

**Snježana Dubovicki (Croatia)**

Faculty of Education, J. J. Strossmayer University of Osijek

[sdubovicki@foozos.hr](mailto:sdubovicki@foozos.hr)

**RAVNATELJ ŠKOLE, VRTIĆA I DOMA [PRINCIPAL OF SCHOOL, KINDERGARTEN, AND STUDENT DORMITORY<sup>1</sup>] (Zagreb: Znamen, 2025, 648 pp.) by Stjepan Staničić**

The monograph *Principal of the School, Kindergarten, and Student Dormitory* makes, at first encounter, a strong impression as a comprehensive, conceptually well-designed, and scientifically rigorous work, the result of a substantial investment of time, systematic research effort, and deep professional commitment. Without hesitation, it can be described as a seminal work in the field of leadership and management of educational institutions in the Republic of Croatia. At the same time, this is the first and, to date, the only publication in this context that brings together, in a single volume, all key and numerous complementary contents necessary for a comprehensive understanding of the complex processes involved in leading a school, kindergarten, or student dormitory.

The author fully and in many respects more than fully fulfils all that is announced in the introduction to the monograph, to the extent that in numerous segments the work clearly exceeds the promises made to the reader. The author's initial intention that the book should be "more than a guide," that it should serve as "a call to action, an incentive to re-examine established practices, and an inspiration for shaping the future of leadership in educational practice," is ultimately realised at a significantly higher level. The book may be read as a form of dedication to the principalship as a profession, while at the same time constituting a powerful, evidence-based appeal to educational policymakers. The author unequivocally conveys that there are no longer any justifications for postponing the systematic professionalisation of principals, and that

---

<sup>1</sup> Author's translation (unofficial)

any further delay simultaneously represents a postponement of investment in the future of education.

Despite its considerable scope, the monograph does not confront the reader with a sense of overload or the need to defer reading. On the contrary, the structure of the book is exceptionally well-conceived and functional, enabling the reader, already after the introductory section, to orient themselves quickly and locate the content most relevant to their immediate needs. The book may be read linearly or selectively, and the reading experience often encourages a return to the beginning and a renewed, comprehensive reading.

Such a reading experience is significantly supported by the author's carefully designed "content navigation" throughout the text. The monograph is divided into two main parts, within which eight thematic sections are structured, encompassing a total of thirty chapters. The chapters are clearly and logically organised and titled in a highly functional manner: as thematic units (e.g. Education and Competencies of Future Principals, Selection and Appointment of Principals), as operational guidelines for principalship practice (e.g. Carefully Building an Institutional Culture, Anticipating Potential Crisis Situations and Preparing for Them), or in the form of problem-oriented questions (e.g. How Does a Principal Motivate Themselves and Their Colleagues?, What Does Artificial Intelligence Bring to Education?).

Each chapter follows a clearly defined and consistently implemented structure. It begins with an introduction to the topic, followed by a precise statement of the chapter's objectives and a set of questions that the reader will be able to answer through engagement with the text. The central section presents the core content, organised into coherent and logically sequenced units, while a concluding summary highlights the key points. The same level of structural clarity is evident in the introductions to both major parts of the book as well as to each of the eight thematic sections.

In terms of content, each chapter systematically develops two complementary perspectives: theoretical and operational. First, a given phenomenon or topic is examined on the basis of relevant scientific and professional research (for example, school culture, the learning organisation, or theories of leadership). Subsequently, the topic is operationalised from the perspective of the principal's role, offering clear and actionable guidance for practical implementation.

The text is further enriched by numerous references to current legislation, strategic documents, and other practical sources. In doing so, the author demonstrates exceptional evaluative judgement, directing the reader precisely to those sources that are genuinely useful to principals in addressing specific situations. For example, in the chapter devoted to safeguarding the legality of operations and the pedagogical process, the author provides clear guidance for navigating the regulatory framework, thereby directly linking theoretical considerations with practice.

The concluding sections of the monograph represent an additional, yet highly valuable, extension of the main text. A glossary of terms, an overview of occupational and qualification standards for principals, a reference library, a range of relevant online resources, links to key national and international institutions, and an extensive bibliography comprising 708 references all testify to the thoroughness and scientific grounding of the work.

Particular attention should be paid to the author's writing style. The author frequently addresses the reader—specifically the principal—directly, guiding them through the text and enabling them to view each topic from multiple perspectives: that of their own professional role as well as that of other stakeholders in the educational process. Wherever possible, the author offers concrete, clearly articulated, and well-argued recommendations for action.

An additional value of the monograph arises from the skilful balancing of different types of content and narrative modes. The author combines scientific discourse, professional analyses, pedagogical guidance, reflective commentary, and documentary-style writing. Particularly valuable are those sections written in a documentary style, such as the chapter on the development of the principal's role, which presents an original periodisation of educational policies in relation to the professionalisation of the principalship, substantiated through analysis of legislative and strategic documents. The significance of these sections is further enhanced by the fact that the author personally participated in many of the described processes as a member or leader of national working groups.

The author deliberately repeats and deepens certain contents, which contributes to a better understanding of the whole, thereby allowing individual chapters to retain a degree of autonomy and enabling selective reading without loss of coherence. This

approach further confirms the author's attentiveness to the reader and to their need for clear, functional knowledge.

Throughout the book, a deep commitment to the principalship as a profession is clearly evident, alongside the high ethical standards advocated by the author. The book promotes visionary, responsible, and professional leadership, while simultaneously not avoiding critical engagement with poor practices, professional shortcomings, and situations that may justify the dismissal of a principal. Particularly strong are the author's critical reflections on systemic shortcomings in educational policy, especially with regard to the selection and appointment of principals and the lack of genuine support for the professionalisation of this role.

In conclusion, this is a work of lasting value. Although regulatory frameworks and institutional titles may change over time, the fundamental concepts, analyses, and recommendations presented in this book will retain their relevance. The monograph *Principal of the School, Kindergarten, and Student Dormitory* will undoubtedly become essential reading for principals, aspiring principals, researchers, and all those engaged in leadership and management in education. It is a book to which readers will repeatedly return, and its contribution to the development of the principalship profession and the educational system as a whole is difficult to overestimate.

A particular strength of the monograph *Principal of the School, Kindergarten, and Student Dormitory* lies in the fact that the author does not remain confined to a descriptive or normative framework of the principal's role, but systematically addresses contemporary challenges of leadership and management in educational institutions within the context of rapid social, technological, and organisational change. In this respect, the monograph transcends traditional approaches to school management and positions the principal as a key agent of change, a driver of development, and a strategic leader of learning.

The author clearly and convincingly addresses issues that characterise the contemporary educational environment: increasing administrative and legal responsibility of principals, growing pressure from the public and founding bodies, changes in the structure and expectations of staff, crisis management, digital transformation, and the challenges posed by new technologies, including artificial intelligence. In doing so, the monograph directly responds to the needs of today's principals, who operate in complex and often unpredictable conditions and are

expected to combine pedagogical leadership, organisational effectiveness, and a high level of ethical responsibility.

Contemporary concepts such as the school as a learning organisation, distributed and transformational leadership, the development of professional learning communities, and strategic planning are presented not only theoretically, but also in terms of their operational applicability. The author consistently demonstrates how these concepts can be translated into everyday principalship practice, thereby narrowing the gap between scientific knowledge and the realities of work in educational institutions. This integration of theory and practice represents one of the key strengths of the monograph.

The scientific contribution of the work is evident on several levels. First, the monograph provides a systematic and comprehensive synthesis of national and international research on leadership and management in education, the like of which has not previously been available in the Croatian language. Furthermore, the author develops an original analytical framework for understanding the principal's role, particularly through historical and documentary analysis of educational policies and through original interpretations of the professionalisation process of principals within the Croatian context.

The scholarly value of the monograph is further reinforced by methodological consistency in the treatment of topics, a critical approach to literature and policy documents, and a clear differentiation between normative, descriptive, and prescriptive levels of analysis. Rather than uncritically adopting existing models and concepts, the author examines them in relation to the specificities of the national education system, thereby contributing to the development of a contextualised theory of leadership in education.

The monograph also has considerable developmental potential for future research. It establishes a strong theoretical foundation for further empirical studies of principalship practice, professional competencies, the impact of leadership styles on organisational culture and learning outcomes, as well as for comparative analyses of education systems. In this way, the book transcends the role of a reference manual and becomes a point of departure for further scholarly dialogue in the field.

Within the context of contemporary educational reform processes, the monograph also has clear strategic significance. It does not view the principal merely as an administrative executor of educational policies, but as an autonomous and competent professional whose quality of work directly affects the quality of the entire institution. In doing so, the author makes a substantial contribution to redefining the principalship profession and its position within the education system.

In sum, the significance of the monograph *Principal of the School, Kindergarten, and Student Dormitory* does not lie solely in its scope or clarity, but in its capacity to address the key issues of contemporary leadership and management and to offer scientifically grounded yet practically applicable responses. It is a work that simultaneously shapes practice, fosters the professional development of principals, and enriches the scholarly body of knowledge on leadership in educational institutions, thereby securing a lasting place in Croatian pedagogical and management literature.