Beyond Receptivity: Exploring the Role of Identity in Educators' Orientation Toward Newcomers in a New Immigrant Destination

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Research on education in new immigrant destinations has highlighted the importance of educators' professional missions and expertise in shaping their receptivity toward newcomers. Less attention has been given to how educators' social identities, especially in relation to newcomers, influence how they perceive their role in serving the population. Drawing on the theory of representative bureaucracy, this qualitative study explores how educators' social identities shaped their identification with and orientation toward addressing the needs of immigrant-origin English learners in one new-destination high school. Results indicate that educators framed their orientation toward serving the population as a moral imperative, a professional responsibility, or a legal obligation. These orientations influenced how educators perceived their role in addressing newcomers' needs. This study offers implications for educational practice and provides avenues for future research on education in new immigrant destinations.

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Over the past 20 years, the U.S. South—a new immigrant destination—has experienced exponential growth in the English learner (EL) population. Indeed, between 2000 and 2017, the percent increase in the number of EL students enrolled in southern schools ranged from 69% in Tennessee to 790% in South Carolina (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2019). According to Thompson et al. (2020), newcomers—immigrant-origin students enrolled in U.S. schools for fewer than 3 years—represent a unique subset of the growing EL population. This diverse subgroup of EL newcomers includes refugee students, students with interrupted formal education, migrant students (Thompson et al., 2020), and sojourner students—a unique type of transnational migrant who is vulnerable to dislocation but does not necessarily meet the federal definition of a migrant student (Hamann, 2001).

Also among this growing population of EL newcomers are unaccompanied adolescent immigrants. Similar to other EL newcomers, unaccompanied minors often enter the country and U.S. school system both escaping and facing unique challenges. These children, generally males aged 15 to 17 years (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2019a), typically cross the border seeking refuge in the United States due to poverty, violence, and political turmoil in their native countries (Terrio, 2015). In addition to hopes for the future, unaccompanied minors also bring with them a number of intersecting inequalities (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015)—including language barriers

(Canizales, 2017), interrupted educational journeys (Menjívar, 2008), and liminal legal status (Heidbrink, 2014)—that shape their integration into the U.S. school system. Moreover, their incorporation into the educational system is often complicated by transnational ties and commitments that may prevent them from permanently resettling (Hamann, 2001). Given the unique social context of their lives, unaccompanied minors, like other EL newcomers, often require specialized support from educators to address their academic and socio-emotional needs (Hos, 2016) as well as their mental well-being (Acuña & Escudero, 2015).

The literature on the educational incorporation of immigrant-origin students indicates that educators are generally receptive to newcomers (Jones-Correa, 2008; Marrow, 2009, 2011); however, research also suggests that educators' welcoming attitudes may not necessarily reflect a commitment to actively support the education of newcomers, especially those perceived as semi- or nonpermanent settlers (Hamann, 2001). High school teachers, in particular, are less likely than their primary and middle school counterparts to feel a sense of accountability toward EL newcomers and their educational success, often framing newcomers as the primary responsibility of the English as a second language (ESL) department (Harklau, 2000; Lowenhaupt et al., 2020). The potential distinction between primary and secondary educators with regard to professional orientation toward serving newcomers is an important avenue for

exploration given that foreign-born students account for only 10% of the EL population at age 5 but upwards of 50% at age 18 (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017). Moreover, despite their interrupted educational journeys, more than 70% of unaccompanied minors enter the United States as high-school-age children (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2019a).

Given that high school teachers often frame newcomers as the responsibility of the ESL department, there is an outstanding question as to when these teachers see themselves as playing a direct role in the education and lives of EL newcomers. With regard to educators' ability and willingness to take ownership in educating newcomers, prior work has largely focused on teachers' instructional capacity (Lowenhaupt & Reeves, 2015), institutional processes within the school (Dabach, 2015), and the bureaucratic ethos of public schools (Jones-Correa, 2008; Marrow, 2009). However, this study focuses on a more foundational motivator, namely, the social identities of teachers themselves. Building on Dabach's (2011) discussion about the relationship between educators' sense of shared connection—or mutual identification—with EL newcomers and their preferences for teaching this population, this study explores how the social identities of educators in one new-destination high school shaped their identification with and orientation toward addressing newcomers' needs, both inside and outside the classroom.

In the following sections, I discuss educators' roles as institutional agents within newcomers' receiving context. I also outline the factors shaping their willingness to accept responsibility for newcomers' educational experiences and outcomes, including structural and interpersonal dynamics. I then draw on the theory of representative bureaucracy to discuss the importance of educators' social identities in shaping their orientation toward serving newcomers. After providing an overview of my methods, I describe my findings and conclude by discussing their implications for research, policy, and practice.

The Role of Educators in the Context of Reception

The "contexts of reception" framework has become central to our understanding of immigrant incorporation (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014). The framework refers to governmental policies and other features of the receiving community that shape newcomers' access to U.S. institutions, and subsequently their integration experiences. *Plyler v. Doe* (1982), the landmark Supreme Court decision guaranteeing all students the right to a free public education, established schools as a primary context of reception for migrant children. Indeed, schools are often the first institutions to develop policies aimed at incorporating immigrants (Odem, 2008), and they typically reflect newcomers "first sustained, meaningful, and enduring participation in an institution of the new society" (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008, p. 2).

One key feature of the school context of reception are educators, who "act as both institutional agents as well as agents of reception within the host society" (Dabach, 2011, p. 68). Within their official institutional roles, educators professionally operate as pedagogues; however, given "the moral imperatives inherent in the teacher/educator role," educators often go beyond their official duties to serve their constituents (Stanton-Salazar, 2001, p. 162). With regard to serving EL newcomers, this could not only include taking on the responsibility of shaping their academic experiences and outcomes, but it may also involve "provid[ing] 'more-than-routine' service to newcomer clients" (Marrow, 2009, p. 759) and acting as mediators between newcomers and the broader community (Dabach, 2011; Marrow, 2009; Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

Educators' willingness to serve newcomers in official and/or unofficial capacities is not necessarily a given. In fact, Lowenhaupt and colleagues (2020) found that high school general education teachers do not necessarily feel accountable for the educational experiences and outcomes of EL immigrant students given their tendency to view newcomers as the primary responsibility of the ESL department. Moreover, given that teacher-sorting processes prioritize the preferences of educators with seniority or high professional status, who might not want the perceived additional burden associated with teaching EL newcomers, the education of this population often falls into the hands of newer teachers (Dabach, 2015).

The extent to which all educators, versus a select few, take ownership of their institutional roles has important implications for newcomers' educational incorporation, given that sorting processes may match newcomers with teachers who are not adequately prepared to tackle the unique challenges that they face (Dabach, 2015). Moreover, research indicates that framing EL immigrant youth as solely or primarily the responsibility of the ESL department has contributed to newcomer segregation within schools, shaped reclassification timelines, and limited newcomers' course-taking opportunities (Lowenhaupt et al., 2020). Thus, it is important to explore the factors shaping educators' orientation toward and willingness to serve newcomers in their official and unofficial capacities.

Understanding Educators' Orientation Toward Newcomers

There are a number of factors that shape educators' ability and willingness to take ownership of their role as agents of reception. First, a school's institutional policies around EL education may influence whether and how educators accept responsibility for newcomers' academic experiences and outcomes. For instance, in an effort to support newcomers, schools have increasingly implemented specialized programs that separate newcomers from their English-proficient peers as they adjust to their new environment (Hos, 2016;

Short, 2002). Such programs offer a number of benefits to newcomers, but they also limit collaboration between general education and ESL teachers, which further contributes to the notion that only ESL teachers are agents of reception (Harklau, 2000; Lowenhaupt et al., 2020). It is important to note that in resource-constrained school contexts, budget and personnel issues may restrict school leaders from staffing separate programs for EL newcomers (Garver, 2020; Lowenhaupt et al., 2020; Umansky et al., 2020); therefore, the growth of EL newcomers in these schools may contribute to increased contact between general educational teachers and immigrant-origin EL youth (Lucas, 2011).

We know that intergroup contact experiences can positively shape receptivity toward immigrant populations (Tropp et al., 2018); however, whether or not those welcoming attitudes translate into action often depends on another important factor: educators' expertise and capacity. Indeed, educators' professional knowledge and expertise may constrain their willingness and ability to take on an active role in the education of newcomers. Research suggests that traditional teacher education programs are not preparing mainstream educators to address the needs of EL immigrant populations (Lucas, 2011; Lucas et al., 2008). Acquiring the skills necessary to meet the needs of newcomers will likely require additional effort on the part of educators; however, they may not have the time or resources to invest in their own professional development. Therefore, some educators might believe that it is better to leave the education of newcomers to the "experts," which might be nice in an ideal world but is not possible in reality.

Educators' orientation toward serving newcomers may also be shaped by their perceptions of the population vis-à-vis the school's traditional constituents. For instance, although the literature suggests that educators often frame newcomers using deficit perspectives by viewing their language and cultural backgrounds as challenges to "overcome rather than as resources to draw from" (Turner, 2015, p. 7), these stereotypes do not necessarily hold when educators compare newcomers to economically disadvantaged native-born minorities (Blanchard & Muller, 2015; Dabach, 2011; Wainer, 2006; Wortham et al., 2009). Particularly in schools that serve large populations of disadvantaged and minoritized students, educators' positive perceptions of newcomers might act as "pull factors" in terms of their willingness to take on an active role in shaping newcomers' educational experiences and outcomes (Dabach, 2011; Wainer, 2006).

Educators' social identities—particularly in relation to their student populations—is a final factor that might affect their commitment to serving newcomers. For instance, in a study on teachers' preferences for teaching EL students in a sheltered instruction context (e.g., specialized content classes for EL students), Dabach (2011) found that educators' perceived sense of a shared connection with newcomers acted as

one "pull" toward serving that population. In particular, a shared immigrant background, especially among Latinx educators, played an important role in their commitment to serving EL newcomers. Unfortunately, in the absence of a major demographic shift in the U.S. South's teaching force, the underrepresentation of educators of Latin American origin in the region (Boser, 2014) means that the educational incorporation of EL newcomers will depend on the efforts of educators who may not share salient social identities that are visible to the outside world.

Fortunately, educators enter schools with multiple intersecting social identities related to their gender, ethnoracial identity, socioeconomic background, parental status, political ideology, and religious orientation. However, compared with the other motivating and inhibiting factors, educators' social identities have received less explicit attention in the literature on educators' engagement with EL newcomers. Therefore, we have less insight into how various dimensions of educators' identities shape their perceptions of their roles in supporting the population. Thus, the goal of this study is to examine how educators' social identities shape their identification with and orientation toward serving EL newcomers.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of representative bureaucracy provides a useful lens to explore the relationship between educators' social identities and their interpretations of their roles in facilitating the incorporation of EL newcomers. According to Mosher (1982), representation of a population can be either passive or active. Passive representation refers to the extent to which an organization's workforce descriptively reflects the population it serves. Within the educational context, this speaks to the demographic match or mismatch between educators and students. The potential shared connection between bureaucrats and clients is theorized as a key link between passive representation and active representation, which involves bureaucrats acting as representatives for clients who share the same characteristics and working in their interest to produce beneficial outcomes (Meier, 1993).

With regard to the link between passive and active representation in schools, educators' shared connection or identification with a particular population may give them unique insight into (a) the needs of their constituents and (b) the potential benefits of their actions for the well-being of the population (Meier, 1993). This insight may motivate bureaucrats to engage in advocacy or participate in efforts aimed at promoting equity for the represented group. Finally, because identity is tied to values, mutual identification can provide intrinsic motivation and shape how institutional actors perceive the reward of stepping into the role of a representative (Dabach, 2011; Meier, 2019). This is particularly important because there are also costs

associated with taking on an agentic role in the outcomes of a particular group (Selden, 1997).

The literature on representative bureaucracy often centers ethnoracial identity and gender as key salient characteristics in the link between passive and active representation (for a review, see Grissom et al., 2009; Meier, 2019). However, as previously mentioned, the ethnoracial mismatch between southern educators and the region's growing immigrant-origin population raises important questions about (a) other possible points of mutual identification between educational bureaucrats and newcomers and (b) how those shared characteristics shape educators' understanding of their role as agents for the population. Again, in addition to their professional identities, educators have complex social identities that likely inform their connection with and orientation toward EL newcomers. This study explores these relationships by examining the following questions:

How do educators' identities shape their identification with and orientation toward serving newcomer populations in a diversifying school context?

What are the implications of educators' orientations for how they discuss their role in addressing newcomers' unique needs?

Research Context and Methods

The present research is part of a larger embedded case study exploring the educational incorporation of immigrant-origin EL students in the American South (Yin, 2003). An embedded case study design draws on various types and sources of data associated with different units of observation and analysis (Yin, 2003). The larger project includes archival and administrative data as well as participant observations conducted between August 2018 and December 2019 at a new-destination high school; however, analysis for this article is based on semistructured and unstructured interviews conducted with educators ($N = 64$) over the course of my fieldwork.

I selected as my case Freeman High School (pseudonym), a historic African American high school in the U.S. South that recently experienced a rapid increase in its immigrant-origin EL population. For more than a century, African Americans generally constituted more than 95% of the student population. However, beginning in the mid-2010s, Freeman began to see a population it had never seen before—first- and second-generation Central American–origin immigrants. Within a 5-year period, the immigrant-origin EL population went from less than 10% of the population to more than 50%. During that same period, student enrollment nearly doubled, which meant that a school once in danger of closing due to declining enrollment was now, according to many educators, bursting at the seams.

Demographic change at Freeman is part of a larger story about immigration, and the "browning" of the South more generally. According to the Migration Policy Institute, the state in which Freeman is located has experienced more than a 100% increase in the foreign-born population since 2000. In recent years, it has also become a top-10 state for the resettlement of unaccompanied minors (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2019b), who account for the vast majority of Freeman's first-generation immigrant population. Freeman's newcomers were generally indigenous youth from Guatemala who were not fluent in English, a reality that contributed to language barriers between newcomers and the overwhelmingly monolingual Black and White faculty members.

When newcomers first began arriving at Freeman, they were segregated from the rest of the school in their own building. Over time, this arrangement proved untenable as the size of the population grew daily. With a change in the school leadership, the 2018–2019 school year was marked by a concerted effort to integrate newcomers into the broader learning community and to encourage all educators to take ownership of the education of newcomers. The question, however, is whether educators acknowledged that responsibility and how their social identities shaped their perceptions of that potential duty.

Data Collection

To explore this question, I conducted unstructured and semistructured interviews with Freeman educators. The unstructured interviews took place within the context of participant observations and allowed me to (a) become familiar with key stakeholders and (b) engage in unedited conversations with educators about school demographic change. During these conversations, I used ethnographic jottings to record fragments of informal dialogue with educators (Emerson et al., 2011). In my jottings, I differentiated exact quotes from paraphrased remarks, using quotation marks and brackets, respectively. After each conversation, I wrote detailed fieldnotes and memos from my jottings. Overall, the unstructured field interviews enabled me to refine my semistructured interview guide and use subsequent interviews to explore emergent themes.

The semistructured interviews began after spending months building a rapport with the respondents at my research site. I generally recruited teachers during observations and through e-mail, using a script approved by the institutional review board. I adopted a non–probability sampling method to purposively recruit educators based on their demographic characteristics, including their gender, ethnoracial background, content area, and tenure at the school. With regard to educator demographics, 42.2% identified as African American/Black, 45.3% identified as White, and 12.5% identified as Latinx, Asian, or other (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
Demographic Characteristics of Educators (N = 64)

Characteristic	No.	Percentage
Gender identity		
Woman	35	54.7
Man	29	45.3
Race/ethnicity		
African American/Black	27	42.2
White	29	45.3
Latinx/other	8	12.5
School role		
Academic	18	28.1
Elective	12	18.8
English as a second language	12	18.8
Student services	17	26.6
Administration	5	7.8

Additionally, 45.3% of the educator sample identified as men, and 54.7% identified as women.

My positionality as an African American woman from the U.S. South, who had previously taught at a Title I school, was an asset during participant observations given that educators treated me as an insider at Freeman. However, I also understood how my identity might complicate my efforts to engage in honest conversations about race and immigration during semistructured interviews with educators who did not share my background. To create an environment where respondents could speak candidly about their perspectives, I hired and trained both White and Latinx research assistants to allow for interviewer-respondent race matching for a subset of semistructured interviews (Anderson et al., 1988). It is important to note that given the nature of my relationship and ongoing, unedited conversations with five White educators at Freeman, I personally conducted their semistructured interviews.

The semistructured interview protocol for educators included open-ended questions grouped into four major categories, related to (a) educators' personal and professional backgrounds, (b), their perspectives on the changing community and school, (c) their responses to demographic changes at the school, and (d) their beliefs about, and role in enacting, equity within the context of demographic change. At the end of each interview, we asked educators a series of demographic questions, and their responses were recorded using Qualtrics, an online survey tool. All the semistructured interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Analytic Approach

To analyze the data, I used an iterative process that enabled me to explore emergent themes in the data and later develop a theoretical story that engaged with prior literature. Using a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1978), I initially began data analysis by inductively coding my data while still in the field. For instance, after conducting interviews or listening to the audio recording of interviews conducted by my research assistants, I wrote analytic memos to develop a portrait of each educator and contextualize the data based on "the identity or identities that informed [their] work as an educator" (interview guide). Additionally, for each major category of questions, I created an expanded list of codes that "fit the data" and language of the respondents (Charmaz, 2006, p. 49). Overall, the emergent themes provided me with an analytic direction for subsequent stages of my coding process, including the review and integration of relevant literature.

I then developed a list of focused codes that reflected the themes that emerged most frequently during my first round of coding. As they relate to the present study, I explored educators' (a) receptivity or openness to the changing demographics, (b) perceived sense of connection—or mutual identification—with newcomers and the traditional student population, (c) perception of how their own identity shaped their relationship with students, and (d) beliefs about students' barriers to success. I also identified three major codes that differentiated how educators perceived their own role in assisting newcomers: as a moral imperative, professional responsibility, or legal obligation.

In the third and final step of my coding process, I explored the relationship between substantive codes by placing them in conversation with the literature on passive and active representation. In particular, I gave explicit attention to the potential link between educators' sense of shared connection with newcomers and their orientation toward serving the population. I also searched for and systematically analyzed cases that challenged that potential link. Doing so enabled me to develop an "analytic story" that stayed close to the data while also building on existing literature (Charmaz, 2006, p. 63).

Findings

Analysis of interview data suggests that educators' perceived sense of shared connection, or lack thereof, with EL newcomers shaped their orientation toward serving newcomers in one of three ways. Depending on how educators perceived their identity in relation to their students, they described their role in educating newcomers as (a) a *moral imperative*, (b) a *professional responsibility*, or (c) a *legal obligation* (see Table 2). These orientations had important implications for how educators discussed their vision for and/or role in accommodating newcomers' unique needs. In the sections below, I elaborate on the defining features of each orientation, how educators' social identities shaped their sense of connection with and orientation toward serving newcomers, and the implications of educators' orientations toward serving EL newcomers.

TABLE 2
Educators' Orientations Toward EL Newcomers

Distinguishing features	Moral imperative	Professional responsibility	Legal obligation
Relevant identities	Ethnoracial identity; immigrant identity; multilingualism; socioeconomic background; social proximity to immigrants	Primarily socioeconomic background/disadvantage	Ethnoracial identity; citizenship status; political identity
Identities in relation to newcomers	Educators perceived a sense of connection with newcomers that led to empathy and interest in advocacy	Some educators perceived a sense of connection with newcomers that led to understanding and perceived impartiality	Educators generally perceived their identity in conflict with that of newcomers
Newcomers in relation to the traditional student population	Educators emphasized the unique needs of the newcomer population; some educators suggested that newcomers were especially driven	Educators emphasized similarities between the newcomer population and the traditional student population	Educators generally framed newcomers as outsiders; some perceived a sense of competition between the two populations in terms of resources
Orientation toward addressing newcomers' unique needs	Perceived sense of urgency in addressing newcomers' needs	Perceived sense of fairness in addressing the needs of newcomers and the traditional student population	Perceived sense of burden in addressing newcomers' needs
Preferred professional strategy in addressing newcomers' unique needs	Educators should develop the skills necessary to directly address newcomers' needs	Educators should give language accommodations but generally treat all students the same	Educators should not provide special accommodations; educators were disinterested in but willing to support newcomers in their professional capacity
Preferred school strategy in addressing newcomers' unique needs	Targeted interventions that increase the resources available to newcomers to overcome their interrupted education	Relevant interventions that target "achievement gaps" should apply to *all* students	Targeted interventions that separate newcomers and only involve ESL teachers

Note. EL = English learner; ESL = English as a second language.

Moral Imperative

One group of educators ($N = 19$) generally framed their role in serving newcomers as a "moral imperative" or as part of a larger "mission" shaped by their personal experiences and/or values. This particular orientation was characterized by a sense of urgency in addressing the unique challenges that newcomers faced as they became integrated into the Freeman community. Educators with this orientation often expressed feeling a special pull toward Freeman's EL newcomer population and discussed their interest in creating an inclusive and equitable environment for the population.

For many educators, the moral imperative orientation was grounded in their perceived sense of a shared connection with newcomers. Shared ethnoracial identity and immigration history served as the primary points of connection between a small group of educators and EL newcomers. For instance, during his interview, Mr. Vega (pseudonym), a Latinx educator, shared that, like Freeman's newcomers, he had also immigrated to the United States at a young age. His personal experiences of being an EL student sparked his "passion to help students like [him]." Similarly, when asked about her motivation for teaching EL students, Ms.

Benavides, a Latinx educator, stated, "Well, in a nutshell, I was once an EL when we came to this country. I wasn't born here. [At the] age of five, we came here, and I think that kind of motivated me to teach ESL."

Educators' sense of a shared connection with newcomers went beyond ethnoracial identity and immigration history. Other points of connection included multilingualism and gender (among educators who identified as women). Socioeconomic background also served as a basis for many educators' perceived connection with newcomers, who typically migrated from rural regions of Guatemala characterized by high levels of poverty. When describing her affinity with newcomers, Ms. Oakes, a White educator who grew up in a poor rural community, shared,

> My heart is drawn to kids who [pause] . . . I didn't have anything growing up. We had a very small little home. I guess we—I'm trying to remember—maybe the most we ever might have had was 400 dollars a month. Yes, our place was paid for, and I lived with my mother and my daddy, but I was poor. My daddy said, "Get as much education as you can. No one will ever be able to take that away from you." So, he had that vision. He understood. He really encouraged that. I just always wanted to be a teacher. Every day of my life, I'm on a mission. I'm on a mission to find kids that just

don't really know or haven't seen or maybe don't have that support at home to grasp that they can go somewhere and do something.

The pull toward serving newcomer populations was also shaped by educators' social proximity to and interpersonal relationships with immigrant-origin people outside the Freeman context. For instance, Ms. Nelson, a White educator who grew up "very Appalachian," noted that her experiences teaching EL students in California and her interracial marriage to a Mexican-origin immigrant sparked her interest in "working with Hispanic populations." Similarly, during an informal conversation in the teachers' lounge, Mr. Morrison, a White educator who married into an immigrant family, stated that he had "a duty" to serve newcomers "regardless of how they came into the country" (field note, April 2019). Connecting his in-laws' experiences to the experiences of Freeman newcomers, he later shared in his formal interview that he understands the difficulty immigrants face as they attempt to integrate into a new society.

Not only did educators with this orientation suggest that they understood newcomers' challenges, but they also perceived that their personal experiences enabled them to recognize newcomers' "hunger" for a better life (Mr. Foster, African American educator). Beyond understanding, educators' perceived sense of connection with newcomers contributed to feelings of empathy. For instance, Ms. Nelson indicated that her background and her interpersonal relationships with immigrant-origin populations provided her with insight that educators "who don't know nothing about being poor" lacked.

Perceived insight into the challenges that newcomers face informed educators' beliefs about the possibilities that awaited these students with the help of dedicated educators. Thus, their proposed solutions to address newcomers' needs were characterized by a sense of urgency. When asked about the school and district response to the growing EL population, Ms. Jones, an African American general education teacher, shared,

> I think we're making progress, but I think we're also building, building the car while we're driving it. And so I'm not sure that we're going to see a big close in the gap right now. I see that as maybe being three to five years out, and for a business model that works—three to five years out. But from a human standpoint it doesn't work because that three to five year gap, how many students are either going to drop out or graduate but not have had their needs met? That's a concern that the district needs to address. How do we speed up the timeline for effectively meeting the needs of our students?

This sense of urgency was also reflected in their discussions about their role in serving newcomers. Despite feeling overwhelmed with her various duties and underprepared to serve the school's growing EL newcomer population, Ms. Jones described properly serving newcomers as a "moral imperative" for all educators:

> Whether someone else has provided me with the tools or not, it's my job to go out and find out. So, you know, we have access to the Internet. We can Google. So, you know, I can Google, "How do you help students that are trying to acquire another language?" I can Google "strategies to help ESL learners." Our ESL department is great, but they're overwhelmed as well. They have huge caseloads, and they're translating, and they're having to make all the parent phone calls, you know? . . . I just feel like it's my job to do it, and it's not in the description and nobody's holding me to that standard, but I should hold myself to that standard.

In addition to meeting newcomers' needs inside the classroom, this group of educators discussed their own roles in advocating for the population outside the classroom. Many discussed activities aimed at building a broad coalition of supporters willing to represent and address newcomers' unique challenges. According to Mr. Bauer, a White educator from rural Appalachia, "many of these efforts are still in their infancy." However, a core group of educators who felt connected, directly or indirectly, with newcomers expressed their commitment to actively representing the interests of the population.

Professional Responsibility

The second, and largest, group of educators ($N = 39$) described their orientation toward newcomers as a professional responsibility. This orientation was characterized by a perceived sense of fairness that was grounded in many educators' (a) sense of a shared connection with both newcomers and the traditional student population and/or (b) stated interest in treating all students *equally*.

Similar to educators with a moral imperative orientation, many educators with a professional responsibility orientation also perceived a sense of shared connection with newcomers. Black and White monolingual educators accounted for the vast majority of educators with this orientation; therefore, their sense of a shared connection with newcomers generally centered on direct and indirect experiences with poverty. These experiences also fostered their sense of connection with the traditional student population. In fact, many educators with this orientation discussed their close ties to the local school community. For instance, Mr. Williams, an African American student support specialist, discussed his long-standing connection to the school:

> When I say history, the school has been around for a long time. I remember my grandfather talking about [Freeman]. I can't remember what year he was here, but then it goes to my mother, who was a graduate here as well. . . . So it's a lot of history.

When describing their personal and professional backgrounds, other educators mentioned that they had grown up in the local neighborhood, graduated from Freeman, or taught at the school for decades.

Because the majority of Freeman educators had limited experience serving immigrant-origin students, many drew on their own experiences and/or their understanding of the traditional student population to make sense of newcomers' lives. Indeed, educators with this orientation often suggested that students who made up the old and new worlds of Freeman shared many of the same struggles but with slightly different shades of disadvantage. For instance, when asked to describe the Freeman student population, Mrs. Jimenez, a mainstream educator, shared,

> My Hispanic students are taking care of siblings, so are my Black students. My Hispanic students are dealing with parental discord, so are my Black students. My Hispanic students are afraid of being deported, but some of my Black students are afraid of being taken out of their home. So, there are just a lot of similarities.

Similarly, when describing the academic background of newcomers, Mr. Ward, an African American student support specialist, stated, "They come in as ninth graders, but they're at the fifth-grade or sixth-grade level, because they just got into the United States." When discussing the African American student population, he suggested that although African American students do not have an interrupted education, many elementary and middle school teachers often "push a kid to the next grade if they're not ready." According to Mr. Ward, the propensity for teachers to promote students to the next grade regardless of the students' readiness accounts for the fact that many African American students who enter high school are "still at the sixth- or seventh-grade level." Ms. Campbell, another African American educator, also noted that "75% of our students are behind grade level per se—particularly in reading. So they're struggling students." Ms. Campbell added that most students at Freeman, regardless of their ethnoracial background, "start off behind, and they're always trying to play catch-up throughout their educational experience."

Some educators' perceived sense of connection with both populations fostered a sensitivity to the commonality of experiences between the newcomer and traditional populations that was masked by perceived surface-level differences; therefore, they generally pushed back against comparisons that they thought minimized the issues that African American students faced. Ms. Caldwell, an African American teacher who grew up in the local community and came to Freeman to "work with kids who have the same background," shared that she "wouldn't leave [Freeman] because . . . [the] school is changing. [She] would leave when people start thinking that some kids deal with issues that other kids don't deal with." Educators in this group were particularly concerned with comparisons that framed newcomers as more deserving based on the perception that they were more motivated and driven than the school's African American population. For instance, some educators with a moral imperative orientation described African

American students as "much more lackadaisical [than newcomers] in their studies" (Ms. Dominique Jones, interview); however, educators with a professional responsibility orientation were generally frustrated by such comparisons, which they rejected.

Given the perceived shared connection between newcomers and the traditional student population, educators with this orientation often emphasized their preference for *equally* addressing the needs of all students. The perceived sense of fairness that characterized this orientation was reflected in how educators discussed their vision for and role in serving newcomers. For example, when asked about her role in creating an equitable school environment within the context of demographic change, Ms. Willis, an African American general education teacher, declared,

> So, I'm not going to treat or I try to do a good job of not treating you any different because you're a Black student or a Hispanic student. I don't care if you're Hispanic, you're Black, you're White, everybody gone get the same.

In response to the same question, Ms. Sears, a multi-ethnic educator, replied,

> Equity would be, to me, making sure that all students reach their full potential, and all students have equal opportunities to apply for whatever is offered here or there. That's what I see as equity. I don't want it to be like, because this is your language and you're a little behind that I'm going to take extra time, or extra precaution, or I'm going to give you extra privileges. I think they all should be given the same privilege, and they all should be challenged.

Beyond language accommodations specific to EL newcomers, many educators with this orientation suggested that achievement-related interventions should be offered to all students. When discussing their role in serving newcomers, this group typically referenced "the implementation of standards across the board" (Ms. Myers, White educator) and avoided singling out either group. In contrast to educators with a moral imperative orientation, the sense of shared connection between newcomers and many educators with the professional responsibility orientation led to understanding and perceived impartiality rather than empathy and advocacy.

Legal Obligation

A third, but small, group of educators ($N = 6$) described their orientation toward serving newcomers as a legal obligation. This orientation was characterized by a perceived sense of burden in serving the newcomer population. Specifically, when discussing the school's responsibility for accepting newcomers or their own role in educating them, they often deferred to specific laws and policies that facilitated newcomers' access to Freeman. Instead of viewing the education of EL newcomers as a professional responsibility or a moral imperative, educators in this group saw it as merely a legal

requirement. For instance, in response to Mr. Morrison's comment in the teacher's lounge about his "duty" to serve newcomers "regardless of how they came into the country," Ms. Sloan, a White educator, quickly responded, "Yeah, because of [state] law" (field note, April 2019).

Educators with a legal orientation toward serving newcomers did not emphasize a shared sense of connection with the population. Instead, these educators—who generally identified as extremely conservative, regardless of race—othered newcomers by characterizing them as foreigners to both the country and the Freeman community. For instance, Mr. Lewis, a White educator, stated during his interview that he "might not have a job if [they] weren't teaching ESL but [he] would like to see everyone here in this country be legal—[even] if that meant that illegals[1] went home." Similarly, when asked about whether or not the school was working to meet the needs of EL newcomers, Ms. Sloan responded,

> Well see, resolving it in my mind . . . I mean I have a problem with it because, like I said, they're not supposed to be here, but we're paying teachers, we're paying, you know. I mean, where do you draw the line? Um, they're using all our resources. I hate to say that. I hate to be recorded saying that, but is that fair? I don't know. It is quite the conflict.

Ms. Sloan, like other educators in this group, generally used language that framed their identities in conflict with that of newcomers. These conflicts typically revolved around citizenship status and ethnoracial identity and contributed to questions about newcomers' claims to school resources and whether they deserved them.

The disconnect between newcomers and educators with a legal orientation contributed to a perceived sense of burden with regard to educating the population. For example, when asked about where newcomers fit at Freeman, Mr. Sharper, an African American educator, stated in an exasperated tone, "Regardless of if they speak English or not, Freeman High is going to accept them. Regardless of if they were last in the ninth grade based on their age, Freeman High is going to accept them." Within the context of this response, "accept" referred to a legal requirement—not receptiveness or welcoming attitudes.

This perceived sense of burden was reflected in their discussions about how the school should address newcomers' unique needs and who should be responsible for that task. When asked about enacting equity for newcomers, Mr. Sharper did not take ownership of his role, suggesting that newcomers might be better served in a different context:

> Maybe for the non-English speakers—and I know you're not supposed to separate the students—but maybe for the non-English speakers, they could have like a wing of their own or something like that. But it can be challenging because if you're constantly up and you're teaching or if you're doing a lecture and you don't

speak Spanish, you completely lose that group—um, if they're really interested at all.

Other educators offered similar suggestions when discussing what they perceived as ideal approaches to addressing newcomers' needs. Mr. Milsap, a White educator, described a policy solution he had proposed to administrators:

> They haven't been in school, a lot of them, since the second grade. So they haven't been to school in 10, 12 years. So they are behind everyone. It's a big effort to get them on par. . . . My suggestion 5 years ago was to take that middle school and take all the kids that come in brand new and put them in there for 2 years and make them learn English, make them learn math, and then put them back in school as . . . 11th [graders]. They need to be isolated.

In addition to proposals to segregate students, many of these educators expressed resistance to implementing language accommodations in the classroom. For instance, Mr. Monroe, an African American general education teacher, suggested that newcomers should assimilate in response to a question about addressing their language needs:

> One thing that bothers me, we do all this other stuff to try to cater to their needs. "No, no, no. You moved here. Let's make you learn our stuff, because we're going to help you. But you're going to do it our way. I mean, this is what you come to get. We didn't invite you over." That's kind of edgy, but that's the way I feel.

Mr. Monroe was not alone with regard to his beliefs about language accommodations; other mainstream educators also pushed back against school efforts to incorporate Spanish in the classroom. Overall, educators who framed their role toward newcomers as a legal obligation did not express an investment in serving the population, especially prior to their becoming fluent in English. Moreover, unlike educators with the moral imperative and professional responsibility orientations, this group of educators was generally less receptive to EL newcomers' presence at Freeman.

Discussion

This study examines how educators' social identities shaped their identification with and orientation toward addressing the needs of unaccompanied EL newcomers in one new-destination high school. While prior research has provided insight into how educators' perceived sense of connection with EL students shape their preferences toward serving the population (Dabach, 2011), the present study further develops our understanding of the different ways in which identity might matter for educators' orientation toward EL newcomers. As previously mentioned, research on bureaucratic representation has highlighted the importance of shared ethnoracial identity for active representation (see Grissom et al., 2009; Meier, 2019); however, the results from the present study make a case for extending

conversations about passive representation beyond ethnoracial identity.

Within the context of this study, ethnoracial identity and immigration history served as primary points of connection between EL newcomers and educators who identified as immigrants and/or Latinx; however, educators with these specific identity links represent a small subset of the overall study sample, the educator population at Freeman, and the teacher workforce in the U.S. South (Boser, 2014). That said, these educators were not alone in regard to their perceived sense of connection with newcomers or their orientation toward the population. Specifically, findings suggest that ethnoracial identity and immigration history were not the only salient shared characteristics that mattered for how educators framed their role in supporting the educational incorporation of EL newcomers. In fact, the majority of educators with a moral imperative orientation had less than obvious identity links with newcomers (e.g., socioeconomic background and social proximity to immigrant-origin populations outside Freeman).

Educators have multiple social identities that may shape their perceived connection—or lack thereof—with newcomers. Moreover, educators' complex identities may also complicate how they think about their role in serving students in schools undergoing demographic changes. For instance, within the context of this study, educators' personal experiences with poverty shaped their orientation in two ways. For some educators, these experiences provided them with perceived insight into the lives of newcomers, who migrated from and settled into environments characterized by disadvantage. Given the perceived role that education played in their own success, some of these educators expressed a sense of urgency in addressing newcomers' needs. These educators frequently discussed their willingness to go beyond the call of duty to support students who they felt were hungry for a better life.

For other educators, however, personal experiences with poverty and/or their sense of connection with the traditional student population—Black students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds—heightened their sensitivity to potential distinctions between Freeman's diverse student population. Given the perception that both traditional and newcomer populations faced issues with regard to poverty, family instability, and achievement, many educators with a professional responsibility orientation emphasized the importance of being impartial. Although this group was receptive to welcoming newcomers into the school community and open to meeting their academic needs to the best of their ability, they generally expressed a desire to avoid practices and policies that would provide targeted academic support to a single student population. Overall, these educators were concerned with what they perceived as fairness. It is important to note that some educators with a professional responsibility

orientation did not emphasize any potential points of mutual identification with Freeman's student population; therefore, their focus on equally addressing the needs of traditional and newcomer populations reflected their general values or their sense of disconnect with both groups.

Finally, identity also seemingly shaped educators' perceived disconnect with the growing population of EL newcomers. Instead of highlighting their potential connection with newcomers, a small group of educators emphasized newcomers' foreignness in relation to their immigration status or cultural membership within the Freeman community. This othering of newcomers was reflected in how the educators framed their role in serving the population. In addition to expressing resistance to implementing accommodations in the classroom, some educators with this orientation questioned newcomers' claims to school resources and/or noted their desire to segregate the population. Notably, educators with this orientation often expressed conflicting views about EL newcomers; however, this analysis reflects their general perspectives.

Limitations

This study provides a unique insight into the potential relationship between educators' complex social identities and their perceptions of their own role in serving students in schools undergoing demographic changes; however, it is not without limitations. First, given the sample and research design, these data are not generalizable. Moreover, while data collection continued until a saturation point for the various subgroups represented was reached, the findings may not speak to the full spectrum of experiences, beliefs, and attitudes of Freeman educators. Finally, Freeman's unique social context likely shaped educators' perceptions of and orientation toward EL newcomers in distinct ways; therefore, some themes that emerged from these analyses may be unique to this research context. However, while the findings may not be generalizable, they do have potential implications for research and practice.

Implications and Future Directions

This study has important implications for research. Immigrant-origin children are one of the fastest-growing segments of the school-age population; therefore, it is imperative that education policy scholars "address the research needs of a changing student population and the teachers, school leaders, districts, and states who serve them" (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008, p. 13). One research need is additional insight into how immigrant educational incorporation both complicates and is complicated by efforts to balance the needs of newcomers and native-born populations in resource-constrained contexts, especially schools that serve multiple disadvantaged populations. Another avenue for research relates to what it means to

actively represent EL newcomers. Specifically, given the emphasis on mutual identification, this study primarily builds on our understanding of passive representation. While these findings provide insight into how educators discuss their role in serving newcomers, they do not shed light on what educators actually do in the classroom or how their actions shape the outcomes of EL newcomers. Whether educators work on behalf of EL newcomers and how they do so are open questions that deserve scholarly attention. Along those lines, future research should qualitatively and quantitatively explore the mechanisms that contribute to educators' willingness to actively represent and enact equity for immigrant-origin EL youth.

With regard to educational practice, this study sheds light on possible points of shared connection between educators and students, as well as the implications of a shared connection for educators' professional orientation. Given the link between passive and active representation, these findings may also have implications for EL newcomers' educational success, which will depend on dedicated educators willing to work on their behalf. Indeed, beyond the available literature on bureaucratic representation, prior research suggests that perceived similarities between educators and students can positively shape students' academic outcomes (Gehlbach et al., 2016). Again, this study suggests that mutual identification can extend beyond ethnoracial identity; it also highlights the importance of educators gaining insight into their students' backgrounds and being open to making potential connections. Openness to less than obvious identity connections is particularly important in new-destination contexts, given the potential mismatch between educators and EL newcomers with regard to ethnoracial identity (Boser, 2014). From a practice standpoint, research suggests that schools can use interventions that highlight and leverage similarities between students and teachers for the benefit of students (Gehlbach et al., 2016). Finally, this study emphasizes the need for professional development opportunities that address potential deficits in educators' instructional toolkits and mind-sets related to immigrant-origin EL youth.

Conclusion

Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of research on education in new immigrant destinations. In addition to moving beyond the White-Latinx paradigm that typically characterizes research on immigrant educational incorporation, this study also speaks to the growing diversity within the EL newcomer population. Although this study only focuses on one school community in the U.S. South, it reflects broader social patterns related to the educational sorting of immigrant-origin youth and raises important questions about *where* newcomers fit in the region's educational landscape and *who* will be their champions.

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Note

1. The use of the term *illegals* to describe unaccompanied EL newcomers reflects the language of the quoted educator. The inclusion of this term is not an endorsement by the author of this article.

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