



## **In memoriam: David Magnusson 1925-2017**

David Magnusson has peacefully passed away at the age of 91. He was Sweden's perhaps most internationally renowned psychologist, and we sorely miss his brilliant mind and guidance.

David grew up in humble circumstances on a small farm in Småland, and his teachers early discovered his exceptional ability. He was first trained as an elementary school teacher and worked in that profession for some years. He then began his studies of psychology that led to his doctor's thesis about the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) in 1959 and to obtaining the Eneroth Chair in Psychology at Stockholm University in 1969. In this position he remained until he retired in 1992.

Already in the early sixties, David published a number of now classic studies of situational interactionism that was the starting point for his development of a holistic-interactionistic approach to psychological research. In this approach, the person was regarded as a holistic system. This has important consequences, both with regard to the kind of theory that is needed, and the nature of the methodologies that match the theory. One implication is that the individual must be studied as an integrated indivisible whole. As he saw it, the neglect of this view had led to a fragmentation of research that has had a

hampering effect on real progress in psychology as a scientific discipline.

Essential to his approach is that this holism has to be combined with interactionism. That is, even though the individual person has to be seen as an integrated indivisible whole, we also have to take into account that the individual (1) is in constant interaction with the environment, and (2) consists of a number of different systems that interact at various levels. To this, he added a developmental perspective with a focus on how the individual changes in a transactional, not additive process. He forcefully argued that research strategies should match these characteristics. Normally, it is not adequate to focus merely on variables regarded separately, but the effects of single variables must be seen in the context of other factors that are operating concurrently.

A further important consequence of this holistic-interactionistic framework is that developmental processes are by necessity idiosyncratic, and must therefore be studied at the individual level. As he put it, only the integrated individual, not variables, remains distinct and identifiable across time. He therefore argued for a person approach as an alternative to the traditional variable approach in empirical psychological research. Whereas a variable

approach may seek knowledge about individual differences in single variable values, the person approach seeks knowledge about internal patterns within the individual person. From this basis, the modern person-oriented approach has evolved, grounded in David's holistic-interactionistic theoretical framework. There the lawfulness in individual functioning and development is usually studied in terms of typical patterns of values on a set of variables at the level of the individual.

Parallel to David's early work on interactionism, already in the sixties he started a large longitudinal research program, Individual Development and Adaptation (IDA). Two whole school grade cohorts in the Swedish town of Örebro were studied and followed to adult age. The theoretical framework was groundbreaking in that he saw the whole child as a functional unit that had to be studied simultaneously in different respects through their upbringing to understand the developmental processes behind the emergence of good or bad adjustment. This was in contrast to the dominating research paradigm that focused on variables and the relationships between variables. David led IDA for more than 30 years until 1996, at which time the IDA program had led to more than 500 publications and was internationally very well-known - by some regarded as perhaps the most important longitudinal program in developmental psychology during the 20:th century. It was a great joy to David that the IDA program is still active and that new studies are planned when the original school children are about to enter retirement age.

Outside his own research, David has also given other great contributions to the scientific community, for instance in the form of participating in and sometimes chairing scientific boards in many countries and in being a prominent member of learned societies. To give just two examples: He was a member of the Swedish Royal Academy of Sciences, where his brilliant understanding of scientific matters also far outside Psychology, combined with his great organizational ability, were highly valued. He was also vice president of Academia Europaea 1988-97. David has received honorary doctorates from many universities in many countries and he has been awarded a number of scientific prizes, for instance the Aristotle Prize in 1999.

We much miss David as a mentor and a guide. His profound understanding of the psychology of the developing child, combined with his exceptional ability in finding the right way to navigate the

complex web of different theories and sometimes conflicting empirical findings, was invaluable to many of us.

Lars Bergman

Lars-Gunnar Lundh