



# A qualitative metasynthesis comparing U.S. teachers' conceptions of school readiness prior to and after the implementation of NCLB



Christopher P. Brown <sup>a,\*</sup>, Yi-Chin Lan <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> The University of Texas at Austin, USA

<sup>b</sup> University of Taipei, Taiwan

## HIGHLIGHTS

- This metasynthesis studies teachers' conceptions of readiness pre- and post-NCLB.
- Post-NCLB, teachers took on more responsibility in readying children for school.
- Their conceptions of readiness tend to reflect a White, middle-class understanding.
- Post-NCLB, the onus for school readiness remains on the child.
- NCLB appears to dissuade teachers from teaching in the ways that children learn.

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 20 January 2014

Received in revised form

26 June 2014

Accepted 29 August 2014

Available online 20 September 2014

### Keywords:

Qualitative metasynthesis

School readiness

Teachers

NCLB

Qualitative research

## ABSTRACT

As school readiness continues to gain prominence on political agendas across the globe, policymakers have also implemented reforms that demand improved student performance. While these demands for improved student achievement have been shown to impact teachers in numerous ways, little is known about how such policies affect their understanding of school readiness. This is significant because how teachers conceptualize school readiness impacts their teaching and their relationships with children. This article examines this issue by presenting findings from a qualitative metasynthesis of peer-reviewed studies that examined how U.S. teachers conceptualized school readiness prior to and after the implementation of NCLB.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Purpose of the study

Globally, having children ready for school has been a key initiative for policymakers, school personnel, and families for decades (e.g., Landers, 2008; Muralidharan & Banerji, 1975; National Education Goals Panel, 1992). Empirical research has consistently shown that being ready at school entry correlates with later academic success in school and in life (Matthews, Kizzie, Rowley, & Cortina, 2010; Pianta, Barnett, Burchinal, & Thornburg, 2009).

The importance of this issue has intensified as policymakers around the world continue to implement a range of education reforms that expect children to meet specific academic achievement markers at particular points in their schooling (e.g., Jensen, Broström, & Hansen, 2010). As MacNaughton (2007) pointed out, reforms such as these in Australia promote a “technocratic ‘quick fix’ model of change” (p. 193) that, as Woods and Jeffrey (1998) have found in United Kingdom, lead to an educational environment in which students are “to learn a prescribed set of things in order to be able to survive” in school and in the larger “competitive market” (p. 548). In short, these reforms can affect teachers' sense of who they are as professionals (Valli & Buese, 2007; van Veen, Slegers, & van de Ven, 2005), their decision making about what (Alvestad & Duncan, 2006; Watanabe, 2007) and who they teach (Booher-Jennings, 2005; McNeil, 2000), and how they teach their students (Boardman & Woodruff, 2004; Rex & Nelson, 2004).

\* Corresponding author. The University of Texas at Austin, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, 1912 Speedway, Stop D5700, Austin, TX 78712-0379, USA. Tel.: +1 512 232 2288 (office).

E-mail address: [cpbrown@utexas.edu](mailto:cpbrown@utexas.edu) (C.P. Brown).

A clear example of this intensification in the education process in the United States (U.S.) is the implementation of the federal government's *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) Act. This policy holds students, schools, districts, and states accountable for improving the academic performance of all children (O'Day, 2002). Its impact on teachers and their teaching has been well documented (e.g., Au, 2007; Diamond, 2007). However, little has been done to understand the relationships between these reforms and how teachers conceptualize what it means for children to be ready for school.

This is significant because how teachers who work with children prior to and after entering schools governed by national, state, and/or local education policies conceptualize school readiness impacts the relationships they establish and the practices they engage in with their students (e.g., Palermo, Hanish, Martin, Fabes, & Reiser, 2007). For instance, the types of relationships teachers establish with their students correlates with their academic and social readiness; a more positive relationship correlates with increased student readiness and vice versa (e.g., Birch & Ladd, 1997; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001; Pianta, Steinberg, & Rollins, 1995). Whereby, increasing academic expectations for children, which impacts teachers' conceptions of school readiness (e.g., Adcock & Patton, 2001), can potentially play an important role in the relationships teachers establish and practices they engage in with their students. Thus, there is an empirical need to investigate the possible impact of such reforms as NCLB on teachers' conceptions of this construct in a systematic manner.

This article addresses this necessity by presenting findings from an interpretivist metasynthesis of published peer-reviewed qualitative studies of U.S. early educators' conceptions of school readiness prior to and after the implementation of NCLB (Major & Savin-Baden, 2010). Qualitative metasynthesis analyzes, synthesize, and interprets qualitative studies to provide a refined understanding of a particular event or phenomena (Finfgeld, 2003; McCormick, Rodney, & Varcoe, 2003; Thorne, Jensen, Kearney, Noblit, & Sandelowski, 2004). This metasynthesis first investigated how early educators in studies that met specific criteria for quality conceptualized school readiness (Major & Savin-Baden, 2010). It then looked at whether these understandings of school readiness differed after the implementation of NCLB. Analyzing, synthesizing, and interpreting the findings from this investigation offers a credible source of information about what impact reforms such as NCLB might have on teachers' understandings of school readiness, which has the potential to impact the relationships teachers establish as well as the practices they engage in with their students.

## 1.2. Defining school readiness, its significance, and the need for this study

### 1.2.1. Conceptions of school readiness

Conceptually, debates among policymakers, educators, and families over what it means to have children enter school ready typically center around one of four conceptions of school readiness (e.g., Dockett & Perry, 2004; McWayne, Hahs-Vaughn, Cheung, & Wright, 2012): the nativist, empiricist, social constructionist, and interactionist perspectives (Meisels, 1999). How any or all of these stakeholders frame this construct informs the ways in which they understand the role of the teacher and school system in preparing children for school success. For instance, the idealist/nativist perspective frames this construct of readiness as being "a within-the-child phenomenon" (Meisels, 1999, p. 50). Children are ready for school when their "level of development is ready" (Kagan, 1990, p. 272). The teacher and school are absent in this understanding of school readiness. An empiricist conception of this construct views "readiness [as] something that lies outside the child" (Meisels,

1999, p. 52), and as such, teachers and their school programs prepare unready children to be "successful in a school context" by providing them with the necessary skills, knowledge, and experiences (Carlton & Winsler, 1999, p. 338). Many of the current education reforms that focus on ensuring young children are ready for elementary school reflect this understanding of school readiness (e.g., Allen, 2011; U.S. Department of Education & U.S. Department of Health, & Human Services, 2011). The social constructionist framework "looks to the setting for its definition of readiness" (Meisels, 1999, p. 49). Under this lens, the "meanings of readiness" for school success and the role of teachers and school programs in readying children for school are "locally developed" by "actors" within each social context (Graue, 1993a, p. 248). An interactionist perspective frames readiness as a "bidirectional concept" that is co-constructed "from the child's contributions to schooling and the school's contribution to the child" (Meisels, 1999, p. 49). This lens frames school readiness as an interaction between what teachers do at school with children and the knowledge, skills, and experiences children bring with them to the school context. Many early childhood education (ECE) advocates (e.g., Educational Transitions and Change Research Group, 2011), organizations (e.g., National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), 1995; Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY), 2013), and researchers (e.g., Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000; Shaul & Schwartz, 2014) across the globe tend to promote this view of school readiness.

### 1.2.2. Why school readiness matters

The academic and social skills, knowledge, and dispositions children enter public school with, which in the U.S. is typically at age 5, are significant predictors of their later academic achievement (Duncan et al., 2007; La Paro & Pianta, 2000; Quirk, Furlong, Lilles, Felix, & Chin, 2011; Quirk, Nylund-Gibson, & Furlong, 2013). For instance, Lee and Burkham (2002) investigated the predictive validity of formal and informal assessments of children's school readiness using the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten (ECLS-K) data set. They found that both measures of children's reading and mathematical achievement and teachers' ratings of children's academic competencies in kindergarten were both strong predictors of children's academic achievement at the end of third grade.

In brief, children entering kindergarten at age five lagging their peers in cognitive and social measures are less likely to be successful in grade school, more likely to drop out of high school, and are projected to earn less as adults (Duncan et al., 2007; Fryer & Levitt, 2004; Gutman, Sameroff, & Cole, 2003; Halle, Hair, Wandner, & Chien, 2012). Additionally, these gaps in children's academic and social achievement, which can be found across the globe (e.g., Feinstein, 2003), tend to increase across their time in school (Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 1993; Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2001). Thus, no matter in which nation children live, entering school ready is a significant issue for them and their larger communities.

Furthermore, teachers continue to indicate that large numbers of children enter school lacking the academic and/or social skills needed for success (e.g., Lara-Cinisomo, Fuligni, Daugherty, Howes, & Karoly, 2009; Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000). This is significant because children's levels of readiness at school entry impact the relationships they establish with their teachers (Howes et al., 2008). Children who enter school ready are more likely to develop positive and close relationships with their teachers, which in turn are correlated with improved academic and social-emotional outcomes and long-terms school adjustment (Howes, 2000; Palermo et al., 2007; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/373968>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/373968>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)