

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

with the assistance of David Sehmisch

Educational Leadership and Children's Rights?

Kinderrechte als Führungsaufgabe?

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Preface – Series Editors

Vorwort der Reiheneditorinnen

In the academic discourse on school development and leadership, the idea of considering the children's perspective in theoretical considerations, in the design of empirical research projects, and the linking of research results to educational practices has repeatedly come into focus. It is argued that children are to be seen as subjects, rather than objects of educational programs. As such, they are entitled to rights. The necessity to bring together the discourse on children's rights and the role of leadership in the educational system marks a gap that the sixth volume of the series *Collaborative School Development*, entitled *Educational Leadership and Children's Rights?*, explores. As children's rights are also an international topic, the volume is – for the first time – primarily written in English.

The basic conception of this volume once again corresponds to the general principles of the series: The volume sees itself as a link between academic theory and professional practice and as a nexus between discourses that often take place in parallel and sometimes isolated areas. It combines theoretical and empirical contributions from the leadership discourse and enriches these with guest contributions that discuss the implications of children's rights for specific pedagogical areas.

We are delighted that this diversity is also reflected in the editorial board, which adds to the series editors' expertise. While Charlotte Assmann, with her expertise at the interface of school supervision and law, represents the current academic discourse on leadership at the level of educational administration, Andreas Schmidt contributes his methodological profile from his empirical work on meta-reflexivity and teacher professionalism.

We would like to thank the Alumni Association of the Foundation of German Economy (Stiftung der Deutschen Wirtschaft, sdw) as well as the foundation itself for financing this volume, and Waxmann Publishing House for their creative and constructive support at every stage. We would also like to thank the authors who have enriched the volume with their contributions and the reviewers for their support in the review process. Finally, the work of David Sehmisch, which was crucial to the formal completion of the volume, cannot be sufficiently recognized.

Given the wide range of topics covered by the articles, we hope you find the volume inspiring and that it can serve as an incentive for the continued exploration of intersections between leadership and children's rights.

Jonas Scharfenberg & Julia Hugo

Preface – sdw Alumni e.V.

Vorwort des sdw Alumni e.V.

Education plays a pivotal role in promoting children's rights. As Nelson Mandela said: "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

The sdw Alumni e.V. of former scholarship holders of the *Foundation of German Economy* (Stiftung der Deutschen Wirtschaft, sdw) is especially concerned with this challenge. We are an impactful, interdisciplinary, and entrepreneurial community that has grown to approximately 3.000 members since its inception in 1999. In 2024, we celebrated our 25th anniversary under the motto "25 Years of Courage & Doing". Entrepreneurial thinking and acting are vital for cultivating an open and progressive society. In this society human rights form the foundation of a self-determined life, enabling people to develop their full potential and take responsibility for their actions. Thus, especially the recognition and protection of children's rights is crucial. Therefore, we are delighted that this year's volume addresses a topic central to the pursuit of a just and equitable society, namely children's rights as human rights.

The sdw Alumni e.V. aims to make meaningful contributions to society. Future generations must grow up in environments that foster physical, emotional, and intellectual development. By prioritizing entrepreneurial values and educational leadership, we want to contribute to ensuring that every child – and, finally, every human being – can reach their full potential and become an active, informed citizen, who listens to understand, challenges the status quo, sees more opportunities than fears, treats everyone else (including and especially competitors and competing views) with respect. The future of our society depends on the investments we make in our children today.

With this in mind, we wish you an inspiring reading,

Carena Scheunemann
Board Member
sdw Alumni e.V.
www.sdw-alumni.de

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; Fosslund & 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; Liefwaard & 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; Kilkelly, 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; Anderegge 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-*