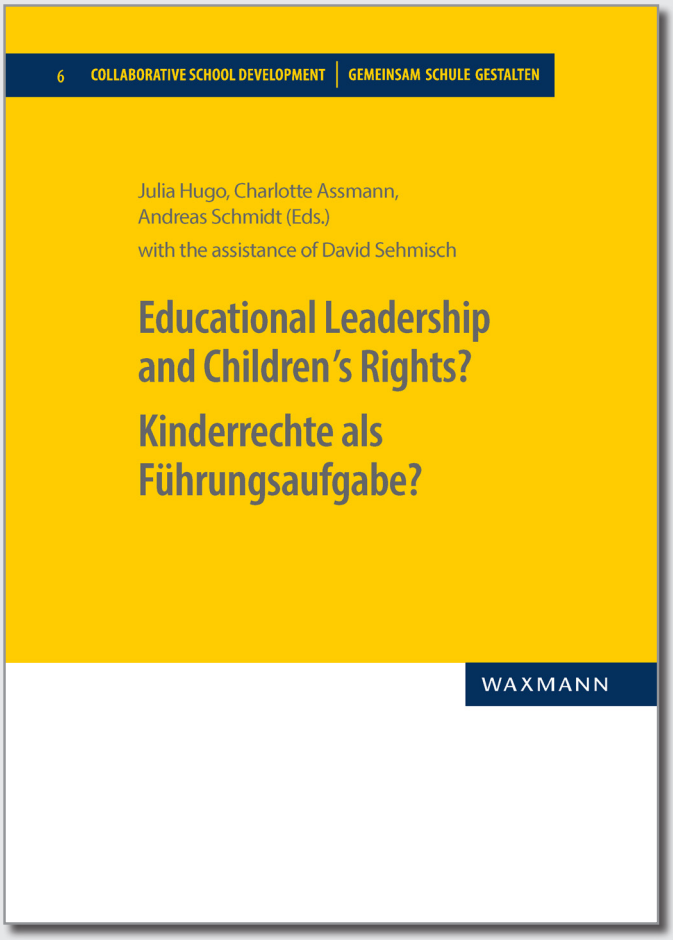

Julia Hugo, Charlotte Assmann,
Andreas Schmidt (Eds.)

with the assistance of David Sehmisch

Educational Leadership and Children's Rights?

Kinderrechte als Führungsaufgabe?

Gemeinsam Schule gestalten / Collaborative School Development, Volume 6, 2025, 156 pages, pb., € 34,90, ISBN 978-3-8309-4825-4

E-Book: 30,99 €, ISBN 978-3-8309-9825-9
doi.org/10.31244/9783830998259

WAXMANN
Steinfurter Str. 555
48159 Münster
Fon 02 51 – 2 65 04-0
Fax 02 51 – 2 65 04-26
info@waxmann.com
www.waxmann.com
Weitere Informationen
zum Buch hier.

Julia Hugo, Charlotte Assmann, Andreas Schmidt (Eds.)
Educational Leadership and Children's Rights?/
Kinderrechte als Führungsaufgabe?
© 2025, Waxmann. https://doi.org/10.31244/9783830998259_1

Julia Hugo, Charlotte Assmann, Andreas Schmidt & David Sehmisch

Educational Leadership and Children's Rights? Two Disparate Strands United

Führung und Kinderrechte im Kontext: eine interdisziplinäre Perspektive

The discourse and the research on leadership in education have been established internationally since at least the late 1980s (see e.g., Fullan, 1998; overview in Gumus et al., 2018) and continue to be a focus of attention (for an overview: English, 2011; Waite & Bogotch, 2017; English, 2020). Over the same period, children's rights became increasingly important in politics and society. Since 1989, this development has been promoted by the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) in almost all countries around the globe. However, the scientific discourse, for the most part, neglects to consider the interrelationship between the two topics (exc.: Theoharis, 2024).

On a theoretical and empirical level, central strands of the *discourse on leadership* include different models of educational leadership (overview in Grootenboer, 2018), ranging from leadership theory in general (e.g., Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2004) to specific leadership models such as new public management (Dubs, 1996), distributed leadership (Harris, 2004; Tian, Risku & Collin, 2016; Phillips et al., 2023) and its efficacy (Pietsch & Tulowitzki, 2022), co-constructive forms of leading from the middle (Grootenboer et al., 2017; at district level: Hargreaves, 2024; as teacher leadership: Strauss & Anderegg, 2020), and – from a perspective of change – transformational leadership (fundamentally Bass, 1999; Sun & Leithwood, 2012). Regarding individual leaders, the (subjectively perceived) roles and task profiles of educational leaders, as well as their interactions, are of interest (Warwas, 2015; Fossland & Sandvoll, 2021; Veletić & Olsen, 2021). In view of educational governance, the social**,** structural, organizational**,** and individual factors determining the probability of (non-) successful leadership are analyzed (Gallagher, 2021). Finally, at the professionalization level, the leaders' needs for specific competencies and resources are researched, to derive implications and content for further training (Schratz et al., 2013; Bush, 2018). These concepts are also related to children and young people in the sense of leadership for learning (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Townsend & McBeath, 2011; Anderegg et al., 2023). The effects of leadership on students' outcomes are, therefore, of great interest (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008; Day, Gu & Sammons, 2016).

The international academic debate on *children's rights* is divided into a legal and an educational strand. The legal part covers the discussion about inclusion (UN CRPD; Liefaard & Sloth-Nielsen, 2017; Tobin, 2019) and other specific children's rights, primarily participation (Correia et al., 2019) as well as the relevant transnational case law before the European (ECHR) or the International Court of Human Rights (ICHR) – all at an international level. At the level of individual states, questions of the validity, scope, and implications of international law for the state law and, thus, the respective education systems (Lundy, Kilkelly & Byrne, 2013; Kilkelli, 2019) are discussed, as well as the validity of national fundamental rights (e.g. the right to education, McCowan, 2013). In *educational science*, the discourse on inclusion and children's rights as a school subject dominates. The former regularly refers to the UN CRPD, but without considering the legal implications (e.g. Cornett & Knackstedt, 2020). The latter culminates in children's rights education as a concept (Covell, Howe & McNeil, 2010; Quennerstedt, 2011, 2019; Jerome et al., 2015). Furthermore, the debate about leadership addressing social justice and equity (Brown, 2004; Shields, 2010; for an overview: Tillman & Scheurich, 2013) as well as the aforementioned learning of children and young people (Southworth, 2011; Anderegg et al., 2023) touches (fundamental) legal issues. Apart from only a few studies (for Art. 12 UN CRC see Lundy, 2007; Lundy & Templeton, 2022), the question of a connection between leadership and the promotion of children's rights is critical.

However, if educational leadership is understood as "the quality and competence of exerting leading influence on educational organization members, teachers and faculty, students, and diverse stakeholders within and beyond certain educational organizations and settings towards the achievement of educational visions and goals" (Yan & Han, 2018, n.p.), then children and young people, as the addressees of these "visions" and "goals", are influenced by leadership in the educational context. Accordingly, children's rights become visions and goals of educational leadership.

This ties in with the overarching goals of schools and education in a modern, progressive society. The (social) goal of education is to enable children and young people to participate in society, provide them with the necessary skills and competencies (in the sense of education), and ultimately support them in their personal development so that they can lead a self-determined life. Conversely, leadership in schools is legitimized by the educational mandate of the respective state, usually regulated legally at the constitutional level (e.g., in Germany, France, India, South Africa, etc.) or the statutory level (e.g., in the USA, United Kingdom, Canada, etc.). Despite the respective state's responsibility for education on the one hand and the importance of children's rights for leadership on the other, what is missing is a united discourse on educational leadership and children's rights.

Against this background, this volume interweaves the discourse on children's rights and leadership from different theoretical, conceptual, and empirical perspectives. The compiled articles are situated in one or both areas, always considering the implications for the other. They either focus on leadership and discuss impacts on children's rights, or they focus on children's rights and their implications for educational leadership. In this way, the volume is divided into two sections.

Educational Leadership – and Children's Rights?

The section on *Educational Leadership – and Children's Rights?* includes contributions addressing specific aspects of school leadership and discussing them in relation to children's rights.

In the first article – *Leading with an Equity Vision as a Driver of Instructional Change at Schools Serving Marginalized Communities? Evidence from Four German Schools* – the authors, *Hanna Luise Bronnert-Härle* and *Esther Dominique Klein,* explore a specific concept of leadership – transformational leadership. They ask how educational leadership focused on equity can enhance teaching in schools facing adversity. Using a transformational leadership framework, the study analyzes four German schools, and emphasizes the importance of a clear vision of equity to overcome challenges such as teacher pessimism and student marginalization. A commitment to children's rights, including equitable access to education and recognizing every child's potential, underpins the successful implementation of school instructional strategies. By contrast, schools lacking a unified equity-focused vision struggle with low teacher morale and ineffective teaching practices. The research suggests that leadership anchored in social justice, equity, and children's rights can inspire teachers and promote sustainable instructional improvement, urging leaders to establish inclusive goals that counteract negative beliefs and ensure educational opportunities for all students.

The second article focuses on teachers and their training. *Andreas Schmidt*, *Ruth Luzmore,* and *Colin Cramer* discuss the role of *Teachers as Educational Change Agents for Children's Rights. Implications and Challenges for Meta-Reflexive Teacher Education*, particularly in upholding children's rights as outlined in Articles 28 and 29 UN CRC. The article highlights the concept of meta-reflexivity in teacher education, which encourages teachers to reflect critically on their roles and navigate complex educational goals. They argue that by adopting ten principles of meta-reflexivity, teachers can better handle the challenges of promoting children's rights. Ultimately, teachers are seen as pivotal change agents, requiring professional development that prepares them to implement these ideals in diverse classroom settings.

Complementary to these articles focusing on leadership actors, the following two contributions examine the structural conditions of the education system in general: In the article *Academic Tracking in Germany as a Challenge to Children's Rights. Implications for School Leadership,* the authors *Robert Pham Xuan* and *Dong Nguyen* analyze Germany's academic tracking system. They raise concerns that tracking, i.e. dividing students into different secondary school paths based on ability, can deepen social inequalities, especially for students from low socio-economic backgrounds – which can be an issue regarding children's right to school education. The article notes limited evidence on whether mobility between tracks can alleviate these issues and emphasizes the role of school leadership in promoting fairness through equitable teacher recommendations and informed parental involvement to ensure tracking decisions benefit all students.

Another contribution addressing the structural level is authored by *Philipp Schubert*, *Melanie Hochmuth*, *Julia Hufnagl*, and *Silvia Annen*. Their article about *Recogni-*

tion Authorities as Gatekeepers? Immigrants' Legal Opportunities to Utilize their Qualifications Acquired Abroad explores the role of authorities in facilitating or hindering immigrants' ability to use foreign qualifications in Germany. They highlight that only a moderate number of immigrants manage recognition procedures and that political, social, and economic factors often influence the process. Leadership is essential in ensuring that recognition procedures are transparent and fair, promoting professional integration and social participation for immigrants, as well as their children. The study emphasizes the need for structured management approaches to reduce barriers and inequalities in labor market access through recognition processes.

The section on educational leadership concludes with a contribution drawn from pedagogical practice in early childhood education. *Antonia Bongen's* article *Diversity Management for Discrimination Prevention. A Leadership Task in Daycare Centers* explores the potential of implementing diversity management to prevent discrimination in early education settings. She emphasizes that children's educational success is often linked to their social background, making early education vital for addressing these inequalities. Adapted from business models, diversity management aims to create inclusivity at the leadership level; promoting equal opportunities and reducing discrimination – an objective that corresponds to the prohibition of discrimination in Art. 2 Para. 1 UN CRC. Bongen points out that effective leadership in early childhood settings is essential for embedding diversity awareness and fostering inclusive practices.

Children's Rights – and Educational Leadership?

The section *Children's Rights – and Educational Leadership?* includes contributions addressing specific aspects of children's rights and discussing them with regard to leadership.

In the first article, *School Principals and the Obligation to Act Under a Zero-Tolerance Policy Against Bullying in Schools*, *Carolina Dahle* and *Tine Sophie Prøitz* give an insight into Norwegian education law and the perspective of one of the countries that has long incorporated children's rights into national legislation. As there is remarkable legal regulation in Norway, by which actors in schools can be criminally charged if pupils do not feel included, they examine the legal obligations under the Norwegian Education Act. The Act mandates principals to ensure a safe and inclusive school environment but places them in a dilemma when conflicting regulations and possible personal sanctions arise. Through content analysis of national regulations and a school leaders' magazine, the authors highlight the growing burden on principals, as well as the need for enhanced competencies and support to effectively manage these responsibilities amidst pressures from policy requirements and practical constraints.

The second article, *Talent Development in the Context of Children's Rights. The Goal of School Design and Leadership,* focuses on a specific child's right: Namely on Article 29 Paragraph 1a of the UN CRC, which grants every child the right to develop their talents. *Mirjam Maier-Röseler, Enkeleta Shtërbani,* and *Gabriele Weigand* argue that schools should support all children in nurturing their unique abilities, tying this

to educational equity. Achieving this goal requires significant changes in school structures, teaching approaches, and educator training, transforming individual and group practices. The article reviews vital research on giftedness and the need for educational support, underscoring the importance of a talent-promoting school environment and highlighting the essential role of school leadership in driving these changes with guidance from current theories and research findings.

A concept to practically implement children's rights on a school level is provided by *The UNICEF Child Rights Schools Program. Evaluation from the Perspectives of Teachers, Pupils, and Parents.* The authors *Margit Stein, Benjamin Möbus,* and *Fabio Wensing* examine the UNICEF Child Rights Schools Program, which seeks to empower children and adolescents to be actively involved in their educational environments. They evaluate the program's effectiveness, focusing on the perspectives of various stakeholders – 25 teachers, 39 students, and 33 parents – from a certified UNICEF Child Rights primary school. Their research explores the acceptance and support of the program, the implementation of children's rights, and the perceived opportunities and challenges faced during implementation. The findings indicate that teachers understand the program better than students and parents. While protection rights related to bullying and discrimination are well established, provision and participation rights, such as equitable educational opportunities and student engagement, are less effectively realized. The authors emphasize the need to address information gaps and enhance participatory structures to better integrate children's rights within the school context.

The second part of this volume concludes with two focus articles, both discussing implications for pedagogical practice. First, *Linn Behrendt* analyzes the *Normative Demands of Art. 12 UN CRC on Educational Institutions and their Leaders* for early childhood education. Article 12 guarantees children the right to express their opinions on matters affecting them and to have their views given appropriate weight. Educational institutions are tasked with developing participatory structures to ensure children's rights are respected, requiring educators to adopt a participative approach. Leadership plays a crucial role in fostering environments that support children's involvement. The article highlights how early childhood education can instil participatory rights, emphasizing that leadership must actively promote children's rights and participation.

Second, *Thea Jenner* contributes a paper on *A Children's Rights Approach to All-day Schooling. Implications of the Convention on the Rights of the Child for All-day Education and Care Programs,* where she examines the implications of the UN CRC concerning the shared responsibilities of the school system and child welfare system in organizing all-day education and care programs under the German "Ganztagsförderungsgesetz" (GaFöG). Jenner argues that the broadly defined children's rights – protection, care, academic support, and participation – must be translated into specific recommendations to enhance the quality of all-day programs. This focus on actionable steps aims to ensure that children's rights are effectively integrated into educational practices, ultimately fostering better support and development for children in these settings.

In conclusion, this volume brings together contributions, that show examples for bridging the gap between the fields of educational leadership and children's rights, offering insights into their interplay and mutual impact. The articles presented tackle essential issues such as educational equity, talent development, anti-bullying policies, and inclusion, emphasizing the critical role of leadership in fostering environments that uphold children's rights. Through diverse theoretical, empirical, and conceptual lenses, each contribution highlights how leadership in educational settings can support or hinder children's rights and explores actionable strategies to address this. The debate on this highly relevant issue does not stop here. While the volume aims to inspire further dialogue and research by uniting these strands, underscoring the importance of leadership that actively integrates children's rights into educational practices for meaningful and equitable educational experiences, each article remains focussed on one strand. Further work, that genuinely integrates both educational leadership and children's rights, is needed. This volume serves as a first step in this direction.

References

Anderegg, N., Nies, A., Jesacher-Rößler, L., & Breitschaft, J. (Eds.). (2023). *Leadership for Learning – Shaping Schools for Effective Learning Together.* hep. https://doi.org/10.36933/9783035523010

Bass, B. M. (1999). Two Decades of Research and Development in Transformational Leadership. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 8*(1), 9–32. https://doi.org/10.1080/135943299398410

Brown, K. M. (2004). Leadership for Social Justice and Equity. Weaving a Transformative Framework and Pedagogy. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 40*(1), 77–108. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X03259147

Bush, T. (2018). Preparation and Induction for School Principals: Global Perspectives. *Management in Education*, *32*(2), 66–71.

Cornett, J., & Knackstedt, K. M. (2020). Original Sin(s): Lessons from the US Model of Special Education and an Opportunity for Leaders. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *58*(5), 507–520. https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-10-2019-0175

Correia, N. Camilo, C. Aguiar, C., & Amaro, F. (2019). Children's Right to Participate in Early Childhood Education Settings: A Systematic Review. *Children and Youth Services Review, 100*, 76–88. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2019.02.031

Covell, K., Howe, R. B., & McNeil, J. K. (2010). Implementing Children's Human Rights Education in Schools. *Improving Schools*, *13*(2), 117–132.

Day, C., Gu, Q., & Sammons, P. (2016). The Impact of Leadership on Student Outcomes: How Successful School Leaders Use Transformational and Instructional Strategies to Make a Difference. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *52*(2), 221–258.

Dubs, R. (1996). School and New Public Management. *Contributions to Teacher Education, 14*(3), 330–337. https://doi.org/10.36950/bzl.14.3.1996.10477

English, F. W. (2011). *The SAGE Handbook of Educational Leadership. Advances in Theory, Research, and Practice* (2nd ed.). SAGE.

English, F. W. (2020). *The Palgrave Handbook of Educational Leadership and Management Discourse*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-39666-4

Fossland, T., & Sandvoll, R. (2021). Drivers for Educational Change? Educational Leaders' Perceptions of Academic Developers as Change Agents. *International Journal for Academic Development, 28*(3), 305–318. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2021.1941034

Fullan, M. (1998). Leadership for the 21st Century: Breaking the Bonds of Dependency. *Educational Leadership, 55*(7), 1–4.

Gallagher, T. (2021). Governance and Leadership in Education Policy Making and School Development in a Divided Society. *School Leadership & Management, 41*(1–2), 132–151. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2021.1887116

Grootenboer, P. (2018). Theories and Models of Educational Leadership. In P. Grootenboer (Ed.), *The Practices of School Middle Leadership* (pp. 21–41). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-0768-3_2

Grootenboer, P., Rönnerman, K., & Edwards-Groves, C. (2017). Leading from the Middle: A Praxis-Oriented Practice. In P. Grootenboer, C. Edwards-Groves & S. Choy (Eds.), *Practice Theory Perspectives on Pedagogy and Education* (pp. 243–263). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-3130-4_13

Gumus, S., Bellibas, M. S., Esen, M., & Gumus, E. (2018). A Systematic Review of Studies on Leadership Models in Educational Research from 1980 to 2014. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 46*(1), 25–48. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143216659296

Hargreaves, A. (2024). *Leadership From the Middle. The Beating Heart of Educational Transformation*. Routledge.

Harris, A. (2004). Distributed Leadership and School Improvement: Leading or Misleading? *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 32*(1), 11–24. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143204039297

Jerome, L., Emerson, L., Lundy, L., & Orr, K. (2015). *Teaching and Learning about Child Rights: A Study of Implementation in 26 Countries*. UNICEF.

Kilkelly, U. (2019). The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: Incremental and Transformative Approaches to Legal Implementation. *The International Journal of Human Rights*, *23*(3), 323–337.

Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (2008). Linking Leadership to Student Learning: The Contributions of Leader Efficacy. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *44*(4), 496–528.

Liefaard, T., & Sloth-Nielsen, J. (Eds.). (2017). *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: Taking Stock After 25 Years and Looking Ahead*. Brill Nijhoff.

Lundy, L. (2007). 'Voice' is not Enough: Conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. *British Educational Research Journal*, *33*(6), 927–942.

Lundy, L., Kilkelly, U., & Byrne, B. (2013). Incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in Law: A Comparative Review. *The International Journal of Children's Rights*, *21*(3), 442–463.

Lundy, L., & Templeton, M. (2022). Children's rights and School Leadership: An International Perspective. *International Journal of Educational Research*, *114*, 101980.

McCowan, T. (2013). *Education as a Human Right: Principles for a Universal Entitlement to Learning*. Bloomsbury Academic.

Phillips, D., Stewart-Fox, T., Phillips, S., Griffith, M., & Bhojedat, J. (2023). Distributed Leadership in Education: A Systematic Review of its Role in Fostering Innovative Practices and Enhancing School Performance. *International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR), 12*(11), 2083–2089. https://doi.org/10.21275/SR231128014118

Pietsch, M., & Tulowitzki, P. (2022). Effects of Distributed Leadership on Teachers' Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour: a Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, *50*(5), 764–781.

Quennerstedt, A. (2011). The Construction of Children's Rights in Education – a Research Synthesis. *International Journal of Children's Rights*, *19*(4), 661–678.

Quennerstedt, A. (2019). Language Use in the Human Rights Education of Children. *Human Rights Education Review*, *2*(1), 25–46.

Robinson, V. M., Lloyd, C. A., & Rowe, K. J. (2008). The Impact of Leadership on Student Outcomes: An Analysis of the Differential Effects of Leadership Types. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *44*(5), 635–674.

Schratz, M., Laiminger, A., MacKay, F. K. P., Křižková, E., Kirkham, G. A., Baráth, T., Cseh, G., Kigyós, T., Chrappán, M., Kovács, E., Révai, N., Hašková, A., Laššák, V., Bitterová, M., Erčulj, J., Peček, P., Malmberg, K., & Söderberg, T. (Eds.). (2013). *The Art and Science of Leading a School – Central5: A Central European View on Competencies for School Leaders.* Tempus Public Foundation.

Shields, C. M. (2010). Transformative Leadership: Working for Equity in Diverse Contexts. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 46*(4), 558–589. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X10375609

Southworth, G. (2011). Connecting Leadership and Learning. In J. Robertson & H. Timperley (Eds.), *Leadership and Learning* (pp. 71–85). SAGE. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446288931.n6

Spillane, J. P., Halverson, R., & Diamond, J. B. (2004). Towards a Theory of Leadership Practice: A Distributed Perspective. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 36*(1), 3–34. https://doi.org/10.1080/0022027032000106726

Strauss, N.-C., & Anderegg, N. (Eds.). (2020). *Teacher Leadership – Leading Schools Collectively*. Hep.

Sun, J., & Leithwood, K. (2012). Transformational School Leadership Effects on Student Achievement. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, *11*(4), 418–451.

Theoharis, G. (2024). *The School Leaders Our Children Deserve*. Teachers College.

Tian, M., Risku, M., & Collin, K. (2016). A Meta-Analysis of Distributed Leadership from 2002 to 2013: Theory Development, Empirical Evidence and Future Research Focus. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, *44*(1), 146–164. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143214558576

Tillman, L. C., & Scheurich, J. J. (Eds.). (2013). *Handbook of Research on Educational Leadership for Equity and Diversity*. Routledge.

Tobin, J. (2019). *The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: A Commentary*. Oxford University.

Townsend, T., & MacBeath, J. (Eds.). (2011). *International Handbook of Leadership for Learning*. Springer.

Veletić, J., & Olsen, R. V. (2021). Exploring School Leadership Profiles Across the World: A Cluster Analysis Approach to TALIS 2018. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, *27*(5), 1090–1116. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2021.1953612

Waite, D., & Bogotch, I. (Eds.). (2017). *The Wiley International Handbook of Educational Leadership*. Wiley. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118956717

Warwas, J. (2015). Principals' Leadership Behaviour: Values-based, Contingent or Both? *Journal of Educational Administration, 53*(3), 310–334.

Yan, W., & Han, Y. (2018). Educational Leadership. In A. Farazmand (Ed.), *Global Encyclopedia of Public Administration, Public Policy, and Governance* (pp. 1581–1586). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-20928-9_2236