships through the organisation of activities in the classroom, they affect the relationship between the teacher and the student and they influence the student's opportunities to learn in school.

Anna-Carin Bredmar's article is also an empirical study, but it is about teachers' experiences of enjoyment of work. In her study, she focuses on one dimension of teachers' enjoyment of work, namely the atmosphere as a subtle dimension of enjoyment. Her results show four aspects of this kind of enjoyment. In the first aspect a subtle atmosphere of enjoyment of work emerges as a basic function in teachers' work, just like a floor that gives stability and a point of departure. The second aspect is characterised as standing in a doorway, which is related to expectant foreshadowing. The third aspect is connected with the experience of flow and control. The fourth aspect she characterises as confirmation of good work, like a receipt.

It has been very rewarding for me as a Guest Editor to publish a Special Edition about the Gothenburg tradition of the lifeworld approach. It gives the opportunity to see that this approach is not identical with a particular method and that it has a particular identity of its own affecting all aspects of the research process. This would have been even more visible if I

had succeeded with the original plan to include five empirical studies in this venture. Unfortunately, various circumstances prevented me from fulfilling this plan.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to my fellow reviewers for taking their time to comment on the papers included in this Special Edition and to the English experts for correcting the language.

### Referencing Format

Bengtsson, J. (2013). Guest editorial: Special edition of the lifeworld approach for empirical research in education – the Gothenburg tradition. *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, 13 (Special Edition, September: *Lifeworld Approach for Empirical Research in Education – the Gothenburg Tradition*), 2 pp. doi: 10.2989/IPJP.2013.13.2.2.1176

### About the Author



Jan Bengtsson, who held the post of Professor in the Department of Pedagogical, Curricular and Professional Studies, University of Gothenburg, Sweden, passed away on 31 August. Throughout his long illness, which was bravely borne, Jan continued to be academically active but very sadly never lived to see the publication of this Special Edition.

Professor Bengtsson previously studied at the University of Vienna (Austria), the University of Freiburg (Germany), Ruhr-University in Bochum (Germany), and the University of Grenoble (France).

During his lengthy career, Jan had been a Visiting Scholar at several institutions such as the Husserl-Archives in Louvain (Belgium), the University of Grenoble (France), the University of Århus (Denmark), the University of California at Berkeley (USA), the National Institute of Educational Research in Paris (France) and the University of Queensland (Brisbane, Australia). He had also been a Visiting Professor at the Universities of Helsinki (Finland) and Oslo (Norway) as well as the University of Agder in Norway.

Over the years, Jan founded several scientific organizations in the Nordic countries such as the Centre of Lifeworld Phenomenological Research (University of Gothenburg) and the Nordic Society for Philosophy of Education.

Jan's research areas were diverse, and included the fields of teaching, teachers and learning, school architecture, history of scientific research, the philosophy of education, and phenomenology.