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How Social Justice Leadership Complements Instructional Leadership

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ABSTRACT

Instructional leadership (IL) needs other frameworks to complement it. This qualitative study examined how social justice leadership (S JL), which involves understanding school inequities and taking action to eliminate them, might complement IL. The participants were 36 Israeli elementary school principals. Data collection included semi-structured interviews and focus groups, and data analysis included sorting, coding, and categorizing. The findings revealed that principals perceived S JL as providing answers to three main questions about IL: for whom (whose achievements should be improved), how (in what way should student achievements be improved), and with whom (who should the partners be for improving student achievements).

Introduction

Instructional leadership (IL) is nearly 100 years old, given that one of its earliest research studies began in 1926 (Gray, 1934). However, it remains stalwart today, continuing to appear as the most frequently investigated school leadership framework (Hallinger & Wang, 2015; Hallinger et al., 2020). This leadership orientation expects principals to explicitly prioritize the improvement of teaching and learning in their schools and therefore to be extensively and directly involved in bettering curriculum and instruction (Neumerski et al., 2018; Shaked, 2023b). Still recommended today as one of the most effective frameworks for school leaders, IL has been found to play an essential role in raising student achievements, commonly measured in mathematics and language subjects (Day et al., 2016; Hou et al., 2019). Thus, researchers, policymakers, and educators alike expect principals to view IL as their primary responsibility.

Without challenging its dominance, many researchers have argued that IL alone is not enough to improve school performance (Bowers, 2020). A broader, more holistic “leadership for learning” framework upholds that the major IL framework needs to be supported by other school leadership approaches and functions (Hallinger, 2011; Murphy et al., 2007). For example, Printy et al. (2009) argued that transformational leadership – where principals lead changes based on their ability to inspire teachers and develop their collective professional identity – is necessary for successful IL. Grissom and Loeb (2011) asserted that IL should be combined with organizational management, which involves keeping the school running smoothly and ensuring its efficient functioning (Shaked, 2023a). Halverson and Clifford (2013) recommended weaving IL practice together with distributed leadership, by promoting the decentralized application of IL by multiple stakeholders, mid-level leaders, and networks of influence who all work simultaneously to improve teaching and learning.

Coinciding with the holistic “leadership for learning” approach, the current study aimed to explore how social justice leadership (S JL) may complement IL. In S JL, principals carefully examine how issues of race, gender, family income, national origin, ability or disability, sexual orientation, native language, and other marginalizing characteristics influence the design and effectiveness of learning

environments (Theoharis, 2007) and emphasize the assets brought to the table as a result of the diversity represented by these characteristics (Khalifa, 2018). SJL is based on the belief that each and every student can thrive (Furman, 2012). Beyond the pursuit of equal opportunities and equal outcomes, SJL also advocate for treating individuals according to their unique needs and requirements, thereby guaranteeing that children with diverse needs receive the essential support and resources necessary to reach their full potential (Wang, 2018). They monitor current educational arrangements, identify what generates and reproduces inequalities, and take actions to promote school initiatives and practices that support fairness and equity (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Gay, 2018). Inasmuch as in today's Western schools, white, heterosexual, middle-class, physically able, nonimmigrant students reach higher levels of achievement, are disciplined less harshly, and have a greater sense of school belonging (Dutil, 2020; Gay, 2018), SJL is indispensable to current education systems.

Notably, the contribution of SJL to IL has not been previously addressed in the empirical literature. How can principals uphold the mantle of IL equitably for all their students rather than settling for enhanced teaching and learning that leads only to improvements in school-wide averages or totals? The increasing emphasis on education outcomes, where the principal's success is evaluated by standardized test scores indicating the school's overall progress in instructional quality and student outcomes (Pont, 2020), may conflict with principals' individualized or small-group actions to reach the most marginalized or low-performing students who may need the most help. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following research question: How can SJL complement IL? The findings of this study may hold both theoretical and practical implications.

Specifically, the present study was conducted in the Israeli school system, which explicitly endorses an IL framework for principals (Capstones, 2008). The Israeli school system serves approximately 1.95 million students in Grades 1–12 attending nearly 5,400 elementary, middle and high schools (Israeli Ministry of Education, 2022).

Theoretical Background

To establish the platform for this study examining SJL's contribution to IL, this section will conceptualize each of these two leadership frameworks, presenting their definitions, fundamentals, and components. Then it will discuss how SJL may complement IL.

Instructional Leadership

IL is a school leadership approach in which principals free themselves as much as possible of bureaucratic tasks and focus their efforts on implementing teaching methods that can positively impact student learning (Hallinger et al., 2020). From this approach's perspective, the principal's primary purpose is to establish best practices in teaching (Shaked, 2023b). More than anything else, instructional leaders need to create a school environment conducive to classroom teaching and student learning so that students can achieve academic success (Neumerski, 2012). Principals are repeatedly called upon to take on a prominent role as instructional leaders who emphasize school leadership's teaching and learning aspects and who are directly involved in various curricular and instructional issues (Hallinger et al., 2020).

Therefore, this study regarded any activity of the principal designed to directly enhance teaching, learning, and achievement as IL. Specifically, the study adopted the conventional mainstream conceptualization of principals' IL, which encompasses three dimensions including ten functions (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Hallinger & Wang, 2015). The first dimension, *Defining the school mission*, requires the principal to ensure a clear instructional mission for the school and share this mission with the school community. This dimension consists of two functions: (1) Framing the school's instructional goals; and (2) Communicating those goals to all necessary parties. The second dimension, *Managing the instructional program*, demands the principal to regulate and control the

instructional program. This dimension is broken down into three functions: (3) Coordinating the school's curriculum; (4) Supervising and evaluating instruction; and (5) Monitoring students' progress. The third dimension, *Developing a positive school learning climate*, asks the principal to create a culture of ongoing improvement and high expectations for students and teachers. This dimension comprises five functions: (6) Protecting instructional time from threats; (7) Providing incentives to motivate teachers; (8) Providing incentives to encourage students' learning; (9) Promoting staff members' continual professional development; and (10) Maintaining high visibility for quality interactions with teachers and students.

IL may be seen as inherently contributing to social justice in the school because it strives to raise the academic achievements of all students (Cann & Hernandez, 2012; McKenzie et al., 2006). In this context, IL may be considered consistent with the No Child Left Behind Act, which was rooted in the ideological commitment to equal opportunity for all citizens (Normore & Brooks, 2012). SJL also clearly coincides with one of the three alternative logics of IL suggested by Rigby (2014) – social justice logic – which is the common belief that IL practices can and should improve the academic outcomes of all students. This logic is “focused on the experiences and inequitable outcomes of marginalized groups,” and it “challenges the current ‘neutral’ systems that engender the reproduction of inequality in our society” (p. 618). Rigby's other two logics were prevailing logic (the belief that the principal's role is to be both an instructional leader and a manager of the school site) and entrepreneurial logic (the belief that IL improves teaching and learning through innovation and mechanisms borrowed from the private sector).

Social Justice Leadership

SJL has been defined in several ways. Theoharis (2007, p. 223) viewed SJL as a school leadership approach in which “principals make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions . . . central to their advocacy, leadership practice, and vision.” For Furman (2012, p. 194), SJL “involves identifying and undoing these oppressive and unjust practices and replacing them with more equitable, culturally appropriate ones.” According to Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002, p. 162), SJL is “the exercise of altering these [unjust] arrangements by actively engaging in reclaiming, appropriating, sustaining, and advancing inherent human rights of equity, equality, and fairness in social, economic, educational, and personal dimensions.” Brown (2004, p. 80) defined SJL as including actions that “foster successful, equitable, and socially responsible learning and accountability practices for all students.”

To define SJL through its practices, McKenzie et al. (2008) identified SJL as playing a role in (1) raising the academic achievement of all the students in their school, (2) preparing their students to live as critical citizens in society, and (3) assigning students to inclusive, heterogeneous classrooms that provide all students access to a rich and engaging curriculum. Santamaría (2014) pointed to nine common characteristics of SJL: (1) willingness to initiate and engage in critical conversations with individuals and groups in formal or informal settings even when the topic is not popular in the whole group (e.g., ageism, institutional racism, affirmative action, LGBTQ-ism). (2) Assuming a Critical Race Theory lens to consider multiple perspectives of critical issues, which involve considering race first, valuing story as communication, being critical of liberalism, and understanding the reality of racism. (3) Using consensus building as the preferred strategy for decision-making in meetings or one-on-one talks. (4) Consciousness of stereotype threat or fulfilling negative stereotypes associated with perceived racial, ethnic, or linguistic groups. (5) Making empirical contributions and adding authentic research-based information to academic discourse regarding underserved groups. (6) Honoring all members of their constituencies (e.g., staff, parents, community members, stakeholders). (7) Leading by example to meet unresolved educational needs or challenges. (8) Building trust when working with mainstream constituents or partners or others who do not share an affinity toward issues related to educational equity. (9) Servant leadership, in which individuals are guided by a sense of purpose that may be described as a higher calling.

DeMatthews and Mawhinney (2014, p. 846) pointed out the commonality between the different definitions: “Despite the wide range of definitions of SJL, there is a clear consensus that SJL involves the recognition of the unequal circumstances of marginalized groups with actions directed toward eliminating inequalities.” DeMatthews (2015, p. 145) pinpointed the recommendation that SJL must focus both on “understanding the inequities that persist in schools and taking action.” This dual focus on comprehension and action, which is essential because “leadership without an understanding of systemic inequity can reproduce oppression” (Bertrand & Rodela, 2018, p. 14), was utilized in this study to operationally define SJL.

Importantly, SJL does not only occur within the school building but also involves family and community engagement (DeMatthews, 2018; DeMatthews et al., 2016; Watson & Bogotch, 2015). Parents from disadvantaged populations often lack trust and rapport with their children’s school; in addition, their immediate health care, housing, and economic problems may limit their ability to be meaningfully engaged. However, SJL establishes socially just partnerships with family and community (Furman, 2012; Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002).

Social Justice Leadership as a Complement to Instructional Leadership

IL and SJL are related to each other in the pursuit of school effectiveness. Decades of research have found that IL is a highly effective way to enhance overall school performance and student accomplishments (Goddard et al., 2021; Mitchell et al., 2015). IL has been correlated with positive school outcomes, including higher teaching quality and improved student outcomes (O’Donnell & White, 2005; Shatzer et al., 2014). Even after controlling for other variables like students’ demographic characteristics, IL remains consistently responsible for significant changes in students’ academic results (Day et al., 2016; Hallinger & Wang, 2015; Hou et al., 2019).

Importantly, IL focuses primarily on improving the performance of the school as a whole and not on improving the achievements of all students. It reflects a school effectiveness perspective rather than an individual needs perspective. It has a school-wide effect, bringing about an overall change that does not necessarily have the same impact on different groups of students within the school. This point was well demonstrated in the study of Gümüş et al. (2022), who recently found that while IL might be beneficial in reducing the achievement gaps between schools, it may not make much difference in reducing the disparity between different socioeconomic groups within schools.

Quite differently, SJL focuses on improving the level of achievement of underprivileged students (Theoharis, 2007). SJL challenges the presumed limitations of race, class, disability, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic situation by taking measures to increase achievement among all students (Koçak, 2021). Discussing culturally responsive school leadership, which may be seen as a subset of SJL that specifically addresses issues of cultural diversity and inclusion within the broader context of social justice and equity in education, Khalifa (2018) claimed that principals seeking to be effective in raising the achievements of students from underserved groups need a deep and nuanced understanding of cultural responsiveness. Thus, SJL may be necessary to foster impactful instructional leadership that enhances the teaching and learning of all students.

For this reason, IL alone is not enough for school effectiveness in terms of closing achievement gaps: “the existing understanding of IL may not be sufficient in itself to compensate for the disadvantages of students from a difficult home/family background” (Gümüş et al., 2022, p. 432). Principal effectiveness that considers all students can be realized only by integrating a SJL notion into the IL framework to improve learning opportunities for disadvantaged groups within schools.

Indeed, it is possible to engage in IL without explicitly addressing educational inequities, while the reverse is not true: one cannot claim to engage in SJL while overlooking instructional issues. Addressing instruction is an integral part of practicing SJL. Therefore, the current study does not position SJL and IL as two distinct leadership approaches operating alongside each other. They are more interrelated: principals can implement IL without SJL, but when they enact SJL, they necessarily demonstrate IL, at least to some extent. In this context, the question that motivated this study is how

SJL complements principals' IL, seeking to understand the expansions that SJL brings to IL. This question has not been empirically studied to date. Given the vitality of social justice issues and potential close relevance to leadership in today's education systems, the current study tapped Israeli school principals' own views about these leadership frameworks, through interviews and focus groups.

Method

Qualitative research methods that ask participants about their experiences, and thereby allow researchers to understand their perspectives, are most suitable when existing knowledge about a studied phenomenon is limited (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), as in the current study. The following sections describe the Israeli context, the sample of this study, data collection processes, and analytical strategies.

Research Context

Preparation programs for school principals in Israel clearly emphasize the IL responsibility of the principal. The Ministry of Education, which regulates these programs, declared that "IL will be the main axis of learning in the preparation program" so that "The program will provide up-to-date and applied knowledge in this field, and especially on the subject of the relationship between the improvement of education, teaching and learning, student achievements and the role of the school principal" (Israeli Ministry of Education, 2019, p. 5).

While IL is explicitly instilled in Israeli principals' preparation programs, SJL is more implicitly conveyed. Capstones, the institute responsible for training school principals in Israel, defined the role of Israeli principals as instructional leaders who are required to improve the education and learning of "all students." Using terminology that emphasizes leaders should prioritize "all students" might, in practice, sidestep addressing differences by appearing to be inclusive. This could result in leaders overlooking the unique needs of students who have been historically disadvantaged or underrepresented, as these needs might be overshadowed by the overall performance of other student groups. This approach may align better with endeavors aimed at guaranteeing equal treatment rather than promoting genuine equity, which provides the necessary support for students with diverse needs to thrive. However, the focus on the individual student can be seen in the four dimensions that make up the Capstones (2008) framework for IL: shaping the future image of the school – developing a vision and creating change; leading the team and fostering its professional development; focusing on the individual; and managing the relationship between the school and the surrounding community.

Nevertheless, preparation programs' attempt to endorse principals' commitment to obtaining equity for diverse individual students remains clearly secondary to the primary IL vision. Thus, for the most part, individual principals develop SJL through their own system of values and educational perspectives. Formative experiences that affect their worldview and personal ethos are those that shape principals' organizational vision as well (Arar, 2015; Oplatka, 2013; Yoeli & Berkovich, 2010).

Participants

This study focused only on elementary school principals so as not to address the differences in IL between elementary and secondary (middle and high) schools (Gedik & Bellibas, 2015; Hallinger, 2012). The sampling for this study was purposive sampling, which selects "information-rich" cases. Indeed, recent research illustrated the greater effectiveness of purposive versus random sampling in qualitative research, supporting related assertions long put forward by qualitative methodologists (van Rijnsoever, 2017). Therefore, this study only tapped principals who were evaluated by their superiors as successfully and concurrently implementing both IL and SJL in their schools. To this end, 12 superintendents from all six Israeli school districts were asked to recommend potential participants whom they viewed as having expertise as both social justice leaders and instructional leaders. It should

be noted that the terms IL and SJL were not explained to these superintendents, which could have led to various interpretations or understandings.

To involve “as many subjects as necessary to find out what you need to know” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 113), the current sample included 36 principals. Of them, 23 were women and 13 were men. Their mean age was 51.4, with a mean of 10.13 years of principalship experience. As for their education, 29 principals had a master’s degree or higher (2 with a doctorate), and seven principals had a bachelor’s degree. Table 1 presents information on the study participants.

Interview and Focus Group Data Collection

All 36 participants were first offered the option of participating in a focus group, and 12 of them had schedules that allowed them to do so. They formed three focus groups of 4 principals each, who did not know one another. The remaining 24 principals were interviewed individually (see Table 1). Although one-on-one interviews and focus groups were conducted similarly, focus groups produced the richest data despite the lack of privacy because listening to others’ verbalized experiences evoked participants’ memories and ideas. To prevent individual principals’ tendency to dominate a focus group, attention was paid to ensuring all participants’ opportunity for self-expression.

Interviews and focus groups explored how SJL may support IL through questions such as: “What do you think is the connection between students’ learning opportunities and their results?;” “In your opinion, how should social justice issues influence the quality of instruction?;” “From your point of view, how does fairness relate to teaching and learning?;” “In your view, how may equity help improve teaching quality?” While the participants were asked to answer predefined questions, the researcher as an interviewer changed the order of the questions based on the participants’ answers, encouraged them to expand their answers, and added questions that arose from previous answers. This allowed the interviewer to “respond to the situation at hand, to the respondent’s emerging worldview and new ideas on the subject” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 111). Importantly, the interviewer did not mention the terms IL and SJL during the interviews to prevent framing the participants’ responses within these frameworks.

All the interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The average length was one hour for interviews and two hours for focus groups. Also, five follow-up interviews were conducted to clarify questions that emerged during the review of the transcripts (with an average length of 15 minutes).

For ethical reasons, all participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could leave the study at any time (none did). It was clarified that the superintendent who recommended them as possible participants would not know whether they participated in the study. They were assured of confidentiality, and pseudonyms were used. Participants signed written consent based on an understanding of the purpose of the study. Contagion

Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis of the interview and focus group data included three stages. The first stage was sorting, which “is not something separate from the analysis. It is a part of analysis. The researcher’s decisions – which data chunks to code and which to pull out . . . are all analytic choices” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 12). This stage was designed to seek statements related in some way to the contribution of SJL to IL.

In the second stage, coding, the identified statements were given named codes. The codes consisted of “essence-capturing” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 4) words or short phrases (e.g., improved outcomes for all students, fair discipline, no child left behind, communication with parents), which represented the perceptions of the principals who participated in this study regarding how SJL complements IL (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The codes were modified throughout the coding process (Neuendorf, 2018). This stage was data-driven and not theory-driven because the researcher did not use a priori codes but rather inductive codes developed by directly examining the data, grounded in the various

Table 1. Study participants' information.

	Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Years of experience	Education	District	School size (No. of students)	Focus group (FG)/Interview	1 st category: For whom?	2 nd category: How?	3 rd category: With whom?
1	Albert	Male	44	5	MA	Center	350	Interview	✓	✓	
2	Angela	Female	59	13	BA	North	250	Interview	✓	✓	✓
3	Anne	Female	47	11	MA	Center	350	Interview	✓	✓	✓
4	Ashley	Female	39	6	MA	Jerusalem	250	FG 3	✓		
5	Barbara	Female	51	11	MA	Tel Aviv	300	FG 2	✓		
6	Betty	Female	56	15	MA	Jerusalem	450	Interview	✓	✓	
7	Carl	Male	53	8	MA	Center	300	FG 2	✓	✓	
8	Charles	Male	54	13	MA	North	250	Interview	✓	✓	
9	David	Male	49	9	MA	Jerusalem	400	Interview	✓	✓	✓
10	Deborah	Female	57	11	MA	Jerusalem	150	Interview	✓	✓	
11	Donna	Female	39	6	MA	Center	450	Interview	✓	✓	✓
12	Dorothy	Female	53	18	BA	Jerusalem	450	FG 3	✓		
13	Elizabeth	Female	43	8	MA	Haifa	300	FG 1	✓	✓	
14	Emily	Female	49	12	MA	North	250	Interview	✓	✓	
15	Ethan	Male	46	12	MA	North	500	Interview	✓	✓	✓
16	Evelyn	Female	48	11	MA	South	300	Interview	✓	✓	
17	James	Male	49	6	MA	Jerusalem	250	FG 3	✓		
18	Jennifer	Female	48	13	PhD	South	200	Interview	✓	✓	✓
19	Jessica	Female	55	14	MA	Center	250	Interview	✓	✓	
20	John	Male	57	12	BA	Tel Aviv	400	Interview	✓	✓	✓
21	Joseph	Male	45	8	MA	South	450	Interview	✓	✓	
22	Karen	Female	53	6	MA	Center	200	FG 2	✓	✓	✓
23	Kimberly	Female	48	7	MA	North	550	Interview	✓	✓	
24	Linda	Female	51	8	MA	Tel Aviv	200	Interview	✓	✓	
25	Mary	Female	54	5	MA	Haifa	500	FG 1	✓	✓	✓
26	Michael	Male	61	17	BA	South	300	Interview	✓	✓	✓
27	Michelle	Female	57	13	MA	South	300	Interview	✓	✓	✓
28	Nancy	Female	60	16	BA	South	250	Interview	✓	✓	✓
29	Patricia	Female	55	4	MA	Tel Aviv	450	FG 2	✓		
30	Richard	Male	56	3	MA	Haifa	350	FG 1	✓	✓	
31	Robert	Male	52	9	MA	North	300	Interview	✓	✓	✓
32	Sarah	Female	48	7	PhD	Haifa	350	FG 1	✓	✓	
33	Sandra	Female	49	7	MA	Center	650	Interview	✓	✓	✓
34	Susan	Female	56	14	BA	Tel Aviv	150	Interview	✓	✓	✓
35	Thomas	Male	50	11	MA	Haifa	250	Interview	✓	✓	✓
36	William	Male	60	16	BA	Jerusalem	200	FG 3	✓	✓	✓

perspectives articulated by participants (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Furthermore, this stage was not driven by the question of how the participating principals developed their professional understanding of IL and SJL. Instead, it aimed to understand how they practically integrated SJL with IL within their schools.

After capturing the essence of utterances in the previous stage, the third stage of data analysis was categorizing, namely clustering the coded statements together according to similarity to generalize their meanings. It was like “decorating a room; you try it, step back, move a few things, step back again, try a serious reorganization, and so on” (Abbott, 2004, p. 215). The three categories identified in this stage formed the basis for the Findings chapter.

To enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of the analysis and interpretation, member checking was employed. Following the completion of the analysis, the findings were shared with the participants, and they were asked for their feedback. Twelve participants provided input on whether the interpretation aligned with their experiences. Additionally, peer debriefing was utilized by engaging with colleagues knowledgeable in qualitative research to discuss the findings, analysis, and interpretation, aiming to identify potential biases or assumptions. In line with the recognized importance of reflective journals in qualitative research (e.g., Ortlipp, 2008), the researcher maintained a personal reflective research log throughout the study to ensure critical thinking.

Findings

Analysis of Israeli principals’ perceptions regarding how SJL may complement IL yielded three main categories. Principals suggested that SJL may help answer three questions about IL’s aim to improve student achievements: *for whom* (whose achievements should be improved), *how* (in what way should student achievements be improved), and *with whom* (who should the partners be for improving student achievements). The findings are presented next, supported by participants’ utterances.

For Whom: Whose Achievements Should Be Improved?

In their interviews and focus groups, principals pinpointed the first contribution of SJL to IL: SJL emphasizes that the school’s instructional goals are relevant to all students, leaving no one behind. While IL focuses on quality teaching and learning and academic success, SJL accentuates that these goals apply to everyone attending the school, regardless of race, class, gender, physical ability or disability, sexual orientation, and other potentially marginalizing characteristics. This notion was mentioned by 18 study participants (see Table 1).

The participating principals argued that the school should strive for improved academic outcomes for all students, regardless of their initial starting point. These school leaders framed this notion of across-the-board achievement promotion – for all learners without exception – not only as an instructional policy but also as a moral obligation. For them, schools must be committed to creating an empowering learning environment for all students, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In this context, some principals noted that contemporary outcome measures do not give an accurate picture of schools’ social injustice and therefore do not hold school leaders accountable for each individual child’s improvement. For example, the Ministry of Education’s external standardized MEITZAV tests (Indices of School Efficiency and Growth) measure schools by their mean scores, but high means do not require high scores for all students. High means could be achieved by a small group of excellent students. As Albert asserted: “The easiest way for us to get a high mean score is by focusing our efforts on strong students and giving up on struggling students. However, the school’s goal must be high scores for all students.”

Moreover, each school’s mean score on these external standardized tests does not include special education students. Despite this, the participating principals expected their teachers to promote the learning and success of special education students. In a focus group, Barbara argued: “External tests

are not the only thing that matters. Teachers have to modify curricula, teaching methods, resources, learning activities, and products to address the diverse needs of individual students.”

Some of the participating principals, especially those serving students in rural or disadvantaged areas, extended their call for social justice beyond the intraschool context to apply to interschool comparisons. Namely, they attributed importance to promoting all students’ learning and outcomes not only within schools but also between schools, claiming that even schools that serve students from low socioeconomic families and communities should strive for high-quality teaching and high achievements. Donna said: “I don’t accept that just because my students come from homes with a low socioeconomic level, they should get the worst teachers, who don’t know how to teach and don’t like being in the classroom.” Emily explained: “As a school that serves students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, we must not see their backgrounds as barriers to their success. We strive for high achievement just like any other school.”

How: In What Way Should Student Achievement be Improved?

The qualitative data analysis suggested that the second contribution of SJL to IL is that it explains how to go about helping to improve students’ academic outcomes. IL answers the question of *what* the school’s goals are, focusing on student learning and outcomes, and SJL answers the question of *how* the school goals should be accomplished, claiming that while schools bring students to attain academic success, they must also maintain fairness, equity, and respect for diversity. Twenty-one study participants mentioned this notion (see Table 1).

The participating principals expected teachers to improve student learning and success through a culturally responsive instructional approach. They asked teachers to include literature from diverse authors, cultures, and parts of the world. They believed all students should read about characters who look like them or their families, in order to see school as relevant to who they are and the world they inhabit. At the same time, principals wanted students to read texts that helped them learn about others. As Nancy said: “I want protagonists from different countries of origin to be visible in the classroom, and authors from different countries of origin to be represented in the classroom library.” Moreover, the participating principals required teachers to connect students’ backgrounds and life experiences with what they were learning in school. Joseph asserted: “We no longer believe that the teacher should adhere strictly to the curriculum. Today’s teachers should tie lessons from the curriculum to the student’s social communities to make it more contextual and relevant.”

Although the participating principals believed that a disciplinary climate is a necessary condition for improving achievements, they qualified “how” this discipline should be implemented. They objected to any manifestation of inequality, pinpointing students from marginalized groups as more likely to experience overuse of harsh punitive consequences and, particularly, exclusionary discipline practices such as suspension and expulsion that might pose a risk to their chances of academic improvement. Charles asserted: “If zero tolerance means that students with very distinct characteristics are more likely to experience harsh punitive consequences such as suspension and expulsion – I don’t want it.” Betty claimed: “Frequent sending of very specific students out of their classrooms for disciplinary violations, without a plan as to what should happen next, is simply unfair.” Thus, study participants called for proactive and preventative approaches to school discipline, which are not characterized by control-driven punitive mechanisms intended to maximize student compliance. Evelyn explained: “We must ask ourselves whether the school’s disciplinary policy exists to exert power over our students or to foster positive and holistic human development.”

Thus, for these study participants, SJL seems to outline “how” to uphold the ethics of IL. As instructional leaders constantly strive to improve student learning and achievements, they should rely on recommended ethical concepts of right and wrong as their means to achieving this goal. As Linda explained: “For me, equity and fairness are part of a set of moral principles that dictate what educators should and should not do as they strive to improve student learning and outcomes.”

With Whom: Who are the Partners in Improving Student Achievement?

The third contribution of SJL to IL yielded by the current data analysis focused on diverse stakeholders as partners in improving student learning and results. SJL asserts that in creating effective learning environments, as IL requires, more stakeholders need to come together in a meaningful way through collaboration and therefore connection. This notion was mentioned by 16 study participants (see Table 1).

Principals consulted various additional school community members about their school mission, including parents. Participating principals were aware that the majority of active parents were those whose home culture most closely matched the norms and values reflected in the school. Thus, principals strived to give consideration to culturally diverse families' beliefs, goals, and interests. Michelle said: "All parents, regardless of their income or education, want their children to do well in school, so I want to hear all the voices." Some principals' focus was on the challenges inherent to engaging families from different backgrounds rather than seeing it as an opportunity. As articulated by Michael: "Some parents do not readily agree to participate in discussions about the school vision. However, I ask for feedback about it from families who may not share the same language or culture."

Yet, for the most part, when it came to parents as partners, these participating principals believed that, across all sociocultural groups, parents could support their children to make gains in their achievements. To increase parental involvement among disadvantaged groups, the principals expected their teachers to provide high-quality information about how to support children's learning and academic attainments as well as to strengthen the parents' confidence in their ability to help their children with their studies. As Jessica stated: "When we are intentional and proactive in providing information and support to culturally diverse families, we enable meaningful parent engagement and better student results." The study participants also asked teachers to adjust communication strategies and utilize phone calls and face-to-face interactions rather than letters or e-mails. David said, "We educate exceptional children from different cultural backgrounds, so we need to be aware of unique communication styles common to those cultures."

Thus, when principals wanted to communicate with parents from marginalized populations to advance the instructional goals of the school, they reported using several strategies: They selected an appropriate reading level in their messages, looked for messages being returned, and strengthened the use of different communication channels based on the understanding that not all parents could communicate in the same way. Anne, who wanted parents from marginalized populations to know the school's instructional goals, said: "Some parents and guardians can be hard to reach, so we need various communication strategies." Susan wanted parents to participate in parents' evenings as an opportunity for them to get involved in their child's education. She said: "We believe in parents' evenings as making a great contribution to student learning, and we don't want to give up on any parent, so we need more than a single text message to market our parents' evening."

Discussion

The present qualitative investigation of principals with expertise as both instructional and social justice leaders identified SJL as contributing important specific answers to three questions that principals face about their IL. Specifically, SJL may help answer three questions about IL: for whom, how, and with whom.

Under the first question, "for whom," the principals who participated in the current interviews and focus groups pinpointed SJL as helping them to clarify that their school's instructional improvement goals must be applied to all students, regardless of their potentially marginalizing characteristics, without exceptions. One might argue that the obligation to serve all students, including those encountering barriers (e.g., poverty, disability), sets a relatively low standard, as it represents a fundamental ethical responsibility for all educators to address the needs of every student, including those facing challenges, while SJL should aim for a higher standard by prioritizing those who

experience systemic inequities. Moreover, the clarification that the school's instructional goals must be applied to all students may not seem to be innovative considering that, traditionally, IL has been described as contributing to social justice because it is supposed to improve the achievements of all students in the school (Cann & Hernandez, 2012; Mckenzie et al., 2006). However, the current principals pointed out that IL does not inevitably lead to equitable outcomes in schools when implemented without the complementary social justice orientation. Principals emphasized that even when instructional leaders succeed in prioritizing instruction and curriculum, by continually and actively engaging in a wide range of activities aiming to improve all their students' teaching and learning, the resulting enhanced whole-school gains in achievement levels may reflect a core group of excelling students without reaching each and every struggling student. These principals' warnings about the dangers of a school-success focus may possibly reinforce the claim of DeMatthews et al. (2016, p. 759) that some instructional leaders "are heavily concerned with managing organizational effectiveness related to student achievement and often justified by false claims of 'social justice' to close achievement gaps through teaching and leading to standardized tests."

The present principals' voices may thus explain Gümüş et al. (2022) recent findings showing that IL does not significantly moderate the relationship between individual students' socioeconomic status and academic outcomes. Moreover, these principals' insights may help elucidate how it is possible that, on the one hand, IL has been shown to be essential in yielding desired student achievement results (Goddard et al., 2021; Mitchell et al., 2015) and has been demonstrated as particularly important for improving outcomes in schools that serve students from low socioeconomic communities (Vale et al., 2010), whereas on the other hand, significant gaps between high-performing and low-performing students may continue to be exhibited. According to the present findings, IL may indeed be quite effective in raising student achievements overall but still needs to be combined with SJL in order to narrow the inequities between students from different socioeconomic and demographic backgrounds within the school. Without explicit attention paid to SJL in line with a holistic leadership for learning framework, IL will contribute to bettering overall school performance but may leave many students from disadvantaged backgrounds behind.

Under the second question, "how," the principals in the current study offered constructive guidance on ways in which social justice tenets of equity, respect, and fairness should consistently shape instructional leaders' efforts to raise students' achievements. This category is relatively broad, including curricular content, instructional practices, and issues related to student management. Specifically, as instructional leaders, principals first and foremost need to ensure that the teaching in their schools is of high quality, attending to matters of curriculum and student engagement; yet, as social justice leaders, they additionally need to ensure that the high-quality teaching is also inclusive and culturally responsive, associating the taught contents equitably and respectfully to diverse cultures and languages. As the curriculum is a core focus for instructional leaders, the principals described how all students should read texts that describe their and their families' relevant life experiences, to reduce gaps in their sense of belongingness. At the same time, to cultivate active supporters of social justice, principals suggested that all students should read texts that help them learn about diverse others' experiences in the world (Gay, 2018; Muñiz, 2019).

Moreover, the study participants emphasized that the school's disciplinary policies, which IL views as a prerequisite to improving student learning and achievements, should also reflect SJL. Researchers have long documented, with remarkable consistency, persistent disparities in exclusionary discipline rates between White and minority children, which begin when they enter school and continue and even grow as they progress through formal education (Dutil, 2020; GAO, 2018; Pearman et al., 2019). The current findings suggest that to complement IL, SJL promotes equity in school discipline by focusing on preventive and proactive practices while avoiding strategies associated with higher rates of exclusion.

Under the third question, "with whom," the school principals focused on SJL's importance for broadening the partnerships that support their IL. As instructional leaders, principals are keenly interested in ensuring that parents work shoulder-to-shoulder with schools to accelerate student

learning. SJL highlights the importance of involving all parents in the education of their children, regardless of race, income, national origin, native language, and other marginalizing characteristics. Successful involvement of all parents is often a difficult challenge for schools. Thus, as social justice leaders, principals recommended that their school's parent engagement initiatives, primarily designed to support improvements in student learning and success, should also carefully incorporate strategies for reaching and creating rapport with culturally diverse families who may not share the same language, culture, or ethnicity as well as impoverished families who may not have ample time and financial resources or awareness about the importance of parent-school partnership for their child (DeMatthews, 2018; Watson & Bogotch, 2015).

Overall, the present findings indicate that these expert inservice principals, who were evaluated by their superiors as successful both as instructional leaders and as social justice leaders, assert that IL does not inherently and inevitably contribute to social justice in the school even if principals' clear mandate is to improve achievements for all students. Instead, these principals uphold that only when IL practices are combined with a SJL orientation can social justice be seen as the "logic" underlying IL (as suggested by Rigby, 2014). Only when school leaders recognize the unequal circumstances of marginalized groups and work resolutely to eliminate inequalities in outcomes, discipline, and belongingness can they successfully raise all students' academic achievements while "preparing students as critical citizens, and ensuring heterogeneous, inclusive classrooms" (Rigby, 2014, p. 618). Without the conscious attention required by SJL, IL might not contribute to equity in the school.

Theoretically, the current findings support previous studies that framed IL as the most critical element of effective school leadership (Hallinger et al., 2020) while arguing that it should be accompanied by other frameworks and functions, such as transformational leadership, organizational management, and distributed leadership (e.g., Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Halverson & Clifford, 2013; Liebowitz & Porter, 2019; Printy et al., 2009). Thus, this study recommending the integration of IL with SJL links up with the multidimensional leadership for learning framework (Bowers, 2020), which claims to be "the conceptual evolution" of decades of diverse IL research (Boyce & Bowers, 2018, p. 161).

Furthermore, the findings of this study can be interpreted as suggesting that SJL can function as a comprehensive conceptual framework within which various leadership practices (including IL) are integrated. From this perspective, SJL offers a view that shapes the organization of instructional leadership, as well as other crucial dimensions of the principalship, such as cultivating partnerships with families and community members.

The findings of this study hold practical implications. Based on the findings, influential principals must utilize SJL to answer questions about IL. They have to promote the best instructional methods so that students can achieve academic success (IL) in ways that eliminate inequities and ensure no one is left behind (SJL). Toward that end, it seems advisable to explicitly prepare school leaders for their multidimensional or complementary leadership roles. Principals need to be trained explicitly in SJL too in their preparation programs, not just implicitly. Educators should discuss the contribution of SJL to IL with prospective principals in their preparation programs and with novice principals in mentoring programs given to beginning principals who are in the stage of becoming instructional leaders. The integration of instructional and SJL is also relevant in later stages of school leadership and should be discussed in professional development meetings of active inservice principals.

Moreover, if we indeed consider SJL to be a perspective that molds various facets of the principalship, SJL – in contrast to IL – must be the linchpin of principals' professional development throughout their careers. This shift in focus toward SJL can empower educational leaders to better address the complex challenges of equity and inclusion in our diverse educational landscape.

The current three-part findings can serve as a structured guideline for helping principals integrate the two leadership frameworks. Namely, principals can focus on the three main questions about IL that SJL answers: for whom – whose achievements should be enhanced; how – in what way student achievement should be improved; and with whom – who are the partners in

improving student achievement. Accordingly, school principals should be evaluated by their superintendents for the extent to which they reduce gaps within their school, not only between their school and other schools. Based on this study's findings, the integration of SJL with IL should be promoted by all those connected to and involved in the critical endeavor of educational leadership.

Compared to existing research, this study provides new data on how SJL complements IL. However, it has several limitations. First, school leadership is context-dependent (Hallinger, 2018). Inasmuch as the findings were collected in Israel, their cross-cultural validity was not proven. As mentioned above, Israeli principals develop their IL and SJL separately. They become instructional leaders mainly through preparation programs (Israeli Ministry of Education, 2019) while becoming social justice leaders as part of their personal system of values (Arar, 2015; Oplatka, 2013; Yoeli & Berkovich, 2010). This separation can cause difficulty in combining IL with SJL. Future comparative research would do well to explore how principals develop instructional and SJL orientations in different countries to validate the current findings' generalizability. Second, the data collected for this study were self-reported. Thus, the study could not control the possibility that respondents were providing socially desirable responses. Future research could explore the integration between IL and SJL through direct observations and interviews with teachers describing their principals. Third, this study did not identify correlations between the principals' perceptions of instructional and SJL and their characteristics, such as gender, principalship experience, and education. Such differences may be gleaned from future research tapping a larger sample.

Disclosure Statement

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